

Media Monitoring In the Campaign for the Presidential Elections of 2016 (General Conclusions)

Report no. 5
21–28 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

21–28 OCTOBER 2016

2.1 Broadcast media:

- Between 21 and 28 October 2016 there was a significant increase in the number of items of direct or indirect electoral character broadcast by the 12 broadcasters monitored. In total, they broadcast 1118 items, of which 1016 news items, 70 programs, 23 election debates and 9 Vox Populi. The total amount of items was of 326239 sec. or circa 90.6 hours, the largest space of which was allocated to opinion programs, followed by news and debates.
- The highest amount of news of direct or indirect electoral character was broadcast by Publika TV (165 news items in the amount of 18229 sec.), Jurnal TV (102 news items, 16597 sec.) and NTV Moldova (94 news items, 15819 sec.) that also allocated the largest space for programs – 43305 sec, 31997 sec. and 24540 sec. accordingly. Realitatea TV organized the highest number of election debates (10 debates in Russian and Romanian), followed by Moldova 1 (5) and Pro TV (4). The private stations with national coverage did not broadcast election debates in the interval monitored. The station N4 covered the election campaign summarily, thus depriving the public of information about the election campaign.
- The subjects covered by the 12 broadcasters monitored most of the times referred to the political area (514), election process (238) and various crimes (94). These included allegations launched by some candidates against others; the results of a number of election surveys; the election meetings of some candidates; CEC decisions; and reports on the monitoring of the campaign by civil society organizations. Also, they broadly covered the announcement about the withdrawal of the Democratic Party (PDM) candidate Marian Lupu from the election run “in favor of the pro-European candidate” and the reaction that followed.
- In documenting their items, most of stations most of the times resorted to citizens (620 times), representatives of the local public administration (LPA) (123 times), of the Central Election Commission (CEC) (96 times), of the civil society (82 times), experts (77), members of the Government (69) judges/lawyers (51). The stations also quoted or mentioned businesspeople, representatives of the police, of the church, of the President’s Office, of the Parliament, etc.
- The election candidates and the political parties that were quoted or mentioned most of the times in the relevant items included Maia Sandu (300 times), Igor Dodon (263 times), PDM members (256 times) and Marian Lupu (224 times), followed at a big distance by Iurie Leancă (106 times) and members of Our Party (103). Igor Dodon and the PDM members are leaders by space allocated to direct interventions – 3961 sec. and 3854 sec. accordingly.
- In the reporting period, the gender unbalance in disfavor of the female sources was retained. However, as compared to the previous reporting period one remarks a four-percent increase in the number of women sources. In total, the items on the 12 TV stations analyzed mentioned or quoted 31% women sources and 69% men sources.
- As a whole, the most favored election candidates by frequency and duration of appearances in positive context were Marian Lupu, followed by Igor Dodon and Maia Sandu. The ratio between the number of appearances in positive and negative contexts for these election candidates is of 1.97 for Marian Lupu; 1.8 for Igor Dodon; and 0.4 for Maia Sandu who was mainly disfavored.
- In the reporting period, the private stations with national coverage **Prime TV**, **Canal 2**, **Canal 3** and **Publika TV** continued promoting the PDM candidate Marian Lupu. Until 26

October, when his withdrawal from the election run was announced, Marian Lupu often had direct interventions, also being favored by items with positive connotation about the activities of the Government and of the PDM members. Marian Lupu was favored by 43% news items and programs on Prime TV; 42% - on Canal 2; 38% on Canal 3; and 44% on Publika TV. By contrast, the single candidate of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS), Demnitate and Adevăr Platform Party (PPDA) and of the Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM) Maia Sandu, and that of Our Party Dumitru Ciubașenco, were disfavored by most of the items. They often appeared on the screens of these stations, mainly in items with negative connotation, without being given too much space for direct interventions.

- The TV station with national coverage **Jurnal TV** favored especially the election candidate Maia Sandu both by the space granted to her personal interventions and by the positive context of the items. Sandu was favored in 38% of the relevant items on Jurnal TV. Marian Lupu in the vast majority of cases was disfavored (51% items), especially via news items of indirect electoral character in which the PDM members and of the governance appeared in negative light. Igor Dodon was disfavored in 28% of items.
- **NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV** massively favored the Socialist Party (PSRM) candidate Igor Dodon, both by the space granted for his direct interventions and of the PSRM members, and by the positive context of the direct or indirect electoral items (57% and 35% accordingly). Both stations mainly disfavored Maia Sandu who was the protagonist of a number of news items and programs that put her in negative light (47% and 26% items accordingly).
- The public broadcaster **Moldova 1**, the private stations **Realitatea TV**, **Pro TV Chișinău**, **TV 7**, and **N4** had a relatively balanced behavior without displaying any trends of obvious favoring or disfavoring of the election candidates.
- In conclusion, the TV stations Prime TV, Canal 2, Canal 3, Publika TV, NTV Moldova, Accent TV and Jurnal TV did not observe the **Regulation** on coverage of the campaign for the presidential elections of 30 October 2016 by the Moldovan media and infringed upon the provisions of the Election Code (art. 64) and of the Broadcast Code (art.7)², according to which the election campaign must be covered in a responsible, balanced and impartial manner.

2.2 Online portals:

- Between 21 and 28 October, the 12 web portals monitored published nearly twice as many news items as in the previous monitoring period. Thus, in these eight days, the portals posted a total of 778 journalist items referring directly or indirectly to the campaign and the presidential elections (for comparison: in the previous period, during seven days, they published 494 relevant items). The absolute majority of the items (94.2% of the total) were simple or elaborate news items; other 5.3% of all the stories were commentaries or editorials; 3 interviews with the candidates; and one Vox Populi survey.
- Jurnal.md is further the detached leader among the portals by the number of items of political and electoral character. In the report period, Jurnal.md published 170 relevant items, followed by Agora.md and Ziarulnational.md (98 and 95 accordingly), Noi.md and Unimedia.info (80 and 77 accordingly), Deschide.md (57), Realitatea.md and

² Art. 7, Broadcaster Code: (3) In view of encouraging and facilitating the pluralist expression of opinion trends, broadcasters are required to cover election campaigns in a truthful, balanced and impartial manner. (4) In order to ensure the observance of the principles of social-political balance, equidistance and objectivity in their informative programs, broadcasters shall post each news story in such a way that: a) the information that composes the news is truthful; b) it does not distort the sense of reality via editing tricks, comments, manner of formulation or headlines; c) for subjects related to conflict situations, the principle of multiple sources shall be observed.

Newsmaker.md (52 and 51 accordingly), Sputnik.md (44), Gagauzinfo.md (23), Today.md and Moldova24.info (17 and 14 items relevant for this monitoring).

- From a topical point of view, the items covered more the campaign activities of various election candidates; the statements made thereby; the mutual allegations but also the allegations received from third parties or from the journalists themselves (651 of items or 83.7% of the total). The CEC work and the unfolding of the election process were covered in 78 items (10% of the total) while in the other 49 items (6.3% of the total) the authors, in an election context, referred to the functioning of the rule of law and to some social, economic, etc. issues.
- Overall, all the 12 portals quoted 1364 sources or protagonists, 885 of them (64.9%) being politicians, representatives of parties/political entities or parties' press releases. The leaders of the following parties were quoted or mentioned most often in various contexts: PDM – 187 times; PAS – 184 times; PSRM – 121 times; PPDA – 81 times; Our Party – 74 times; Liberal Party (LP) – 58 times; and the European People's Party – 50 times. The stations also quoted foreign and local experts – 74 times; CEC and other representatives of the election authorities – 73 times; other media outlets – 68 times; the ordinary citizens – 58 times; the civil society and the NGOs – 50 times; foreign diplomats, officials and observers – 43 times etc.
- The candidate Marian Lupu most often appeared in a negative context in the report period, especially after the announcement about his withdrawal was made. In total, he was mentioned 236 times in a disfavoring context while other 35 times the former PDM candidate was favored. Igor Dodon was favored in 149 cases and disfavored in other 36; Mihai Ghimpu was disfavored 53 times versus favored 11 times, while Maia Sandu had 134 cases of favoring presentation and was disfavored 94 times.
- The gender discrepancy in the items published by portals remained at the same level compared to the previous monitoring period. Thus, the rate of men quoted as protagonists or sources constituted 65% while women – 23%; in 12% of cases the sources of information were not specified.
- The multiple sources principles was neglected very many times, especially when the stations covered certain allegations against the candidates and did not give the right to respond to those directly mentioned.
- The editorial policy of the portal **Agora.md** is relatively balanced and the candidates are covered in various contexts. At the same time, by the number and frequency of appearances in positive or negative contexts, we can conclude that in the monitoring period Marian Lupu was disfavored (20 cases) rather than favored (6 cases), both before and after his withdrawal from the presidential elections. The same situation was registered for the candidate Igor Dodon (19 times disfavored and 5 times favored). In the case of the candidate Maia Sandu, the number of appearances in negative and positive contexts was approximately the same.
- **Deschide.md** published relatively balanced news items and the authors of the stories were usually unbiased. At the same time, this portal published many news items documented from one source that showed certain candidates in negative light. Marian Lupu was 5 times presented in a disfavoring context; the candidates Igor Dodon and Maia Sandu were also mentioned a few times in a disfavoring rather than favoring context.
- The regional portal **Gagauzinfo.md** editorially favored the candidate Igor Dodon 5 times, including via news items conveying that the Our Party leader Renato Usatîi and the Bashkan of the Gagauz Autonomy Irina Vlah were ready to support him, and the results of the public

opinion barometer were presented as follows: “And there is little left what could impede the Socialists leader Igor Dodon become a president,” but he was presented in 2 news items that disfavored him. The candidate Maia Sandu was disfavored in 6 items, Mihai Ghimpu – in 4, and Marian Lupu was presented in different contexts but more often in disfavoring ones.

- **Jurnal.md** constantly favored the candidate Maia Sandu in news items that mentioned her (74 cases) and presented her as the most fit candidate for the President’s Office. As usual, Vlad Plahotniuc was the target of negative messages, Marian Lupu thus being indirectly disfavored (107 cases). The number of news items that mainly presented the candidate Igor Dodon in a negative context considerably increased (47); the candidates Mihai Ghimpu and Iurie Leancă were also disfavored but in fewer news items.
- The texts published by **Moldova24.info** are biased and subjective and often use ironic or offensive expressions about the protagonists. In this period, the website continued the editorial attacks at Maia Sandu and Andrei Năstase who were constantly accused of lying to their electorate, without being given the right to respond. The candidate Maia Sandu was presented in a disfavoring context 9 times, the candidate Igor Dodon – 4 times, but both were once presented in a generally positive context.
- **Newsmaker.md** disfavored Marian Lupu, including by publishing accusing statements launched by other politicians and candidates against the PDM and the Party’s First Deputy President Vladimir Plahotniuc (22 cases). The candidate Mihai Ghimpu was also presented a few times in a disfavoring context (6 cases).
- **Noi.md** did not have obvious editorial preferences but its failure to observe the source balance principle and many of its news items and especially those that cover the allegations candidates launch, causes the big difference between the cases of editorial favoring and disfavoring of certain candidates. In the report week, the candidate Marian Lupu and the candidate Maia Sandu were disfavored (20 and 15 times accordingly) rather than favored (7 and 4 times accordingly). The candidate Mihai Ghimpu was disfavored (7 times).
- **Realitatea.md** covered the election campaign in a relatively balanced manner. At the same time, this portal often published news items that presented mainly in a negative context the candidate Igor Dodon (17 times) and Maia Sandu (16 times), especially through the allegations launched by the candidates against their opponent. Much more rarely, the candidates were also presented in a context that favored them.
- **Sputnik.md** continued the trend of disfavoring Mihai Ghimpu (10 cases of presentation in negative contexts versus one case in positive context); a number of news items criticized the current governance, thus indirectly disfavoring Marian Lupu and the same Mihai Ghimpu.
- **Today.md** continued publishing news items that directly attack Andrei Nastase and indirectly disfavor the candidate Maia Sandu (5 cases); it also published 5 news items that disfavored the candidate Igor Dodon. The decision of the candidate Marian Lupu to withdraw from the election run was intensively covered; the portal appreciated this gesture of the PDM.
- **Unimedia.info** continued the disfavoring trend of Marian Lupu (15 cases of presentation in a generally negative context); the candidate Igor Dodon was more often disfavored than favored; the candidates Mihai Ghimpu and Iurie Leancă were also presented several times in a negative context while the candidate Maia Sandu, on the contrary, was editorially favored.
- **Ziarulnational.md** editorially disfavored Marian Lupu (30 cases) and the candidate Igor Dodon (27 cases). The candidate Maia Sandu appeared twice as often in a positive context (24 times) than in a negative context (12 times), thus being favored.

2.3 Print media:

- In the report period, the 4 newspapers monitored cumulatively published 86 stories that directly or indirectly referred to the presidential elections, which is twice as many as in the previous period monitored. The total area of relevant stories also doubled.
- Traditionally, the highest number of relevant items appeared in the weekly *Timpul* (36 texts) and the daily/five issues per week *KP v Moldova* (20 texts); *Săptămîna* published 17 stories, and *Panorama* – 13 stories.
- Half of the total number of stories and nearly half of the area reserved by the newspapers was taken by editorials and other opinion items. The newspaper with the highest disproportion between the amount of opinions and the news items remains *KP v Moldova* (two-thirds of the items published in this newspaper were opinions and commentaries and only one-third – news items).
- The 86 items published in the newspapers monitored had a total of 131 sources and protagonists, including 32% were politicians, leaders or representatives of parties, and candidates for the president's office (the PSRM representatives were mentioned or quoted most often – 9 times). Citizens, foreign and local experts, other media sources, sources from CEC and LPA were quoted often.
- The gender unbalance of the sources and protagonists of newspapers somewhat decreased compared to the previous period and accounted for 69% of men and 24% of women.
- In the report week, the most disfavored candidate by frequency of appearances and negative context as a whole by all 4 newspapers was Marian Lupu (23 times disfavored and 6 times favored). The other candidates were mentioned both in negative and positive contexts.
- The multiple source principle was further neglected by the media monitored while the news items that reported a conflict in the context of the election campaign often were unbalanced.
- **KP v Moldova** editorially favored the candidate Igor Dodon by publishing promotional materials in the Friday edition prior to the elections (a picture on front-page, answers to the readers' questions etc.). At the same time, the opinion items disfavored the candidate Maia Sandu and indirectly the candidate Mihai Ghimpu.
- **Panorama** obviously disfavors Marian Lupu, directly and indirectly, through the criticism against Vladimir Plahotniuc, PDM, and previous governments. Other candidates (Maia Sandu, Mihai Ghimpu, Igor Dodon) were also disfavored but more rarely.
- **Săptămîna** continued favoring the independent candidate Silvia Radu by publishing promotional materials of hidden election publicity character. In its edition of 28 October, the candidate Igor Dodon was favored three items, including in two editorials while the candidate Maia Sandu was disfavored through the labels attached to her: "Timofti with earrings", and "Chirtoacă in a skirt."
- **Timpul** editorially favored the candidate Mihai Ghimpu, including by publishing promotional materials of hidden election publicity character. The candidate Maia Sandu was more often favored (9 times) than disfavored (5 times). At the same time, Marian Lupu was often presented in a negative context (9 times) and so was the candidate Dumitru Ciubașenco (4 times).