

Sobyanin Embraces Luzkhov's TV Station

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Mayor Sergei Sobyanin has dumped some of the favorite assets of his predecessor, Yury Luzhkov.

He sold the Moskva airline (formerly known as Altant-Soyuz) to Tyumen-based carrier UTair, and the massive Medyn dairy farm to Kaluga regional authorities.

But City Hall's media holdings are not under threat.

Earlier this month Sobyanin signed a decree that, among other things, confirms 20 billion rubles (\$705 million) in subsidies for television channels controlled by City Hall.

The money is for the years 2009 through 2011, but analysts said Tuesday that the decree signals that City Hall will continue financing television on a scale that is unrivaled among the country's 83 regions.

The lion's share of the money goes to [TV Center](#), set up in 1997 to promote the political ambitions of Luzhkov, who was then considering a bid for the presidency.

The channel, which unlike other regionally controlled media is available throughout much of the country, will receive 2.98 billion rubles (\$105 million) from the city's budget this year, according to the decree, which is [published](#) on City Hall's web site.

TV Center does not publish any financial data, and neither its spokespeople nor City Hall spokespeople were available for comment Tuesday.

The only publicly available figure about the channel's advertising revenue is contained in a [statement](#) from the Anti-Monopoly Service last fall that says TV Center "might have" earned 3.31 billion rubles (\$116.5 million) from advertising in 2008 and 2009.

By comparison, state-owned Channel One, the country's biggest national channel, made 10 times as much, earning 33.5 billion rubles in the same period, Kommersant reported last fall. English-language channel Russia Today will get 11.4 billion rubles (\$401 million) from the federal budget this year.

TV Center, whose daily audience has been stable at 1.2 million viewers over the past three years, according to the decree, was quickly brought in line when Sobyenin assumed office last fall.

Luzhkov's spokesman Sergei Tsoi, whose influence led observers to call the channel "TV Tsoi," was consequently removed as board chairman and the "Moment of Truth" show hosted by Andrei Karaulov, a Luzhkov loyalist, was ditched.

Since then, Sobyenin has used TV Center as his mouthpiece much like Luzhkov did, even introducing a call-in program called "Our City" modeled on Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's annual televised shows.

Andrei Richter, a journalism professor at Moscow State University, said it was only logical for Sobyenin to hold onto TV Center. "Every local government has media it controls, and none of them make a profit. Moscow is Russia's richest region, so it can afford a larger-scale outlet," he said.

Pavel Gusev, editor of Moskovsky Komsomolets and chairman of the Public Chamber's media committee, said there was nothing wrong with City Hall's support for television. "I do not see TV Center as a mouthpiece. What I see is that the subsidies can improve the channel's programming and help form civil society," he told The Moscow Times.

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