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## **Russia to start 24-hour TV news in English**

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**7 June, 2005**

## THE ARTICLE

### **Russia to start 24-hour TV news in English**

**BNE:** In an attempt to spruce up its international image, Russia will soon start its own 24-hour English language TV news channel. *Russia Today* will have a CNN-type format that will air up-to-the-minute news of world and Russian affairs from a Russian perspective. It will inform viewers of all aspects of life in Russia, or at least those the Kremlin censors and programmers will allow that ensures Russia is presented in a positive light. The channel is an arm of Russia's already tightly controlled state media.

*Russia Today* will initially be broadcast in Russia, Europe, the USA and some C.I.S. and Asian countries. It is due to screen from as early as late summer. Rumor has it that the launch will coincide with President Vladimir Putin's address to the U.N. in September. Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief, said the time had come to challenge the U.S.-British stranglehold on English-speaking world news coverage. She said: "Many leading countries have this TV format, and now we are ready to introduce it in Russia as well."

A watchdog committee is to be established to oversee editorial policy. Members will comprise of famous Russian and foreign public figures, to provide a semblance of credibility of balanced and fair reporting. Many have voiced doubts over the degree of journalistic independence, the objectiveness of reporting and the level of bias injected from the Kremlin. A major concern is indeed whether non-Russians will want to watch Russian news in English.

## WARM-UPS

**1. NEWS:** Write down three good things that have happened to you recently and three not so good things. In pairs / groups tell each other your good and not so good news.

**2. TV NEWS:** In pairs / groups, talk about TV news. Do you watch TV news every day? Do you have a favorite news station? Why do you watch a particular TV news station? Do you ever watch news in English? Which is better, the BBC or CNN?

**3. WORLD CHANNELS:** In pairs / groups, talk about your images of what kinds of stories are reported on the TV news in the countries below. Change partners to hear more ideas.

U.S.A.	Brazil	Nigeria	Pakistan	Indonesia
Japan	Iceland	Saudi Arabia	Bhutan	North Korea

In each of these countries, do you think the news is (1) interesting, (2) accurate, (3) objective, (4) internationally focused?

**4. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

*International image / 24-hour TV news / news in English / CNN / Russian news / the Kremlin / Vladimir Putin / balanced and fair reporting / world news / bias*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

**5. RUSSIA:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with Russia. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

**6. OPINIONS:** Talk with your partner(s) about how far you agree with these opinions.

- It's time for an alternative to the Anglo-centric BBC and CNN.
- Russia's international image will greatly improve with the *Russia Today* channel.
- The reporting will be as objective as CNN's or the BBC's.
- Absolutely no one is going to watch Russian news in English.
- The whole thing is part of Vladimir Putin's propaganda machine.
- I'm sure news of Chechnya will be fairly reported.
- I think it'll be funny.
- I can't wait for copycats like "China Today", "Cuba Today" or "Iran Today".

## BEFORE READING / LISTENING

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| a. Russia wants to improve its international image.                  | T / F |
| b. There is likely to be no censorship over programming.             | T / F |
| c. Russia's TV channels are free to report freely and independently. | T / F |
| d. The channel will air only in Russia and C.I.S. countries.         | T / F |
| e. The channel will challenge the stranglehold of CNN and the BBC.   | T / F |
| f. A watchdog committee will oversee editorial policy.               | T / F |
| g. There are no worries about interference from the Kremlin.         | T / F |
| h. Many think the channel will be very popular with non-Russians.    | T / F |

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |                 |              |
|-----------------|--------------|
| a. spruce up    | overseers    |
| b. perspective  | smarten      |
| c. censors      | uncertainty  |
| d. due          | synchronize  |
| e. coincide     | inspect      |
| f. stranglehold | plausibility |
| g. oversee      | angle        |
| h. credibility  | partiality   |
| i. doubts       | scheduled    |
| j. bias         | monopoly     |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |                               |                           |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. spruce up                  | up-to-the-minute news     |
| b. air                        | of credibility            |
| c. presented in a             | injected from the Kremlin |
| d. tightly controlled         | stranglehold              |
| e. rumor                      | its international image   |
| f. challenge the U.S.-British | has it                    |
| g. watchdog                   | state media               |
| h. provide a semblance        | reporting                 |
| i. balanced and fair          | committee                 |
| j. level of bias              | positive light            |

## WHILE READING / LISTENING

**GAP FILL:** Put the words in the column on the right into the correct spaces.

### Russia to start 24-hour TV news in English

**BNE:** In an attempt to \_\_\_\_\_ up its international image, Russia will soon start its own 24-hour English language TV news channel. *Russia Today* will have a CNN-type \_\_\_\_\_ that will air up-to-the-minute news of world and Russian affairs from a Russian \_\_\_\_\_. It will inform viewers of all \_\_\_\_\_ of life in Russia, or at least those the Kremlin censors and programmers will allow that \_\_\_\_\_ Russia is presented in a positive light. The channel is an \_\_\_\_\_ of Russia's already tightly controlled state media.

*perspective*  
*ensures*  
*format*  
*arm*  
*spruce*  
*aspects*

*Russia Today* will \_\_\_\_\_ be broadcast in Russia, Europe, the USA and some C.I.S. and Asian countries. It is due to \_\_\_\_\_ from as early as late summer. \_\_\_\_\_ has it that the launch will coincide with President Vladimir Putin's \_\_\_\_\_ to the U.N. in September. Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief, said the \_\_\_\_\_ had come to challenge the U.S.-British \_\_\_\_\_ on English-speaking world news coverage. She said: "Many leading countries have this TV format, and now we are ready to introduce it in Russia as well."

*screen*  
*stranglehold*  
*time*  
*initially*  
*rumor*  
*address*

A \_\_\_\_\_ committee is to be established to \_\_\_\_\_ editorial policy. Members will \_\_\_\_\_ of famous Russian and foreign public figures, to provide a \_\_\_\_\_ of credibility of balanced and fair reporting. Many have voiced doubts over the degree of journalistic independence, the objectiveness of reporting and the level of \_\_\_\_\_ injected from the Kremlin. A major concern is \_\_\_\_\_ whether non-Russians will want to watch Russian news in English.

*bias*  
*comprise*  
*indeed*  
*semblance*  
*oversee*  
*watchdog*

## AFTER READING / LISTENING

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'state' and 'media'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. GAP FILL:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. STUDENT RUSSIAN NEWS SURVEY:** In pairs / groups write down questions about news of Russia in English.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make a mini-presentation to another group / the class on your findings.

**6. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- |               |                |
|---------------|----------------|
| • spruce up   | • stranglehold |
| • air         | • watchdog     |
| • perspective | • comprise     |
| • arm         | • voiced       |
| • initially   | • bias         |
| • coincide    | • non-Russians |

## DISCUSSION

### STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. What was your initial reaction to this headline?
- b. Do you think it's a good idea?
- c. Will you watch it?
- d. Don't you think it will make a change to have news in English from a non-Anglo-centric perspective?
- e. Do you think news from the BBC or CNN is unbiased? Is one more biased than the other?
- f. Do you think *Russia Today* will report objectively?
- g. Are you interested to see how the channel handles Chechnya, NATO's expansion and the quiet revolutions in ex-Soviet states?
- h. Would you like to see other countries introduce English news?
- i. Will *Russia Today* improve Russia's international image?
- j. Do you think there'll be a Russian Larry King?

### STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading the article?
- b. Are you interested in Russian news?
- c. Do you think *Russia Today* will be successful?
- d. Will the new news channel challenge the supremacy of CNN and the BBC?
- e. Do you think the channel will still be on air a year after its launch?
- f. Does your country have news in English on its TV channels?
- g. How often do you think about whether the news you watch is objective and unbiased?
- h. Can you think of any times you thought the news was biased?
- i. Can you live without TV news?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

**AFTER DISCUSSION:** Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

## SPEAKING

**RUSSIAN NEWS:** Below are some stories that appeared on the website of the Russian news service Pravda (<http://english.pravda.ru/main/>) on June 6, 2005. Perhaps these stories are a taste of things to come from *Russia Today*.

1. In pairs / groups, discuss your views on each of the stories.
2. Talk about how you think the story might unfold.
3. Rate each story from 1 to 10 (1 is best) on the criteria in the table:

HEADLINE	News-worthiness	Fun	Truth	Sequence to be read in news program
New TV channel to improve Russia's image abroad				
Doctors create first-ever transsexual dog				
Shepherd stolen instead of sheep				
Man performs act of extreme striptease in the center of Kiev				
Laura Bush and Lyudmila Putin do not understand their husbands' jokes				
Two U.S. travelers to be evacuated from the Russian North				

After you have finished, change partner(s) and compare what you spoke about with your earlier partner(s). Reach agreement on the scores you assigned to the headline criteria.



## LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

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A watchdog committee is to be established \_\_\_\_\_ policy. Members will comprise of famous Russian and foreign public figures, to provide a \_\_\_\_\_ of balanced and fair reporting. Many have voiced doubts over the degree of journalistic independence, the objectiveness of reporting and the \_\_\_\_\_ from the Kremlin. A major concern \_\_\_\_\_ non-Russians will want to watch Russian news in English.

## **HOMEWORK**

- 1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.
- 2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find more information on the *Russia Today* TV news channel. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.
- 3. CNN vs. BBC:** Make a poster comparing the two satellite TV channels. Write a conclusion telling the reader which channel you think is better and why. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you have the same ideas?
- 4. MY STATION:** Write a letter to the leader of your country explaining why his/her government should immediately start a state run TV news channel in English. Read your letter to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

## ANSWERS

### TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T      b. F      c. F      d. F      e. T      f. T      g. F      h. F

### SYNONYM MATCH:

- |                 |              |
|-----------------|--------------|
| a. spruce up    | smarten      |
| b. perspective  | angle        |
| c. censors      | overseers    |
| d. due          | scheduled    |
| e. coincide     | synchronize  |
| f. stranglehold | monopoly     |
| g. oversee      | inspect      |
| h. credibility  | plausibility |
| i. doubts       | uncertainty  |
| j. bias         | partiality   |

### PHRASE MATCH:

- |                               |                           |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. spruce up                  | its international image   |
| b. air                        | up-to-the-minute news     |
| c. presented in a             | positive light            |
| d. tightly controlled         | state media               |
| e. rumor                      | has it                    |
| f. challenge the U.S.-British | stranglehold              |
| g. watchdog                   | committee                 |
| h. provide a semblance        | of credibility            |
| i. balanced and fair          | reporting                 |
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### GAP FILL:

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