



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
AND THE BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS

*OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL*

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ISP-IB-13-46

Office of Inspections

September 2013

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**MEMORANDUM**

TO: IBB – Richard M. Lobo

FROM: OIG – Harold W. Geisel 

SUBJECT: Review of Broadcasting Board of Governors' Operations in Kyiv, Ukraine  
ISP-IB-13-46

**Executive Summary**

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) found no significant management issues at the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) bureau or with the Voice of America (VOA) contract journalist in Kyiv. VOA recently reduced its presence in Ukraine from four contract journalists to one, and the RFE/RL news bureau in Kyiv experienced budget reductions. Both VOA and RFE/RL expressed concern about the impact that expected future reductions may have on their ability to cover news events inside Ukraine. With 26 contract journalists, the RFE/RL presence in Ukraine remains robust. RFE/RL is able to implement a number of the goals of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) Strategic Plan 2012-2016, *Impact through Innovation and Integration*, through a number of activities, including the increased use of social media and an intern program involving Ukrainian students of journalism. Relations with Embassy Kyiv are characterized as excellent, and the embassy provides support to the BBG entities when requested. None of the staff expressed security concerns.

**Purpose, Scope, and Methodology**

In connection with the OIG inspection of Embassy Kyiv, an inspector reviewed BBG operations in Ukraine, focusing on interviews with the RFE Ukrainian Service bureau chief in Kyiv and the VOA Ukrainian Service contract reporter in Kyiv. The inspector also conducted telephone interviews with the RFE Ukrainian Service bureau chief in Prague and the VOA

Eurasian Division director in Washington, DC. The inspection took place in Washington, DC, between March 25 and April 12, 2013, and in Kyiv, Ukraine, between April 15 and May 7, 2013.

### **Issues regarding Budget Reductions**

In mid-April 2013, budget reductions caused by sequestration forced the VOA Ukrainian Service to terminate contracts for three of its four stringers in Kyiv. The one remaining stringer on contract was advised that his workload would be significantly reduced to no more than seven assignments each month with exclusive focus on television programming on the national television station, Channel Five, which is now the principal VOA Ukrainian Service platform. VOA operations in Ukraine could be further challenged at the end of the year if Channel Five requests an increase in funding for contract renewal as they have for the past 2 years. During both of those renewal negotiations, Channel Five requested a 10 percent increase, which VOA was able to negotiate down to 5 percent. Following sequestration cuts this year, the VOA Ukrainian Service comprises 12 full-time employees (including one vacant position and one employee currently being detailed to the BBG Office of Strategy and Development) and one part-time contractor/stringer in Kyiv.

The RFE/RL Ukrainian Service absorbed a \$400,000 reduction in its budget several months ago and expects an additional reduction in 2013, but at the time of the inspection had received no specific information. The earlier reduction resulted in the elimination of three contract positions in Prague. The RFE/RL Ukrainian Service broadcasts 2 hours and 30 minutes of live news daily that is carried on a number of national and regional stations throughout Ukraine.

Although there was concern in the past regarding possible VOA and RFE/RL duplication of services in Ukraine, the recently imposed personnel and program cuts have minimized that concern. In fact, the reductions have resulted in closer collaboration between the two services on the coverage of specific news events. RFE/RL now makes its recently expanded video studio available to the VOA correspondent to conduct interviews for future VOA broadcasts. According to the most recent BBG national survey (Gallup, October-November 2012), RFE/RL Ukrainian Service content on the radio or Internet reaches 1.6 percent of adults weekly, and VOA Ukrainian Service content on television or Internet reaches 8.7 percent of adults weekly (accounting exclusively for about 7 in 10 U.S. international broadcasting weekly users in Ukraine).

### **Social Media**

In addition to its radio news service, RFE/RL produces approximately 70 video news programs each week that are streamed on its Internet Web site. During the inspection, the RFE/RL Ukrainian Web site received an average of 30,000 views each day. The service has also moved into social media with interactive programs on Twitter and Facebook. RFE/RL incorporates Facebook interaction with audiences on a number of programs broadcast by radio. One particularly successful effort has been "Youth Plus," a Friday evening program dedicated to

youth issues that includes audience participation by Facebook. One recent program received 19,000 Facebook views. These developments relate to BBG's 5-year strategic plan goal #7, *Elevate and Expand Social Media Innovation*, and goal #8, *Employ Leading-Edge Communication Techniques and Technologies*.

### **Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Intern Program**

In 2011, the RFE/RL Ukrainian Service initiated an intern program drawing on journalism students from universities in Kyiv. The students serve as interns for 3 to 4 months in the RFE/RL news bureau in Kyiv bureau under the supervision of RFE/RL contract journalists and contribute material that is often broadcast. The very best of the interns frequently move on to become RFE/RL stringers. This program is in line with BBG strategic plan goal #11, *Spur Development through Targeted Media Initiatives and Training*, and has been complemented by the Ukrainian Government and nongovernmental organizations as a positive contribution to Ukrainian society.

### **Embassy Support**

Although administrative support from Embassy Kyiv to VOA and RFE/RL is limited to the use of the pouch for sending and receiving official mail, both services characterized relations with the embassy as excellent. The RFE/RL Ukrainian Service contract journalists work out of a bureau located in downtown Kyiv. Security services for the facility are provided by a private firm, although RFE/RL occasionally seeks and receives advice from the embassy on security issues. The Kyiv news bureau chief voiced no concerns about the physical security of this facility. The embassy invites both services to attend all events involving the media.

I would be happy to meet with you to discuss this matter further, or your staff may contact Robert Peterson, Assistant Inspector General for Inspections, [Redacted] [Redacted] (b) (2), [Redacted] (b) (6)

cc: Kelu Chao, Director, International Broadcasting Bureau  
Carol Prah, Management Analyst, International Broadcasting Bureau