SAINT PETERSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY
School of Journalism and Mass Communication
Global Communications and International Journalism

Manuscript

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The Influence of Media on Protest Activities in post-Soviet semi-Authoritarian Regimes

Master Thesis

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St. Petersburg
2017

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1. Introduction

In the early months of 2017 alone, five countries located in the former Soviet Union experienced waves of protest and unrest. In response to reports about dismal labor conditions, demonstrations occurred in Georgia in February 2017[1]. Several protest actions were held across post-Soviet States in March of this year. After a popular oppositional leader was arrested in Kyrgyzstan, hundreds of his supporters took to the street in the capital Bishkek[2]. All major Belarussian cities saw rallies against the so-called "parasite tax", requiring the unemployed to pay a fee[3]. Demonstrations opposing corruption were held in Russia's biggest cities in March as well[4]. In Moldova's capital Chișinău, protesters gathered in the middle of May 2017 to voice their discontent with controversial changes to the electoral system[5].

Protests are common international occurrences in the 21st century. The number of protest actions in Western democracies has increased dramatically since the 1970s. But with the so-called Color Revolutions in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in the early 2000s as well as the Arab Spring in the early 2010s, protests have become more widespread even in authoritarian regimes. In light of this, it is interesting to analyze the challenges protest movements in authoritarian regimes have to face and how the media may influence the mobilization of protest participants, specifically in post-Soviet states.

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[1] Pertaia, Luka 2017: Are Georgia's Disparate Left-Wing Protesters Consolidating Into a Coherent Political Force?, in http://oc-media.org/are-georgias-disparate-left-wing-protesters-consolidating-into-a-coherent-political-force/, last accessed 18.05.2017.

[2] Putz, Catherine 2017: Politician's Arrest Sparks Weekend Protests in Kyrgyzstan, in: http://thediplomat.com/2017/03/politicians-arrest-sparks-weekend-protests-in-kyrgyzstan/, last accessed 18.05.2017.

[3] Erickson, Amanda 2017: Belarus Wanted to Tax its Unemployed 'Parasites.' Then the Protests Started, in: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/03/10/belarus-wanted-to-tax-its-unemployed-as-parasites-then-the-protests-started/?utm_term=.33a7e96e7828, last accessed 18.05.2017.

[4] Sinelschikova, Yekaterina 2017: 'We Want Change. Not Promises!': Mass Anti-Corruption Rallies Hit Russia, in: https://www.rbth.com/politics_and_society/2017/03/27/we-want-change-not-promises-mass-anti-corruption-rallies-hit-russia_727993, last accessed on 18.09.2017.

[5] Popsoi, Mihai 2017: Changing the Rules of the Game in Moldova, in: https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/mihai-popsoi/changing-rules-of-game-in-moldova, last accessed on 18.05.2017.

A lot of research focusing on the strong mobilizing effect of social media has been conducted in regard to protests against authoritarian regimes in the Arab world. Numerous scholars even refer to the large-scale demonstrations in Egypt (2011)[6] and Tunisia (2010/2011)[7] as "Facebook Revolutions". Concerning recent mass protests in post-Soviet regimes, a similar research focus can be observed. Stephen White and Ian McAllistster focus on whether Russia had a so-called Facebook Revolution of its own in 2011[8]. However, the results of this Master thesis do not fully support a hypothesis that this was the case, as will be shown in chapter five. Each of the post-Soviet protest waves discussed in this study featured different media outlets instrumental for the mobilization of their participants. Thus, this Master thesis will argue against the common research trends highlighting the importance of social media in protest mobilization and will state that other media outlets such as TV, newspapers, calls and text messages via mobile phones and even word-of-mouth can be just important, if not even more crucial to protest mobilization in post-Soviet states.

Seven protest waves in four post-Soviet countries will be analyzed in this study: The Orange Revolution (2004) and Euromaidan Revolution (2014) in Ukraine; the Tulip Revolution (2005) and the Second Kyrgyz Revolution (2010) in Kyrgyzstan; the Russian mass demonstrations in 2011/2012 and the Belarussian protests in 2010 and 2017.

Furthermore, the usage and influence of the media in these protest cases will be discussed. In detail, recent levels of Press and Internet Freedom in those four countries, changes to these levels caused by the protest waves, the most influential media outlets during protest mobilization, usefulness of access to traditional media (especially TV) and the outcome of the protests will be examined.

[6] Gunning, Jeroen/Baron, Ilan Zvi 2014: A Facebook Revolution, in: Why Occupy a Square?, Oxford University Press.
[7] Marzouki, Yousri et. Al. 2012: The Contribution of Facebook to the 2011 Tunisian Revolution, in: Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking 15:5, 237-44.
[8] White, Stephen/McAllister, Ian 2014: Did Russia (Nearly) have a Facebook Revolution in 2011? Social Media's Challenge to Authoritarianism, in: Politics 34:1, 72-84.

Eight semi-structured expert interviews were conducted, which deliver valuable insights into the role of the media in relation to these protests. Two experts for each of the four countries were interviewed to collect more balanced and in-depth views. Namely, four researchers and four journalists shared their deep knowledge on the seven protest waves, media spheres and political structures of Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Belarus. Seven of the eight interviews with those experts were conducted via Skype in either English, German or Russian. Upon request, one expert answered the interview questions in written form on Facebook. All of the interview transcripts can be found in the appendix of this study. To keep the volume of the appendix as small as possible, only the English versions were included.

With the data gathered from these interviews, the following research questions will be answered in this Master thesis:

RQ1: How did the media play a role in mobilizing the protest waves of the countries analyzed and which kind of media (traditional or social) was more influential?

RG2: Would television coverage of protests be beneficial to a protest movements, so that large-scale demonstrations could be mobilized or is social media sufficient enough for that?

RQ3: What is the current situation of Press and Internet Freedom in the countries analyzed and did the protest waves cause any changes to this situation?

RG4: Did the protest waves bring about long-lasting political changes and democratic reforms or did they completely fail to initiate a democratizing process in the countries analyzed?

Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Belarus were chosen as case studies for this analysis for several reasons. Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan both experienced a color revolution and then a “follow up” revolution just a few years apart. Thus, it is

interesting to evaluate if the media outlets used to mobilize participants differed from each other. Russia and Belarus were selected because they are more repressive compared to the other two and usually swiftly suppress any protest attempts. Therefore, it is fascinating to investigate which media outlets were capable of mobilizing participants on a larger scale despite those repressions.

As for the chronological framework used to analyze those seven protest movements in four post-Soviet hybrid regimes, a period between 2004 and 2017 was selected. This timeframe is attractive to look at because two so-called color revolutions took place during this time, as well as several failed attempts at such a government overthrow.

In terms of scientific literature, the following books and article were most helpful for this study to explain how protests develop in general and in authoritarian regimes in particular and what the media's role is in protest mobilization. The theory of social movements is one branch of Sociology research, which especially examines protest actions. In their chapter of the book "Social Movements and Networks", published in 2003, Pamela Oliver and Daniel Meyers used diffusion and network approaches to explain protest cycles. Graeme Robertson explains in his book "The Politics of Protest in Hybrid Regimes" (2011) what unique challenges protest movement have to overcome in semi-authoritarian systems. Lastly, Anita Breuer, Todd Landman and Dorothea Farquhar discuss in their article "Social Media and Protest Mobilization" published in a scientific journal in 2015, how the media in general and the internet and social networks in particular can help with mobilizing protest participants in semi-authoritarian regimes.

This theoretical framework will be explained more in detail in the literature review of this Master thesis, which will serve as an introduction into the topic of protests as political participation and the media's role in protest mobilization. In chapter three of this study, the case study approach used will be outlined and

background information on the seven protest waves analyzed will be given. Chapter four introduces semi-structured expert interviews as a popular research method, details how the eight interviews for this paper were conducted and explains the research questions of this study. In the fifth chapter, the data gathered from the interviews will be discussed and the research questions will be answered one by one. Lastly, the results of this Master thesis will be summarized and put into a broader research context in the concluding chapter of the paper.

2. Literature review

2.1. Political Participation

In a research tradition going back decades, politicians and scholars have always emphasized that political participation is as a cornerstone of democracy. Ordinary citizens may participate in political affairs in a myriad of ways, such as voting, contacting public officials, joining political parties, demonstrating, boycotting, signing petitions, posting blogs, volunteering etc. Although these elements are important for every political system, the extend of political participation is a decisive criterion for evaluating the level of democracy.

The main characteristics of political participation remain undisputed, despite the significant changes to its definition caused by the blurring of lines between public and private spheres, the increased resources and education of citizens and the accessibility of a vast amount of political information. First, political participation is understood as an activity carried out voluntary and not commanded by political leaders or the law. Second, it refers to the actions of regular citizens as opposed to politicians, lobbyists or civil servants. Third, it concerns politics, government and the state and is not limited to any specific time periods or areas.

Over the last six decades, the range of political participation broadened extensively. Studies from the 1940s and 1950s concentrated on party membership, campaigning and voting as the most common forms of participation. By the 1960s, direct contact between officials, politicians and citizen was included to reflect the growing importance of community politics. These types of action emerged as conventional or institutionalized modes of participation.

Because of the vast social and political changes in the late 1960s and 1970s, citizens' involvement in political affairs increased. This made it clear that political participation is not limited to institutionalized modes only. The interests and opinions of citizens, including disapproval, dissent and rejection, were now included in the range of political participation. As protest actions initiated by

women's, pacifist's and ecologist's groups were not conform with the social norm in this time period, they were referred to as unconventional modes of participation.

The 1980s saw the expansion of political participation with activities like social engagement, volunteering and civil activities. As the risks of increasing government spending became evident, civil engagement of citizens was seen as a good way for state intervention. After all, the presence of an active civil society is strongly related to the strength of democracy. Here, individual citizens making an ethical and moral standpoint is underlined, such as boycotts and buycotts: citizens exercising their consumer power to reach a certain political goal. These individualized collective actions are called modes of creative participation.

Recently, the rise of the internet and new technological developments have promoted these types of actions by making it easier to voice frustrations, demands and ideas, which are available for everyone at an instant with little costs. The usage of the internet as a mode of participation is characterized as connective action[9].

The profound impact of new technologies on political participation has given rise to research that is focusing on how the internet influences the political activities of citizens. Technology offers new ways for participation or alters some aspects of already existing ones. The internet has lowered the cost of participation and extended the possibilities of political activities. It has also increased the opportunities for promoting participation in political affairs, primarily direct actions, protests and new social movements. Furthermore, internet-based technology has expanded the territorial scope, thus making the coordination of political action easier even on a transnational scale[10].

[9] Van Deth, Jan 2016: What is Political Participation?, in: Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, Oxford University Press, p. 2-5.
[10] Anduiza, Eva/Cantijoch, Marta/Gallego, Aina 2009: Political Participation and the Internet, in: Information, Communication and Society 12: 6, p. 860-861.

Three types of political participation regarding the internet can be identified: there are activities one may only undergo online, such as affecting government policies via e-mails, petitions or discussions on websites. Therefore, this type broadens the traditional modes of political participation. Second, there are those activities, which one might carry out both online and offline. These include getting in contact with a government institution or a politician in person, by calling or writing them a letter or online via e-mail to pose a question or voice an opinion. To put a signature under a petition or to donate money follow the same pattern. This way, the frequency of participation may be increased, if citizens who are usually not involved in politics become engaged via these new chances the Internet provides. The last type of participation is only possible offline, in real life. Here, Internet access and the material on politicians and political organizations it supplies, can affect the voting disposition of the citizens and whether or not they join political parties[11].

Considering such newer types of political participation, Casteltrione (2015) has come up with a modern and vast definition of political participation: *"a set of activities influencing or aiming to influence governments' actions and other individuals' political behaviours, and/or reflecting individuals' interest and psychological involvement in politics"*[12]. This definition contains various aims of participation. For one, it encompasses mobilization – affecting governments' activities directly (by getting in contact with officials) or indirectly (by influencing members of the public). In addition, it also includes communication activities, such as reading up on politics in the news and discussing political events with social contacts[13].

[11] Anduiza, p. 862-863.
[12] Casteltrione, Isidoropaolo 2015: The Internet, Social Networking Web Sites and Political Participation Research, in: http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/5462/4403, last accessed 15.04.2017.
[13]. Ibid.

2.2. Political mobilization

A key question in the literature is what motivates people to engage in political affairs in the first place. Political mobilization is an important prerequisite for participation, because citizens have to be briefed and recruited before they join political activities. There are two sides to mass participation in politics: a "supply" – the inhibitions and motivations of individual citizens for their participation – and a "demand" side – the political elites' opportunities, incentives and resources to mobilize their citizens' participation. Therefore, political mobilization is both a foundation of influence for individual citizens and a tool for political elites to gain power and compete for office. To be victorious at elections, political parties and candidates must mobilize contributors, volunteers and voters. To affect governments and their policies, activists and politicians have to motivate followers to support leaders, constituents to back a cause and citizens to support organizations[14].

Encompassing both supply and demand side, Rosenstone and Hansen have formulated a broad definition of political mobilization in their book "Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America" (1993). It refers to political mobilization as *"the process by which candidates, parties, activists, and groups induce other people to participate"*[15] in political affairs *"to win elections, to pass bills, to modify rulings, [and] to influence policies"*[16]. Political organizations can either get into direct contact with citizens to present them a specific *"opportunity for political action"*[17] or enter in general mobilizing communications with them to lower their costs of collecting political information. This leads to an increase in the contacted citizen's intake of vital information and a greater chance of political participation.

[14] Hansen, John 2016: Mobilization, Participation, and Political Change, in: Party Politics 22: 2, p. 149.
[15] Rosenstone, Steven/Hansen, John 1993: Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America, New York, p. 25.
[16] Ibid., p. 30.
[17] Ibid., p 30.

The methods and tools used by political parties, politicians, organizations and activists to inform and motive citizens to participate in various causes have transformed significantly in recent years. Generally speaking, simply being asked to participate already makes a lot of difference. Most citizens react to some sort of mobilizing attempts from either another citizen who already participates or an organization. Mobilization can also have various aims, ranging from gathering financial or material support, raising awareness or spreading information.

Conventional mobilization methods feature posters, leaflets, movies and TV-ads, radio etc. to reach citizens[18]. They also contain publicly available voter and registrant lists or privately compiled lists with the names of citizen who previously welcomed contact attempts. Methods such as neighborhood canvassing and phone book dialing may be used as well.

But the internet has turned out to be a game changer here too. In contrast to costly and time-consuming mobilizing attempts via postal mail, telephone or door-to-door campaigning, the internet establishes a way of communication that drastically decreases the costs of mobilization. For example, the cost of sending out a single e-mail is practically the same as sending a 1000[19]. In addition to electronic mail, online donations, social networking sites, YouTube videos and community websites may all be used to inform and mobilize participants via the internet.

In addition to being a cost-effective and fast information and mobilization tool, the spread of new technologies increase the possibility for a more intense and inclusive political communication between citizens. Internet use and a higher level of political engagement is also positively correlated[20].

[18] Hooghe, Marc et al. 2010: The Potential of Internet Mobilization: An Experimental Study on the Effect of Internet and Face-to-Face Mobilization Efforts, in: Political Communication, 27: 4, p. 406-408.
[19] Krueger, Brian 2006: A Comparison of Conventional and Internet Political Mobilization, in: American Politics Research 34: 6, p. 760-761.
[20] Hooghe et al., p. 409.

2.3. Protests as a form of political participation

Since the main subject of this study is a specific form of participation, namely political protests, an overview of the term, its types and potential ways of mobilization will be given in this section.

Protests may contain a wide array of actions, such as marches, demonstrations, blockades, sit-ins, occupations and strikes. Any actions utilized by groups of people to make appeals to the government or to other people whose attitudes may be affected by the government can be considered as forms of protest[21].

In Western democracies, patterns of political participation have altered a lot in the past decades. A significant change is the growing participation in marches and demonstrations. Since the 1970s, a dramatic increase of the number of people participating in protest actions has been observed. This caused many researchers to declare a "social movement society" or "demonstration democracy"[22].

Vast amount of literature in Sociology and Political Science agree that because of the professionalization, institutionalization and diffusion of protest, previously contentious actions by the politically excluded have now been included in the standard range of political participation. This is why the differentiation between conventional and unconventional participation that has been formerly applied in the studies of political protests is no longer necessary. In democratic states, protests have developed into a political strategy and is not separate from, but more complementary to the conventional mode of participation.

Other characteristics shared by protest actions in democracies are the tendency to respect the rules of democratic participation and a desire to attract positive attention to a cause or a demand. This is why protests in democratic states generally do not threaten either public property or the safety of people. Of course,

[21] Robertson, Graeme 2011: The Politics of Protest in Hybrid Regimes. Managing Dissent in Post-Communist Russia, Cambridge University Press, p. 18.

[22] Saunders, Clare et. al. 2012: Explaining Differential Protest Participation: Novices, Returners, Repeaters, and Stalwarts, in: Mobilization: An International Journal 17: 3, p. 263.

terrorism and violence is also an issue to be dealt with, but the majority of protests in these states are more moderate and comprise of demonstrating commitment, unity and numbers, vocalizing challenges and makings demands rather than direct action.

The relationship between democracy and protest repression is also generally positive. Repression – such as physical harm of participants and/or violations of their civil rights – has repeatedly been revealed as much less frequent in democratic states than in non-democratic ones[23].

One field of Sociology research in particular examines protest actions: the theory of social movements. They are defined as *"an organized effort by a significant number of people to change (or resist change in) some major aspect or aspects of society"*[24]. This concept first emerged in France more than 200 years ago to describe the social protests that broke out there and later at other places. It was first applied to new political actors challenging the status quo, but is now used to refer to forces operating outside the political system. Researchers studying social movements focus on their beginnings, recruitments, organizations and impact.

One of the earliest systematic classifications of social movement was put forth by Neil Smelser ("Theory of Collective Behaviour", 1962). He describes six steps a social movement usually undergoes: "*structural conduciveness (the broadest social conditions necessary for the movement to occur); structural strain (a sense of injustice or malaise); the growth and spread of a generalized belief (such as an ideology which offers answers to people's problems); precipitating factors (events that trigger action); mobilization of participants for action (for example via conversion); and, finally, the operation of social control"*[25].

[23] Robertson, p. 19-20.
[24] Scott, John/Marshall, Gordon 2009: A Dictionary of Sociology (3 rev. Ed.), in: http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199533008.001.0001/acref-9780199533008-e-2148, last accessed 06.04.2017.
[25] Ibid.

Another prominent viewpoint on social movements is the theory of resource mobilization, established by Mayer Zald and John McCarthy ("The Dynamics of Social Movements", 1979). Within this brand of research, social movements are seen as organizations which concentrate on mobilizing resources. The theory explores how such resources are used and how the state may limit them. Resources in this perspective take on a multitude of meanings. Elements such as ties to business and political leaders, communication networks, time and money available and leadership are utilized to explain a social movement's success or failure[26].

More recently, Pamela Oliver and Daniel Meyers used the social movement approach to explain protest cycles in a chapter of the book "Social Movements and Networks" (2003).

Specifically, they apply network and diffusion concepts and the link between them to analyze protest cycles. In that sense, they understand social movements *"as diffuse action fields in which actions affect other actions and the action repertoires of the different actors coevolve through time and through interaction with each other"*[27]. The regime and movement/protest participants interact with each other in such a way that one actor reacts to the actions of the other actor and so forth. Similarly, inside the movement, various participants or organizations also respond to one another. Successful tactics and ideas of the movement may reach new participants or organizations or they may not, mobilizing more support or losing it. The movement and their protest actions are either covered or not covered in the mass media, so further protest actions are thus promoted or disheartened. Every one of these processes influence other processes and together create an intricate web of interactions.

[26] Scott, Marshall: http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199533008.001.0001/acref-9780199533008-e-2148, last accessed 06.04.2017.

[27] Oliver, Pamela/Meyers, Daniel 2003: Networks, Diffusion, and Cycles of Collective Action, in: Diani, Mario/McAdam, Doug: Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action, Oxford, p. 2.

Individual citizens and groups may protest because of a myriad of reasons and do so on multiple occasions. One demonstration or march by these individuals or groups increases the likelihood of a repeat of that demonstration or march. This is the essence of the diffusion model. However, for diffusion to occur, some form of communication or network ties between the individuals or groups have to be established first. More protest actions can only be mobilized if the original participants coordinate further with each other and inform other potential protesters about their actions. The success of these diffusion effects depends on whether the protest actions actually manage to initiate change, appear in the media and are not quashed by the regime.

This diffusion process creates protest waves or cycles, which may be first started by strong reactions by the public to major events like the outbreak of a war or natural disasters. Protests then occur in cycles, around regular life rhythms such as school, work and political calendars. After all, participants can't engage in protest activities 24 hour a day, at the very least they must eat and sleep. There is always a period of rest and reorganizing before a protest movement is prepared for further actions again. However, this does not mean that diffusion is absent in these dormant periods. It may take a while to arrange the logistics of a big event or march and information about it to spread.

Furthermore, it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of diffusion embedded in other diffusion processes. Some smaller protest waves and their diffusion processes are able to develop into long protest campaigns spanning months or even years. A large social movement is always based on smaller events in specific areas or linked to special issues. These smaller events tend to develop from an eruption of activities by one organization or in one area or from the diffusion of a specific movement tactic and issue between those organization or areas. In both cases, the network concept is often applied. It refers to the political and social ties in a movement that allows a group of people to act in unison and the communication channels used to broadcast information between them.

To understand how exactly network ties play a role in the diffusion of protest cycles, a description of the three processes – communication, influence, joint action – that occur within networks have to be given. Communication ties are necessary to spread information about past and future protest events. Influence ties lay the groundwork for one actor to influence the activities or opinions of other actors. Both ties create the potential to mobilize more protest participants. The third stage is joint action, when actors initially independent from each other come together, make collective decisions and act as a group.

Both influence and information are transmitted through social connections. However, actors may be connected in different forms. Three elements are important to mention here: spatial, organizational and relational. All of these dimensions influence protest movements in a different way.

Spatial: Protest movement are tied to specific places. Participants often gather in the same location simultaneously to protest in unison. A lot of the time, protests and riots diffuse geographically: individuals find out about them because they happen to be close to their locations.

Organizational: Participants, especially the organizers, of a protest movement are usually connected beyond simply being close to a demonstration. After all, protest actions have to be organized and coordinated, which happens through movement or political ties. A national movement organization likely has strong political connections with its various local outlets. These local chapters of the same movement organization can arrange protests in several cities at the same time.

Relational: Participants of a movement organization may also be connected to non-members through social ties, such as friendship, presence at the same university, school, sports club and church or employment in the same business. Many times, these ties are responsible for further protest mobilization[28].

[28] Oliver, Meyers, p. 3-9.

2.4. Protests in semi-authoritarian regimes

Thus far, the literature review has shed light on the vast research on political participation, mobilization and protests as a special form of participation in democratic states. However, this study features cases located in the former Soviet Union, which are classified as semi-authoritarian or hybrid regimes. This is why it is necessary to provide an overview on the classification of hybrid regimes and the specifics of protest waves in such regime types.

On the political spectrum, a semi-authoritarian or hybrid regime is located in between a fully developed democracy and a totalitarian system. Such a regime typically does not comply with one or more requirements of a democracy, namely "*(a) universal suffrage, both male and female, (b) free, competitive, recurrent, and fair elections, (c) more than one party, and (d) different and alternative media sources"*[29].

In a hybrid regime, some form of public sphere still exists and formal democratic institutions, especially elections, have never been disbanded[30]. A few oppositional groups have been able to establish themselves due to at least some degree of adherence to civil rights by the regime. Also, a number of political parties are allowed to engage in politics, but usually only one dominates somewhat competitive elections. Within that party, there may even be real contest and campaigning between candidates. The other parties are characterized by bad management, frequent re-organizing and usually have a limited number of supporters. In other words, political participation exists, but is typically focused on election periods. A variation of exploitation of state resources, intimidation of opposition leaders, restriction to media access for the opposition and manipulation of elections may be common among incumbent leaders of a hybrid regime[31].

[29] Morlino, Leonardo 2009: Are There Hybrid Regimes? Or are They just an Optical Illusion?, in: European Political Science Review 1:2, p. 277.
[30] McFaul, Michael 2005: Transitions from Post-Communism, in: Journal of Democracy 16: 3, p. 7.
[31] Morlino, p. 280-281.

Therefore, a hybrid regime can be defined *"as a set of institutions that have been persistent, be they stable or unstable, for about a decade, have been preceded by an authoritarianism, a traditional regime (possibly with colonial characteristics), or even a minimal democracy and are characterized by the break-up of limited pluralism and forms of independent, autonomous participation, but the absence of at least one of the four aspects of a minimal democracy"*[32].

The countries used in this study, namely Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Belarus all fall under this regime type. A good indicator on this is the Freedom House Index. It characterizes Ukraine in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution in 2004 as "partly free"[33], the same with Kyrgyzstan and its Tulip Revolution in 2005[34]. The index took a harsher stance, however, on Russia[35] and Belarus[36] following mass protest in 2011 and 2012. It considered both countries as "not free" back then, with scores just slightly below the medium.

Protest waves in such hybrid regimes differ from protests in democracies – and autocracies – in several ways. First of all, it has to be said that protests in hybrid regimes are officially allowed and may even play a legitimate part in political affairs. Because of that, repression on a large scale is not anticipated as the regime's first response. In addition, the regime is not the only force behind political action and social movements, including NGOs, are able to operate.

Therefore, a higher degree of protest may be observed in hybrid regimes, compared to authoritarian ones. With very restricted entry to political institutions, the level of protest is at the bottom of the scale because only small chances for mobilization of more participants exist. On the other hand, with excellent access

[32] Morlino, p. 282.
[33] Freedom House Index, Ukraine 2004-2005, in: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2005/ukraine, last accessed 11.04.2017.
[34] Freedom House Index, Kyrgyzstan 2005-2006, in: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2006/kyrgyzstan, last accessed 11.04.2017.
[35] Freedom House Index, Russia 2011-2012, in: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/russia, last accessed 11.04.2017.
[36] Freedom House Index, Belarus 2011-2012, in: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/belarus-0, last accessed 11.04.2017.

to institutions, the motivation for protesting is also low because institutions are instrumental for political work. However, when there is at least come access, enticements to protest to affect decisions and gain more access is high. Thus, hybrid regimes with openness located in the middle of the scale but with dissatisfaction with institutionalized politics can expect the highest protest levels.

However, Graeme Robertson argues in his book "The Politics of Protest in Hybrid Regimes" (2011) that it is not as simple as claiming hybrid regimes are located in the exact middle between democracies and autocracies. Alternatively, he says that protest will differ – both in quality and quantity – among hybrid regimes contingent upon the set-up of organizations in a specific state, the mobilization opportunities employed by the state and the degree of rivalry within the elites.

The base for analyzing protests in various forms of hybrid regimes is to examine the nature and development of social movements and the environment in which such organizations keep up their work. Graeme refers to these elements as "organizational ecology" of a regime, which is essential to figuring out the levels and characteristics of protests in hybrid states.

Three factors are especially important in this context: the circumstances under which organizations are allowed to operate under the law and in reality, the character of organizations that are sponsored by the regime and the character of organizations that are autonomous or sponsored by actors outside of the regime.

By definition, hybrid regimes permit social movement organizations to operate in accordance with civil rights such as freedom of assembly and association. But this comes de facto with certain restrictions, such as mandatory registration, extensive monitoring, heavy bureaucracy and easy process to close such organizations down. In addition, the right to assembly may also be limited by coercions such as imprisonment, bodily harm, intimidation and persecution. All of this enormously restricts the ability to organize for the opposition.

As for the structure of state-funded organizations operating in hybrid regimes, it has to be said that they may resemble social movements in terms of their campaigning strategies but serve as political forces to mobilize support for the regime. For example, the Russian politician Vladimir Yakunin founded numerous nationalistic NGOs like the "Center for the National Glory of Russia". They honor Russian victories during the Second World War and are established for creating a feeling of a special history and patriotism while mobilizing approval of the regime.

At the same time, the working conditions for independent organizations are not easy. In addition to coercion by the regime, securing funding can be a tricky issue as well. In absence of state funding, most organizations rely on money that comes in from abroad. This may result in a dependency on the needs of foreign supporters rather than citizens. Therefore, a well-organized national campaign by autonomous movements don't happen very often. That said, during the Orange and Rose Revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, independent movements – most notably youth organizations – sprung up and were able to mobilize opposition and protest participants in the tens of thousands.

A second important element for analyzing protests in hybrid regimes is the level of mobilization for regime support. The presence of regular elections means that the regime must be able to activate its supporters, not just squash the opposition. Furthermore, they need to find creative methods to do so, since there is still some form of competition around. However, it's not all about elections and mobilizing voters. A hybrid regime must show off its power and point out the weaknesses of the opposition in other periods as well to dishearten possible contenders. Allowing an obvious show of force by the opposition in form of street demonstration may indicate to elites that this protest might be successful. Some parts of the elites may then be animated to change sides and come over to the opposition. For example, during the Orange Revolution, demonstrations emboldened Viktor Yushchenko, a former prime minister, to challenge the regime.

All of this means that leaders of hybrid regimes have to adapt their mobilization strategies to reflect these circumstances. In Russia under Putin, for example, the central government - rather than regional ones - has gained the monopoly on mobilizing support for the regime to forge an image of its all-encompassing power. A variety of organizations were established with the sole responsibility to gather support for the Kremlin of young people in particular. Youth organizations such as Nashi and the youth branch of the United Russia Party, Molodaya Gvardia, are instrumental for organizing pro-government rallies and showing strength in numbers to television audiences.

One additional element that connects to organizational ecology and state mobilizing methods is the level of elite competition. Elites may mobilize a large number of people as a consequence of elite competition. Therefore, it can be said that levels of protest are high where one can observe active elite competition. This may occur in hybrid regimes not automatically from the rise of numerous political parties, but is connected to a sense of change of the popularity of current political leaders. In other words, when elites are fighting over who receives what exactly and about the basic principles of political competition, protests and more competition is likely to occur on a larger scale[37].

[37] Robertson, p. 22-35.

2.5. The role of the media

Now that political participation, mobilization and the nature of protests in both democracies and semi-authoritarian regimes have been described in detail, the role of the media in this regard is analyzed further. Specifically, this chapter will be divided in two sections: the effects of mass media and the internet, specifically social networks, on political participation and their uses as mobilization and information tools of protest movements.

Mass Media

The mass media can entice citizens to acquire information about and participate in political affairs. It frames how people view the world they live in. The media has the ability to shape citizens' knowledge of a vast array of topics ranging from community politics to foreign policy, crime statistics, human rights etc. Consequently, what citizens understand and believe about such issues can mobilize them to take actions[38].

Previous research on the effect the mass media has on political participation is divided into newspapers, television and the internet. Each medium shows different characteristics regarding their influences on participation.

Reading newspapers shows positive links to participation. It mobilizes citizens to make a difference in their communities through social work and volunteering. It is also affiliated with activities like joining political parties, taking part in political campaigns, voting and fundraising.

Consuming print media also has an indirect impact on political participation. It expands the knowledge one has of political affairs and thus encourages participation. Increased political knowledge leads citizens to believe their activities can have an impact on the political system, which in turn raises the likelihood for them to participate. Articles published in newspapers also contain

[38] Moy, Patricia/Hussain, Muzammil 2011: Media Influences on Political Trust and Engagement, in: The Oxford Handbook of American Public Opinion and the Media, Oxford, p. 1.

information that advices citizens on concrete actions they can undertake to participate.

Furthermore, reading a newspaper can encourage participation by provoking discussions. Talking with each other permits citizens to trade information, discuss political issues and find out how they can make a difference together. However, individuals who do both, reading newspapers and discussing political issues with their social contacts, have a much higher chance to become active in the political world than citizens who only engage in one of those activities.

In contrast to newspaper consumption, the effects of television on participation are more complicated. The reason for this lays in the different programming and content of television.

Researchers divide TV content in news and entertainment. TV news consumption is strongly linked to participation in voting, going to political gatherings, reaching out to politicians and officials, joining campaigns and contacting editors. That said, the indirect links between watching TV news and participation are much more powerful. Through consuming the news on TV, citizens increase their knowledge about ongoing events, policy questions and politicians. With this information, they are more inclined to participate in political affairs.

Consuming entertainment content on TV can also affect participation. Content that includes both entertainment and political information can encourage participation such as going to a campaign event. So-called “infotainment” programming has the ability to improve participation by increasing citizens’ feeling of empowerment.

When the internet was established as a common way of receiving information, a lot of research has emerged in recent years to analyze its huge impact on participation. This has already been hinted on in previous sections of this literature review. Generally speaking, the regularity and the reasons for internet use show

strong effects on participation. If the internet is used for political, informational and social purposes frequently, the chances of participation increase.

Internet users, who read political information online, are more likely to participate in politics if they exhibit above average interest in political affairs rather than if they exhibit low interest. However, some data shows promising evidence that the internet may be able to mobilize all kinds of citizens to participate in politics on a deeper level[39].

To explain how the mass media plays a role in protest movements, Pamela Oliver's and Daniel Meyers' chapter "Networks, Diffusion, and Cycles of Collective Action" is again analyzed. They discuss diffusion patterns and networks ties in protest waves as described in a previous section of this literature review. One crucial network process in protest movements is "information flow".

When actors of a protest movement come up with ideas, strategies or plans for protest events, the "material" that spreads between them is information. In general, two forms of networks exist that may share information between actors: "node-to-node" and "broadcast". The network called "node-to-node" simply implies that actor one talks to actor tow, who gets in touch with actor three and so on. However, a "broadcast" network means that a big group of people is simultaneously connected to a single communication outlet: the mass media.

Through their reactions to a common news outlet, a huge amount of people without prior contact with each other can be rapidly brought together. When the mass media broadcasts the activities of a group, a communication chain reaction spreads within the reach of the broadcast.

However, it has to be said that the news media does not work in a completely unbiased way. Editors choose what to publish through certain criteria. The bigger,

[39] Moy, p. 9-11.

more disruptive and geographically closer to the broadcaster an event is, the higher are its chances of being included in a broadcast.

Also, it should be noted that the media itself undergoes diffusion. Once a news outlet has published a story, others might follow up on it and publish something on it themselves. It becomes news, when a sizeable number of news organizations pick up on it and start to publish more information on the same subject. This phenomenon is called "media attention cycle". Researchers have found that when it comes to protests, the "media attention cycle" under-reports movements at earlier stages and towards their completion and over-report them in their middle.

Furthermore, researchers claim that bigger protests profit from increased chances of media coverage. The bigger a protest movement's network is and the tighter the links between that network, the broader their demonstrations will be and the more press outlets will cover them.

When a demonstration appears in the mass media, the protest's theme and strategy is broadcasted to other potential participants. So, further protest mobilization goes hand in hand with media exposure. Activists in a different city can be motivated through the media to organize a similar demonstration, even if they haven't been in direct communication with the activists from the original event.

A combination of reports about a protest movement in the mass media and communication with one's own social circle can also increase mobilization on a more personal level. If an individual has watched news coverage of the protest movement and is then asked to support it by social contacts, this potential participant is more likely to join up.

In conclusion, protesters need the news to report their actions to mobilize a broader public. If they succeed in that, the protest movement is likely to be strengthened, prolonged and increased in numbers[40].

[40] Oliver, Meyers, p. 17-21.

Social Networks

There is a comparable mixed view on social media's input to political participation. Casteltrione (2015) describes social networking sides as *"Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system".* Vast research has been done on how social media affects political campaigns, activities and participation. In recent years, a lot of studies were conducted in relation to the Arab Spring, a wave of protests in North Africa in 2010 and 2011[41].

Boulianne (2015) has added to this research branch extensively. In her article "Social Media Use and Participation: A Meta-Analysis of Current Research", she describes theories on the relationship between social media and political participation.

Within one school of thought, researchers view social media as a vehicle for compiling information and news from traditional media outlets, friends and family. Because of this, users of social media could potentially stumble upon mobilizing information by chance. This sort of info might even be more convincing, because it has been shared by trusted social connections. Use of social media may therefore increase citizens' awareness of politics, which in turn increases participation in society and political affairs. Another theory claims that social media establishes network ties that have the potential to be mobilized. Taking part in a large network provides more chances of coming across information that points out how and why citizen should take part in politics. People who are being included in a big social network are more likely to stumble upon, for example, a call to back a petition or support boycott. In addition, they could obtain information about political parties or campaigns, which may raise

[41] Casteltrione, in: http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/5462/4403, last accessed 15.04.2017.

the voting turnout. Another research strain investigates social media use for taking part in online political groups or for establishing contact with politicians or activists. The more groups people engage in, the more chances they receive to be approached or inspired to participate in politics. If a big group of people is involved in an organization, it is relatively simple for this organization to mobilize a lot of participants to support their on- or offline events. Finally, some research analyzes the contagious links between political participation and members of social networks. They investigate queries like whether or not online friends' political statements or support of petitions or boycotts affect other people's activities in this regard[42].

Furthermore, Boulianne (2015) presents the outcomes of a meta-analysis of 36 studies, which accesses the impact of social media use on political participation. She concludes that the metadata, with 80% positive coefficients, displays a positive link between social media use and participation. Furthermore, she specifically studied social media use and protest activities, such as boycotts, petitions and demonstrations. Here, the results also point to a positive connection between the two[43].

Recent occurrences of mass protests against authoritarian governments in the Arab world have initiated additional research into the connection between social media and political mobilization. A lot of research has already been carried out on this in Western democracies. However, the impact of Internet and social media use in hybrid or authoritarian systems is not as extensively researched yet, although quite a few researchers acknowledge that the Internet displays great potential to challenge authoritarian regimes[44].

[42] Boulianne, Shelley 2015: Social Media Use and Participation: a Meta- Analysis of Current Research, in: Information, Communication and Society 18: 5, p. 525.
[43] Ibid. p. 534.
[44] Breuer, Anita/Landman, Todd/Farquhar, Dorothea 2015: Social Media and Protest Mobilization: Evidence from the Tunisian Revolution, in: Democratization 22: 4, p. 764.

In a hybrid system, it is difficult to mobilize a large part of society to participate in protests against wrongdoings by politicians or the state, because the government has a monopoly over public discourse. It employs a mixture of censorship and threats to combat negative publicity in traditional mass media. That is how social networks enter the field. Since the Internet is hard to control for rulers of a hybrid regime, citizens may voice their opinions via online social media. Activists and citizens have the chance to share grievances via social networks and potentially gather the attention of a wider public. This may become an incentive for people to participate in protests. The most critical element of protest mobilization in hybrid regimes is to assure potential participants that a large enough group will take part in the demonstrations to make an actual difference. Because of the limited possibility to access information in hybrid regimes, potential protest participants have good reasons to be afraid of great personal costs (health risks, police brutality, incarceration) if the demonstrations they are a part of go awry due to horrible organization or inadequate information. Social networks may decrease these fears by chronicling past protest events and creating an information cascade that increases protest participation. Also, social media can supply its users with information about the organization of the demonstrations and future actions. Thus, the Internet and social networks are capable of increasing the awareness of protest actions[45].

[45] Breuer, p. 768.

3. Mass protests in the former Soviet Union

3.1. Case study approach

This Master thesis uses a case study approach to analyze protest movements in four post-Soviet hybrid regimes between 2004 and 2017. This period is interesting to look at because two so-called color revolutions took place during this time, as well as several failed attempts at such a government overthrow.

A case study research design is used to understand underlying processes found in a single environment of framework. This may include one or several cases or one or more degrees of analysis. Case studies may also contain various kinds of data collection approaches, such as observation, interviews or surveys. Such data can be collected through qualitative (meaning it consists of words and texts) or quantitative (such as numbers and statistics) or a mixed method approach. Lastly, a case study approach aims to achieve several different goals: to come up with a description of a phenomenon, to test an already existing theory or to design a completely new theory[46].

As for this Master thesis, a research design with several cases and two levels of analysis was chosen: seven protest waves in four post-Soviet countries, divided into successful and unsuccessful protest movements. The Orange Revolution (2004) and Euromaidan Revolution (2014) in Ukraine and the Tulip Revolution (2005) and the Second Kyrgyz Revolution (2010) in Kyrgyzstan were selected as successful protest cases in post-Soviet regimes. Furthermore, three more unsuccessful protest waves were singled out, such as the Belarussian protests in 2010 and 2017, as well as the Russian protests in 2011/2012. The term "successful" is used to express that the protest movements managed to force the incumbent political leader to either step down or go into exile and thus achieve a change in government. Protest waves are labeled as "unsuccessful" when they could not initiate such a change.

[46] Eisenhardt, Kathleen 1989: Building Theories from Case Study Research, in: Academy of Management Review 14: 4, 534-535.

This was done so that the cases could be systemized and background facts provided in this chapter, including the causes of the protests, the main actors on the side of the protest movements and of the governments, a timeline of the protest events, how they were mobilized and their final outcome. These background facts on the protest movements will come from secondary sources such as scientific journals, academic books and newspaper articles. Later on, the cases are analyzed in more depth via a qualitative data collection method, namely expert interviews. This approach and its results will be described in chapter four and five.

Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Belarus were chosen as a unit of analysis in this Master thesis because of several reasons. First of all, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan not only went through color revolutions in the early 2000s, but also two "follow-up" revolutions several years after. Thus, it is interesting to analyze why these protest waves occurred just a few years apart within the same countries, if the protest causes differ from each other and which media outlets were most influential in mobilizing the demonstrations. However, the two other successful color revolutions in Eastern Europe – Serbia's Bulldozer Revolution in 2000 and Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003 – were left out of this case study. Since this Master thesis focuses only on the former territory of the Soviet Union, the Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia was automatically excluded because the country is located outside of this region. Georgia's protest wave in 2003 is not part of the analysis because it took place almost 15 years ago and is therefore the oldest and least relevant color revolution in post-Soviet times. Unlike Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, there are also no significant "follow-up" protest waves to analyze in Georgia. As for unsuccessful protest waves in the former Soviet Union, cases in Russia and Belarus were chosen because those two countries are the most repressive out of the bunch. Yet, despite significant police crackdown on any protest attempts, large numbers of people were mobilized there in recent years. Therefore, it is interesting to analyze how this was possible, which media outlets were used and why these protests ultimately failed.

3.2. Successful cases

3.2.1. Ukraine 2004 and 2013/2014

In the years leading up to the Orange Revolution 2004, Ukraine went through an economic recovery period. Some reforms were passed and as a result, the country's GDP was raised considerably. This new-found wealth was not distributed evenly throughout the Ukrainian society, but many people's life changed for the better at the turn of the millennium.

Economically, Ukraine was doing relatively well, but the circumstances within the political sphere were strained. A political divide emerged under Leonid Kuchma, who had served as the country`s president since 1994. During Kuchma's presidency, Ukrainian oligarchs - businessmen who became very wealthy practically overnight in the early 1990s when key industries were privatized – gained a lot of political power. Many oligarchs served as members of parliament. Despite Kuchma's attempts to take control over these oligarchs at least to some degree, backroom deals and strong influence of business over politics became the norm during his presidency. This caused plenty of accusations of exploitation and corruption to surface. The situation turned even worse with the so-called "Kuchmagate" scandal, released audio tapes implicating Kuchma to be involved in the killing of independent journalist Georgiy Gongadze in 2000.

Because the Ukrainian constitution sets a limit of two terms in the presidential office, Kuchma could not run a campaign of his own during the presidential election in 2004. However, he did put his weight behind Viktor Yanukovych, a politician from the region of Donezk and chairman of the Party of Regions. Yanukovych, a prospective president with a pro-Russian attitude, was a controversial figure with a criminal record, including accusations of rape. But the opposition, deeply divided for years, now united to challenge Yanukovych in the 2004 elections. Key political figures in Kuchma's administration defected, joined the opposition and established a coalition called "Power of the People".

It was led by Viktor Yushchenko, a financial expert and former prime minister. He opposed Yanukovych in the 2004 presidential elections. His party, "Our Ukraine", was seen as rather moderate and western-oriented. He ran a down-to-earth campaign supported by some civic groups, while Yanukovych counted on TV promotion and a negative campaign to slander his opponents. Yanukovych was also backed by Vladimir Putin, who gave interviews on Ukrainian state TV in support of him. It was important to Russia to keep Ukraine close, because it wanted the county to join the Single Economic Space along with other Ex-Soviet countries[47].

On October 31st, 2004, Yushchenko won a slight majority over Yanukovych in the first round of the presidential election. However, the International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) argued that the campaign leading up to the first round did not meet the criteria for democratic elections. Yanukovych was able to get 64% of airtime, almost all of it positive. Yushchenko, on the other hand, got only 21% of airtime, a majority of which negative. Additionally, manipulations favoring Yanukovych were disclosed by the IEOM: interference with the opposition's campaigns by the state, restriction of Freedom of Assembly, considerable issues with voter lists, inadequate amount of polling stations and little transparence during the process of vote counting.

However, since the race between Yushchenko and Yanukovych was so close, a second vote took place on November 21. The latter officially received 49% of the vote, while the former got 46%. This did not add up, because Yushchenko already came ahead of Yanukovych in the first round and two previous candidates put their support behind Yushchenko for the second round. Because of this unbelievable outcome and evidence of election fraud released by election observers, many protesters took to the streets in Kyiv[48].

[47] Gerlach, Julia 2014: Color Revolutions in Eurasia, Springer International Publishing, p. 9-11.
[48] Hesli, Vicki 2006: The Orange Revolution: 2004 Presidential Election(s) in Ukraine, in: Notes on Recent Elections / Electoral Studies 25, p. 171.

This kickstarted the Orange Revolution, a series of mass protests over the course of 17 days after the results of the second round was announced on November 22, 2004. It was estimated that around 100,000 to 300,000 protesters came together in Kyiv on each day during the revolution. More demonstrations took place in other Ukrainian cities, such as Lviv, Ivan-Frankivsk and Kharkiv. A system to support the protests on Kyiv's Independence Square (Maidan) was quickly set in up, such as a steady supply of food, sanitation installations, tents and even a big video screen. This was organized by the Youth Organization Pora and Yushchenko's "Our Ukraine" party, which had previously chosen Orange as its campaign color. They succeeded in getting word out that the presidential election was largely manipulated and mobilized many people to join the protests mainly on Maidan Square. Additional funding for the demonstrations came in from Ukrainian diasporas abroad and residents and businessmen from Kyiv. Therefore, a mix between quick thinking, good organization and clever PR was responsible for sustaining large-scale demonstrations during the 17-day long Orange Revolution.

Under pressure from the opposition and mass protests, the Ukrainian Supreme Court eventually decided to annul the results of the second round of the presidential election. This made it possible to organize a repeat of the vote, which was promptly held on December 26, 2004. The standards for democratic elections were mostly upheld this time and Yushchenko emerged as the winner with 51% of the vote. He was finally inaugurated as the president of Ukraine in early 2005[49].

Many Ukrainians had faith in Yushchenko as president and also in Tymoshenko, who was appointed prime minister. It turned out to be misplaced trust, however, since the Orange Coalition fell apart quickly because of political and personal conflicts. This resulted in political chaos, including constantly shifting allegiances, stalemates, instability, resolving parliaments and early re-elections

[49] Copsey, Nathaniel 2005: Popular Politics and the Ukrainian Presidential Election of 2004, in: Politics 25: 2, p. 102-105.

until Yanukovych became president after all in 2010. Yushchenko did not play a significant part in Ukrainian politics after that and Tymoshenko served a sentence in jail for abuses of office from 2011 to 2014[50].

In 2013 and 2014, the Maidan square in Kyiv was yet again the focal point of a revolution. The so-called Euromaidan movement started on November 21, 2013, when President Yanukovych did not sign the European Union Association Agreement as initially planned. As the term "Euromaidan" floated through social media, activists and protesters in their hundreds came together on Maidan the same evening. The protest also spread to other Ukrainian cities. However, on November 22, the government attempted to end the demonstrations and get rid of the tends that were quickly put up in downtown Kyiv under the pretense of getting ready for Christmas markets. Despite this, the size of the protest grew to over 10 000 people during the day.

At this initial phase of the revolution, students were the backbone of the movement. They demanded that the government stay true to the promise of European integration as its main foreign policy. On November 24, a pro-European rally took place in Kyiv, which numerous people – mostly students – from other Ukrainian cities attended as well. More than 100 000 people came together on that day. By the end of November, leaders and members of several political parties had joined the movement. Their main demands were ratification of laws required for European integration and the swift acknowledgement of the Association Agreement. The Ukrainian government, however, did not give in and many activists decided to leave Maidan.

Only a core group of students remained. The government thought they would be easy to disperse, so on November 31, 2013, policemen brutally suppressed the protesters. As video footage documenting the beating of students by security forces was released to the public, the student movement quickly transformed into

[50] Gerlach, p. 11.

a national one. In early December, the revolution gained momentum again when half a million protesters returned to Maidan square, this time to voice their aggrievances with the repressive government. The protesters' slogans turned more radical as well. Some activists seized the Administration Office of Kyiv and the first violent encounters between protesters and security forces occurred.

Now, in this second phase of the revolution, the demands were less about European integration and the Association Agreement and more about getting Yanukovych and his ministers to resign from office. The protests on Maidan square turned more and more violent, as barricades were build following an attack by security forces on December 11. The protesters' main stronghold began to look more like a military base than a peaceful tent camp.

The third phase of the Euromaidan revolution began on January 16, 2014, when a new law forbidding protests and assembly on the streets was passed. Despite this, several protesters were killed in downtown Kyiv during violent altercations with the police. Following these clashes, representatives from the Ukrainian government, the opposition and the foreign ministries of Germany, France, Poland and Russia met several times over the course of January and February to negotiate a peace agreement. However, this did not succeed.

The most violent days of the revolution took place from February 18 to February 21. The security forced fired shots at the protest participants, killing 113 in total. The victims came from all over Ukraine, not just the city of Kyiv.

On February 21, protesters occupied the Presidential Palace and insisted on the removal of Yanukovych. The Ukrainian parliament complied with this request and dismissed him as President of the country. Yanukovych then went into exile, ending the Euromaidan revolution, but plunging the country into turmoil when a still ongoing civil war between its Eastern and Western part broke out[51].

[51] Shveda, Yuriy/Ho Park, Joung 2016: Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity: The Dynamics of Euromaidan, in: Journal of Eurasian Studies 7, 87-88.

3.2.2. Kyrgyzstan 2005 and 2010

Similar to Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan is split into two parts – the North and the South. The divisions are rather convoluted along the lines of ethnicity, regional alliances and economics. The northern regions, where the capital Bishkek is located, have abandoned a nomadic way of life. Instead, key industries have been established there. Ethnically, Kyrgyzs, Russians and Kazakhs primarily live in the North. On the contrary, tribal tradition plays a huge role in the South, which is populated largely by Kyrgyzs, Tajiks and Uzbeks. It is poorer than the North and depends on agriculture as its main income. Ethnical conflicts between Kyrgyzs and Uzbeks are rather common there. The rivalry of North and South Kyrgyzstan for political power goes back to Soviet times and is still going strong.

Askar Akaev, who ruled over Kyrgyzstan from 1990 until 2005, first served as head of the Kyrgyz Academy of Science in Soviet times and then took up a career in politics, presenting himself as a liberal and reformer. Until around 1995, economic reforms had been passed in Kyrgyzstan and its government had established key civil rights. This raised president Akaev's status as a democratic ruler in the West, which made it possible for Kyrgyzstan to be integrated in the WTO and receive financial support.

However, since the mid-90s, Akaev and his government were steadily losing popularity amidst an economic decline, clashes between different ethnicities in the South and political marginalization of the Southern part of the country. Akaev answered these challenges with establishing a presidential system, cracking down on non-governmental organizations, excluding political opponents from participating in elections and putting key figures of the opposition in prison. Additionally, his family members brought important industries and business under their control while corruption spread. His proclamation to step down as president in 2005 so that one of his children could take over caused key members of his administration to defect to the opposition.

The parliamentary election kicked off with the first round on February 27, 2005. 27 000 people competed for 75 seats. This vote was accompanied by chaos. A unicameral parliament had been introduced to Kyrgyzstan at that point and the new majority voting system was built around personal votes. Because of these changes, businessmen and heads of major clans were afraid of losing some of their power. When a few of them did not even manage to officially sign up as candidates, local demonstrations took place shortly before the elections. The main contenders were the Forward Kyrgyzstan party headed by Akaev's daughter and the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan, a coalition led by Kurmanbek Bakiev. He started out as an engineer, but then worked his way up the political ladder with two governorships and a stint as prime minister in the early 2000s.

International observers claimed that the parliamentary election did not match democratic criteria. Soon after the second round took place on March 3, 2005, protesters organized rallies in numerous southern cities. This was in response to regional clan leaders failing to gain a foothold in the new parliament. The Tulip Revolution started when middle-aged and older protest participants occupied a local administrative office in Jalalabad, a border town to Uzbekistan. These demonstrations soon claimed the lives of several protesters and spilt over to Osh and other cities in the South. At this point, though, the protest movement was not organized by the opposition, but by regional clan systems to support their leaders. There was also no clear political connection or demands for Akaev to step down as president.

However, after evidence of election fraud came to light, key figures of the opposition stepped in, communicated with protest leaders from the South and even managed to put so-called people's governors in office in critical cities such as Jalalabad and Osh. Akaev's government reacted by sending in police against protesters, turning the revolution even more violent.

Despite this, more and more people's governors took office all over the South. Now, the protest movement also reached the capital Bishkek, where some members of the newly elected parliament did not vow to uphold the constitution at its opening session on March 22. A day after, some 15 000 protesters gathered in Bishkek to insist on fair elections and democratic changes to the political system. This was organized by NGOs, a student organization called Kel-Kel and key figures of the opposition. Shortly thereafter, Akaev's offices and the state TV channel was occupied by protesters. The Tulip Revolution, named after a popular pink Tulip flower, finally concluded at the end of March 2005 when Akaev and his family members left Kyrgyzstan. He officially resigned from the presidential office a few days later.

Oppositional leader Bakiev was then voted as president of Kyrgyzstan in July 2005. He started to serve a second term in the presidential office in 2009. However, similar to the Our Ukraine coalition under Yushchenko, Bakiev's People's Movement did not work out because of inner fighting and personal rivalries. Corruption again went rampant in Kyrgyzstan while Bakiev gave away political positions to family members[52].

Not only that, but Bakiev's family – especially his son Maxim – oversaw the entire economy of Kyrgyzstan. Maxim served as head of the Central Agency of Development of Investments and Innovations. As such, he was accused of embezzling money from a loan provided by the Russian government to aid the Kyrgyz economy. In addition, a close friend and advisor to Maxim, Yevgeny Gurevich, managed almost all of the national economy's finances through his MGN Group. This included national businesses such as telecommunication, electricity companies, mining and a social fund. Moreover, Maxim and his close circle even privatized a few previously state-owned companies for very little money.

[52] Gerlach, p. 12-14.

These facts, in addition to broad harassment of the opposition and free media outlets, again sparked social outrage all over Kyrgyzstan. Bakiev's government systematically got rid of almost the entire oppositional leadership through putting them in jail or forcing them to go into exile. Independent journalists suffered the same fate. Some publishers were forced to shut down their publications via questionable court decisions. All in all, around 20 leaders of the opposition and journalists went into exile because of governmental repressions.

This already bad situation was made worse with the economic crash of 2008-2009. Bakiev's regime failed to deal with the crisis adequately. In the beginning of 2010, the government raised the prizes for electricity, heating and communication services. As a result, the costs for heating climbed 400% and those for electricity by 170%. This caused an uproar of the poorer proportion of Kyrgyzstan's citizens[53].

To make matters worse, politicians from the North were upset with the fact that Bakiev, originally from the South, pushed them out of his regime. The so-called 2nd Kyrgyz Revolution started on April 6, 2010, when residents of the northern town Talas took to the streets to protest against Bakiev. He reacted to the threat by putting some oppositional leaders in jail. This mobilized a mass rally outside of the president's residence in Bishkek. Almost 100 people died when Bakiev ordered his security forces to fire on the crowd[54].

Nonetheless, the protesters did not give up and attempted to storm the president's residence again. This time, Bakiev backed down and left for his home in South Kyrgyzstan. Eventually, he went into exile. Meanwhile, Roza Utunbayeva, a long serving foreign minister, took over the leadership of the opposition and became the interim president of the country. She committed herself to reforming the

[53] Temirkulov, Azamat 2010: Kyrgyz "Revolutions" in 2005 and 2010: Comparative Analysis of Mass Mobilization, in: Nationalities Papers 38:5, p. 595-596.
[54] Huskey, Eugene/Hill, David 2011: The 2010 Referendum and Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan, in: Electoral Studies 30, p. 877.

country, but faced massive unrest in the South during the month of June 2010. Ethnik Uzbeks, who threw in their support for Utunbayeva, were the subject of violence. Allegedly, this was provoked by associates of Bakiev. It resulted in a refugee crisis and even caused concerns of an impending civil war[55].

However, this could be avoided when the interim regime under Utunbayeva went ahead with a referendum on June 27, 2010, that introduced some much-needed reforms to the country. Kyrgyz citizens were asked to vote on the new constitution and the confirmation of Utunbayeva as president until the end of 2011. At that time, Almazbek Atambayev was voted as the new president of Kyrgyzstan, but according to the new rules, only for a single six-year long term. The next presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan are scheduled for November 2017[56].

3.3. Unsuccessful cases

3.3.1. Russia 2011/2012

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia became independent and ratified its first constitution in December 1993, formally establishing a presidential democratic system in the country. Two chambers exist in the parliament, the State Duma with 450 seats and the Federal Council with 178 regional representatives. The parliament's main obligations are passing laws and overseeing the work of the government. Russian citizens vote for their president in direct elections. The president's responsibilities are foreign and defense policy, drafting law proposals or objecting to those from the parliament and issuing decrees. Such decrees are legally binding and are considered law. The president may also declare a state of emergency, which defers all civil rights for a certain time period[57].

[55] Kubicek, Paul 2011: Are Central Asian Leaders Learning from Upheavals in Kyrgyzstan?, in: Journal of Eurasian Studies 2, p. 116–117.
[56] Huskey, p. 877.
[57] Smith, Gordon B. 2012: The Russian Constitution, in: Gill, Graeme J. (Hrsg.): Routledge Handbook of Russian Politics and Society, London, p. 73.

Since ratification in 1993, the constitution was amended only a few times. In 2008, some states of the Russian Federation smaller in size were joined together, so their number fell from 89 to 83. The legislative cycle of the Russian State Duma was prolonged from four to five years and the tenure of the president was raised from four to six years[58].

These amendments to the constitution made it possible for Vladimir Putin, who already served two terms in Russia's presidential office from 2000 to 2008, to campaign for the post again in 2012. During his first years as president, he changed the way the country is run fundamentally. He established a powerful presidential system, with the state apparatus answering to his office alone. Putin achieved this through three steps[59]: Firstly, he eliminated Russian oligarchs from the political sphere and built himself a core group of supporters, the "siloviki". This term is used to describe officials, who hold the most crucial offices within the intelligence agency FSB and the ministries of defense, interior and emergency management. All members of the "siloviki" personally knew Putin either from serving with him in the Soviet intelligence agency KGB or in the St. Petersburg city council. Former president and now prime minister, Dimitry Medvedev, is also a member of this group[60]. Secondly, Putin extended his reach within the federal regions by putting an end to direct election of their governors. Instead, the president now selects the governors himself. Thirdly, he changed the voting system so that political parties can only gain entry to the Russian State Duma if they manage to draw in a minimum of seven percent of the votes. Before this change, the threshold sat at five percent. This new voting system benefitted the ruling party "United Russia", who gained even more power[61].

[58] Smith, p. 77.
[59] Hill, Ronald J. 2012: The Putin Era, in: Gill, Graeme J. (Hrsg.): Routledge Handbook of Russian Politics and Society, London, p. 13.
[60] Taylor, Brian D. 2011: State Building in Putin's Russia: Policing and Coercion after Communism, Cambridge, p. 56.
[61] Hill, p. 13.

Some parts of the Russian population did not react well to these changes. Less experienced and ineffective governors took the place of well-liked and long-serving ones. These replacements were extremely unpopular among local politicians and residents. Additionally, famous blogger Alexey Navalny investigated cases of corruption by members of "United Russia" and published his findings on his blog shortly before the December 2011 parliamentary elections. Some instances came to light, where bureaucrats offered their subordinates special benefits for participating in electoral fraud in favor of "United Russia". This is why Navalny invented the slogan "Vote for every party except for United Russia" to organize strategic voting against the regime. At least some voters took that to heart, because "United Russia" only won 49 percent of the votes at the parliamentary election, even according to the official results[62].

Shortly thereafter, Russia experienced its biggest demonstrations since the fall of the Soviet Union. These protests were triggered by electoral fraud, committed both in the parliamentary and later in the presidential election. On December 4, 2011, some 30 000 election observers were working[63]. Many of them were trained by the Russian monitoring group "Golos"[64]. They observed several ways to change the vote count during this parliamentary election. For example, soldiers, employees and students were driven to the polling stations in coaches by their superiors, who encouraged them to vote for "United Russia". Frequently, associates of voting commissions put already completed ballots in the ballot box either before or after working hours of the polling stations[65]. However, the game changing manipulations happened during the vote count and especially while uploading the final vote count into the electronic system[66].

[62] Gel'man, Vladimir 2013a: Cracks in the Wall: Challenges to Electoral Authoritarianism in Russia, in: Problems of Post-Communism 60: 2, p. 5-7. .
[63] Lanskoy, Miriam/Suthers, Elspeth 2013: Outlawing the Opposition, in: Journal of Democracy 24: 3, p. 76.
[64] Gabowitsch, Mischa 2013: Putin kaputt!? Russlands neue Protestkultur, Berlin, p. 100.
[65] Ibid.,, p. 94.
[66] Ibid., p. 105.

To inform Russian citizens about these manipulations, "Golos" uploaded a "fraud map" on the Internet, which showed the observed manipulations in polling stations nationwide. The information on the map came directly from "Golos" employees on-site via calls or texts, so that electoral fraud could be presented almost in real time. This provoked a lot of discontent. As a consequence, numerous new election monitor groups were established and the presidential election on March 4th, 2012 was even more vigorously observed, with a similar outcome as the last election[67]. Officially, "United Russia" received 49 percent of the votes in December 2011, but it was more likely only around 35 percent according to other estimations. Putin was elected as President again in March 2012 with 63 percent of the votes, but he probably gained only 46 percent[68].

Because of the restrictive attitude towards political parties and the huge power of the Kremlin over the few oppositional parties that did receive seats in the State Duma, there was no systemic opposition in Russia during the Winter 2011/2012 to help the protest movement[69]. However, the anti-systemic opposition did manage to take advantage of the uproar triggered by this fraud. Members of this informal opposition were independent journalists and celebrities, politician Boris Nemzov, activist Jevgeniya Tchirikova and blogger Alexey Navalny. This group founded the "Protest Action Organizing Committee" in Moscow, which set up meetings in cafés and restaurants, live-streamed them on the Internet, scheduled upcoming rallies, collected donations and negotiated with city officials. The committee also helped establish other organizations of the protest movement, such as "White Ribbon" named after the symbol of the movement. Older NGOs like "Golos", "Memorial" and "Incarcerated" – the latter two are civil rights organizations - also participated in the committee[70].

[67] Gabowitsch, p. 101.
[68] Shevtsova, Lilia 2012: Implosion, Atrophy, or Revolution?, in: Journal of Democracy 23: 3, p. 20.
[69] Gel'man, Vladimir 2013b: Party Politics in Russia: From Competition to Hierarchy, in: Ostrow, Joel M. (Hrsg.): Politics in Russia: A Reader, Thousand Oaks, CA, p. 284.
[70] Greene, Samuel A. 2013: Beyond Bolotnaia: Bridging Old and New in Russia's Election Protest Movement, in: Problems of Post-Communism 60: 2, p. 42.

The “Protest Action Organizing Committee” was able to help mobilize a lot of protest actions. The biggest protests in size were organized in December 2011 after the parliamentary elections. On December 5th, a few thousand protesters came together on Tchistoprudniy square in Moscow to voice their discontent over the electoral fraud. A number of protesters also took to the streets that day in St. Petersburg, Samara and Tjumen. On December 7th, about ten thousand people gathered for an unofficial rally on Moscow’s Triumph Square, as well as in other major cities[71]. A few days after the election, businessman Arsen Revanov put up a website, which promoted the white ribbon as a symbol linking the protesters together. It was mostly seen between the bigger rallies to draw attention to the movement. For example, a car parade flying white ribbons drove through Moscow or a human chain called “Big White circle” was organized on Moscow’s Garden Ring[72]. December 10th was the day with the biggest protest turnout in over 100 Russian cities. In freezing weather conditions, 100 000 people showed up for a rally on Moscow’s Bolotnaya square, in St. Petersburg and Ekaterinburg 10 000 people participated in protest actions. The largest demonstrations in the countryside took place in Northeast Russia and Western Siberia[73]. To prepare for upcoming protest actions in Moscow on December 24th, organizers and participants used Facebook groups like “We were on Bolotnaya square and will come back”[74]. On that day, again 100 000 people were mobilized to participate in a rally on Moscow’s Sacharov street. Some smaller protests were also organized in spring of 2012. About 20 000 participants showed up to a demonstration in Moscow on March 5th, a day after Putin’s was elected as president. Lastly, the security forces brutally dispersed around 50 000 protesters and ended the White Ribbon protest movement by force on May 6th, Putin’s inauguration[75].

[71] Gabowitsch, p. 81.
[72] Ibid., p. 176.
[73] Ibid., p. 82.
[74] Ibid., p. 175.
[75] Greene, p. 42.

3.3.2. Belarus 2010 and 2017

Belarus, just like Russia, can be considered more like an authoritarian than a hybrid regime, as indicated in chapter one of this thesis via links to the Freedom House Index. All power within the country lies with the president's office. In addition, Belarus has never really advocated for a national identity. Instead, the country's discourse is built around Soviet symbols, nostalgia for the Soviet Union and a strong connection to Russia and the Russian language. As for the economy, it is to 80% owned or controlled by the state. On one hand, this keeps the degree of inequality relatively small. On the other hand, it also generates high levels of job-dependencies.

Internationally, despite trying to maintain good relationships with both East and West, Belarus has become increasingly isolated from other European countries. It has moved away from the EU's policy of European Neighborhood and instead choose to be integrated in the Single Economic Space, along with Russia and other CIS countries. Belarus' relationship with Russia does not come without problems, though.

The current and long-serving president of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, started out as a manager of collective farms and agricultural businesses. In the early 1990s, he was elected to serve in the Belorussian parliament. His popularity started rising in 1993 when he functioned as the head of the parliamentary commission against corruption. This aided him in the presidential election of 1994, which he won with a clear majority. During his first years working in the presidential office, he marginalized the power of local and regional authorities, established a firm hold over all important state institutions and built a strong security service capable of penetrating every part of society.

Lukashenko's way of handling the opposition is rather abusive and includes denying politicians higher positions, coercion and imprisonment. Nonetheless, he continues to be rather popular with the general population, as opinion polls have

indicated. This is because Lukashenko is seen as successful in his fight against corruption and his upkeep of a relatively stable economy that affords people a more or less secure standard of living.

By the time of the March 2006 presidential election, the constitution had been amended with a provision allowing Lukashenko to run for president continually. However, this election was special because for the first time in a decade, he went up against a somewhat well-organized opposition. The toughest competition came from Alexander Milinkevich and Alexander Kazulin.

The former is an academic and previously worked as a doctor. In the early 2000s, Milinkevich became a member of the Congress of Democratic Forces, established by some oppositional parties. Kazulin started his career as a rector of the Belorussian State University. As head of the Social Democratic Party, he was perceived at the first stages of the campaign as Lukashenko's pseudo-candidate to steal attention and votes away from Milinkevich. But in the month leading up to the presidential election 2006, Kazulin emerged to be very critical towards the regime. Both of them attempted to get the attention of the media to promote their campaigns, but were faced with few opportunities as the media is largely owned by the government[76].

The outcome of the presidential election of 2006 offered little surprises: Lukashenko won with 83% of the votes. However, the amount of people working as election observers had been continuously growing in a five-year period before 2006. That's why it was possible to deploy around 30 000 observers to report on the presidential election. They kickstarted the first big protest wave in Belarus in six years. As reports of election fraud began surfacing, 10,000 – 30,000 protesters came together on Minsk's October Square to voice their aggrievances against these manipulation, attempts of intimidation of potential rally participants prior to election day and more generally, against a repressive regime. The protest wave

[76] Gerlach, p. 20-21.

continued for five days, during which around 150-200 protesters were constantly at the tent camp in Minsk. On March 25, however, riot police brutally broke up the protests. Nonetheless, it was a huge achievement that the camp managed to hold on for those five days despite cold weather, horrible sanitary conditions and little food. It was continuously surrounded by security forces, so no additional protesters were able to join and no food and water could be brought in. There was a surprising solidarity between both middle-aged and young protesters at the camp. Unfortunately, between 500-1000 of them were arrested during the protests and about 400 were sentenced afterwards. According to a report by the OSCE, an astonishing 200 individuals were sentenced in Minsk alone on just one day. Also unique about this protest wave was the strong presence of participants from outside Minsk and its clear non-party nature. It was not organized by the opposition and it did not aim for a regime change in Belarus. Instead, the demonstrations sprung up in a spontaneous way through exploitation of a general feeling of dissatisfaction rather than ideology or affiliation with the opposition. Therefore, the protest movement of 2006 in Belarus was special because of its self-mobilization in never before seen size[77].

Another big protest wave in Belarus took place on December 19, 2010, again in connection with presidential elections. Lukashenko won 80% of the vote and started to serve a fourth term as president of the country. In reaction to alleged election fraud, a huge crowd of people got together on Minsk's central square. They were using non-violent tactics to express their discontent, like spontaneously applauding or being completely silent. These demonstrations were largely mobilized via social media and have garnered a good amount of attention internationally[78].

[77] Korosteleva, Elena 2010: Was There a Quiet Revolution? Belarus After the 2006 Presidential Election, in: Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics, 25: 2, 325-326.
[78] Gerlach, p. 22.

However, the police soon broke up the protests and took hundreds into custody, including seven politicians that had campaigned in the presidential election. These seven candidates were put through a trial and then sentenced to jail. As a consequence, this protest movement failed to make an impact on the regime[79].

The latest protest case in Belarus took place earlier this year, during the months of February and March. This time, the protests did not follow after an election, but were set against a law taxing the unemployed. The so-called "parasite tax" was signed by Lukashenko on April 2, 2015 and adheres to the thinking that unemployed people are unlawfully taking away valuable resources from the state and should be punished for that. By February 20, 2017, Belarussians affected by this tax were supposed to pay the required amount of $250. It was reported that around 52,000 people complied, while 470,000 more notices were sent out.

The first rallies against this policy took place on February 17, when around 2,500 participants gathered in downtown Minsk to demand the annulment of the tax. Two days later, protest events were held in several other cities, such as Gomel, Vitebsk, Brest and Grodno. The protests continued well into March, with the biggest event attracting more than 3000 attendees. Compared to the tens of thousands of participants of the 2010 post-election protest, this number is rather small. However, it should be noted that this time, the protest stretched out to lots of Belarussian cities and did not concentrate solely on Minsk[80].

In March, Lukashenko finally decided to suspend the law pending further revisions. The last big protest took place on March 25, Belarus' Freedom Day, which were followed by mass arrests all over the country[81].

[79] Ash, Konstantin 2015: The Election Trap: The Cycle of Post-Electoral Repression and Opposition Fragmentation in Lukashenko's Belarus, in: Democratization 22:6, 1031.
[80] Ackles, David 2017: We are not Parasites: Understanding Belarus's Protests, in: https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/devin-ackles/understanding-belarus-s-protests, last accessed 08.05.2017.
[81] McVeigh, Tracey 2017: Riot Police in Belarus Attack Protesters Calling for End to 'Dictatorship', in: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/25/belarus-lukashenko-protesters-riot-police-attack-minsk, last accessed 08.05.2017.

4. Research method and questions

4.1. Expert interviews

Interviews are one of the most widely used research methods for compiling qualitative data. There is a broad variety among interview techniques, which developed from different disciplinary objectives.

Interviews are conducted to learn more about the interview partner. The purpose of gaining this knowledge is different and always subject to the research question and the disciplinary angle of the study. Therefore, some studies are aiming to test hypotheses, using clearly structured interviews with standardized questions and findings. Other studies examine certain content and viewpoints to gain more in-depth insights into a phenomenon and/or create hypotheses. This usually contains a qualitative form of interviewing, which is supposed to animate the interview partner to provide detailed explanations of a phenomenon to be analyzed later by the researcher. The goal of using qualitative interviews as a research method is to come up with theoretical insights and observations based on the experiences, expert knowledge and opinions of the interview partners.

Different categorization exists for qualitative interviews, distinguishing between structured, semi-structured and unstructured formats. This Master thesis contains semi-structured, individual expert interviews. Thus, this structure will be described more in detail in the following section.

Often used as the only research method for a qualitative study, semi-structured interviews are generally set up in advance by the researcher and the interviewee at a certain time and location. The interview process involves a bunch of pre-formulated, open-ended questions with the possibility of asking follow-up questions, if necessary. This semi-structure is the most commonly employed interview format for a qualitative project and can either involve an individual or a group. Usually, they are carried out only one time and may last between half an hour to several hours.

An in-depth interview with a single person may inquire deeper into personal and social issues. The research questions should be formulated in such a way that a somewhat homogenous group of interviewees is able to share common experience and knowledge about an issue. The selection of interview partners is supposed to elicit a maximum of depth and variety to the data, so that the research questions may be answered adequately. Open and direct questions need to be used in a preferable private and friendly interview setting to extract experiences and opinions in the best possible way.

Similar to the different qualitative interview formats, numerous forms of data analysis developed from varied disciplinary traditions. Different methods may be used for analyzing semi-structured individual interviews, such as the grounded theory approach which involves coding and grouping the qualitative data gathered into categories. However, this Master thesis contains a hermeneutic approach to interpret the data from the interviews. This is essentially an editing process, during which the researcher reviews and selects parts of the interview answers and then determines patterns for clustering the material gathered[82].

4.2. Identifying interview partners and conducting the interviews

As stated in the previous chapter, this study analyzes seven protest waves in four ex-Soviet countries in the period of 2004 to 2017. Two experts for each country were interviewed. This way, the analysis doesn't have to rely solely on one opinion per country, but can utilize more balanced and in-depth views. Therefore, eight interviews were conducted in total in between April 14 and April 28, 2017.

The ability to either speak English or German, the country of origin and the occupation was considered while selecting interview partners for this study. A good balance between foreign experts and those native to the countries analyzed

[82] DiCiccio-Bloom, Barbara/Crabtree, Benjamin 2006: The Qualitative Research Interview, in: Medical Education 40, p. 314-318.

and between journalists and researchers specializing on politics and/or media of the countries selected was desired. As the researcher for this paper does not speak Russian fluently, only those potential interviewees with English or German speaking skills were considered.

The prospective experts were approached via E-Mail, containing the general premises of the project, the questions to be asked during the interview, a notice that all interviews will be recorded, transcribed and included in the appendix of the study and a request for scheduling an interview via Skype. When the potential expert agreed to be interviewed, the question of whether or not personal information such as name and workplace may be included in the paper was asked face-to-face.

All in all, four researchers and four journalists were interviewed. Three experts were foreigners and five were native to the countries analyzed. This breaks down as follows in relation to the countries selected for the study: two native Ukrainian researchers as experts for the Ukrainian protest cases, two foreign journalists as experts for the Kyrgyz protest waves, one native researcher and one native journalist as experts for the Russian protests and one foreign journalist and one native Belorussian researcher as experts for the case study of Belarus.

The majority of the interviews, namely seven, were conducted via Skype. In two out of those seven interviews, English was used as the language of choice. A further four interviews were conducted in German. With the help of the Russian-speaking supervisor of this study, another interview was held via Skype in Russian. All of these interviews were later transcribed and translated to English, if necessary. In the case of the interview conducted in Russian, two fellow students and native Russian-speakers from the "Global Communications and International Journalism" Master program kindly provided the researcher with the transcription and translation. One expert requested to be interviewed via Facebook. Therefore, the questions were send to the interviewee on a private

Facebook chat, where they were answered in written form. This was done entirely in English.

Two interview partners specifically asked not to be named in this study. Therefore, their names and workplaces will not appear in the main text or in the appendix. However, the other interviewees agreed to be quoted by name.

4.3. Analytical questions and clustering of the material

To analyze the influence and usage of the media during the protest waves in those four countries mentioned, a questionnaire containing seven questions was used during the interviews. The experts were asked about current levels of Press and Internet Freedom in their country of expertise, whether or not changes to these levels of Press and Internet Freedom were caused by the protest waves, whether or not they initiated real political change and democratic reforms, which kind of media (traditional or social) was most influential during protest mobilization, which specific social network were most important and whether or not they think a protest movement needs the help of traditional media (especially TV) to be able to mobilize demonstrations on a massive scale.

To analyze the data gathered form the interviews, four research questions were formulated according to which the data was clustered after its thematic context:

RQ1: How did the media play a role in mobilizing the protest waves of the countries analyzed and which kind of media (traditional or social) was more influential?

RG2: Would television coverage of protests be beneficial to a protest movements, so that large-scale demonstrations could be mobilized or is social media sufficient enough for that?

RQ3: What is the current situation of Press and Internet Freedom in the countries analyzed and did the protest waves cause any changes to this situation?

RG4: Did the protest waves bring about long-lasting political changes and democratic reforms or did they completely fail to initiate a democratizing process in the countries analyzed?

These research questions will be answered one by one in the following results chapter by systematically summarizing the answers of the experts and giving examples for each country and protest wave analyzed.

4.4. Limitations of this study

One obvious limitation of this study is the small sample size of the interviews. More insight could have been gained and the research question better answered if more time, resources and interview partners had been available. Therefore, this thesis is not representative in any way and can only be considered as a starting point for further research.

More and more, a mixture between methods with both quantitative and qualitative data collection modes are used to answer complex research questions and to conduct comprehensive studies. Such mixed method approaches are capable of setting up methodologically solid research designs[83].

In that sense, it would have been better to apply a mixed-methods approach for this Master thesis as well. The main reason why only one research method was used and a limited number of eight interviews were conducted is the researcher's lack of Russian language skills and personal contacts in the Russian speaking world.

Therefore, with careful consideration, a content analysis of Russian speaking media and a survey of participants of protest waves in the four former Soviet republics analyzed were disregarded as unfeasible as an advanced command of the Russian language would have been needed.

[83] DiCiccio-Bloom, p. 320.

Qualitative interviews with English or German-speaking experts were then chosen as the best and most of all doable option. Initially, because of the lead researcher's lack of contacts in the post-Soviet space, interview partners were hard to find. However, with the help of the thesis supervisor and of fellow Master students of the "Global Communication and International Journalism" program, eight potential interview partner could be recruited.

5. The media and protest activities

5.1. Protest mobilization

In the following section, an answer to RQ1 is presented: How did the media play a role in mobilizing the protest waves of the countries analyzed and which kind of media (traditional or social) was more influential?

The first country analyzed is Ukraine. Two protest waves took place there in recent years, the Orange Revolution 2004 and the Euromaidan Revolution 2014. During the former, traditional media played a huge role in protest mobilization. First of all, TV channel "Kanal 5" was an important outlet for the Orange protest movement. It was established as a main channel for the opposition in just a few months prior to the protests. Surprisingly, "Kanal 5" was not shut down by the authorities and could therefore stand out with excellent and independent reporting during the revolution. Also, the channel served as a stepping stone for its journalists. Some former employees of "Kanal 5" became prominent figures working in the presidential administration and the political sphere. In addition, the independent newspaper "Ukrainskaya Pravda" rose to prominence with its critical reporting during this time. Both traditional media outlets helped the protest movement by covering the demonstrations and relying mobilizing information to the public.

Ten years later, however, Facebook turned out to be very important to the Euromaidan protest movement. According to Roman Dubasevych, head of the Faculty of Slavic Philology at the University of Greifswald and a Ukrainian national, this was hardly a surprise and almost predictable in a way since most of the revolutions during the Arab Spring went through Facebook as well. The Ukrainians just waited for their turn to have a Facebook revolution of their own. And sure enough, on the day President Yanukovych refused to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union, the term "Euromaidan" spread through posts on Facebook and activists started gathering in downtown Kyiv.

In addition, several cameras were set up around Maidan square to livestream everything that was happening on the internet. In Dubasevych's opinion, watching these livestreams was a bit confusing. At times, they did not convey much at all and only showed a huge crowd of people. They also lacked a commentary or interpretation of the events and could therefore not analyze what was going on critically. However, people interested in the Euromaidan protest movement were able to watch its progress online in real time. Through these livestreams, people could follow important rallies and get a heads up whenever clashes with the police were about to break out. Therefore, these livestreams represented a new media phenomenon. Although badly structured and edited, it was hard for viewers to pull themselves away from the screens and stop watching the livestreams, because something new could have happened at any minute.

As for the Tulip Revolution 2005 and the second Revolution 2010 in Kyrgyzstan, journalist and lecturer at American University of Central Asia Christopher Schwartz thinks that the most important media for mass mobilization were any devices with the capabilities to disseminate information immediately. In both 2005 and 2010, information about the protests spread through calls and instant messages via mobile phones. Online services and apps such as Twitter, Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki provided some sort of auxiliary support in that. However, Edda Schlager, freelance journalist based in Kazakhstan, stated that Vkontakte is currently used more for entertainment in Kyrgyzstan and that Twitter is not very important for local journalists. In her view, political and social discussions go through Facebook, because politically active citizens all communicate with each other on this platform. Also, short video clips and livestreams are popular tools used by local journalists on Facebook to report not only on protests, but also on topics such as gender roles and environmental protection.

All in all, the key to protest mobilization or to any kind of political discussion in Kyrgyzstan seems to be media that is "handheld". Mobile technology provides the fastest movement of information and therefore the fastest organization.

Traditional media plays more the role of an observer in Kyrgyzstan. According to Christopher Schwartz, journalists working for traditional media outlets often find out about an event that is already ongoing and report on it live when it is well under way. It is also common for them to report on an event only after it has already concluded. However, Schwartz brought up one notable exception to this. In the beginning of 2017, Kyrgyz journalists organized a rally responding to recent moves against user-generated content on Facebook. Initially approved by the mayor of Bishkek, the demonstration was nonetheless swiftly broken up by the police.

Peculiar about this protest event was that despite all of the journalist involved in its organization, few information appeared about it during the lead-up. Christopher Schwartz only heard about it two days prior via WhatsApp. This means that journalists employed by traditional media outlets have the same preference for mobile technology and the communication structures associated with it as regular citizens do. Considering that they have access to more effective means to disseminate information and mobilizing people, this is counter-intuitive.

In Russia, on the other hand, calls and text messages via mobile phones were not widely used during the protest wave 2011/2012. One expert, a journalist from Russia, claims that the telephone network is under surveillance, sometimes even without a court order. Therefore, the so-called “white ribbon” protest movement was mobilized by a mix of social networks and independent online media.

According to Maxim Alyukov, researcher and PhD candidate at the Sociology Department of the European University in St. Petersburg, most people got their information about the protest movement of 2011/2012 via independent newspapers like Novaya Gazeta and the internet portal lenta.ru. Traditional Russian media, like TV channels “Kanal 1”, “Rossiya” and “NTV” also reported on the protests, but stressed the alleged “foreign involvement” within the protest movement, which was trying to throw Russia into chaos.

The internet and social media played an important mobilizing and clarifying role during the protest wave of 2011/2012. The participants communicated and arranged meetings with each other via Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. However, it should be noted that the journalist from Russia sees a regional difference in social media use. According to him, VKontakte is used more in St. Petersburg and in the countryside. Facebook is more popular in Moscow. The journalist recently covered a protest movement organized by Russian long distance truck drivers. They are based more in Odnoklassniki.

On the contrary to all the other protest movements analyzed, the media did not play a significant role in the beginning of the 2017 demonstrations against the "parasite tax" in Belarus. One of the experts interviewed, Simone Brunner – a journalist from Austria specializing on Belarus and other post-Soviet states – claims that the most important trigger of the protest was anger over the parasite tax and a general feeling of being able to voice discontent without punishment at that point in time. This discontent among certain parts of the Belarussian population simply got bigger than their fear of repression, so the reluctance of taking to the streets in protest dropped. Surprisingly many people participated in the protests in early 2017, even the opposition did not plan on that. So, citizens interested in the protest movement got their information about meeting points etc. mainly through "word-of-mouth", as in the smaller cities such as Gomel and Vitebsk residents know each other well and don't rely on social media very much.

That said, the internet - especially Facebook and livestreams - was used during the protests. The Belorussian opposition is traditionally communicating online with a strong preference for Facebook above all other social media outlets. As a Western communication tool, it is considered as very secure. And the funny thing with livestreams was that Radio Svoboda gave out instructions for how to use this tool to film one's own arrest to draw attention to these repressions. Usually, many participants get arrested during such protests in Belarus. In that case, the internet had a documentary function. However, it proved to be difficult to set up

livestreams as the internet was down completely in the center of Minsk during the biggest rally on March 25th. Even still, the internet gave the protest movement a platform and some publicity. But it was not a mobilizing factor for the demonstrations.

As for social media use in general, the second expert for Belarus voiced a similar opinion as one of the experts for the Russian protest wave. Similar to Russia, Facebook in Belarus has the largest audience in its capital. In other smaller cities, Facebook's audience is not as big. In the regions, the main social media outlet is Odnoklassniki. Belarussians around 35 years of age or older communicate through that. VKontakte is also popular, but mainly with younger people.

When it comes to messenger apps, Telegram is widely used by both regular citizens but also by the media and the opposition. Telegram messages are heavily encrypted, so this outlet too is considered as safe to use.

5.2. TV versus social media

The following section will provide an answer to RG2: Would television coverage of protests be beneficial to a protest movements, so that large-scale demonstrations could be mobilized or is social media sufficient enough for that?

Most of the experts interviewed think that access to mass media would indeed be beneficial to a protest movement. Roman Dubasevych, a researcher and expert on Ukrainian media, says that TV broadcasts live and therefore, viewers can continuously see with their own eyes how large the crowd of participants is on the streets. This may lower their reluctance to take part themselves and animate them to join too. Simply reading a description of a demonstration after it already happened does not have the same mobilizing effect as seeing video footage of an ongoing rally live.

However, Dubasevych also argues that a different target group can be mobilized via social media: young people. During the Orange Revolution in 2004, young students were not the primary protest participants. Instead, the protest originated from the middle class. But the Euromaidan Revolution 2014 started with those people, who would have profited the most from the Association Agreement with the EU. That was the younger part of the population, who wanted to travel and study abroad. They were mobilized mostly via Facebook, because the level of trust for TV programs was not very high among them.

Olena Goroshko, Chairholder of the Cross-Cultural and Media Communications Department at National Technical University Kharkov also thinks that the internet is a great mobilization tool mostly for young people. But for the majority of Ukrainian residents, TV and not the internet is the main source of information. Therefore, she argues that it would be much better for a protest movement if it had access to TV in order to mobilize mass demonstration.

The same stays true for Kyrgyzstan, says Edda Schlager, freelance journalist and expert for Central Asia. Access to TV can be very important to a protest movement to mobilize a maximum number of residents. Television screens are turned on pretty much 24/7 in Central Asia. In the countryside, where the internet connection is not that great, the majority of residents get their information from TV.

Christopher Schwartz offers a sociological and cognitive psychological perspective on why he thinks that protest movements most definitely need the help of TV to mobilize large scale demonstrations. Mass media enjoys a different kind of legitimacy than social media. The latter is connected to the user's immediate social circle, so any information shared via social media is subjective and seen through the lenses of other people. Traditional media enjoys an element of objectivity. If viewers hear a television anchor saying "The people are rising up", their immediate feeling will most likely be that this is not a rumor. If the

same anchor continues with “Down with the government!”, there is a good chance that viewers will instinctively react with “Yes!”. Not necessarily because these viewers believe what they hear on TV is 100% true, but traditional mass media lends information a feeling of universality, truth and a “we”-ness for large parts of the general population. Social media on the contrast, is limited to a feeling of “we” as in the users and their friends.

In addition, Christopher Schwartz shares the opinions of the other experts for Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine. Traditional media can mobilize people where social media cannot. For both media types, one needs to have access to the corresponding technology: smartphones and computers for social media and radio, newspapers and television for traditional media. But given the state of the economies and low average wages in post-Soviet states, access to technology of traditional media is more likely for the general population and not just limited to the middle and upper classes. It is a lot older and much more deeply established as newer technology.

One expert from Russia and two from Belarus offer alternative viewpoints on whether or not a protest movement needs the help of traditional mass media to mobilize large scale demonstrations. Maxim Alyukov states that a significant part of the Russian population uses the internet and especially Russian search engines such as Yandex and Rambler. The internet alone would be a sufficient mobilization tool for protests, if popular search engines would include coverage of protest activities. However, the government somehow controls them by using an algorithm to prevent the listing of news about protests. For example, no reports of the latest protests in Russia against corruption in March 2017 showed up in the news feeds of Yandex or Rumbler. But Alyukov found out from conducting a focus group with Russian TV viewers that they also surf the internet on a daily basis. In addition to watching TV programs, most of them use these popular search engines and also read their news feeds. If Yandex or Rumbler would be able to

include articles of demonstrations in their news feeds, any protest movement could profit from that immensely and mobilize more people.

Journalist Simone Brunner, expert for Belarus, says that this question is hard to answer because protest movement tend to be very complex and unpredictable. But she is inclined to think that it is generally possible to mobilize mass demonstration without access to TV, as this is what happened in Belarus. In early 2017, many people participated in the protests against the "parasite tax". Even only 2000 protesters in a smaller city is a lot for Belarussian standards. In this case, the protest movement received no help from TV. But in her opinion, it is a lot more difficult for the opposition and protest movement to mobilize their activities if they have no access to mass media. It is also very obstructive, if mass media is used by the government to discredit the protest movement. This was the case on Belarussian state TV, where the protest participants were accused of being right-wing extremists.

The second expert for Belarus, a researcher at a Belarussian university, has a similar point. If all TV channels are state owned, as it is the case in Belarus, and they reflect only the government's point of view, they can seriously hurt a protest movement's capacity of winning more people over. Portraying the protest movement's participants in a negative light on state TV could be described as counter-propaganda in this case.

5.3. Changes to Press and Internet Freedom

RQ3 will be answered in this section: What is the current situation of Press and Internet Freedom in the countries analyzed and did the protest waves cause any changes to this situation?

Both experts for Ukraine, Roman Dubasevych and Olena Goroshko, agree that the level of Press and Internet Freedom is rather high in their country now. The latter says that a few independent media outlets are now operating, namely a

couple of oppositional newspapers and TV channels. In her opinion, this is a great outcome since there should always be an alternative way of thinking in any given society. She also thinks that there is currently no significant censorship of the internet in her country. She attributes these achievements to the Euromaidan Revolution.

However, both experts state that there is a high level of self-censorship among Ukrainian journalists. According to Dubasevych, this problem is deeply rooted in Ukrainian culture. The country may very well have the highest possible level of Press Freedom worldwide, but it can still be capable of producing only propaganda, as is currently the case. This stems from a relationship to Russia that has never been properly re-evaluated and that contains many post-colonial resentments. Ukrainian news often used expressions such as "our boys" are fighting against "Russian terrorists" during the first two years of war in Eastern Ukraine. Dubasevych cannot fathom why journalists would position themselves like that and lose all of their objectivity. Although the country enjoys a good level of Press Freedom, its journalists chose to heavily favor the Ukrainian side while neglecting any other positions. For Dubasevych, this is the most critical issue that Ukrainian media faces today: a conflict between the inner self-censorship of the society and the outer Press Freedom, which is of course not without fault either. What is being broadcasted is the opinion of the majority, while there is no historic-critical discourse being held within the society.

Dubasevych gives several examples to illustrate this point. For one, Ukrainian journalists could not really decide which position they should take after crimes of Ukrainian volunteer battalions in Donbas came to light. On one hand, it was argued that "our boys" risked their lives by going to war for their country. On the other hand, facts were published that those battalions were dissolved and their leaders put in prison because of instances of theft and rape. The journalists could have chosen to report in a more objective manner, but they were unsure of how to assess this situation.

Another example is talk shows, where intense debates were held during the Euromaidan revolution. Journalists did not react well whenever someone from the Yanukovych camp put forth good arguments. They were even irritated, when representatives for Yanukovych argued in favor of a good relationship with Russian and claimed that Ukraine really cannot afford to go to war with its neighbor. The biased position of the journalists and talk-show hosts and the hot debates resulting from that did fragment the protests to a great deal.

Journalists with good intention and a willingness to do a good job were nonetheless so entangled with their own pro-Ukrainian camp that they did not want to hear any contra-arguments. In Dubasevych's opinion, the outbreak of a civil war after the Euromaidan revolution was caused by the fact that the other side was being ignored and not able to speak up properly.

The Tulip Revolution of 2005 and the "follow up" revolution of 2010 both had a different impact on the level of Press and Internet Freedom in Kyrgyzstan. Between 2005 and 2010, it got a lot worse. Local journalists were harassed and even killed, foreign journalists were put on blacklists.

After the 2010 Revolution, there has been a significant pluralization of the news market in Kyrgyzstan. The number of news agencies and new media outlets has risen exponentially. Most of these outlets were able to establish themselves with excellent and critical reporting. Some of them still play a big role in the Kyrgyz media sphere, for example the online news portals "akipress24.kg" and "fergananews.kg". Both had been restructured post 2010. The same happened to the only state TV channel, which was transformed into a public one shortly after the protest wave had ended. It should also be noted that many online discussion platforms and commentary functions have been created. A lot of independent blogs, for example, regularly publish op-eds. So, the willingness for discussing a wide range of issues has increased. Furthermore, it was possible for foreign journalists to freely travel to and work in Kyrgyzstan, even without an

accreditation. Especially Tajiks, Turkmen and Uzbeks were able to go there anytime and report on Central Asian issues. These are the reasons why Kyrgyzstan received the reputation of being Central Asia's island of Press Freedom after the Revolution of 2010.

However, according to Edda Schlager, this is all changing now and the level of Press Freedom is declining as well. The current president, Almazbek Atambayev, has become more repressive towards the media. For example, he has recently filed criminal charges against Zanoza.kg and Radio Free Europe for the sole purpose of silencing them. The Kyrgyz government would prefer it if Radio Free Europe, which is financed by the United States, cease their reporting and abandon the Kyrgyz subsidiary all together. This hasn't happened yet, but Edda Schlager thinks it is a possibility. She has also looked up the country's ranking in the Press Freedom index of "Reporters without Borders" and notes that it is currently placed 85th out of 180 countries in total. Kyrgyzstan is still the highest ranked Central Asian country, but this might change in the future precisely because of such repressions like the ones against Radio Free Europe.

As for the current level of Internet Freedom in Kyrgyzstan, Christopher Schwartz claims it's quite decent, but not without issues. Two major landlines provide the country with access to the internet. Both landlines run through Kyrgyzstan's neighbors – Uzbekistan for the area around the city of Osh and Kazakhstan for the region around the capital Bishkek. In addition, there are indications that the Kyrgyz internet ultimately goes through Russian servers. For example, access to websites such as LinkedIn and Google Translator is blocked by the Russian censor "deny.spacenet.ru". Furthermore, Kyrgyz security service attempt to silence political discussion on social media. There have been incidents where Facebook users were charged with trying to overthrow the government because they had posted complaints about the president.

In the aftermath of the Russian protest wave of 2011/2012, some new laws and regulations concerning the Russian media and the internet were introduced. There was an attempt by the government to control social networks. For example, security services tried to force the founder of VKontakte to sell his outlet to individuals loyal to the Kremlin. When that failed, the government tried unsuccessfully to coerce VKontakte to store their data in Russia, so that it could be accessed when needed. Similar attempts were made towards Facebook, which equally failed. Multiple laws related to bloggers were passed as well. When a blog reaches a significant audience, it has to be registered as an official media outlet. That imposes certain regulations on the blogger. Furthermore, under a new anti-extremism law, people can now be accused of criminal conduct, if they express an opinion online that is considered "extremist". Additionally, a story circulated in the media in early 2017 about Russian Cossacks, who apparently ran some sort of cyber militia. They deliberately searched for people on the internet and tried to stop them from doing anything they considered wrong.

So, both legal and informal initiatives were undertaken to try and control the Russian press and internet. In Maxim Alyukov's opinion, this has only gotten worse since the 2011/2012 protests, but says it's hard to confirm empirically because there are no interviews with officials available.

In regard to the current level of Press Freedom in Russia, Alyukov states that it only exists in some information ghettos. Some big independent newspapers are currently operating, which do enjoy some level of Press Freedom. Popular examples are The Moscow Times and Novaya Gazeta. But just like with online blogs, other media outlets are also falling under government restrictions once they reach a wider audience. This happened to a well-liked online newspaper called lenta.ru a couple of years ago. A significant audience visited the portal, so it was subjected to government attacks and as a result, their editorial staff had to be changed. So, some level of Press Freedom exists in Russia, but it depends on the type of outlet and the size of its audience.

The second expert for Russia adds that when it comes to Russian television, only "Kultura" and "Rossiya 24" are somewhat independent. The former produces a lot of cultural programs and the latter reports on important events without much commentary or analysis. All of the other channels are more or less at the government's side. One can notice this in the way these channels present the news. In the expert's opinion, the aim is to get viewers to behave according to the model that TV presents them with and to get them to interpret important events like they are interpreted on TV. Among radio and newspapers, the expert also mentions Ekho Moskvy, Kommersant and Vedermosti as alternative sources of information. He starts each working day by reading both of these newspapers. However, he adds that reading newspapers in printed form is a dying culture in Russia. Especially young people are relying on the internet heavily now.

According to Maxim Alyukov, until a few years ago, one could publish anything on the internet. It was completely free. However, the current level of Internet Freedom in Russia is getting worse with the number of new laws allowing security forces to regulate the internet. There is also more censorship and monitoring. This is especially true for social networks. The Russian journalist interviewed as an expert speaks from personal experience here. He is constantly receiving friend requests on his social media accounts from complete strangers. When he checks out their profiles, they look suspicious and somehow "fake". So, the journalist thinks they are trying to gain access to his accounts to monitor the contents of his posts. These are the reasons why his trust in Russian social media networks like VKontakte and Odnoklassniki is very low and why he doesn't use them for his work anymore. However, he also claims that when servers are located in Europe, it is possible to bypass the controls and get access to certain websites. That is why he still relies on Facebook for his research, because one may find more information there than in newspapers or on TV, despite all the monitoring. It is possible on Facebook to establish closed groups for more privacy. If one gets an invitation to join those, some interesting information may be unearthed there.

Simone Brunner, one of the experts interviewed for Belarus, says that the level of Press Freedom was relatively good during the last several years. The Belarussian media wasn't under as much pressure, profiting from a period of relaxation. But since the protest wave in early 2017, the situation has become tougher again. The only independent TV channel in Belarus, Belsat, has been especially affected. It suffered from office searches and arrest of one of its cameramen at a demonstration on March 25th. He was jailed for 15 days.

Another problem for independent media in Belarus is that there is no possibility for official registration by the state. Therefore, all of its activities are considered illegal. In Simone Brunner's experience, Belarussian journalists have to work under a lot of pressure. A friend of hers, a journalist who works for Belsat, is not even officially an employee there. The channel doesn't officially exist, because the authorities won't issue a registration. This is the reason why it is extremely hard for journalists working for independent Belarussian media outlets to cover protests, because a huge number of police forces are always present there. If a journalist can't produce an official accreditation – especially at an illegal event – changes of being taken into custody are very high. This is the biggest problem Belarussian journalists are facing right now. Their activities are seen as illegal, if the media outlet they are working for is not officially registered. Independent journalists are of course most affected by this.

A second issue for independent Belorussian media outlets is that the authorities may easily block access to their websites. This happened to online newspaper chartiya'97 running up to the big demonstration on March 25th in Minsk. During this rally, mass arrests of about 40 to 50 journalists took place. Some of them were put in prison for several days. Such examples of repressions are attempts by the government to intimidate media outlets and journalists to discourage further reporting on the protests (or other issues), so that they can't spread and grow larger.

That said, there are some media outlets in Belarus able to report relatively freely. Belsat and Radio Svoboda aside, internet portals Tut.by and Naviny.by are good examples. To Simone Brunner's knowledge, Tut.by even has the largest audience out of every online newspaper. Other than that, most media outlets are either owned by or at the side of the government. Every time larger protests occur in Belarus, state controlled media accuses the participants of being extremists in order to discredit them. For example, there was a report on the recent demonstrations on state TV, which equated the rallies to "Nazi-like" events. Russian media often uses this rhetoric as well. They claim that any kind of protest participants are fascists, who are trying to initiate a coup. Belarusians often consume Russian media as well.

Generally speaking, Belarus is never placed very high on the Press Freedom Index of "Reporters without Borders". In 2017, the country ranked 153rd on the list, out of 180 countries in total.

As for the level of Internet Freedom in Belarus, Simone Brunner states that there have been a few attempts by the authorities to control the internet recently. For example, there is a new law forcing Internet café owners to safe search histories. The entire internet traffic goes through Beltelekom. It is the only telecommunication company in Belarus and heavily controlled by the government.

Simone Brunner considers Belarus as a surveillance state and says that pretty much every resident is careful about how and through which kind of outlet to communicate. As experts for Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Russia have stated before, the opposition largely relies on Facebook, because they trust in its encryption and that nothing can be tracked there. This is also the case for Belarus' opposition, according to Brunner. Telegram is also used since it is heavily encrypted. VKontakte as a Russian outlet is however regarded skeptically.

5.4. Long-term outcome of the protests

Under this section, the last research question is answered: Did the protest waves bring about long-lasting political changes and democratic reforms or did they completely fail to initiate a democratizing process in the countries analyzed?

According to Olena Goroshko, there are some notable achievements by the Euromaidan revolution worthy of mentioning. For one, this protest wave has contributed in establishing Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Assembly and Ukraine's integration into common European values. It has also helped to build up the country's self-esteem, national identity and values.

Roman Dubasevych agrees that the Euromaidan revolution and by extension also the Orange Revolution were important steps in the development of Ukraine as an independent nation. However, he thinks that revolutions in general have always been overestimated by Ukrainian history. They are considered as more meaningful than slow advancements. The Ukrainian society may be prepared to protest on a whim, but is helpless when it gets down to bringing about long-term changes. In Dubasevych's opinion, the Ukrainian society does not have either the knowledge or experience yet to establish lasting developments. For that, the ability to compromise is crucial. But this opportunity is lost now, because of the war in Eastern Ukraine. That is the reason why the achievements of the Maidan protest wave are in danger.

A second problem the Ukrainian society faces post Maidan is economic hardship. Only rather weak socio-civilian structures have emerged after the revolution, and there are being undermined constantly. The clan system of rich and powerful oligarchs has turned out to be very resilient. So, Ukraine's economy has been steadily declining since 2014, not only due to the military conflict in Donbas.

Even so, both revolutions generally had a positive outcome for Ukraine. But in Dubasevych's opinion, not all of the chances resulting from this outcome were used properly and things that shouldn't have escalated, have only gotten worse.

The 2010 Revolution has affected Kyrgyzstan in a positive way, says Edda Schlager. It has fostered democracy in the country and has given a good degree of freedom to the civil society, media and the opposition. As stated before, this has established Kyrgyzstan as an island of democracy and Press Freedom in Central Asia in the previous years. However, according to Schlager, the current government under President Atambayev has become more repressive again heading up to the presidential election in November 2017. The most recent smaller protests in early 2017 against apparent harassment of the Kyrgyz opposition were brutally smacked down and resulted in some arrests.

Furthermore, she sees a similar fate for Kyrgyzstan as for Ukraine post-revolution: an economic decline hindering any substantial political reforms. In Schlager's opinion, the biggest shortcoming of the Kyrgyz government is that they are depending heavily on foreign development aid and don't do enough to generate real economic perspectives for its citizens. The political shift of 2010 has initially set out to tackle this problem, but has failed to solve it until now. Corruption is still widespread and reforms are not implemented fast enough. These are the reasons why there is so much discontent in Kyrgyzstan again now.

Christopher Schwartz has a very critical opinion regarding any changes brought by the protest waves in Kyrgyzstan. He also stresses that long-term, they have not done anything to stop the harassment of the opposition, swift crackdowns of police forces on any open discontent and empty promises of reforms by the government. After a brief period of relaxation, one can now observe all of these issues again under Atambayev.

Schwartz also thinks that it is highly debatable whether protests can initiate a democratizing process in general, because they do not automatically equate to democratic actions. Sometimes protest participants voice quite undemocratic demands as often seen in Kyrgyzstan, where ultranationalists call for a Kyrgyzification of politics and the oppression of religious and ethnic minorities.

As for the Russian protest wave of 2011/2012, Maxim Alyukov says that in terms of formal changes to the political structure and the law, it did not accomplish anything. In fact, he claims the situation has only gotten worse in conservative terms. However, there have been some positive politicization effects. This "white" protest movement helped hundreds of local activism groups to establish themselves in smaller regions and cities. They organize political events or protests and participate in local elections. Unfortunately, they haven't won a significant number of seats in local parliaments yet. However, groups of people who previously did not participate in politics at all, are now more politicized than before the protests. Alyukov currently monitors the activities of up to ten such activist groups. They are also involved in local protest campaigns against issues such as closings of public parks. They were especially active during the first half of 2016 running up the parliamentary elections held in September.

The second expert, a journalist from Russia, analyzes whether the "white" protest movement initiated some real changes more from the society's point of view. He claims that the protest did not cause any shift in the way of thinking within the society. He shares an interesting anecdote to illustrate this point: For his work, he often reports from the Red Square in Moscow on important anniversaries. He once overheard a conversation between two men standing in line in front of a memorial. One guy asked the other for his reasons to come there on this day. He answered that he can recall how his family lived in the Soviet Union, that they ate sausages made of high quality meat and that his parents brought caviar home with them. So essentially a guy, who is thankful to his parents for giving him a rich childhood and who now visits the graves of Stalin and Lenin. People like him have not changed in the aftermath of the 2011/2012 protests. There have always been a group of people – intellectually mostly – who are discontent with the political situation in Russia. And there have always been people like this guy, who will call others with different opinions names and put obstacles in their way. In the expert's view, such people will always hinder the development of the Russian society.

However, the journalist also notices now after the March 2017 protests in Russia against corruption how young protest participants have become. He refers to those youths, who are not turning on their TVs anymore, who are looking to the internet to find alternative sources. To say that current youths are lazy and spend all day playing online games on their computers is wrong, thinks the expert. They are online a lot, but they are also using the internet to educate themselves on what is going on within the society. It is those young people who are participating in demonstrations because they believe they can make a difference and initiate some democratic changes. In the expert's opinion, this is at least a step in the right direction, even though it might take a long time to actually catch on.

Simone Brunner has looked into the political situation in Belarus in the period between the protests of 2010 and the recent protest wave of early 2017. Like Maxim Alyukov, she thinks that there were no changes caused by these protests to the formal political structures of the country. And just like Russia, the situation has only gotten worse in Belarus as well.

In the years leading up to the protests in 2010, Belarus' relationship to the West was relatively stable. There was even an economic convergence with a real prospect of loans for Belarus. But the presidential election of 2010 were heavily fraudulent, which caused a protest wave that was brutally suppressed. As a result, Belarus became isolated internationally and the political structure even more repressive domestically. The brutal tactic of the Belarussian government shocked the country's civil society, because the regime was opening up a bit beforehand. But these repressions paralyzed and intimidated the civil society for years to come. Many opposition members were jailed as well and only released as late as 2015. The protest movement initiated no reforms to the system, on the contrary, there was a downright repression wave after 2010. Since then, the conditions for the opposition and the civil society only worsened. The protests in March 2017 against the "parasite tax" represent the first resistance to the government in years.

Also interesting to look at is the effect the Maidan protests in Ukraine had on Belarus. After 2014, Belarus tried to mend its relationship with the West and the EU, because the country did not want to depend solely on Russia as a partner anymore. Considering Russia's aggressive foreign policy, some Belarussian politicians were scared that something like what happened to Crimea could befall their country as well. So, there were some attempts of rekindling the partnership with the EU. However, at least some resemblance of democracy in Belarus was needed as a prerequisite for that. As a result, the regime released the last political prisoners still in custody from the protest wave, which prompted the EU to lift the sanctions put on Belarus after the repressions of 2010. In summary, one can say that both before the 2010 as well as the 2017 protests, Belarus enjoyed a period of relaxation both internationally and domestically. But this did not help bring about any changes or make the government's reaction any less violent to outbreaks of dissent.

6. Conclusion

This Master thesis started with an overview on the literature about protests as a form of political participation. Due to the vast political and social changes during the 1960s and 1970s, citizens' political involvement increased. Their interests and opinions, including any negative feelings, were now seen as part of the scope of political participation. Protest actions as a vehicle to express these negative feelings with political or social issues were called "unconventional" as they did not conform with the social norms at that time.

In Western democracies, the shape of political participation has shifted considerably over the last few decades. For example, the number of citizens regularly engaged in protest activities has increased significantly since the 1970s. Many researcher have therefore proclaimed "social movement societies" or "demonstration democracies". Any actions carried out by groups of citizens to make appeals to the government are seen as forms of protests. This includes a wide range of actions, such as strikes, sit-ins, occupations, blockades, marches and demonstrations.

However, this Master thesis analyses countries within the post-Soviet space, which are considered as semi-authoritarian or hybrid regimes. Such a regime type is positioned in between full democracies and totalitarian systems. It usually does not fulfil one or several conditions of a full democracy. Compared to the other regime types, there are several unique difficulties which protest movements have to face in hybrid regimes. In accordance with the rights to Freedom of Association, social movement organizations are technically allowed to operate in hybrid regimes, but not without restrictions: comprehensive observation by the state, obligatory registration and threats of foreclosure. Also, Freedom of Assembly may be affected by repressive measures like coercion, bodily harm and imprisonment. These are the reasons why an opposition's or a protest movement's ability to organize is severely restricted.

Here is where the media comes in. Within hybrid regimes, it is hard for protest movements to mobilize participants for their actions in large numbers, because the state exercises a monopoly over public discourse. Generally speaking, the traditional mass media is used by the regime through censorship and threats to fight against any negative attention. The internet and especially social media are difficult to control, though. This provides the protest movement with a window to share injustices and complaints and potentially get the attention of a wider audience. Similarly, citizens may freely express their opinions and enter in discussions with the protest movement. This may inform and mobilize more protest participants.

In the second chapter of this Master thesis, background information on the countries and protest waves analyzed and the reasons for choosing those cases were given. Seven protest waves in four post-Soviet countries were discussed, divided into successful and unsuccessful cases to systemize and distinguish them. The Orange Revolution 2004, which brought Viktor Yushchenko, head of the oppositional "Our Ukraine" coalition, into the presidential office and the Euromaidan Revolution 2014, which forced President Yanukovych into exile were chosen as successful protest movements for the case study of Ukraine. Kyrgyzstan had two successful revolutions in recent years, the Tulip Revolution 2005, which brought Kurmanbek Bakiev, leader of the oppositional "People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan" into power and the second Kyrgyz Revolution of 2010, which in turn ousted Bakiev again. As for the cases that did not achieve a change in leadership, three protest movements in Russia and Belarus were chosen. In 2011/2012, mass protests broke out in Russia against fraudulent parliamentary elections and Vladimir Putin's and Dimitry Medvedev's presidential "job swap". In 2010, people took to the streets when the president of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, was re-elected for a fourth term. In 2017, widespread protest in Belarus started in response to the so-called "parasite tax". Neither protest wave achieved any change to the political leadership of Russia or Belarus.

These countries and protest waves were chosen to be analyzed in this Master thesis because of several reasons. Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan went through both, a color revolution and then a "follow up" revolution a few years later. Thus, it is interesting to discuss why these revolutions occurred so close together and if the media outlets most influential in mobilizing the demonstrations differed from each other. Russia and Belarus were chosen because they are more repressive compared to the other two. Yet, despite the usual serious crackdowns on any protest attempts, several protest waves could be mobilized there in recent years. Therefore, it is compelling to investigate how this was possible and which media outlets were used to mobilize the participants.

In the third chapter, the research method utilized and the research questions formulated to analyze media use in those four countries and seven protest waves were laid out. To gain more balanced and in-depth views for the analysis, two experts for each country were interviewed. In total, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with journalists and researchers either native or foreign to the countries analyzed were conducted at the end of April 2017. For analyzing the data gained from the interviews, four research questions were constructed according to which the information was clustered. Each question was then answered one after the other in the final chapter of this Master thesis.

First, the answer to the following research question was provided: How did the media play a role in mobilizing the protest waves of the countries analyzed and which kind of media (traditional or social) was more influential?

Each of the seven protest waves were mobilized via different media outlets. The Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 utilized traditional mass media to inform and recruit participants: the independent TV channel "Kanal 5" and newspaper "Ukrainskaya Pravda". However, the Euromaidan Revolution in 2014 heavily depended on Facebook and online livestreams as communicational and informational tools. During both revolutions in Kyrgyzstan, the protest

movements used calls and text messages on mobile phones to spread information about meeting points of demonstrations. In Russia 2011/2012, Facebook was by far the most widely used social media outlet. However, online media such as lenta.ru also played a role. Interestingly, media was not a part of protest mobilization in Belarus 2017. They were organized through word-of-mouth.

Next, the second research question was tackled: Would television coverage of protests be beneficial to a protest movements, so that large-scale demonstrations could be mobilized or is social media sufficient enough for that?

Most experts agree that access to TV would help a protest movement to mobilize more participants. In all the countries analyzed, most citizens still get their information from television. So, a foothold of the protest movement on TV could potentially reach a large portion of the population all at once. Also, traditional mass media enjoys an element of objectivity more so than social media, where information is filtered through friends and acquaintances of the users. TV, however, gives information an air of universality, truth and a “we”-ness for large groups of citizens. On the contrary, one expert says that internet would be sufficient for mass mobilization if popular search engines would list articles about protests in their search results. In Russia, this is prevented by employing some kind of algorithm. Another expert states that TV can also become obstructive to a protest movement, if it is used by the government for counterpropaganda.

Research question number three was then explained: What is the current situation of Press and Internet Freedom in the countries analyzed and did the protest waves cause any changes to this situation?

According to the two experts for Ukraine, the formal criteria for Press and Internet Freedom were improved after the Euromaidan Revolution. However, self-censorship and biased reporting in favor of the Ukrainian side is now a huge issue, especially with coverage of the ongoing military conflict in Donbas. In Kyrgyzstan, the situation got significantly worse in the period between the two

Revolutions in 2005 and 2010. Critical journalists were harassed, imprisoned and even killed in some instances. After 2010, however, things made a turn for the better. The only state TV channel was converted into a private one and some independent online media outlets and blogs managed to establish themselves. In Russia, the level of Press and Internet Freedom has decreased after the protest waves. New laws allowing the state to prosecute people who have expressed opinions considered "extremists" and requiring bloggers to register their websites as official media were passed recently. Belarus is placed in the bottom half of the Press Freedom ranking of "Reporters without Borders". Independent media in Belarus are subject to intense harassment and won't be officially registered by the state. Therefore, all activities by their journalists are considered illegal.

Lastly, the fourth research question was resolved: Did the protest waves bring about long-lasting political changes and democratic reforms or did they completely fail to initiate a democratizing process in the countries analyzed?

In Ukraine, there were some positive effects by the Euromaidan Revolution such as Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Assembly and Ukraine's integration into common European values. The country's self-esteem, national identity and values have also been strengthened by the revolution. However, these achievements are now in jeopardy because of the war in Donbas. As for Kyrgyzstan, the country was considered an island of democracy and Press Freedom in Central Asia for a few years after the Revolution in 2010. However, the country is still suffering from economic hardship and corruption. This is why discontent is currently on the rise again. In Russia, the protest wave of 2011/2012 has failed to initiate any reforms to the political systems. However, it has politicized groups of people who had not been politically active before the protests. Different local activist groups have been able to establish themselves in the regions, taking part in local elections and protest campaigns. Belarus has also not seen any kind of political reforms through the protest waves in recent years. However, the protest movement of 2017 has at least achieved a suspension of the "parasite law".

There are several surprising results garnered from the expert interviews regarding the influence of the media on protest mobilization in post-Soviet countries. A lot of research has been recently conducted on how important social media was in mobilizing mass protests against authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, proclaiming the emergence of "Facebook Revolutions". Concerning recent mass protests in post-Soviet regimes, a similar research focus can be observed. However, the results of this Master thesis do not fully support this, neither for Russia nor for the other countries analyzed. Each of the seven post-Soviet protest waves discussed in the period between 2004 and 2017 featured different media outlets instrumental for the mobilization of their participants. Of course, Facebook played a big role, as most experts agree that the opposition and politically active citizens in post-Soviet countries use this outlet for communication. However, traditional mass media, online news portals, cell phones and word-of-mouth have turned out to be equally important, depending on the protest wave analyzed. Most experts also agree that access to mass media, especially TV, would be immensely beneficial to a protest movement to mobilize participants on a large scale. In pretty much all of the post-Soviet countries, television is still the most widely used medium. Mobile devices and internet access are not always available or affordable in some remote regions of the countries analyzed.

As far as any outcome of protest waves is concerned, it is important to see the whole picture. Simply classifying a protest movement as successful if it managed to foster change in the political leadership of a country is too shortsighted. A protest movement might succeed in improving the level of Press and Internet movement or encourage the establishment of more online media or blogs, but problems of harassment by the regime, self-censorship or getting official registration and accreditation might still persist long term. In some cases, analysis of the level of Press and Internet Freedom in the years after protest waves have ended, showed that it has only gotten worse if the government reacted by passing more restrictive media laws. Politically, an initial success by protest movements

of ousting incumbent presidents or partial successes of politicizing previously inactive parts of the population or of axing an unpopular law do not equate to any positive long term changes to the system. Economic decline, growing divisions between culturally diverse regions within a country, no change in the way a society thinks and in some cases even a wave of repression, might still follow in the aftermath of a protest wave.

In conclusion, revolutions and protest waves – doesn't matter in which regions of the world they occur – are always unpredictable and difficult to analyze. In most, if not all cases, their real effect on the media and political spheres of a country might not be known for years or decades to come.

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8. Statement

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted is my own unaided work. All direct or indirect sources used are acknowledged as references.

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9. Appendix

Interviews about protests in Ukraine

Roman Dubasevych, head of the Faculty of Slavic Philology at the University of Greifswald, conducted in German on 21.04.2017 via Skype.

1. What is the level of Press Freedom in Ukraine?

Good I think. The problem for me is self-censorship, which is deeply rooted in Ukrainian culture. For a long time now, a focus has been put on formal indicators of Press Freedom. Those are important of course, they are the basis if you will. However, the Ukraine may very well enjoy the best Press Freedom in the world, but if it maintains a relationship to Russia that has never really been reevaluated and that is full of post-colonial resentments, it's still going to produce only propaganda. During the first two years of the war in Donbas, you could hear terms like "our boys" and "Russian terrorists" in Ukrainian news. I don't understand how journalists can position themselves and lose their objectivity like that. It is unbelievable how passionately they speak for the Ukrainian side, although there is a good level of Press Freedom. As a cultural scientist, I can tell you that journalists in Ukraine wear blinders over their eyes. No historic-critical discourse is being carried out with society and only the opinion of the majority is being conveyed. This, for me, is the most suspenseful point. The conflict between the outer Press Freedom, which of course also has its weak points in Ukraine, and the inner self-censorship of the society.

Another example: the crimes of the Ukrainian volunteer battalions in Donbas, which were eventually uncovered. Ukrainian journalists were very unsure which position they should take on this. On one hand, these are "our boys" that volunteered to go to war and risk their lives. On the other hand, it became very clear that those battalions were dissolved because of incidences of theft and rape

and because their leaders were put in prison. But the journalists did not know how to assess this situation, although it has become clear that "our boys" broke the law. They were very confused, although they could have reported this objectively.

A third example is talk shows. During the protests on Maidan, hot debates were led there. These debates even fragmented the protests. When representatives of the Yanukovych-camp put forth solid arguments, journalists reacted in a bad way. They were even irritated, when the Yanukovych-camp took a stand for a good relationship with Russia or when it said that Ukraine can't afford a war with Russia.

People, who actually wanted to do a good job as journalists, were so entangled with their own camp that they did not really allow any contra-arguments. Pretty much everything that happened in Donbas after the Maidan-protests is due to the fact that the other side was not heard properly.

2. How would you assess the Internet Freedom in Ukraine?

I would say, the Internet Freedom is good as well. There is little censorship. Like I said, the biggest problem is self-censorship.

3. Did Ukraine undergo some changes regarding Press and Internet Freedom since the protests?

Some things have changed since the Maidan revolution. It has been put on a pedestal. But like I said, journalists are so merged with their country and their victim status that every argument against it is simply being swept away.

4. How would you describe the outcome of the protest movements of 2004 and 2014? Did they initiate real political change and democratic reforms or did they fail to start a democratizing process?

I do think that they were important steps. But they were a bit like a flash in the pan. The clan system of the powerful oligarchs has proven itself to be very flexible and resistant. The weak socio-civilian structures established after the revolutions

have been undermined by them time and again. I think that revolutions have always been overestimated in Ukrainian history. They are seen as more important than slow and tedious changes. The Ukrainian society is ready to protests and take to the streets on a whim, but it is helpless when it comes to establishing long-term changes. The Ukrainian society does not have the knowledge and experience yet to bring about long-term changes after revolutions. You have to be able to compromise. But this chance is now lost, because of the war in Donbas. This is why the achievements of the Maidan-revolution are in danger now. Even so, both revolutions have generally been positive for Ukraine. It's just that not all chances have been used and things were able to escalate that shouldn't have escalated at all.

5. Did traditional mass media, online media and social networks play a role in protest mobilization? If yes, which kind of media was most influential?

During the Orange Revolution of 2004, the TV channel Kanal 5 played an important role. In fact, it was a swift rise for this channel. Kanal 5 established itself as the main media outlet for the opposition within just a few months. This came as a surprise given the big competition, but the channel achieved great coverage with their excellent reporting. Some of the journalists working for Kanal 5 rose to prominent figures in the presidential administration and the political sphere. So, Kanal 5 was some sort of stepping stone for journalists. In 2004, a lot of people felt that the vast majority of channels did not report critically. But Kanal 5 was different. That made a big difference. Many were surprised that the cannel was not closed. It was a miracle really. Additionally, the newspaper Ukrainskaya Pravda made a name for itself with critical and independent reporting during this time. Both outlets really helped the protest movement.

6. Which social media networks were most important?

During the Maidan protests, Facebook was very important. There is this legend that the protests were started by a Facebook post by a former journalist. This was not surprising, because ever since the Arab Spring, everybody knew that a revolution has to go through Facebook. It was almost predictable in a way. The Ukrainians pretty much just waited for their turn to try this out. Additionally, several volunteers put up cameras on Maidan to broadcast the events live via the internet. Sometimes that was a bit confusing. At first glance, what could be better than watching the progress of the protests via livestreams in real time. But sometimes it didn't convey much at all. You could only see a big crowd of people. Despite the effect of watching everything as it happens, a commentary or interpretation of the events could have been helpful as well. Viewing the events on Maidan critically and analyzing some problems was not possible this way. However, these livestreams were very important for people to know when things escalated and fights broke out on Maidan. This was a new media phenomenon, badly structured and edited, but still something you couldn't get away from. You could watch these livestreams for hours and follow everything. You did not know when to stop, because in the very next moment something new could have happened.

7. Do you feel that a protest movement needs the help of traditional mass media (TV especially) to succeed in mobilizing demonstration on a massive scale and initiate political change or are online media sufficient enough?

TV was important because they broadcasted live. Viewers could see with their own eyes how many people were taking to the streets. This has a different effect than simply reading a description of protest events.

On the other hand, another target group can be reached via social media: young people. In 2004, it was not the students who took to the streets. This was a protest that came out of the middle class. But in 2014, the protests started with those people, who would have benefitted the most from the EU association agreement.

These were mainly young people, who wanted to travel and study abroad. This group was mobilized more via Facebook, because they did not trust TV stations that were mostly in the hands of the oligarchs.

Olena Goroshko, Chairholder of the Cross-Cultural and Media Communications Department at National Technical University Kharkov, conducted in English on 28.04.2017 via Skype.

1. What is the level of Press Freedom in Ukraine?

At the moment, it seems to be rather high. We have a couple of oppositional TV channels and a couple of newspapers. Even a so called pro-Russian channel called News One. This is great in my opinion, because in any given society, there must always be an alternative way or mode of thinking. It is an achievement of the Euromaidan Revolution.

Regarding self-censorship of Ukrainian journalists – yes, that exists. It's a difficult picture to draw, though. There are lots of journalists now engaged in politics. We have got a couple of very famous former journalists, who are members of the parliament in Ukraine. Some journalists tend to convey news of some political force over the other. This is a problem. Also, sometimes journalists are afraid to express pro-Russian opinions openly. Such issues do exist in Ukraine.

2. How would you assess the Internet Freedom in Ukraine?

I think there is no Internet censorship in Ukraine at the moment. There are no restrictions in hosting websites. That is also an achievement of the Euromaidan Revolution. The level of Internet Freedom is also rather high in Ukraine. That is despite the informational war with Russia and despite the situation in Donbas.

3. Did Ukraine undergo some changes regarding Press and Internet Freedom since the Maidan protests?

Yes, I think there were some changes provoked by the information war with Russia. It concerns the information openness with Russia and how to oppose Russian propaganda, like Russia Today.

4. How would you describe the outcome of the Euromaidan-Revolution? Did they initiate real political change and democratic reforms or did they fail to start a democratizing process?

For me it's difficult to say. In my opinion, the main achievements of Maidan are Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Assembly and our integration into common European values. However, there is now a great economic crisis in Ukraine. There are also military actions in the East. This is a very heavy burden on the economy. So, the outcome of the protests is difficult to assess. Regarding the economic situation of the country, the situation has gotten worse since 2014. But regarding our self-esteem, national identity and values and state-building, it has gotten better.

5. Did traditional mass media, online media and social networks play a role in protest mobilization? If yes, which kind of media was most influential?

The most influential media for protest movements are livestreams and social networks, like Facebook and Twitter. All of our politicians are active on Facebook. It's the most important outlet, but Twitter and Instagram are also popular. Politicians use them to communicate with the citizens. But when the protests on Maidan first started, the most useful source was livestreams. They supplied the views with constant information on the development of events on Maidan.

6. Do you feel that a protest movement needs the help of traditional mass media (TV especially) to succeed in mobilizing demonstration on a massive scale and initiate political change or are online media sufficient enough?

During the Orange Revolution, Kanal 5 was a very important source. But now, Kanal 5 is owned by the president of Ukraine. I think the internet is a great mobilization tool, but it's much better for a protest movement if it has access to TV. Most people in Ukraine are still relying heavily on TV and not the internet as their main source of information.

Interviews about protests in Kyrgyzstan

Christopher Schwartz, journalist and lecturer at American University of Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan, conducted in English on 20.04.2017 via Facebook.

1. What is the level of Press Freedom in Kyrgyzstan?

It depends on what you mean by press "freedom" and how you measure it.

If by "freedom" one means that the press can report upon anything it wants without fear of repercussion, then the answer is as Freedom House (FH) has traditionally categorized Kyrgyzstan: "semi-free". Journalists here work in a somewhat dangerous environment, but on specific issues. For instance, since the start of this year (2017) it has become very dangerous to talk about potential ties between the president and the cargo plane which crashed in January, as there have been some major lawsuits by the general prosecutor's office and the apparent expulsion of a foreign journalist (who is married to a local and presumably has a right to be in-country). Intimidation tactics and blackmail are also somewhat commonplace, especially among local journalists.

If by "freedom" we mean things like professional training, support networks and finances, then the answer is as IREX's Media Sustainability Index (MSI) has recently been categorizing the country: "near-sustainable". The majority of journalists here serious lack professional knowledge, skills and even ethos; many are still in some kind of semi-Soviet mindset which caters to power, and many have embraced a kind of bastardized capitalist mindset which focuses on sensationalism. They are also woefully underpaid and overworked. In the capital and to some extent in Osh, they have quite decent equipment, but outside of these two major urban areas they have serious technological challenges.

2. How would you assess the internet freedom in Kyrgyzstan?

Quite decent, freed and unfettered for the most part, but not without trouble. It is well known that as a landlocked country, Kyrgyzstan's Internet is mainly landline-based, and these run through its neighbors Uzbekistan (Osh area) and Kazakhstan (Bishkek area). Moreover, there are disturbing signs that ultimately the Internet here is run through Russian servers. For instance, just today as I tried to access LinkedIn and Google Translator, I was brought to "deny.spacenet.ru", an apparent Russian censor.

There is also an attempt to silence public discussion of certain "hot topics" on social media by the national security services. They have been examples of Facebook users who have complained about the president, charging them with crimes such as the attempt to overthrow the government. It is an extreme overreaction and it is uncertain if it is leading anywhere or whether it is simply the security services trying to placate the president, who to be honest seems increasingly emotional and insecure.

3. Did Kyrgyzstan undergo some changes in regard to Press and Internet Freedom since the protests in 2005 and 2010?

Most definitely. Between 2005 and 2010, it got darker, a lot darker. Local journalists were targeted and killed, foreign journalists were blacklisted. Even the present difficulties are incomparable.

One of the big changes since 2010 has been the intense plurization of the news market. The number of news agencies and outlets had already been growing since independence, but there has been an explosion of them in recent years. I can't site hard numbers off the top of my head, but I recommend Wolters' piece and the MSI.

4. Please name recent protest waves in Kyrgyzstan. How would you describe the outcome of these protest movements? Did they initiate real political change and democratic reforms or did they fail to start a democratizing process?

Recent protests have been primarily focused upon either jailed opposition politicians or social issues. I would not describe these as "movements"; they appear to be rather disparate and inchoate, organized either by the politicians themselves or their patronage networks, or in the case of those complaining about social issues, temporary action committees or NGOs that are not coordinating together.

With respect to any changes wrought by these protests, certainly they have not done anything to undo the imprisonment of the opposition politicians, and when it comes to social issues, they are either dispersed by police action or evoke empty promises of reform by members of the government.

As for whether protests can contribute to a democratizing process, this is highly debatable, and not just in the Kyrgyzstani context. Protests do not necessarily equate democratic action, much less democratization. This is especially so if the protestors are demanding quite undemocratic changes, as we often see in Kyrgyzstan with ultranationalists demanding further Kyrgyzification of the state and the oppression of ethnic and religious minorities.

5. Did traditional mass media, online media and social networks play a role in protest mobilization? If yes, which kind of media was most influential?

As far as anyone can see, the crucial media in mass mobilization in Kyrgyzstan has always been anything that is conducive to immediate information gathering and dissemination. If we expand our notion of "media" for a moment to include any information communication technological platform, then this becomes quite clear:

- in 2005 and 2010, mobile phones played a crucial role in their capacity to send and receive voice and text messages (calls and sms's), with website-centered services such as Twitter, Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki providing a kind of auxiliary support function.

- post-2010, mobile-based instant messenger services such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Facebook messenger are occupying this role, while website-centered services again seem to be providing an auxiliary support function.

The real key appears to be any media that is *handheld*. Such technology will result in the swiftest movement of information, and hence the swiftest organization.

With respect to traditional media, it mostly plays the role of observer. Half the time, traditional reporters only find out about the event as it is happening, and report on it live after it is well underway; the other half of the time, it is somewhat ex post facto. There are exceptions to this, of course. For instance, a few weeks ago there was a protest organized by journalists themselves in response to recent moves against user-generated content on Facebook. This protest, which was approved by the Bishkek mayor's office, was swiftly smacked down by the police.

What was very peculiar about this incident is that despite all of the journalists, very little information actually got about the event, including during the lead-up -- I myself learned about it only two days before over WhatsApp. That means the

traditional journalists themselves have the same technological preferences as civilians, which is counter-intuitive, considering that in principle and often in practice they have at their disposal far more effective means to spread information and mobilize people.

6. Which social media networks were most important?

In terms of social media networks, Vkontatke and Facebook for sure, with Odnoklassniki and Mail.ru always floating around. In terms of social media more generally speaking, WhatsApp by far, with Facebook Messenger, Telegram and Twitter major forces as well.

7. Do you feel that a protest movement needs the help of traditional mass media, TV especially, to succeed in mobilizing demonstration on a massive scale and initiate political change (like in Georgia 2003 and Ukraine 2004) or are online media sufficient enough?

I think it is obvious that a protest movement needs the help of traditional mass media, TV especially, to succeed in mobilizing any kind of mass-level demonstrations.

From a sociological and cognitive psychological perspective, mass media has a kind of built-in legitimacy that social media does not: whereas social media, because it is your immediate social circle, has an element of subjectivity, traditional media has an element of objectivity. If a television anchor is telling you, "The people are rising up," instinctively you feel this is not a rumor; if that same anchor then says to you, "Down with the government!", there's a high likelihood that instinctively you will react, "Yes!", not because you personally agree, but because traditional media taps into certain structures that lend it a feeling of universality, truth and "we"-ness in the really large sense ("we the people", not "we, my friends").

Tactically, traditional media can also reach where social media cannot. Look at it this way: for both kinds of media, you need to have access to the correct kind of technology -- television, newspapers and radio for traditional media, computers and smartphones for social media -- but at this stage of economic development, which of these two families of technology is the general population, not just the middle class, most likely to have access to? The technology of traditional media, obviously. It has been around a lot longer and so has been able to establish itself much more deeply.

Edda Schlager, freelance journalist based in Kazakhstan, conducted in German on 14.04.2017 via Skype.

1. What is the level of Press Freedom in Kyrgyzstan?

This is a gripping question, because a lot has recently changed in this regard. Especially after the protests in 2010, Kyrgyzstan has taken on a special role as an island of Press Freedom and as an island of democracy in Central Asia. Unfortunately, I have to say that the level of Press Freedom is now declining a bit. Until about two years ago, foreign journalists could freely travel to and work in Kyrgyzstan – even without an accreditation. Originally, Kyrgyzstan was an island for foreign journalists in Central Asia, meaning Tajiks, Turkmen and Uzbeks could go there anytime to report about Central Asia. But this is all changing now. The current president, Atambayev, is putting the screws on tighter. He has just now brought criminal charges against Radio Free Europe and Zanoza.kg. Both of them face high punitive fines. The ultimate goal of course is to silence them. The government preferably wants Radio Free Europe, which is financed by the United States, out of the country for good to completely suppress their reporting. Things haven't gone that far yet, but it is a possibility. Kyrgyzstan is currently ranked 85th within the Press Freedom ranking of "Reporters without

Borders". I think the ranking includes 180 countries in total. Kyrgyzstan is still placed up front among all countries in Central Asia. But I am under the impression that this might change in the future. Precisely because such actions against Radio Free Europe, which has reported on the president, who then felt insulted by it. This will be included in such a ranking. Also, a Russian journalist was expelled from the country not long ago. Such a thing has not happened for a long time. So, the level of Press Freedom in Kyrgyzstan is getting worse.

2. How would you assess the Internet Freedom in Kyrgyzstan?

Personally, I only joined social networks about two years ago. I am active on Facebook and Twitter. As a journalist, I can't imagine working in Central Asia without Facebook. It has developed into an important tool for my job, because I stay in contact with local activists, journalists and politicians via this platform. In my view, the internet freedom is relatively good in Kyrgyzstan. Up until now, I don't think you could get into trouble in Kyrgyzstan for posting your opinion on Facebook. However, in Kazakhstan, this has definitely happened before.

3. Did Kyrgyzstan undergo some changes regarding Press and Internet Freedom since the protests in 2005 and 2010?

Following the government overthrow of 2010, some media outlets managed to establish themselves through excellent and critical reporting. This still exists in Kyrgyzstan. Important outlets are for example akipress24.kg and ferganannews.kg, which have been restructured after 2010. A lot is possible there. But I have been warned several times about working without an accreditation now – especially in southern Kyrgyzstan. You absolutely need an accreditation there as a journalist to not cause and problems. Then you can proof that you are allowed to work as a journalist if you are talking to the authorities of if you are stopped by the police on the streets.

4. Please name recent protest waves in your country of interest. How would you describe the outcome of these protest movements? Did they initiate real political change and democratic reforms or did they fail to start a democratizing process?

The government overthrow of 2010 has really brought some changes to the country. However, it looks like this might get partly reversed now. But maybe it is too early to judge yet. You do notice that tension is rising and that the current government under Atembajev tries to turn back the clock. The previously obtained freedom of the civil society and the media, but also the political freedom of the opposition shall now be restricted again. This will be especially exciting to observe this year, because new presidential elections will be held in November. The small protest wave this March, which resulted in a bit of violence and some arrests, was related to the opposition. It was suspected that the government wanted to neutralize political rivals. So, like I said, the big political change happened in 2010, which has more or less fostered democracy in the country. But it has to be said that economically, everything has stayed the same in those seven years since the protests. This is the biggest shortcoming of the government in Kyrgyzstan. They are relying too much on development aid from international donors. There is not enough effort on the part of the government to create some new perspectives for the native population. The political shift of 2010 could not solve this problem up until now. This shift initially came with a promise to solve it, but it has failed to boost the Kyrgyz economy. Reforms are not implemented fast enough, corruption is still a hot topic. This is why discontent steadily grows again in this country.

5. Did traditional mass media, online media and social networks play a role in protest mobilization? If yes, which kind of media was most influential?

Generally speaking, one can say that among traditionally media, newspapers play an important role. However, most of the newspapers here are only published

weekly. The concept of daily newspapers doesn't exist here, not at all in the variety we are used to in Germany. The financial means are just too small. However, radio is not used as an information tool at all. They only broadcast game shows, short news bulletins, weather reports and music. Radio broadcasted via state frequencies as well as private stations are not used to disseminate information in Central Asia, unlike for example the "Deutschlandradio" or the ARD broadcasts in Germany. This understanding of how radio should work doesn't apply here. It existed previously, but now the radio has principally been abandoned as an information tool. So, in Kyrgyzstan, you have newspapers and of course TV. But in my opinion, online media and mobile internet have outranked television by now. I can't judge how the situation is in remote areas. Television is still likely to be the most important outlet there. But even then, young people are going from their villages to the cities and bring back their mobile phones and other devices. This is why I would say that the influence of the internet is really high now.

But of course, the media wasn't the trigger of the protests in 2010. These protests were directed against the rise of utility bills. The prices for water and electricity rose exponentially back then. The protests also escalated pretty quickly since the president at that time, Bakiyev, reacted to them by force of arms. During these days, the internet definitely played a big part. In 2010, the internet was already widely used in Kyrgyzstan. Many people owned smart phones, took videos and arranged meetings and exchanged information via Skype and Twitter. However, I cannot judge if this protest wave had a different outcome as the Tulip Revolution 2005 because of varied media use. I don't think so anyway. It is certainly a bold assumption that the revolution of 2010 was successful and brought a change of political leadership because of smart phones and the increased internet use. But of course, the internet and the availability of sources outside the Russian sphere of influence was important. People who could speak other languages, were able to inform themselves through foreign media outlets. So, like I said, the protests in

2010 did not have a different outcome as those of 2005 because of the internet, although it had a big role in it.

Also interesting to mention is how media use has changed in the aftermath of the protests. Following the revolution of 2010, the state TV channel was transformed into a public one. Some online media have been restructured and online discussion platforms have been established. Commentary functions have been created, blogs for example, where op-eds are regularly published. So, one can notice that the willingness to discuss a wide array of topics has been increased. The media outlets, which make that possible, are of course very important.

6. Which social media networks were most important?

VKontakte is very important here. However, I think that it's mostly used for entertainment. Political or social discussions do not really take place there. There is also odnoklassniki. YouTube plays a big role as well, especially when there are big events going on. Local journalists use Twitter less than German journalists do though. Facebook is more important. The politically active citizens are all on there and communicate with each other. Politically and socially relevant topics are discussed on Facebook. For example, the terror attack in St. Petersburg last week or a meeting of the Eurasian economic union that is taking place in Bishkek right now. Of course, online media is reporting on such events and this is then followed up by other outlets. Nowadays, short video clips and live-streams are very important. These tools are used by local journalists in a big way to report on popular topics such as politics, gender roles and the environment. Video clips and live-streams are especially used widely on Facebook and Twitter.

7. Do you feel that a protest movement needs the help of traditional mass media (TV especially) to succeed in mobilizing demonstration on a massive scale and initiate political change or are online media sufficient enough?

In any case, access to mass media can be very important for a protest movement. Television sets are basically turned on around the clock in Central Asia. In remote

areas, where the internet connection is rather bad, television is the most important information tool.

The greatest possible Press Freedom is also needed to disseminate information. But this brings the risk of misinformation being spread around. Or that communication structures may be used to circulate rumors or to accuse innocent people. This risk is particularly great in authoritarian regimes such as Kyrgyzstan. There is very little legal security. With a big wallet, you can always get off scot free. The laws, that were written in Kyrgyzstan in the last 25 years since independence look great. On paper, they resemble those of Western countries. But they are not implemented. The legal system cannot be depended upon by much of the population. A secure and well-working legal system is an important requirement of political change. Or maybe this is a consequence of political change. These processes may depend on each other. But Central Asian countries are still a long way from that.

Interviews about protests in Russia

Maxim Alyukov, researcher and PhD candidate at the Sociology Department of the European University in St. Petersburg, conducted in English on 17.04.2017 via Skype.

1. What is the level of Press Freedom in Russia?

It's a complicated question, because the public sphere in Russia is very much fragmented. There is some Press Freedom, but it only exists in some information ghettos. There are some independent newspapers, like Moscow Times and Novaya Gazeta. They enjoy some level of Press Freedom and they do reach a significant audience. But once media outlets reach a wider audience in Russia, they are usually subjected to government restrictions. This also happened a couple

of years ago to a popular independent media outlet called lenta.ru. They reached a wider audience, came under government attacks and had to change editorial staff as a result. So, there is some level of Press Freedom. But when you reach a significant audience and have some broad readership, it is restricted. I can't say there is Press Freedom in general. It depends on the particular type of outlet and the size of the audience.

2. How would you assess the Internet Freedom in your country of interest?

It is also a complicated question. Until a couple of years ago, it was completely free. You published whatever you wanted to publish. But in recent years, a number of laws were passed that permits the government to regulate the internet. For instance, they tried to make bloggers who had a significant audience equal to newspapers. They tried to make them register and come under certain rules and regulations. There are constant attempts to impose new regulation onto the internet. So, it is mostly free, but the government tries to find new ways to control it.

3. Did your country undergo some changes in regard to Press and Internet Freedom since the protests in 2011/2012?

Sure, there were multiple attempts to implement new laws and regulations related to the internet and Press Freedom. They tried to control social networks. For example, there was a story about VKontakte. The government tried to force them to store their data inside Russia, so that they could get access to it when needed. They tried to force Facebook to do the same, but of course this is totally impossible. There are now multiple laws related to bloggers. When you reach a certain audience, you are forced to register it as official media which imposes certain regulation on you. Also, there are multiple lawsuits against people who expressed their opinion on the internet. They are articles in Russian law about extremism. Several people got arrested because their views were considered extremist. Additionally, there was a funny story a couple of weeks ago about

Russian Cossacks, who tried to organize a cyber militia. They would search for people on the internet and tried to prevent them from wrongdoings. So, there are a lot of initiatives, both legal and informal ones, which are aimed at controlling the internet. Of course, it got worse since 2011/2012. There are people who speculated that it was a response to the protests. But it is difficult to confirm empirically, because we don't have interviews with officials and the likes.

4. How would you describe the outcome of the protest movement in 2011/2012? Did they initiate real political change and democratic reforms or did they fail to start a democratizing process?

In terms of some formal changes, like changes to the political design, institutions and laws, I would say they didn't achieve anything. In fact, it got even worse in conservative terms. But there was some positive outcome regarding politicization of different groups of people. For example, this wave of protests produced hundreds of local activist groups in small districts, regions and cities. They all conduct some protest activities and participate in local elections. In terms of representation like parliament seats, it didn't produce anything significant. But there is some effect in terms of politicization of different groups of people who were not politized before, who did not participate in politics at all. Right now, we monitor up to ten such groups in Moscow and St. Petersburg. They have a lot of local protest campaigns. They protest against the closing of public parks for example. They tried to participate in local elections and they were very active in spring and summer of last year, because of the elections in September. They tried to run for local parliaments.

5. Did traditional mass media, online media and social networks play a role in protest mobilization? If yes, which kind of media was most influential?

Facebook was very influential, because most protest activities were organized via Facebook. VKontakte was not so popular for various reasons. Independent newspapers like Novaya Gazeta or lenta.ru, which was more or less free at that

point, were very important in this protest campaign. So, most people got their information about the protest on Facebook and via independent press. Russian TV, such as Kanal 1, Rossiya and NTV, also covered the protests, but they framed them how the state wanted them to. They mostly said something about foreign involvement in the protest movement and that kind of things.

6. Do you feel that a protest movement needs the help of traditional mass media (TV especially) to succeed in mobilizing demonstration on a massive scale and initiate political change or are online media sufficient enough?

Of course, it would be helpful, because TV usually has a large audience. But I think that there is a crucial point to be made here. Media researchers sometimes claim that TV is the main tool of oppression and the internet for democratic change. I think this is not true, because the internet it also embedded in different political configurations. For instance, the most significant vehicle for Russian propaganda now is Russia Today, which is mostly broadcasted on the internet. So, I think it is not correct to juxtapose them into oppression and freedom. But TV of course would help. At the same time, though, a significant population in Russia uses the internet. A lot of people use Russian search engines, like Yandex and Rambler. It would really help, if those search engines would show coverage of protests. Internet alone would be sufficient, if there were some popular search engines, which would include news about protests activities. But the problem is that they are somehow controlled by the government via an algorithm or something. So, the search engines do not show protest coverage. For example, the last protest against corruption in March was not included in the news feeds of Yandex and Rambler. But what I know from my research – I conducted focus groups with TV viewers and they also use the internet daily. Most of them also use the search engines and read news articles that are included in the search engines. If there were some articles about protest activities included in their news feeds, that would be really helpful for a protest movement.

Journalist from Russia, conducted in German on 21.04.2017 via Skype.

1. What is the level of Press Freedom in Russia?

The press has always been controlled. But if you asked me which program you could watch without being brainwashed, I would say Channel 5. In Russia, it`s called Kultura and it broadcasts a lot of cultural programs. Additionally, we have a channel called Rossiya 24. It shows what's going on at important events in the country, but without much analysis or commentaries. Every other channel is pretty much at the Kremlin's side. You can see it in the way they report and present the news. I have recently talked to a colleague of mine. He has once asked a director of a Russian channel, why Russian people are tricked like that. His answer was that it didn't really concern him. They were doing it for the people after all. The people are supposed to behave according to the model that TV supplies them with. They are supposed to assess current events just like they are assessed on TV. People who are living in the countryside, trust what's on TV, because everything that is coming from the Kremlin is supposed to be true. These people will not permit the thought to enter their heads that they are being tricked by state TV. This is the worst. People are being manipulated with every news broadcast, it doesn't matter which channel it's on – the first or second channel, the third channel NTV or REN-TV, which was quite critical and in touch with people back in the day.

When it comes down to radio, only Ekho Moskvy is worth mentioning. This one is still different than other media. The programs, which are broadcasted in foreign languages to other countries, are all controlled by the Kremlin.

Among newspapers, I would name Kommersant and Vedermosti. I start my day reading them, doesn't matter if it's in print or digital form. However, newspapers are being sold less and less. Everyone is betting on the internet now. Young people are not buying newspapers anymore, this culture is slowly dying out.

2. How would you assess the Internet Freedom in Russia?

In Russia, there is a TV channel broadcasted via the internet. It is called Rain-TV. I am often turning in to this channel while I am researching something for my work. At his channel, they have a young and tough workforce, who are trying to reach out to people and stay independent in this chaos around them.

However, the internet is also monitored by the Kremlin and state security forces, especially social networks. VKontakte and Odnoklassniki for example. But the internet is difficult to control. When the servers are located in Europe, even the search engines, you can circumvent the controls and open some links and websites. For a lot of my research, I use social networks, because you may find out more there than what you can read in newspapers or see on TV. And this is despite the monitoring by the government. There are always ways and means. For example, social networks allow their users to set up private groups. If you get access to those, you may find interesting things.

3. Did Russia undergo some changes regarding Press and Internet Freedom since the protests?

There is more monitoring and more censorship. Even posts on Twitter are read and censored. I am getting many friend requests on social networks by people, whom I do not know at all. Unfamiliar people want to have access to my account to see what I am posting. At least that's the feeling that I have. When I am looking at their profiles, it just looks very suspicious. Most of the time, I am denying such requests, because I don't want anything to do with strangers. I only want to be friends with people on social networks, who share the same world view and who are close to me. However, I believe that out of all social networks, Facebook is the freest. When it comes to VKontakte, which was founded based on Facebook's design, the situation doesn't look as good. The founder of VKontakte was cornered by security forces after the protests of 2011/2012. He was coerced to sell VKonakte to other groups loyal to the Kremlin. He didn't do it.

More and more social networks are constantly emerging, like Telegram or Viper. People can communicate with each other even faster than via those apps than via VKontakte and Odnoklassniki. I don't trust the latter that much anymore. I don't use them anymore for my research.

4. How would you describe the outcome of the protest movement of 2011/2012? Did they initiate real political change and democratic reforms or did they fail to start a democratizing process?

I wouldn't categorize it so strictly. To say that these protests caused a change of thinking within the society, would be wrong. In Russian society, there is always a group that is discontent. Intellectuals, who understand that there are being underpaid and taken advantage of. This dissatisfied group is not wiped out from the current society. However, this doesn't mean that one is sympathetic to the communists one day and joins the opposition the next day. Here is an example: We are often reporting on important anniversaries from the Red Square. Over the years, I have often noticed there, that the crowds in front of the memorials are steadily getting smaller and younger. Once I overhead a discussion between two men. One asked the other why he has come here. He answered that he can still remember how his parents had lived in Soviet times. They ate sausages made of real meat and not of subpar quality. He can still remember how his parents brought home some caviar. So, a pretty spoilt guy, who is thankful that his parents provided him with a rich childhood and who is now going with the crowd to visit the graves of Stalin and Lenin. These people have not changed because of this protest wave. They will always call the opposition names and put obstacles in their way. They will always be an impediment to the development of our society.

After the last protest events in March of this year, I am most of all realizing how young the protest movement has become. This is the youth, who is not watching TV anymore, who is surfing the internet and reading alternative sources. The assumption that current youths are lazy and spend all of their time on the internet,

is unfair. They are online a lot, but they are also using the internet to inform themselves. They want to know what's happening within the society and where and how something is changing. These youths are going on the streets because they believe that they can stop the lies and the deception. But the end is not in sight yet.

5. Did traditional mass media, online media and social networks play a role in protest mobilization? If yes, which kind of media was most influential?

This "white" protest movement was organized via the internet. The participants connected, communicated and arranged meetings via Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. The telephone network is often listened in on, even without a court order. When you hear an echo while talking on the phone, you can be sure that you are being eavesdropped on. Even still, you can't put the society behind bars. The internet has therefore played an important mobilizing and clarifying role.

6. Which social media networks were most important?

For me it was surprising to see that VKontakte was more used in St. Petersburg and Facebook more in Moscow. In the countryside, the people were more into VKontake as well. Maybe because it is faster or many people in Russian speaking parts of the world are connected there. I can't say how it was in other main cities. Recently, I have reported on the protest movement of the Russian long distance truck drivers. They are more based in Odnoklassniki.

7. Do you feel that a protest movement needs the help of traditional mass media (TV especially) to succeed in mobilizing demonstration on a massive scale and initiate political change or are online media sufficient enough?

Yes of course. Many people are simply used to watch TV. If TV had been important for mobilizing the protests 2011/2012, these processes would have been accelerated. But insofar as the regime in Russia has everything under control, future protests won't be mobilized via television. In Russia, this would only be

possible via Rain-TV. Even though the state may also close this channel down. But yes, TV is best suited for reaching people who are living in the countryside and who are less educated.

Interviews about protests in Belarus

Simone Brunner, freelance journalist specializing on Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, conducted in German on 27.04.2017 via Skype.

1. What is the level of Press Freedom in Belarus?

The level of Press Freedom was relatively ok in the last several years. Or let's just say that there was a period of relaxation concerning the media. It wasn't under so much pressure as before. However, because of the protest wave this March, the screws have been put on tighter again. Belsat, the only independent TV channel in Belarus, has especially been affected by this. This channel is partly funded by the polish government. Their offices have been searched several times during the protests. One of their cameramen was arrested at a demonstration on March 25th and imprisoned for 15 days. So, right now the situation is rather tense. Another problem the independent media in Belarus faces is that they can't be officially registered by the state. All journalistic activities are therefore illegal. I have often worked alongside Belarussian journalists and they are really put under a lot of pressure. A friend of mine, for example, works for Belsat. However, every journalist who works for Belsat is not officially an employee there. Since this TV channel can't be registered with the authorities, it doesn't officially exist. That's why it's so difficult for independent media to report on protests, because there is always such a huge police presence. If you can't identify yourself as a journalist – especially at an illegal event – chances of being arrested by the police are high. This is a great problem for Belarussian journalists. Their activities are being

considered illegal, if their media outlet is not officially registered. This of course affects independent media the most.

During the protests, the online newspaper chartiya'97 was blocked. On March 25th, everything came to a head, 40 to 50 journalists were arrested by security forces and sentences to several days in jail. 10 days earlier, protests were happening already in Minsk, but the situation was a bit calmer then. In Belarus, such protests are streamed live most of the time, for example by Radio Svoboda and Belsat. These repressions are attempts to intimidate the media, so that the protests are not reported on and can't spread any further.

Apart from Belsat and Radio Svoboda, there are several online newspapers that can report relatively freely. Tut.by and Naviny.by for example. To my knowledge, Tut.by is the most widely used online newspaper. Other than that, most media are supervised by the state. Concerning protest waves, state controlled media always tries to portray the participants as extremists to discredit them. There was a report on the recent protests on state TV, which compared the demonstrations to "nazi-like" events. They clearly tried to discredit the protest movement, just like they tried in Ukraine. Especially the Russian media often claims that protest participants are fascists, who try to cause a coup. Russian media is widely consumed in Belarus and of course, they have another agenda as the Belarussian state channels.

Generally speaking, Belarus always comes off badly on the Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders. This year, Belarus placed 153rd on the list, out of 180 countries in total.

2. How would you assess the Internet Freedom in Belarus?

Within the last few years, there have been a few repressive actions by the government to try and control the internet. There is a law which requires Internet café owners to record who is visiting what websites. Everything goes through Beltelekom. The entire internet traffic goes through this telecommunication

company. Another law requires all websites to be registered with the ministry of information.

In addition, websites are often being blocked. Like I mentioned before, chartiya'97 was affected by this during the protests in March. You can definitely say that Belarus is a surveillance state. This is why everybody here is careful about how and through which outlets they communicate. Interestingly, many opposition members communicate via Facebook, because everything is encrypted and they trust that nothing is being tracked. VKontakte is regarded skeptically here, because it is a Russian product. Telegram is also used by the opposition, because it is encrypted.

3. How would you describe the outcome of the protest movement in 2010? Did it initiate real political change and democratic reforms or did it fail to start a democratizing process?

There was a similar situation in 2010 as it is now. Before the protests started in 2010, there was a convergence between Belarus and the West, even economically with the prospect of loans etc. Then they had presidential elections in Belarus, where a lot of fraud was committed. This triggered a big protest wave, which was then brutally bludgeoned down. As a result, Belarus was again politically isolated by the West. Domestically, the system got even more repressive. This brutal suppression of the protests was a big shock for the Belarussian civil society, because the regime was opening up a bit before. Because of these repressions, the civil society was paralyzed and intimidated for years. Many members of the oppositions were put in jail as well. Some of them were only released as late as 2015. There was a downright repression wave after the protests in 2010. No changes or reforms were achieved. The situation for the civil society and the opposition has only gotten worse. The protests in March 2017 are the first rekindling, the first resistance against the regime in years.

Also interesting to analyze is how the Euromaidan-Revolution in Ukraine affected Belarus. After 2014, many things changed in Belarus. After the Maidan protests, there was an attempt by Belarus to reconnect with the West and the EU. The country tried to have a relatively good relationship with the West, so that it doesn't have to rely solely on Russia as a partner. This is why the three years before the protests in 2017 were considered as a period of thawing relations. Under pressure from the West, the Belarussian regime released the last political prisoners. This was a prerequisite for lifting the sanctions that were put on Belarus after the protests of 2010. Because of the aggressive Russian foreign policy, some people in Belarus fear something like the Crimea might happen to them as well. This is why there is an attempt to leave the option of partnership with the EU wide open. But this is only possible, if there is at least a semblance of democracy in Belarus.

4. Did traditional mass media, online media and social networks play a role in protest mobilization 2017? If yes, which kind of media was most influential?

I think that in the beginning of the protests, the media did not play a big role. The more important trigger was a perceived injustice of this special tax for the unemployed. Facebook and livestreams have increased the visibility of the protests for sure. But I wouldn't say that they mobilized them. I have the impression that in such a repressive country like Belarus, the fear of taking to the streets just dropped a bit. Many people went to the streets to protest. It was even a surprise how many people are that unhappy. Many members of the opposition hadn't planned on this. I think that it's not so much the mobilizing effect of the internet as the feeling to be able to say anything without punishment in that moment. At least that was the case in the beginning of the protest wave. Now after all these repressions it has gotten more difficult to predict if there will be even more protests on a larger scale... if the fear has gotten bigger than the discontent again.

5. Which social media networks were most important?

I think the internet, Facebook and those livestreams played a role in the protests, even though these outlets are traditionally being consumed by members of the opposition anyway. Almost all communication between members of the opposition is taking place via Facebook, because it's being considered as a secure, Western communication tool. As for the beginning of the protests, more older than younger people took to the street. Some of those people are also internet users, but I still don't think that the internet mobilized the protests. But it has given the protest a platform. A funny thing was that Radio Svoboda gave out information on how to livestream one's own arrest. Many people are traditionally arrested during such protests in Belarus. This is why people were supposed to stream their own arrests to draw attention to it. Here, the internet has a documentary function. However, in the center of Minsk you couldn't connect to the internet anymore on March 25th. The regime most likely blocked it.

So, the internet gives the protest movement publicity, but things may have turned out the way they turned out even without it. There are other factors, such as this inept law, that were responsible to mobilizing the protests.

6. Do you feel that a protest movement needs the help of traditional mass media (TV especially) to succeed in mobilizing demonstration on a massive scale and initiate political change or are online media sufficient enough?

This is difficult to say, because a protest movement is very complex and unpredictable. But I do think that it is possible to mobilize mass demonstration without the help of TV. This is what happened in Belarus anyway. For Belarussian standards, a lot of people took to the streets. Even 2000 people in a smaller city are a lot under these circumstances. In that case, there was no support from TV. But it may very well be more difficult if the opposition and protest movement has no access at all to bigger, independent media outlets. On the contrary to Ukraine, independent media are only smaller phenomenon. So, I think it is more difficult

for a protest movement to expand without access to mass media, but not impossible. If the state succeeds in discrediting the protest movement on TV, it's probably also obstructive. This is what happened in Belarus. The protest participants were portrayed as right-wing extremists, which was proven to be wrong.

Protest movements are too complex and different to answer this question. Protests are often triggered by something small and then develop into something big. Nobody thought that this law against "benefit cheats" would cause such a big protest wave.

Researcher from Belarus, conducted in Russian on 19.04.2017 via Skype.

1. Please name a recent protest wave in Belarus. How would you describe the outcome of this protest movement? Did it initiate real political change and democratic reforms or did it fail to start a democratizing process?

Yes, on the 25th of March this year. I can say, that the protests took place due to the passing of the law on so-called "social parasites" - according to that, unemployed people and people who work abroad have to pay certain taxes to the government's budget. As for Belarus "hidden unemployment" is common, which means officially the unemployment rate is not very high, around 1-1,5 percent. Unofficially, especially in smaller towns it's much higher, that's why people went on the street in order to prevent implementation of the decree and change the situation. Of course, mass media used it as a news hook to do livestreams on Facebook and on Youtube, especially. The most popular ones were made by Radio Liberty (Radio Svoboda) which used this tool (Facebook live) to conduct livestreams from Minsk and some other regions.

Traditional media more or less covered this topic and the set of the tools used was relatively the same - new media formats, new tools to present the information. We've seen them first of all among online media. The main new thing of this year was these online streams - during these livestreams more and more people were joining to follow and watch, like and comment on them. After these protests, the government decided to suspend implementation of this tax.

2. Did traditional mass media, online media and social networks play a role in protest mobilization? If yes, which kind of media was most influential?

I can say that the amount of people participating in the protests wasn't very high - if we compare to what was in Moscow, for example. Both in Minsk and in the regions the amount of participants actually wasn't very high. I can't say that social media in particular played a catalytic role of these events. A special aspect of the recent protests is that this year, people took to the streets not only in Minsk but also in smaller cities, like Gomel and Vitebsk. The main channel to spread information and mobilize citizens wasn't just social media but mainly through "word-of-mouth", as in a smaller cities people know each other and social media weren't the main tool, probably. People took to the streets because they simply don't have jobs - these kind of economic reasons motivated them. So, they were transferring rotation about meeting points to protest by word of mouth. In the long run, an analogy could be drawn with The Russian Revolution in 1917 that could have happened without the cruiser Aurora. So, social media is an important tool but not the main one.

3. Which social media networks were most important?

It's the same as in Russia. In the regions people mainly use Odnoklassniki (Одноклассники). It's more common for people around +35 to communicate through this social media. In the biggest city of Belarus - Minsk - Facebook is the most popular. In other cities Facebook's audience is much smaller. Gomel could be noted as well, it's the second biggest city in the country in terms of population.

There are two million people live in Minsk, 500.000 - in Gomel. There, Facebook is more or less used.

VKontakte is probably the second most popular, depends on the age. Lately, Instagram is getting more and more popular as well. Messengers are quite popular: these days Telegram is widely used. It's harder for media to establish its own channel on Viber, so a lot of them prefer Telegram. Besides, Telegram messages are heavily encrypted.

4. Do you feel that a protest movement needs the help of traditional mass media (TV especially) to succeed in mobilizing demonstration on a massive scale and initiate political change or are online media sufficient enough?

Speaking of traditional media, all the main channels in Belarus are state-owned. That's why they mainly reflect the government's point of view. There are only a few TV stations that have an opportunity to report freely - like TV-channel Belsat (Белтсат), based in Poland. It broadcasts for the Western part Belarus but also can be watched online. However, I can't say that this channel played somehow an important role in the recent protests, because most of the audiovisual media are pretty much controlled by the state. That's why Internet, Facebook, livestreams serve as an alternative way to transmit information. Traditional media show protests from governmental perspective and could be described as counterpropaganda in this case.