



Monitoring Mass Media during the Campaign for Local General Elections of 5 June 2011

Report No.1
18 April – 1 May 2011

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1. General data

1.1 Project goal: To monitor and inform the public about the performance of mass media during the electoral campaign including the access of electoral candidates to media outlets and whether they guarantee pluralism of opinions. The aim is to analyze reporting trends that can affect media performance and compromise their ability to provide truthful, balanced and comprehensive information to the public.

1.2 Monitoring period: 18 April – 19 June 2011

1.3 Criteria for selection of media outlets to be monitored:

- Audience-impact (national, quasi-national). *Justification:* It is well-known that there is a direct connection between the size of the audience and the impact of media on public opinion: the more people who are exposed to a message, the stronger its impact on certain segments of society.
- Broadcast language (Romanian and Russian). *Justification:* In addition to media broadcasts in Romanian, stations providing news in Russian were included in the study as this language is accessible not only to Russian minorities but also to other ethnic minorities like Bulgarians, Gagauz and Ukrainians.

1.4 List of media outlets monitored:

Broadcast media:

Prime TV (Primele Ştiri, 21:00) – private station, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian;

NIT TV (Curier, 20:00) – private station, national coverage, broadcasts in Russian and Romanian;

Euro TV (Ştiri, 20:30) – private station, quasi-national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian;

Jurnal TV (Jurnalul orei 20:00) – private station, broadcasts via satellite, in Romanian and Russian;

N4 (Obiectiv, 19:30) – private station, regional coverage, broadcasts in Romanian.

Print media:

Adevărul (national daily, Romanian, 5 issues per week);

Timpul de dimineaţă (national daily, Romanian, 5 issues);

Moldova Suverană (national daily, Romanian, 4 issues);

Nezavisimaia Moldova (national daily, Russian, 4 issues);

Jurnal de Chişinău (national bi-weekly, Romanian, 2 issues).

2. Methodological framework

The full content of the newspapers and a daily newscast on each station were monitored, for news with either a direct or an indirect electoral character. Each news item was subject to an assessment of content and context to establish whether it was favorable or unfavorable to one party or another or to one political entity or another. The news was also analyzed according to the following objective criteria:

Impartiality/objectivity: According to the journalistic code of ethics, the news must be impartial and objective; it should not favor certain parties/groups/individuals to the detriment of others. Journalistic objectivity implies a clear distinction between opinions and facts both through the selection of the angle of approach and through the details provided. Discriminatory elements in reports and news items are a prime indication that the story is presented from a journalist's point of view. Screening the news and a minimal analysis of background and context also imply that the interests of certain persons and not those of the general public are being protected.¹

Fairness and balance of sources/diversity of opinions: To be correct and balanced, the news should cover all the parties involved in a dispute, particularly when the subject matter is controversial, and should treat all opponents equally.² Also, the media should ensure the access of the public to a variety of views to help people reach their own opinions about events. If certain views are given more attention than others, they become prominent and implicitly affect the public's perception about what is happening in society.

Language and videos: Responsible journalism means not only a truthful presentation of facts but also includes the use of correct, decent language. Deliberate exaggerations and licentious language such as pejorative labels for individuals or organizations and images manipulated to show certain parties in a negative light can raise serious questions about respect for ethical and professional standards. The ethical conduct of journalists is especially in question when videos show things that are not true or have been faked as well as when news items are illustrated with images that have no connection with the explanatory text.

3. Monitoring data



Involvement in the electoral campaign

In the 14 newscasts broadcast in the period from 18 April to 1 May 2011, Prime TV included 38 items with direct or indirect electoral character. Most of the items that were directly related to the electoral campaign referred to the registration of candidates with the Chisinau Constituency Electoral Council, as well as to events related to the launching of the electoral competition.

The items with indirect electoral character include those referring to exempting from VAT the new buses brought from Minsk, their putting into use, granting aids on Easter to senior people, inauguration by the current mayor of a football field at a Chisinau high school, situation of cemeteries and architectural monuments, bringing of the Holy Fire from Jerusalem, and participation of electoral candidates in the Easter Service.

¹ Simona Ștefănescu, Riscurile comunicării mediatice în timpul conflictelor

² Fico, Sofin, and Dragger, 2007. *Fairness and defamation in the reporting of local issues*

Between 18 and 26 April, subjects with electoral character were not delimited in a special segment but on 27 April, a video and sound signal appeared (the bumper “Elections 2011”) that announced the start and end of the “Elections 2011” segment. However, there were also items with indirect electoral character (headlines suggest the presence of electoral items) that were not included in this segment even after its appearance. For instance, in the newscast of 28 April, the item entitled “On the electoral... route” (the putting into use of new trolleybuses) is broadcast outside the “Elections 2011” rubric.

Objectivity and impartiality

In the period monitored, no deviations from the professional and ethical standards were registered in the news broadcast on Prime TV, which would have led to distorted or truncated information made available to the public.

Some bias was noticed in a number of news articles (a total of 5), for the most part determined by the selection of the sources interviewed. The candidate of the Liberal Party (PL) Dorin Chirtoacă and the candidate of the Democratic (PD) Valentina Buliga were favored in one item each. The news articles entitled “Electoral handout?” broadcast on 18 April (at 21.18), about the aids given out by the Chisinau Mayor’s Office included two voxes and both of them favored the current mayor (people are happy about receiving the aids and one of them says “We will elect him even without these packages...”) and in the videos shown we see how a person invited to the event gives flowers to Chirtoacă. In report broadcast on 28 April (entitled “On diapers days”), the PD candidate Valentina Buliga goes to a maternity hospital in the capital and distributes diaper packages, and the voxes in the item favor this electoral candidate. On the other hand, on 30 April (news article 6), Prime TV broadcasts an item about the situation at St. Lazăr Cemetery in Chişinău and preparation for the Ancestors’ Day. Entitled “Not ready for the Ancestors Day”, it disfavors to a certain degree the current mayor Dorin Chirtoacă. The report says that garbage cans are missing in the cemetery and the reporter asserts that the mayor “did not seem to be bothered by the garbage left on the sidewalk,” thus letting his personal opinion appear on the subject tackled.

Prime TV also broadcast two items that disfavored to a certain extent the electoral candidates from PL and the Communists’ Party of Moldova (PCRM) by stressing that while launching in the campaign the candidates were nervous and “faltered” or “lost their speech”. For instance, on 27 April, the news item “Together... with Chirtoacă” (no. 2 in the newscast), about the launching of PL in the electoral run, the journalist says: “being nervous, some candidates lost their speech.” And on 30 April (news item no. 4), the report “Nervous, into the campaign”, in its lead says: “Flattering and being nervous, into the fight for the mayor’s office. The Communists’ Party has launched its 600 candidates into the electoral campaign...” and gives the statements of several nervous candidates. Or, through such angle of approach, the viewers are offered information that is not relevant because it does not directly refer to their electoral programs and the respective candidates are put in not very favorable light.

Fairness and balance of sources/diversity of opinions

All electoral items broadcast by Prime TV in the period from 18 April to 1 May observed the diversity and balance of sources principle. The items related to certain controversies quoted all the parties involved.

Language and videos used

In the reporting period, on Prime TV, no cases were registered of use of discriminatory language when addressing the electoral candidates or videos capable of distorting the realities.



Involvement in the electoral campaign

From 18 April to 1 May, NIT got actively involved in covering subjects with direct and indirect electoral character, broadcasting a total of 60 news articles relevant to this monitoring. Of these, the vast majority referred to the launching in the campaign of the PCRM representatives both in Chisinau and outside, as well as various criticisms at the address of other candidates. NIT had many news items with electoral connotation in which PCRM is presented as defender of the population's interests, the only party able to cope with the "disastrous policies" of the current governance, and to able to take the country and capital out of poverty. The representatives of the Alliance for European Integration (AIE) are covered as "destroyers of the state, usurpers of the state power, and initiators of the 'economic fascism'" etc.

All electoral news items with direct character put the emphasis on the PCRM candidate Igor Dodon, this candidate for the Chisinau Mayor's Office being allotted very much space. Thus, in one newscast, of 21 April, NIT included three items from the campaign launching event that described in detail the electoral promises of Dodon and of the team of councilors for the Chisinau Municipal Council. Their total amount was approximately 17 minutes. This is not a single case; as a rule, the items with the presence of PCRM representatives being large, with the duration of approximately 4-5 minutes. Thus, the Regulations of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) on Covering the Campaign for the General Local Elections of 5 June 2011 in the Moldovan media, according to which "Electoral candidates shall participate in the electoral campaign on an equal basis and shall be entitled to benefit from non-discriminatory treatment with regard to the granting of airtime and space (a.n.) in media outlet."

Impartiality and objectivity

Of the total of 60 news items broadcast by NIT in the reference period, the vast majority – 57 – items were partisan. All news items mentioning representatives of the parties who advanced candidates to the elections are samples of partisanship and lack of objectivity. PCRM was directly mentioned in 22 news items, all of them in positive or neutral contexts.

As examples of items that favored PCRM serves the news about the launching of Igor Dodon in the campaign (21 April), his departure to Moscow wherefrom he had was supposed to return with bank resources for developing the capital's infrastructure (22 April), Dodon giving solutions for the youth (28 April), registration of the PCRM candidate to Balti Mayor's Office, cleaning campaign started by Balti komsomolists (22 April) etc.

A number of news articles with indirect electoral character referred to the notifying of the Constitutional Court by the communists in regard to the constitutionality of adoption of the national budget by AIE but also to the contestation by PCRM of the set of laws on the budgetary-fiscal policy, approved by the Parliament at the end of March. This station also broadcast items about the participation of PCRM leaders in various events (including the ceremony for the commemoration of the victims of Chernobyl disaster), press conferences held by Vladimir Voronin who stresses various "dangers" as a result of AIE actions, during which the PCRM symbols appear many times (the scythe and the hammer beside the party's name in two languages). On 19 April, NIT allocates a lot of space (around 6 minutes) to the news on the draft law prepared by PCRM on the neutrality status of Moldova that according to PCRM has lately been washed out by the governing alliance. The PCRM symbols appear in the background in the video.

When the news referred to other electoral candidates, the information was usually critical and they were mentioned 44 times per total in a negative context. They appear in news of conflict such as the news item about Democratic Party (PD) allegations against PLDM (about the death threat against a PD mayor), PD allegations against PCRM (about the involvement of PCRM candidate in a fight with a PD mayor), the disputes between PLDM and PL ("the trolleybus scandal," allegations of plagiarized slogans), as well as items about the "empty promises" of Chirtoacă, Filat etc. To note that NIT had in the reference period a number of items about the streets of Chişinău, living houses without access to sewerage and drinking water, with roads full of mud, about certain Chirtoacă's promises that have remained unfulfilled etc.

The bias of this station is obvious based both on how it selects its subjects for the newscasts and on the reporter's attitude. In general, the NIT newscasts are conceived in such way as to convince the viewers to support PCRM in disfavor of the other candidates, especially of the AIE ones. For this purposes, NIT journalists often resort to methods alien to journalism: distorted messages, transferred images, false associations, commentaries not separated from facts.

As examples can serve the news about the called decentralization strategy aiming to gradually go back to counties (judets). The first news article is based on the statements made by Vladimir Voronin in a press conference (27 April), according to which AIE had developed a strategy aiming at reducing the number of mayor's offices, schools and subsequently going back to having judets. This subject is resumed in 2 days, with broadcasts of reports from villages and interviews of people in the city. None of items gives the right to respond to AIE representatives, no opinions of experts are offered. Although the Prime Minister's mouthpiece denied this information in a press conference, NIT ignored the second part, insisting on the idea that what the PCRM leader had stated was the absolute truth. Moreover, by the manner of presenting this news, NIT perpetuates false messages,

facts being presented as already fulfilled and the journalists making premonitions about the fate of certain communities: *“The mayor’s office will be dissolved, parents will have to go abroad and seek work as they will lose their jobs, and the children will have to walk at least 10 km to the school in the neighboring village.”* This subject is resumed during a number of days, with presentation of pessimistic scenarios, inspired only from the words of PCRM leaders: *“Villages erased from the country’s map: this is how the inhabitants of the smallest villages that will be subject to decentralization think. In two of the 2 villages of the Hârjăuca community the optimization has already been felt: the schools have already been closed. People go abroad together with their children or enroll them with the Drochia boarding school”* NIT informs without discussing with experts, with representatives of local or district governments who could have come with explanations why a school with 55 students cannot be viable. The information is also confusing due to the fact that the first sentence refers to the alleged decentralization initiative, followed by the information about the closing of a school that obviously had been closed before putting in discussion the strategy to which the reporters made reference.

Another sample of bias is the news item of 29 April in which NIT announced that the ex-Minister of Justice Alexandru Tănase, ex-First Deputy Chairperson of PLDM, referring to the reasons why reforms are not implemented in Moldova, “categorically said” that the reason is “that in our country the national leader is a thief.” Or, from the inserts that follow it is obvious that Tănase, during an interview for a local radio station, explained in general the phenomena present in the society, using the expression “national sport” making reference to corruption. “We would need something similar in Moldova, when the national leader heading the country wouldn’t be a thief and wouldn’t come to power to fill his/her pockets with money” Tănase asserts. Thus, the reporter assigns to the source things that he did not directly say (see more details in Case Study No.2 in the attachment). If the sources quoted make certain things clear, the reporters should clearly mention it, without interpreting or using expressions such as “he categorically said.”

A message distortion case is the news article about the payments made to Chişinău Mayor’s Office for the trolleybuses procured from Belarus (27 April). The news informs that the payments were made through a Bucharest-based company making it clear that the budget was allegedly prejudiced for this reason. Although it is clear from the document that appears on the screen that it is about a consortium part of which are a Belarus and a Romanian company but the reporter avoids to say it, repeating a few times the message that the money was transferred through the Romanian company that collected commissions.

To mention that the vast majority of NIT news abound in reporter commentaries, reporters’ opinions being presented as facts. Thus, there is a flagrant violation of Art.7 (b) of the Broadcast Code according to which “in order to ensure in the broadcasters’ informative programs the principles of social-political balance, fairness and objectivity, they shall post each news item in such way as to not distort the sense of reality through editing tricks, commentaries, manner of formulation or headlines.”

Fairness and balance of sources. Diversity of sources

The same Art.7 (c) of the Broadcast Code stipulates that in case of the subjects referring to situations of conflict, the principle of information from a number of sources should be followed. Or, of the 42 controversial news articles on NIT in which a second opinion would have been necessary, only 17 presented the opinion of the parties mentioned. The other items presented just one side, usually that of PCRM. As examples can serve the news about the PCRM initiatives to appeal at the Constitutional Court the acts adopted by the Parliament, the news about the so-called decentralization strategy, the news about the poor condition of the streets, “Chirtoacă’s empty promises” etc. At the same time, 32 news items lacked diversity of sources, although it would have been necessary to quote a number of sources, including the experts, the persons directly mentioned etc. in order to make the news more explicit.

Language and videos used

In critical items with direct or indirect electoral character referring to the candidates of parliamentary parties other than PCRM, NIT often resorts to caricatures, music, uses music from the archive, integrates irrelevant videos besides texts that refer to other subjects etc. Thus, in news item no. 4 of the newscast of 18 April, NIT presents Dorin Chirtoacă in the role of the anchor of a well-known program of the first Russian channel “Wonder Field” (Pole Chudes) (see Case study no.1). Other caricatures present Vlad Filat drawing Moldova’s map (in the news article about the so-called decentralization, 28 April), Serafim Urechean having a number of sacks with dollars in his arms (in the news article about his appointment as Head of the Court of Accounts, 21 April), Dorin Chirtoacă whose figure replaces the face of Ștefan cel Mare on a one-hundred lei bill on which also the image of red eggs also appears (in the news item entitled “Dorin Chirtoacă’s Easter Lies”, 19 April), the collage showing Prime Minister Vlad Filat hugging the Transnistrian leader Igor Smirnov, both wearing trainings (18 April).

In some cases, NIT resorts to songs whose lyrics abound in jargons, for instance the item that presents photographs from an alleged party at the mayor’s office: *“Big party in the office of Mayor Dorin Chirtoacă. A number of pictures appeared in the Internet showing what the Mayor did on one of the days in those 4 years of city administration. In the images published, Dorin Chirtoacă throws a party with drinks and dancing with young ladies. The author of the pictures does not say when the party took place but leaves a comment that says – I quote: “The Mayor feasts while Chisinau people who brought him to the mayor’s office by their votes cannot pay their bills. So, gentlemen, this is what the Mayor calls final changes.” Further watch how Dorin Chirtoacă administers the capital’s business from his office,”* the item’s intro says. This is followed on the screen by a number of photographs and the sound background is made up of segments from a song where the refrain can be clearly heard “Gulyai, bratva” (Let’s party, lads).

This is another violation of the Broadcast Code that does not allow “distorting the sense of reality by editing tricks, commentaries, and manner of formulation or headlines.”



Involvement in the electoral campaign

In those 10 newscasts in the monitoring period, the TV station Euro TV broadcast 31 items with direct or indirect electoral character. Most of them refer to the beginning of the electoral campaign and to the process of registration of candidates (22 subjects) but there are also reports that approach the current issues that the capital faces (9 items). The latter include the organization of Easter holidays by the local authorities, street indicators, the garbage in parks, condition of architectural monuments, traffic jams, and putting into use of new trolleybuses. The last subject was present in a number of items (4), some of them having a clear electoral shade.

Impartiality and objectivity

Euro TV did not register in the monitoring period deviations from the ethical standards capable of distorting the information made available to the public. Nor were there problems identified in relation to the separation of opinions from facts or discrimination of an electoral candidate.

The presence of a number of news items about the activities of local authorities (approximately a third of the number of direct or indirect electoral subjects) and especially of the General Mayor Dorin Chirtoacă (who had not been suspended from office) makes him be a little favored by a larger coverage as compared to other electoral candidates about whom there is no news or who are part only of general and collective subjects, such as their registration. For instance, in the newscast of 26 April, the current mayor is head of news in four items (news items 3, 4, 5 and 15). To note that the weekly meeting took place on this day at Chisinau Mayor's Office and the reporters had the possibility to identify three subjects about the free transportation on Easter, street indicators, and the garbage left by city residents after picnicking in parks. At the same time, on this day, the mayor participated in commemorating the victims of the Chernobyl disaster (news item 15). The situation is repeated in a few days when the general mayor is the protagonist of a number of subjects (18 April – 3, 27 April – 3).

Fairness and balance of sources. Diversity of opinions.

In the report period, Euro TV showed respect for diversity of opinions and balance of sources principles. All those five subjects related to certain controversies present both parties to the conflict.

Language and videos used

In the period from 18 April – to 1 May, no cases were registered of use of discriminatory language against the electoral candidates, or videos capable of distorting the realities or create premises for doubting the observance of ethical and professional standards by the EURO TV journalists.



Involvement in the electoral campaign

In the first two weeks of monitoring, the TV station Jurnal TV actively engaged in the electoral campaign, covering both the events directly referring to the campaign and the events/situations that indirectly refer to the elections and the competition among the candidates.

In total, in the main newscast of the day Jurnal TV presented 25 news items that directly refer to the electoral campaign and other 20 items referring indirectly to the campaign. Starting with 28 April, Jurnal TV presents the news that the station's editors consider as directly related to the campaign as part of a special segment "Local Elections 2011. Think what you vote!"

The "Newscast of 20.00", broadcast from 18 April to 1 May 2011 mainly covered the statements, actions and disputes of the candidates to the office of general mayor of Chişinău and one news item made reference to one of the candidates to the office of mayor of Ungheni. The activities of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) were regularly covered in this period, with reports from each CEC meeting. The main subjects covered in the two weeks of the electoral campaign in "Newscast of 20.00" were the following:

- *Drawing lots for the voting ballot in Chişinău;*
- *Registration of candidates in the capital, including in the context of the misunderstandings among the parties that advance candidates and allegations that the members of the Chisinau Constituency Electoral Council acts "upon order";*
- *Launching in the campaign with presentation of electoral programs;*
- *Easter presents in the electoral context and other image actions of the candidates to Chisinau mayor's office;*
- *Arguments and mutual allegations that Dorin Chirtoacă and Victor Bodiu bring to each other etc.*

Impartiality and objectivity

As a total for the monitoring period, the most covered candidate for the office of mayor of Chişinău was Dorin Chirtoacă (PL) who benefited from 20 appearances in "Newscast of 20.00" on Jurnal TV, most of the times in a neutral or favorable context. Taking into account that D. Chirtoacă had not been officially registered as candidate and so had not been suspended from the office of general mayor that he held in the first period of monitoring, his increased media coverage seems to be partly justified. However, the TV station Jurnal TV shows a slight favoring of Dorin Chirtoacă in the electoral campaign. Outside the proper electoral context, the current mayor appears in videos in a positive context, offering sweets and candy on Easter to sick children, presents bought from the money of anonymous businesspersons (24 April), serving Easter bread to the residents of the biggest apartment bloc in Chişinău (25 aprilie), requesting that water barrels be brought for those who would go to cemeteries on the Ancestors' Day (26 April), presenting the new trolleybuses, procured from Belarus (28 April), getting involved to solve some of the problems signaled by the city residents (29 April), helping with the cleaning of a cemetery

(30 April) etc. In the newscast of 29 April, Dorin Chirtoacă appeared in three different subjects.

Victor Bodiu, the candidate for the office of general mayor of Chişinău from PLDM also appeared rather often in “Newscast of 20.00”, in total 12 times, especially presenting electoral initiatives as well in the context of the disputes and mutual accusations with the acting mayor and the declared candidate of PL, Dorin Chirtoacă. In addition, Bodiu appeared in video segments as participating in festivities of giving Easter presents to writers (20 April), bringing the Holy Fire together with the delegation of Moldova’s Metropolitan Church (20, 22, 23 April) and meeting with the Patriarch of Jerusalem (23 April), distributing flags on the Moldovan Flag Day (27 April). In general, this TV station presented the PLDM candidate in a neutral, but slightly ironic manner. In fact, Jurnal TV used a semi-ironic tone in regard to all candidates.

The other candidates who applied for registration with CEC appeared more rarely in the “Newscast of 20.00”: Igor Dodon (PCRM) and Valentina Buliga (PDM) – four times each; Radu Buşilă (Christian Democratic People’s Party, PPCD) and Sergiu Coropceanu (Social Democratic Party, PSD) – two times each; Vitalia Pavlicenco (National Liberal Party, PNL) – once; the other candidates registered did not appear with declarations and/or stands in the newscast of this hour.

Fairness and balance of sources. Diversity of opinions.

Most of the news selected for coverage by Jurnal TV editors at the main newscast of the day generally observed the ethical principle of correctness, i.e. of balanced presentation of positions. In some cases, however, the right to response was not given. Thus, one of the news items broadcast on 21 April was entitled “Chirtoacă weds Dodon and Bodiu” and started with the exclamation “Dodon and Bodiu live together,” attributed to Chirtoacă (here is the exact quote from D. Chirtoacă’s statement: *“Together got launched without documents, got married without legal documents. Perhaps, some kind of cohabitation”*). The news item announces that Chirtoacă accuses the two counter-candidates of launching themselves in the electoral campaign contrary to the legal provisions. The right of response of the two was not ensured.

At the same time, some of the events in this period with the participation of the candidates registered were not chosen for coverage in the “Newscast of 20.00” (for instance, the visit to Moscow of the PCRM candidate I. Dodon/22 April).

Language and video used

The language used by Jurnal TV in the items broadcast in the “Newscast of 20.00” was acceptable. There were no cases of video manipulation.



Involvement in the electoral campaign

In the period from 18 April to 1 May, the TV station N4 broadcast 36 subjects with a direct or indirect electoral character. Most of the items directly related to the electoral campaign referred to the registration of candidates but also to the launching of their campaigns. Electoral reports were not delimited in a special segment. They were included in the newscast depending on the importance of the event, which positioned some of the items at the beginning of the newscast and others – toward its end, with non-electoral subjects in between them.

At the same time, N4 had a number of reports with a veiled campaign character, such as those related to the activities of the Secretary General of the Government Victor Bodiu (the bringing of the Holy Fire, participation in an Easter fair, launching of the project for supervising the road traffic, commemoration of Chernobyl victims), actions of the General Mayor of Chisinau Dorin Chirtoacă (granting of Easter aids to people with low income, launching of new trolleybuses), items in which they appear either in the videos or with some statements.

Objectivity and impartiality

Of the 36 news items monitored as subjects with direct or implicitly electoral character, only 3 had problems with regard to objectivity and impartiality. One of them is based on a news item taken over from the *Flux* newspaper that refers to the so-called feasts that Mayor Dorin Chirtoacă organized in his office. The fact that the reporters took over the text from the newspaper even though they made reference to the source, without specifying when and how that was done, proves certain bias on behalf of this station. Another subject with similar problems refers to the launching in the electoral campaign of the PCRM candidate in which the reporter comes with such conclusions as “*he has already started working*” and “*and originally launched himself.*”

In the period monitored we cannot talk yet about favoring or disfavoring an electoral candidate. Nonetheless, the relatively high number of items – 8 of 36 – with the participation of Victor Bodiu, PLDM candidate for the office of Chisinau mayor and also Secretary General of the Government, makes N4 incline the balance at the beginning of the campaign to the political entity of the Prime Minister that most of the times appears next to Bodiu. The tendency to favor the PLD candidate is also supported by a number of formulations from the N4 journalists. For instance, in the news item of 28 April, the lead betrays the reporter’s interest who presents the promises of the PLDM candidate as being truthful: “*Unbelievable, but true. In Chişinău, it will be possible to procure apartments in installments for 20 years, and the monthly rate will not exceed 200 euro. At least this is another commitment of the liberal democrat candidate for the office of Chişinău mayor Victor Bodiu.*” The reporter makes reference to the Filat–Bodiu tandem, which favors a

transfer of image from the Prime Minister to the candidate, which cannot remain outside a viewer's observations.

The other candidates and electoral events organized by them share the rest of the information space at N4 without many differences in regard to the quantity and quality parameters of monitoring.

Fairness and balance of sources. Diversity of opinions.

Nine news items of the 36 broadcast by N4 in the period monitored had problems in regard to the diversity of opinions. Most of the times, they are related to the lack of a source that would come with explanations about the involvement in the campaign of the factors or administrative resources used by certain electoral candidates. We can mention here the subjects about the bringing of the Holy Fire from Jerusalem, the participation in a charity fair, celebrating the National Flag, putting into use of new trolleybuses etc.

The fact that N4 journalists face problems related to the observance of accuracy and balance of sources is most obvious in the report on the events marking the Day of the National Flag on 27 April. The reporters tried to catch all the events organized on this occasion, just approached the political actors in a different manner. They avoided broadcasting the General Mayor with a statement made during the event but showed how the PLDM candidate for the office of Chisinau mayor distributes tricolor flags to the passersby and explains to them their meaning. The differentiated approach limits public access to the multitude of ideas even though they do not directly relate to the electoral campaign, favoring just one candidate.

In the absence of reactions from a part of the candidates mentioned by their counter candidates, the N4 journalists found their own way of ensuring the diversity of opinions. For instance, in a report of 29 April, in which PD accuses PCRM of another electoral diversion, the communists' reaction is missing. This is how the author got out of the situation: "The communists' have not answered until now to the democrats' allegations but it is certain (a.n.) that PCRM declared that they would have a clean electoral campaign."

From 18 April to 1 May, N4 was careful in covering controversial subjects with allegations against the electoral candidates. Of the six controversial items, three did not include the accused party. In addition to the report mentioned above, there is another item of 26 April in which the Prime Minister makes sarcastic comments about an alleged death threat against a PD candidate to the office of mayor in the district of Strășeni. Vlad Filat's statements remain without response from the democrats who a few days earlier accused the PLDM of organizing a number of attempts to recruit candidates on its lists. Another report sensitive to the analysis of observation of balance of sources relates to the broadcasting of statements made by Sergiu Mocanu, Head of the Ant-Mafia Movement upon the launch of the electoral campaign. He said that the businessman Vlad Plahotniuc prepared two candidates for the office of Chisinau mayor, Buliga and Dodon. Voronin rejected these allegations, Dodon and Plahotniuc did not comment on those statements.

Language and videos used

Throughout the monitoring period, N4 did not show exaggerations regarding the use of accessible language for the news. Except for formulas that leave room for interpretation, such as “Green for trolleybuses” (21 April, it makes reference to the political color of an electoral candidate) and “Democrats thunder” (22 April, it is an exaggeration on behalf of the author of the news item). The first lead comes to illustrate the vote of the MPs on exempting Chisinau trolleybuses from customs duties. The second one refers to the press conference of the PD candidate for the office of Chisinau mayor Valentina Buliga in which she makes public the threats against some party colleagues.

The reporters did not use labeling assigned to certain electoral candidates. Such observations refer to the use of videos but also to the editing elements that observed the ethical and professional standards.

PRINT MEDIA



Involvement in the electoral campaign

In the report period, the daily *Adevărul* had a total of 15 items with direct or indirect electoral character. They referred to the filing of documents with CEC for the registration of first candidates, their declarations and the official launch of the campaigns of some of them. At the same time, some of the news items referred to the representatives of certain parties and electoral competitors who were either involved in various actions or accused by other competitors but also by journalists of certain things.

Impartiality and objectivity

The vast majority of those 15 items were objective and impartial. Only 3 items showed slight bias, obvious from the angle of approach of the subject. Thus, the item entitled ““Let’s go, Chișinău!” for washing machines,” of 27 April, indirectly favors the current mayor Dorin Chirtoacă, who was presented as a manager concerned with the cleanliness in the capital. In another item – “Pompous tri-launching of Chirtoacă’s trolleybuses” of 29 April, the capital’s mayor is disfavored. Expressions such as “hellish jams,” “everyone came to see the ‘wonder’ about which the mayor had been talking about for half a year,” “Dorin Chirtoacă did not miss any occasion for working on his image, carrying the press after him to any event” are the personal opinions of the item’s author that should not be found in an informative item. Some headlines also contain slight irony, for instance: “Copy paste and the electoral rake,” with reference to the allegations of plagiarism from the PLDM and PL candidates, but also the official launching of the PCRM candidate in the elections. The reporter informs that “Dodon also took in his hand a stick with a nail attached to one of its ends,” and 2 MPs came to the “subotnik” (t.n. - community work done on Saturdays, concept from the Soviet times) by a car having parliamentary numbers, playing truant from the plenum meeting.” Thus, the PCRM candidate is a little bantered. To note that such descriptive details are not put in the foreground in the items about the launching of the other two electoral competitors – PL and PLDM.

The item “Christians persecuted by URSS communists,” even though not referring to PCRM, indirectly disfavours it because a transfer of negative image takes place, especially through the inter-headline “Communist ideology justifies the acts of violence and crimes against the Communists.”

Fairness and balance of sources. Diversity of opinions.

The absolute majority of the items in *Adevărul* observed the principle of fairness and diversity of opinions. Fourteen of 15 news items contains the opinions of various sources and the only controversial item published in this period quoted both parties involved in the conflict.

Language and images used

The items in *Adevărul* are written by observing the ethical standards and do not contain pejorative or licentious expressions that would label certain electoral competitors. All the items that fell under the incidence of this monitoring used a correct language and the images were informative, without deviating from the ethical standards. To note that the newspaper quoted is the only publication that tries to keep a balance in presenting the images in which the candidates appear: usually, two photographs appear next to each other and equal in size. However, this is less valid for the PCRM candidate, who does not appear in the images next to Bodiuc and Chirtoacă in the item “Copy-paste and electoral rakes” that refers to all the three candidates (22 April, p.7)



Involvement in the electoral campaign

All the seven issues of *Moldova Suverană* in the period from 18 April to 1 May published 31 items that had been indirectly related to the local elections of 5 June 2011, including 16 articles referring directly to the electoral campaign or to one/several electoral candidates and other 15 articles referring to the political parties involved in the local elections, without their candidate being named or made clear who they are. As journalistic genre, most the articles were opinions, less rarely – analyses and news.

In the coverage of the electoral campaign, the editorial policy of *Moldova Suverană* is focused, on the one hand, on harsh direct and indirect criticism against the political parties from the government and their candidates for the elective offices, and on the other hand, on promoting the PCRM candidates in the elections, as well as this party’s critical message about the government alliance and the results of governing at central and local levels. Electoral campaign events are selectively covered by the newspaper and the readers are informed only about the electoral events organized by PCRM.

Objectivity and impartiality

The character of the items published in *Moldova Suverană* indicates clear favoring of the PCRM candidate Igor Dodon and disfavoring of the candidates Dorin Chirtoacă (PL) and Victor Bodiu (PLDM). Thus, on 19 April, the newspaper informs about the filing of documents and registration of candidates for the office of general mayor of Chişinău where four of the candidates who filed are mentioned but the only candidate quoted is Igor Dodon; in addition, the article is accompanied by his picture. On the following day, the publication comes back with details, titling “Igor Dodon no. 6 in the voting ballot,” posting another photograph of this candidate. In its issue of 22 April, the newspaper publishes an item about the launching of the electoral program and of the team of the PCRM candidate, including five photographs from that event (the newspaper did not cover the programs and the teams of the other candidates), and on 28 April it announces about the launching of the video “We are Moldovans,” that was attended by Igor Dodon who is the only source quoted in the article. Other items tell the readers that the PCRM candidate Igor Dodon has the highest chances of winning the local elections in Chişinău (“The lad will divorce...the city hall,” 27 April).

In relation to the other candidates to the office of general office of Chisinau, *Moldova Suverană* has a totally different editorial performance, they being the targets of media attacks with the clear purpose of being presented in bad light or of being discredited. Thus, Dorin Chirtoacă’s name was mentioned seven times in the report period, each time in a negative context (accused of bad management of the city funds and corruption in the interest of the party that he represents, of instigation to coup d’état in the context of the 20 April 2009 events, that his party had counterfeited the previous local elections and intends to do the same thing in the current poll etc.). The PLDM candidate Victor Bodiu was directly mentioned three times, each time in a unfavorable context. As to the other candidates for the office of general mayor of Chişinău the newspaper announced about them only in the context of the filing of documents/registration as part of news items that directly promoted the PCRM candidate Igor Dodon.

Fairness and balance of sources. Diversity of opinions.

Twenty seven items presented the information from a single perspective and so the diversity of opinions was not ensured and the items were biased. Nineteen items approached a controversial subject or allegations were launched against an electoral candidate or the party he/she represents but in no cases the right to respond was ensured, as required by the ethical standards.

Language and images used

Some items published by *Moldova Suverană* used expressions with pejorative tone, insinuating and semi-licitious, collages not marked accordingly or images truncated for manipulation purposes. Thus, the newspaper issue of 20 April publishes an item that is announced as having being received by the newspaper with the title “*Let us get cured from the green diarrhea,*” signed by “Vladimir Ghirba, FREE LANCE journalist, Floreşti.” The text starts with the following statement “*For two years a ridiculous and impotent liberal coalition made up of 3 lying buffoons and a fat one, withdrawn into shadow, the big AMN (Our Moldova Alliance) member Serafim Poddubnîi (have been riding our poor country),*”

and in the story *Lad to divorce... city hall*” (27 April) Dorin Chirtoacă is called “*Little Dorin, son of stray dogs*” etc.



Involvement in the electoral campaign

Timpul de dimineață publishes in the period monitored 19 articles with direct or indirect electoral character. Of these, half have a strictly informative character (registration of electoral candidates and launching in the campaign, information from CEC), and others are opinions (editorials and street surveys).

Impartiality and objectivity

The newspaper manages to be impartial and objective in the news on the electoral campaign but not always in more complex articles. The subject of 18 April “*It is a sin to be communist*,” the author speaks about a list of sins that allegedly exists at one of the Chisinau churches where among others includes the “*sin of being active as komsomolist or communist*”. The publication does not offer space for interpretation to the others who have a different opinion about this list. The same observations refer also to the article “*Chișinău has turned into a pile of destroyed history*,” that reaches the conclusion that a historical monument is destroyed each month in Chișinău.

Fairness and balance of sources. Diversity of opinions.

At this chapter to note that the newspaper promotes diversity of opinions by launching a section where various commentators but also ordinary people come with ideas about the electoral campaign. For instance, on 27 April, the readers are encouraged to identify the stringent problems in Chișinău and to offer solutions. The publication promises to publish them in the section “*One thousand and one night of Chișinău*.” The same issue publishes a street survey where the respondents are asked to answer the question “Which are the first three things that the new mayor should do?”

In addition to these opinions of the public at large, *Timpul de dimineață* publishes commentaries about the electoral campaign of some dedicated journalists, such as “What do I expect from the candidates?” by Constantin Cheianu (29 April), “Chișinău, a sacrificed city?” by Constantin Cheianu (27 April). Both items tackle how the elections started and what their expectations are from the candidates.

Language and images used

The language of the electoral news in *Timpul de dimineață* is correct but that of the commentaries is sometimes slightly ironic but does not exaggerate in labeling or allegations against candidates.

Involvement in the electoral campaign

From 18 April to 1 May, the five issues of *Nezavisimaia Moldova* published 22 articles with direct and indirect electoral character. The main subjects covered include those about the registration of Igor Dodon with the Chisinau Constituency Electoral Council, presentation of the PCRM electoral platform and of the candidates for the office of general mayor of Chisinau and of municipal councilors on behalf of this entity. Also, the newspaper presents the PCRM achievement for eight years of governing.

Nezavisimaia Moldova also wrote about the activity report presented by Dorin Chirtoacă and the problem of destroyed architecture monuments (current administration being accused of being involved in destroying the capital's historical center), the AIE intention to make a 'confidential' administrative-territorial reform (reform also named "administrative genocide" and in this context the name of the PLDM candidate Victor Bodiu is mentioned). To note that the electoral advertising articles are not marked as such. None of the articles is not accompanied by the specification "Paid for from the electoral fund."

Objectivity/impartiality

The newspaper covered from a positive perspective everything that related to the PCRM candidate Igor Dodon for the office of general mayor of Chisinau and this entity's candidates for the offices of councilors but criticized Dodon's counter-candidates, especially the activities of the current mayor Dorin Chirtoacă, PL candidate.

Igor Dodon is favored in 8 articles. One of them (published on 19 April) says that PCRM advanced a candidate who is "an independent political personality," "the leader of the reforming wing" of PCRM. "And for Voronin, Dodon is first of all an experienced manager, a true technocrat who is meant to solve the problems related to getting the country out the crises," the article adds.

The countercandidates of Igor Dodon appear only in negative light. The PL candidate Dorin Chirtoacă is disfavored in 9 articles and the PLDM candidate Victor Bodiu – in 5 articles.

As examples of disfavoring of the PL candidate Dorin Chirtoacă serve a number of stories in which he is accused of destroying architectural monuments but also for the city degradation as a whole. According to the articles published in *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, the projects of the current mayor were not successful.

The PLDM candidate Victor Bodiu is disfavored in such articles as the one of 20 April that alleges that Bodiu was involved in 'dubious privatization schemes' (the privatization of the IPTEH building is given as an example) because in 1999-2000 he was Vlad Filat's councilor in the Department of Privatization. The newspaper quotes Chirtoacă and alleges that he had made those statements. Bodiu's reactions to those allegations is missing.

Fairness and balance of sources. Diversity of opinions.

Most of the items published in *Nezavisimaia Moldova* presented the information from a single perspective indicating just one source of information. The newspaper had a total of 11 relevant controversial materials that did not offer the right to respond. Thus, the newspaper publishes articles in which Chişinău Mayor's Office is accused that it encourages destruction of the historical monuments in the city (19 April), the current mayor is accused of money laundering through a Romanian company (in case of the trolleybuses procured from Minsk, see issues of 21 and 22 April), the PD and PLDM candidate are accused of having attacked the candidates and propagandists from the districts of Basarabasca and Căuşeni. In none of these cases was the opinion of the other party asked.

Language and videos used

Six articles of *Nezavisimaia Moldova* contain deviations from the ethical standards in regard to the language used (pejorative language and labeling was used). As example can serve the item published on 19 April about the activity report of Dorin Chirtoacă that uses pejorative expressions about Chirtoacă and his projects, such as "Chirtoacăville" "the entire Chisinau is tired of this "mayor" etc. An article of 21 April calls Chirtoacă "amateur-politican." On 22 April, in the section "Newspaper – reader – newspaper" there are published letters from the readers in which Chirtoacă is called "Chirtoşca", "Dorinel", with the mention that "his main project is to transform Chişinău into sewer."

On 29 April, newspaper publishes another letter of a reader who says that Dorin Chirtoacă "should work as gardener in Băsescu's garden."



Involvement in the electoral campaign

In the period monitored *Jurnal de Chişinău* tackled the subject of the local general elections more at interpretation level and less at informative level. Nearly half of those 9 articles published analyze the beginning of the campaign either in an allegorical form ("More adequate candidates" by Ion Buraga, 22 April and 29 April), or at opinion level (interview with Constantin Cheianu, 22 April, "dissolves after 5 June" by Petru Bogatu, 29 April).

Impartiality and objectivity

In general, the first two weeks of electoral campaign are covered in *Jurnal de Chişinău* with observance of the elementary standards of publication of electoral subjects: impartiality, objectivity and fairness. There were no registered exaggerations with regard to the language used or distorted images. Other five articles have a reporting character that talk about the beginning of registration of the electoral candidates but also about the incidents and misunderstandings among the entities of the governing alliance on the background of the electoral campaign. We cannot talk about serious violations of journalistic writing standards but draw attention to a number of omissions by the authors who do not always separate their personal opinions from facts. For instance, in the report "AIE-2 politicians dislike each other," the authors has the tendency to slip his opinions about that he noticed at the commemoration of the Chernobyl victims and comes with a conclusion: "although some

political actors involved in the electoral battle make try to be decent..., their actions however show the contrary.”

4. Conclusions

Based on the monitoring results, it can be concluded that in the period from 18 April to 1 May 2011, most of the media monitored did not admit serious deviations from the ethical and professional standards. Except for a TV station and two newspapers, no obvious favoring of any electoral candidate was noticed.

- The stations Prime TV, Euro TV and Jurnal TV had a balanced performance, without obvious deviations from the professional and ethical standards.
- The station with quasi-national coverage NIT openly promoted the PCRM candidates not only through the space offered to items about them but also through the manner of selection and presentation of news. Most of the news broadcast by NIT was biased and the news that referred to candidates other than PCRM was often denigrating. This station promotes aggressive journalistic language and uses videos that contravene the professional and ethical principles.
- The station with regional coverage N4 slightly favors PLDM both in its news from electoral events and in its video news with the presence of Prime Minister Filat.
- The newspapers *Adevărul*, *Timpul de dimineață* and *Jurnal de Chișinău* covered the beginning of the campaign in a balanced manner, without taking the side of one or another electoral candidate. No obvious deviations from the professional and ethical standards were registered.
- The publications *Moldova Suverană* and *Nezavisimaia Moldova* made open partisanship in favor of the PCRM candidate and in disfavor of the other electoral candidates from PL, PLDM and PDM. Both newspapers have deficiencies with regard to the impartiality and balance of sources, maintaining the trend of presenting the information rather unilaterally and based on one or several sources that expressed the same point of view, but also regarding the language used.

6. Recommendations:

- The media monitored should use the monitoring reports as self-regulatory tools and should eliminate the deficiencies so that in their internal activities:
 - Inform the voters correctly, impartially and fairly;
 - In the news, renounce estimating/commenting on the electoral events of the political parties or their representatives;
 - Eliminate all discrimination in applying the principle of diversity of opinions and in offering the right to respond;
 - Take into account the political convictions of various categories of the population ensuring balance and diversity of opinions but also freedom of expression;
 - Truthfully cover the events without distorting the sense of reality through editing and commentaries observing the principle of information from a number of sources.
- The Broadcast Coordinating Council should take action and sanction in accordance with the provisions of the Broadcast Code the broadcasters who violate the right of

Moldovan residents to full, fair and truthful information, the right to freedom of expression and free communication of information via broadcast and print media.

ANNEX

Case study No. 1

NIT, Curier, 18 April, 20:00

Author: Sergiu Strungaru

The station with national coverage NIT includes in its newscast of 18 April an item that tackles the issue of “electoral presents.” The news item, with the duration of 3.35 minutes, is obviously biased, offers information from one perspective, abounds in commentaries made by the reporter, contains caricatures, images from the archive, for denigration purposes.

“Municipal elections have turned the capital’s mayor’s office into a real wonder field. On the eve of elections, Dorin Chirtoacă presents cards to police officers, distributes bags with food to pensioners and donates hundreds of thousands of lei to the young people who participated in the violent protests of 7 April. And this after 4 years that one could hear just one message from the mayor’s office “we are poor and do not have money,” announces the anchor from the studio while a caricature appears on the screen representing Dorin Chirtoacă in the role of anchor of the well-known program on a Russian TV station (Pole chudes – Wonder field).

From the very beginning, an informed viewer can notice the non-separation of facts from opinions, the anchor presenting to the public her own opinions or the opinions of the authors, which contravenes the Journalist Code of Ethics. Further on, the reporter says: *“On the eve of elections, Dorin Chirtoacă squeezes as much as he can the capital’s budget to distribute presents. Today Dorin Chirtoacă promised to the politicians to buy new clothes for them but also cars of 2 mln lei.”*

After a short insert with Dorin Chirtoacă, the reporter puts herself in the role of expert and comments: *“twenty cars in police stations and that is it. No salary rises, no bonuses, no social aids for the officers. The reason is the same as has been for four years – there is no money. But when it comes to the vandals of 7 April, a wonder happens in the mayor’s office. Chirtoacă finds the necessary funds to distribute to the pogromists 10 thousand lei each.*

A new insert with Chirtoacă is followed by photographs and images of 7 April 2009 that show the mayor of Chişinău among the protesters, thus bringing again the violent protests into the audience’s attention. These images and formulas used (pogromists, vandals) are to indirectly promote the message that the PL leader is one of the organizers of the actions of those times.

Rewards for devastation and participation in violence. And those who built the city and brought it up after the second world war received 100 lei each today,” the reporter continues her own commentary, deviating from the journalistic requirements that clearly

stipulate that news cannot contain the reporters' commentaries. The journalist equates the terms *pogromists* and *vandals* with the term *victims*, perpetuating her personal opinion that the persons who benefited from indemnities as victims were the ones who directly participated in destroying the Parliament and President Office Buildings.

The second part of the item refers to the allocations for pensioners (100 lei) offered by the mayor's office on the occasion of Easter. The text is written in the same key, as a comment: *"Dorin Chirtoacă, master in show actions, foresaw the pensioners' discontent and showed what one can buy with 100 lei. A scenario started here that was like torn from the famous program "Wonder Field," the author says after announcing on a serious tone – Present to the studio, followed by the same expression, in Russian, uttered by the anchor of Pole chudes (Leonid Iacubovici) that is followed by images unrolling fast in which Chirtoacă collects various food products on his desk, in the musical background of that program.*

The opinions of the discontented pensioners are also included in the item.

"Only Chirtoacă knows how many more Chisinau residents will benefit from such presents until the elections. Based on what has happened so far, it could be seen that only the vandals of 7 April had to gain. This has been a real wonder. Who would offer you today 10 thousand lei for the participation of the violence of 7 April?" concludes the reporter in an item that in fact is rather a commentary.

Such approach violates the provisions of the Broadcast Code that say that the sense of reality cannot be distorted through editing tricks, commentaries, manner of formulation or headlines (Art.7).

Case study No.2

NIT, Curier, 29 April, 20:00

On 29 April, NIT inserts in its newscast of 20:00 an item with the duration of 2.48 minutes, made based on an interview given by the ex-Ministry of Justice, Ex-First Deputy President of PLDM for a local radio station. The item is biased, presents the information from one angle, does not separate facts from opinions and resorts to editing to convey certain messages to the viewers.

"Sad fact for Moldova. Former Ministry of Justice Alexandru Tănase who has recently left PLDM said that the national leader is a thief who has come to power to fill his pockets with money" the presenter of the news lead states.

Further on, the reporter announces that *"in a radio program Tănase showed delight with the reforms implemented by Saakashvili in Georgia in the past years and when asked why the same things are not done in our country, the former leader categorically said **"because our national leader is a thief"**(a.n.)"*.

However, the insert that follows shows that Tănase did not directly say what the reporter claims.

Alexandru Tănase: *“And because we would need something similar in Moldova, when the national leader heading the country wouldn’t be a thief and would not come to power to fill his pockets with money. And then you would see that here too it would be possible to do in half a year what the Georgians have done. It is nothing complicated but when the head sells positions and what does the one who buys positions do, because he gives the money, then he takes them from the others and gives them to the head. Of course such a system wouldn’t bring you the Georgian results.”*

Or, in the conditions in which the source quoted makes certain things clear but does not make clear statements about them, the reporter had to quote him faithfully, without interpreting what was said.

The bias becomes obvious from the segments selected that were included in the news item but also from the videos used. *“This disclosure troubled the public opinion and especially discouraged the supporters of the current alliance. On forums and in social networks people say that the electors were deceived with promises and today the alliance leaders make shows. While the country is going down the drain, they are filling their pockets with money. A sad fact for Moldova. And what do we do then?”* the reporter wonders, after which Tănase’s statements are repeated for 50 seconds on a sad musical background. Videos showing the AIE leaders Filat, Urechean, Lupu, Ghimpu, Plahotniuc, Diacov alternate with videos of people begging on the street and poor people. Thus, there are violated the journalistic principles that news should not contain author opinions nor should resort to editing tricks to distort the reality (Art. 7, Broadcast Code).

Case study No.3

Moldova Suverană, 27 April 2011, No. 59 (1081)

“Fraudulent funding schemes of the Liberal Party and misappropriation of public funds through municipal structures,” registered by Vlad Loghin

In its issue of Wednesday, 27 April 2011, the newspaper *Moldova Suverană* published the article *Fraudulent Funding Schemes of the Liberal Party and Misappropriation of Public Funds Through Municipal Structures*³ with the upper title *“Capital’s Budget at the Mercy of Chirtoacă and Ghimpu Clan”*. The item starts on the front page and is accompanied by a photograph from the church showing the Liberal Party leaders M. Ghimpu, D. Chirtoacă, V. Munteanu etc. and continues on the following page, accompanied by other three photographs, including that of the PLDM advertising board *“Vote for Victor BODIU MAYOR!”*, next to other two showing stray dogs and full garbage cans. As journalistic style, the text seems to be an analysis on the topics of public funds management in Chişinău.

As the only source of information for the story is announced *“the economic analyst Victor Gurău,”* in whose behalf a statement is made that in Chişinău there take place *“a huge number of acts of corruption,”* „under the ‘robe’ of the general mayor, with his involvement and that of his uncle.” The reporter says that Dorin Chirtoacă organized *“dissipation”* and

³ <http://www.moldova-suverana.md/politic/1566-bugetul-capitalei-la-cheremul-clanului-chirtoac-ghimpu.html>

“orgies” in the mayor’s office building (with reference to the pictures from the birthday party of the general mayor) and makes it clear that the public structures in Chişinău serve “as a screen that covers the unclean activities of certain hypocrite leaders, even wretched in their Pharisaism.” Also, allegations are brought that the PL leaders Dorin Chirtoacă and Mihai Ghimpu pursue their personal and party interests and resort to misuse of power and arrange ‘dubious’, ‘dirty’ and ‘fraudulent’ schemes, ‘money laundering business’ for funding the party from public funds and from the city budget. The author resorts to speculations such as “It is not excluded that a big part of the money invested from the capital’s budget was used for the electoral campaign of the Liberal Party” (in the context of reconstruction of Alba Iulia street, about which the author says that the investment “was directed from the beginning, i.e. from the announcement of the public tender and until execution by the people of this party”) or “It is about the daily huge flows of water from the water pipe that we, the capital residents, pay for and that are not accounted; the tens and hundreds of millions of lei resulted from the payments of the consumers are used to fund PL” (about the obligation to install water meters by “Apă Canal”), or “It seems that Dorin Chirtoacă resorts also to blackmailing for the sake of strengthening the financial support of his party and that of his uncle” (location of the booths of Cebacot company) etc.

The article analyzed does not observe the professional principle of presumption of innocence or in such an item it was mandatory to ask the opinion of those accused of fraudulent fund management. Also, no clear delimitation is made between facts and the opinions of the journalist who registered the item or of the “economic analyst” Victor Gurău. The allegations of misuse of power, money laundering and illegal funding are very serious but the article does not contain evidence that would prove the allegations, they being based exclusively on the value judgments of the source stated for the article. The ethical standards and journalistic good practices oblige journalists to check the facts from a number of sources independent from each other.

The article analyzed puts labels on the persons to whom it refers and contains certain insulting expressions (*see the examples above*). At a certain point, it says about the councilor Oleg Cernei that he is *“an extremely flattering and disgusting mouthpiece of Mayor Dorin Chirtoacă.”*

The images selected for publication bear a character of informational manipulation. The text on the second page is illustrated with the image of the PLDM advertising billboard and does not have direct connection with the text about the supposed “fraudulent funding schemes” of another party – PL. In such way, the newspaper makes it clear that another governing party or the governance as a whole is involved in such schemes. This conclusion becomes clear also at the end of the article when Chisinau residents are recommended *“to be careful in regard to the candidates who aspire to the mayor’s office management, to pay attention to what they do during the electoral campaign, to the praises they make because there are three big problems in the city: the dogs, the holes and the idiots. Dog packs have not disappeared. The holes are still there, although a lot of money has been invested, and we risk becoming the idiots because they leave us blank, i.e. they dupe us and do not do anything!”*

In conclusion, the article *Fraudulent Funding Schemes of the Liberal Party and Misappropriation of Public Funds Through the Municipal Structures* is an electoral anti-advertising item that uses techniques for manipulating the public opinion and seriously violates the ethical and professional standards of responsible journalism.

Coalition 2009 is a voluntary union of Moldovan non-government organizations that aims to contribute to ensuring free, fair, transparent and democratic parliamentary elections in Moldova and to continue promoting free, fair, transparent and democratic election of the Parliament of Moldova, and continues the activities of promotion of free and fair elections as started by coalitions 2005 and 2007. At present Coalition 2009 comprises over 70 non-government organizations.