

Media Monitoring In the Campaign for the Presidential Elections of 2016

(General Conclusions)

Report no. 3
7–13 October 2016¹



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¹ The full report in Romanian language will be published on the webpages: www.api.md, www.media-azi.md

I. GENERAL DATA

1.1 Objective of the project: to monitor and inform the public opinion about the editorial behavior of media outlets in the election period and in the campaign for presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova.

1.2 Monitoring period: 15 September 2016 – 13 November 2016.

1.3 Criteria for the selection of the media outlets subjected to monitoring:

The media outlets were selected based on the following objective criteria: a) type of ownership; b) geography; c) language of broadcasting; d) fame/audience. Thus, we monitor public and private media outlets, with national, quasi-national and regional coverage, in Romanian and Russian.

1.4 Media monitored:

Broadcast media

Moldova 1, Prime TV, Canal 2, Canal 3, Publika TV, Jurnal TV, Realitatea TV, NTV Moldova, ProTV Chișinău, TV7, Accent TV, and N4 TV

Online portals

Agora.md, Deschide.md, Gagauzinfo.md, Jurnal.md, Moldova24.info, Newsmaker.md, Noi.md, Realitatea.md, Sputnik.md, Today.md, Unimedia.info, and Ziarulnational.md

Print media

Komsomolskaia pravda v Moldove, Panorama, Săptămîna, and Timpul

1.5 Subject matter of monitoring

TV (interval between 18.00 and 24.00)

- A. Newscasts;
- B. Programs of electoral character;
- C. Interviews with the candidates;
- D. Vox Populi;
- E. Election debates.

Online portals

The entire editorial content of websites, without the publicity marked accordingly.

Print media

The entire editorial content of periodicals monitored, without the advertising marked accordingly.

1.6. The team

The project is carried out as part of the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections by the Association of Independent Press (monitoring the online and print media) and the Independent Journalism Center (monitoring TV stations).

1.7 Methodological framework

Statistics: The monitoring methodology was developed by the Oxford Media Research Center for the monitoring projects of the international organization Global Campaign for Free Expression “Article XIX”. The characteristics of this methodology are as follows: use of indicators 1) *quantity indicators*, including type, duration, topic of coverage, sources of news, frequency and duration of

appearance of election candidates in news, and 2) *quality indicators*, which establish the bias of the media outlet monitored in covering the events. Each news item or opinion is subjected to a content and context evaluation, to determine if they are favorable or unfavorable to one or another party/one or another election candidate. A positive or negative content and/or context of a news item does not necessarily point out the bias or partisanship of the media outlet that broadcasts the news item. It is possible for the news to favor or disfavor one of the subjects and still be objective and fair from a professional point of view. Unless there is a tendency, for a certain period, one cannot speak about an unbalance. **In assessing the context, we measure only the frequency of the items that favor or disfavor directly or indirectly the election subjects. The neutral appearances are quantified only from the perspective of the frequency of appearances in images and of personal interventions.**

Case studies: Taking into account the major impact that the media have on creating the public opinion and on the high credibility thereof among the population, we made a content analysis of the items that treated the most important subjects broadcast by the media monitored. We aimed to identify the angles of approach and the manners of presentation of the relevant subjects. The items were analyzed both from the point of view of their observance of the principles of quality journalism (fairness, impartiality, pluralism of the information sources, separation of facts from opinions) and from a technical aspect, looking at the use of technical procedures to amplify or diminish certain messages.

II. GENERAL TRENDS AND CONCLUSIONS

7–13 OCTOBER 2016

2.1 Broadcast media:

- Between 7 and 13 October 2016, the 12 broadcasters monitored broadcast 761 items of direct or indirect electoral character, including 701 news stories, 52 programs, 3 Vox Populi, 1 interview with a candidate and 4 election debates. The total amount of items was of **196,947 sec.** or circa 55 hours. Of them, 104,294 sec. (29 hours) were programs, 83,670 sec. (23 hours) – news stories, and 7,942 sec. (2.2 hours) – election debates. Vox Populi and the interviews with the candidates did not take too much space in the newscasts – 571 sec. and 470 sec.
- The largest space for news stories of direct and indirect electoral character was allocated by Publika TV – 13,219 sec. (3.7 hours), NTV Moldova – 12,990 sec. (3.6 hours) and Jurnal TV – 11,328 sec. (3.1 hours) while the largest space for programs was allocated by Realitatea TV – 26,826 sec. (8 hours) and Publika TV – 19,435 sec. (5.3 hours). Vox Populi were inserted by Prime TV and NTV Moldova while interviews with the candidates – by Jurnal TV. Accent TV, Jurnal TV and Realitatea TV started the election debates. To note that the TV stations Pro TV Chişinău and TV 7 broadcast relatively few relevant news stories and programs while N4 covered the election campaign very summarily. Thus, the candidates were deprived of the possibility to present their election offers and the electorate did not have access to information about the election campaign.
- Most of the times, the subjects tackled by the 12 stations were related to the political area, the election process and social issues. These included the results of a number of election surveys; some candidates entering the campaign and the election meetings of other candidates; the campaign monitoring reports issued by civil society organizations etc.; CEC's approval of the sample voting ballot; the discussions about the nomination of a single candidate by three parties – the Demnitate and Adevăr Platform Party (PPDA), the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) and the Liberal-Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM). A number of TV stations covered the meetings of the members of some parties with the citizens in different localities (the *Reform in Politics* project of the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM)); the meeting of Government members with a group of civil servants in Leova; actions carried out by Vlad Plahotniuc's Edelweiss Foundation; the falling prices of medicines; the apprehension of the former deputy Prosecutor General; the censorship motion filed by the Socialists Party of Moldova (PSRM) against the Filip Government etc. In addition, a part of the media kept an eye on the various allegations brought by some candidates against others.
- In documenting their items, most stations most of the times used the citizens (515 times), representatives of the civil society (60 times), of the Government (50 times), experts (50 times), CEC members (48 times), LPA (44 times), MPs (37 times) etc. Of the election candidates and political parties, Maia Sandu and Andrei Năstase enjoyed the highest number of appearances and mentions. Igor Dodon and Marian Lupu were leaders by the space allocated to their direct interventions. Of the political parties, the PDM ranks first; its members appeared 130 times on the 12 TV stations where they were present both in images and with direct quotes (1846 sec.).
- In the report period, the gender unbalance slightly decreased. In total, on the 12 TV stations analyzed, 33% sources were women and 66% of sources were men. For some stations, one noted an increase of over 10% in the rate of items that referred to or quoted female sources while on others this rate decreased.

- The most favored election candidates by frequency and duration of appearances and positive contexts were Marian Lupu and Igor Dodon, who were favored (198 and 86 times accordingly) rather than disfavored (95 and 39 times accordingly). Andrei Năstase and Maia Sandu were disfavored (83 and 52 times accordingly) rather than favored (32 and 26 times accordingly).
- A part of the stations monitored did not observe the **Regulation** on covering the campaign for the presidential elections of 30 October 2016 by the Moldovan media and infringed on the provisions of the Election Code (art. 64) and of the Broadcaster Code (art.7) that stipulate that the election campaign must be covered in a responsible, balanced and impartial manner.
- The private stations with national coverage **Prime TV, Canal 2, Canal 3** and **Publika TV** continued to promote massively the election candidate Marian Lupu by frequency of appearances and duration of appearances on screens and direct quotes as well as through the positive context of the items. By contrast, Andrei Năstase was disfavored by very many items. They often appeared on these stations' screens and mainly in items with negative connotation, without having personal interventions.
- The TV station with regional coverage **Jurnal TV** massively favored Andrei Năstase both by the space granted to his personal interventions and through the positive context of the items. Marian Lupu was disfavored in most cases especially through news stories of indirect electoral character in which the PDM members and the governance appeared in negative light.
- **NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV** mainly disfavored Igor Dodon both by space granted for the direct interventions of the PSRM candidate and members and through the positive context of the items of direct or indirect electoral character. For NTV Moldova, one noted a slight disfavoring of Marian Lupu and on Accent TV this trend was more obvious.
- The public broadcaster **Moldova 1** and the private stations **Realitatea TV, Pro TV Chișinău, TV 7** and **N 4** had a relatively balanced behavior, without displaying obvious trends of favoring or disfavoring the election candidates. To note that one remarked on TV 7 a slight favoring of the election candidate Marian Lupu by a high number of items, including opinion programs in which the governance appeared in negative light.

2.2 Online portals:

- In the second week of the election campaign, the 12 web portals monitored published in total 487 stories referring directly or indirectly to the campaign and the presidential elections, comparable to the previous week when they published a total of 514 relevant stories. The absolute majority of items (461 texts or 94.7% of the total) were simple or elaborate news stories about the candidates for the presidential office; the political entities represented thereby; the CEC work; etc. The other 24 items (4.9% of the total) were commentaries, editorials and other opinion stories, plus two interviews with one of the candidates.
- Traditionally, Jurnal.md published the highest number of items of political and electoral character (73), followed by Ziarulnational.md (69), Agora.md and Unimedia.info (58 and 57 accordingly), Deschide.md and Sputnik.md (44 and 42 accordingly), Realitatea.md and Noi.md (39 and 38 accordingly), Newsmaker.md (24), Gagauzinfo.md and Moldova24.info (16 and 15 accordingly), and Today.md – 12 items relevant to this monitoring. The regional portal Gagauzinfo.md considerably increased the number of information items about the presidential elections as compared to the previous weeks.

- Most of the items published referred to the behavior or statements made by some candidates or potential candidates, the allegations launched against them by their opponents or other persons, the responses of the accused ones (409 items or 84% of the total), 47 of items (9.6% of the total) reflected the unfolding of the election process as a whole and the CEC work; the other journalistic products tackled various topics in the electoral context, such as the functioning of the rule of law, the economic situation in the country, Moldova's external relations, the fight against corruption, etc.
- In total, all the 12 portals quoted 746 sources or protagonists, 493 of them (66%) being politicians, representatives of parties/political entities or parties' press releases. The following were quoted or referred to most often in positive or negative contexts: the leaders and representatives of PPDA (122 times); PAS (86 times); PSRM (69 times), PDM (52 times) and PL (23 times).
- In the report week, the most favored candidate by frequency of appearances and positive contexts as a whole on all the 12 stations monitored was Andrei Năstase, most often favored than disfavored. Marian Lupu is the candidate most often presented in a disfavoring context while Igor Dodon, Maia Sandu and Mihai Ghimpu were disfavored rather than favored.
- The gender discrepancy in the items published by the portals somehow decreased as compared to the previous weeks. Thus, the rate of men quoted as protagonists or sources accounted for 61% (451 of the total of 746 sources/protagonists) and of women – 23% (173 of the total).
- Very many items had only one source of information and most of the news stories that reported about various conflictual aspects of the election campaign did not observe the multiple sources principle and did not offer the right to respond to those mentioned in the same story, thus being editorially unbalanced.
- **Agora.md** covers the election campaign in an unbiased manner and the candidates are generally presented in a neutral manner. In most cases, however, the second source is missing in the news stories presenting allegations in an electoral context, which gives the impression that certain candidates are disfavored more often. The PDM candidate Marian Lupu was most often presented in a context that disfavored him.
- **Deschide.md** published generally neutral stories and in most cases their authors were unbiased. However, the editorial balance is sometimes vitiated by the lack of the right to respond of those mentioned in the items containing allegations. Some items have an election publicity character but are not marked as publicity. The portal presented more frequently in disfavoring context the candidates Igor Dodon, Marian Lupu and Maia Sandu while Iurie Leancă was favored.
- The stories published by **Gagauzinfo.md** bear a predominantly informative character and in general are neutral. At the same time, the structure and language of some news stories about some candidates' meetings with the electorate point to their favoring, and especially favoring Igor Dodon.
- **Jurnal.md** directly and indirectly favored Andrei Năstase. By contrast, the candidate Marian Lupu was disfavored, being present exclusively in a negative context, in a high number of news items, beside Vladimir Plahotniuc. Igor Dodon, Mihai Ghimpu and Iurie Leancă were also presented in disfavoring contexts, some more often while others more rarely.
- The editorial policy of the portal **Moldova24.info** remained unchanged compared to the previous monitoring periods, focused on disfavoring the opponents of the current

governance: it publishes news without sources, with labeling and ironic expressions about Andrei Năstase and Maia Sandu, without giving them the right to respond.

- **Newsmaker.md** further has an unbiased editorial policy in relation to the election candidates and does not favor or disfavor any candidates.
- **Noi.md** does not have obvious editorial preferences, its most news items being neutral and relatively balanced and the authors not being biased. At the same time, based on the selection of campaign news and events in the report week, the candidates Andrei Năstase and Maia Sandu were disfavored rather than favored.
- **Realitatea.md** does not have obvious editorial preferences, its materials are relatively balanced, most of the election candidates being presented both in positive and negative contexts. In the report week, the candidate Andrei Năstase was favored by the number and frequency of news that presented him in a rather positive context. At the same time, the governance is presented in a predominantly positive context, which indirectly favors the candidate Marian Lupu.
- **Sputnik.md** further massively disfavors the candidate Mihai Ghimpu in all the items that refer to him by publishing some pamphlets and texts with ironic elements. At the same time, the candidates Maia Sandu and Andrei Năstase are presented in a mainly negative context. The candidate Marian Lupu was especially disfavored via critical items about the current governance.
- **Today.md** further disfavored in an obvious manner the candidate Andrei Năstase in all the items that mentioned him. The candidate Maia Sandu was also disfavored in most cases. On the other hand, the candidate Marian Lupu is favored directly and indirectly, including through items about “the positive developments in Moldova lately”.
- The tone of most of the news stories published by **Unimedia.info** is neutral and the authors are not biased. At the same time, the editorial balance suffers due to the publishing of a large amount of news from one source, including allegations launched by some candidates against the others and the replies of the ones referred to are not inserted in the same item. In the report period, the candidate Marian Lupu was disfavored through the number and frequency of news that presented him in a negative context; partially, this statement is also true for the candidate Igor Dodon.
- **Ziarulnational.md** published a number of news stories that present the candidates Igor Dodon and Marian Lupu in negative or predominantly negative contexts, including the cases when they are accused by the opponents, and in some cases without their responses. At the same time, the newspaper intensively covered the election campaign of the candidate Mihai Ghimpu and favored him editorially. The candidate Andrei Năstase was also favored rather than disfavored this week.

2.3 Print media:

- The 4 newspapers monitored published 42 stories that referred directly or indirectly to the presidential elections. The highest number of relevant items were published in the weekly **Timpul** (14) and the daily/five issues per week **KP v Moldove** (12), **Săptămîna** published 10 stories and **Panorama** – 6.
- As in the previous monitoring periods, the largest part of the editorial space of the newspapers monitored was dedicated to editorials and other opinion items – 52.4% of the total number of items, and 54.7% of the total amount. The news accounted for 42.8% of the

total. The newspaper with the highest disproportion between the amount of opinions and of news remains **KP v Moldova** (in the report week, this newspaper published only 2 relevant news items but 9 commentaries and other opinion stories).

- 26% of the total of 54 sources and the protagonists quoted or referred to by the 4 newspapers were politicians, leaders or representatives of political parties, and candidates for the presidential office. The citizens and experts in various areas were often quoted as sources.
- The gender equality somehow declined, up to 70% of men as sources and protagonists and 15% of women; however the disproportionality continues to remain very high.
- The election candidates who were disfavored most often by the frequency of appearances and negative contexts as a whole in all the 4 newspapers were Mihai Ghimpu, Igor Dodon and Marian Lupu.
- The multiple sources principle is not observed by the print media monitored and the news stories that reported a conflict in the context of the election campaign were unbalanced.
- **KP v Moldova** did not attack so virulently the candidate Mihai Ghimpu, as happened in the previous monitoring periods. On the other hand, the newspaper dedicated a lot of space, in two consecutive issues, to the information about the supposed divorce of the Chişinău General Mayor Dorin Chirtoacă, including the offensive opinions of some netizens on this topic. Indirectly, these items disfavored Mihai Ghimpu as well.
- Unlike the previous monitoring periods, in the report week, **Panorama** marked its election publicity items, specifying that they were paid from the election fund of the candidates who had ordered them. Through the topics tackled and the subjects selected, the newspaper disfavors both the current governance and all the previous governments.
- **Săptămîna** in the report period published an interview on a large area (one page) with the independent candidate Silvia Radu, which had an obvious electoral character but was not marked as such, thus constituting hidden election publicity. In one of the editorials published in this magazine, the author used a semi-licitious language in reference to the protagonists.
- In the report period, the editorial policy of the newspaper **Timpul** was relatively balanced, the candidates were treated differently, sometimes were favored and other times were disfavored. The candidates Andrei Năstase and Dumitru Ciubaşenco were several times presented in disfavoring contexts.