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

Report no. 6
29 October – 5 November 2016[1]

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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 Chişinău, 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
29 OCTOBER – 5 NOVEMBER 2016

2.1 Broadcast media:

- In the reporting period, the 12 broadcasters monitored broadcast 682 items of direct or indirect electoral character, with a decline of nearly 40% in the number of items compared to the previous monitoring period: 619 news stories; 56 – programs; 5 – Vox Populi and 2 – election debates. The total amount of items was of 210788 sec. or circa 58.5 hours. Of them 78287 sec. (21.7 hours) accounted for news stories; 125992 sec. (35 hours) – for programs; and 5924 sec. (1.7 hours) – for election debates. The Vox Populi did not take too much space in the newscasts – 585 sec.

- The largest space for news stories of direct and indirect electoral character was allocated by NTV Moldova – 16 815 sec. (4.7 hours) and Jurnal TV – 16175 sec. (4.5 hours) and the largest space for programs was provided by Realitatea TV – 31776 sec. (8.8 hours) and Publika TV – 19029 sec. (5.3 hours). Vox Populi were inserted by Prime TV, Canal 2, Canal 3 și Accent TV. Pro TV and Accent TV organized an election debate each in the reporting period. To note that the TV stations Prime TV, Canal 2, Canal 3 and Publika TV substantially reduced the number of news stories relevant to this monitoring, while TV 7 and N4 increased their number.

- Most of the times, the subjects tackled by the 12 stations referred to the political area (418 items) and the election process (235 items). These referred to the voting procedure on the election day; the results of the elections; the statements of the candidates with access to the second round and of those who were out of the election run; statements supporting the candidates of various players; the voting procedure for students; the problems in the voting sections outside the country; reports on the monitoring of the campaign, launched by civil society organizations and international observers; election meetings of the candidates; allegations launched against the candidates; the protest of students in front of the Central Election Commission (CEC) and the request to allow them vote in the localities where they study; the campaign to mobilize the Moldovan citizens living abroad "Adopt a vote", etc.

- In documenting their items, a part of the stations resorted to citizens (275 times), experts (94 times), CEC (76 times), representatives of the civil society (69 times), of the Church (54 times), MPs (38 times), ministers (16 times), LPAs (15 times) etc. Of the election candidates, the most appearances and mentions were enjoyed by the candidate of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS), Demnitate and Adevăr Platform Party (PPDA) and Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM) Maia Sandu who appeared on the screen 213 times for 9263 sec., with a duration of personal interventions of 4640 sec. The candidate of the Socialists Party (PSRM) Igor Dodon was quoted or mentioned 288 times for 7445 sec. and the space allocated for his direct quotes constituted 3746 sec. The stations also quoted former candidates and members of political parties, especially in items on the results of the elections and the support granted to the two candidates who remained in the competition.

- In the reporting period, the rate of female sources in the relevant news stories and programs slightly increased as a whole on the 12 TV stations analyzed, from 31% to 32%. It is worth mentioning that one noted a reduction of this indicators by over 10% on a part of the stations while on others this rate increased or remained at the same level.

- Igor Dodon was the most favored candidate by the context of appearances. He appeared 116 times in positive light and 80 times in negative light. The report between the number of appearances in positive and negative contexts for Igor Dodon was of 1.45. Maia Sandu was rather disfavored and appeared in negative light in 146 items and in positive light in 103

items. The ratio between the number of appearances in positive and in negative context for Maia Sandu was of 0.7.

- In the reference period, the private stations with national coverage Prime TV, Canal 2, Canal 3 and Publika TV obviously reduced the number of items of direct and indirect electoral character. The items that referred to the election candidates who remained in the run put Maia Sandu more in a negative light, who was disfavored in 44% of the items on Publika TV and in 26% of items on Canal 2. Prime TV and Canal 3 had a lower percentage (16% and 19% accordingly). Igor Dodon was covered rather in neutral and positive contexts: 20% of the items on Publika; 26% on Canal 2; 14% on Canal 3; and 13% on Prime TV favored the PSRM candidate.

- The TV station with national coverage Jurnal TV massively favored Maia Sandu both by the space granted for her personal interventions and by the positive context of the items. Overall, 50% of the relevant items on Jurnal TV favored the candidate of PAS, PPDA and PLDM in elections. Igor Dodon was disfavored in 33% of the items on Jurnal TV.

- In the reporting period, the editorial policy on NTV Moldova and Accent TV was changed and so most of the news stories referred to Maia Sand who appeared in a higher number of items than her opponent Igor Dodon. The context of appearances of Maia Sandu in the vast majority of cases was disfavoring – 53% of all relevant items on NTV Moldova and 50% - on Accent TV. By contrast, Igor Dodon was favored both by the space granted for direct interventions and by the positive context of the items of direct or indirect electoral character. Thus, 38% of all relevant items on NTV and 47% on Accent TV favored Igor Dodon.

- The other broadcasters had a relatively balanced behavior, without showing trends of clear favoring or disfavoring of the election candidates. To note that on Moldova 1 and TV 7, the two election candidates appeared in positive rather than in negative light (Moldova1: 18% Maia Sandu and 15% - Igor Dodon; TV 7: 15% for Maia Sandu and 10% Igor Dodon). On Realitatea TV Igor Dodon was rather disfavored by the context (16% of the items) while N4 disfavored both candidates: Igor Dodon – 32% of the items, Maia Sandu – 22%). On Pro TV Chişinău both candidates appeared in a number of neutral news stories but also there were cases when they appeared in positive and in negative light. Maia Sandu was favored by the context in 16% of the items.

2.2 Online portals:

- In the week of 29 October to 5 November 2016, the 12 web portals monitored published a record number of news stories as compared to the previous monitoring period – 999, including a considerable number of news stories on the day of the first round of the presidential elections. Overall, the websites published 958 simple or elaborate news stories, which accounted for 95.9% of the relevant items, 32 commentaries, editorials or other opinion items (3.2% of the total), 6 Vox Populi survey, 2 election debates (Newsmaker.md and Ziarulnational.md) and an interview with a candidate (Jurnal.md).

- With 168 news stories, the portal Agora.md became leader among the portals by the number of items of political and electoral character, outrunning the portal Jurnal.md that in the report week published 166 items relevant for this monitoring. It is followed, in a decreasing order by: Unimedia.info (113 items), Ziarulnational.md (100), Realitatea (94), Noi.md (91), Deschide.md (81), Sputnik.md (55), Newsmaker.md (52), Gagauzinfo.md (49), Moldova24.info (18) and Today.md with 12 items relevant for this monitoring.

- The statements/actions of the election candidates and the unfolding of the election process – these two topics were priority for the portals monitored. Thus, 736 texts (73.7% of the total) referred to the campaign activities of various election candidates, covered the statements made by them, the mutual allegations but also the allegations received from third parties or from the journalists themselves. Other 227 items or 22.7% of the total, referred to the CEC activities and to the unfolding of the voting on 30 October 2016, the results of the first round of the presidential elections etc. In the other 36 items, the authors in an election context referred to the external relations of our country, to some social issues, the functioning of the rule of law, crimes and corruption etc.

- Overall, all the 12 portals quoted 1690 sources or protagonists, 838 of which (49.6%) were politicians, representatives of parties/political entities or press releases of parties (they quoted or mentioned most often, in positive or negative contexts, the leaders and representatives of the following parties: PSRM (218 times), PAS (189 times), Our Party (67 times), PLM (51 times), PDM (46 times), PPDA (41 times). They also quoted as sources the following: CEC and other representatives of the election authorities (228 times), foreign and local experts (130 times), ordinary citizens (111 times), foreign diplomats, officials and observers (87 times), other media outlets (75 times), the civil society and NGOs (57 times) etc.

- The gender discrepancy in the items published by the portals has insignificantly improved compared to the previous monitoring period, with the rate of men quoted as protagonists or sources accounting for 60% (1019 of the total of 1690 sources/protagonists) and women – 24% (410 of the total); in 261 cases (16% of the total), the sources of information were not specified.

- On the day of the first round of voting, the news stories published by the portals were generally balanced and there were no cases of obvious favoring or disfavoring of any of the candidates. In the following days, the attention was normally focused on the two candidates to participate in the second round of the presidential elections. In total, the 12 portals monitored presented the candidate Igor Dodon three times more often in a negative context that disfavored him than in a positive context that favored him editorially (147 times disfavored vs. 45 times favored). The candidate Maia Sandu was presented both in positive and negative contexts, with the cases of editorial favoring prevailing (103 times favored vs 66 times disfavored).

- **Agora.md** this week retained an unbiased editorial behavior in relation to the election candidates and a relatively balanced one in covering the events of the election campaign. At the same time, by the number and frequency of appearances in positive or negative contexts, one can conclude that Igor Dodon was disfavored (28 cases) rather than favored (7 cases). In Maia Sandu's case, the situation is different: the number of appearances in positive context (15) was twice as high as that of the reports that presented her in a negative context (7).

- **Deschide.md** covered the election campaign events in a relatively balanced manner, without obvious editorial preferences. After the results of the first round were announced, the two favorite candidates were presented in various contexts, most of the times in a neutral manner. At the same time, the candidate Igor Dodon was more often presented in a negative context (7 times).

- The regional portal **Gagauzinfo.md** publishes generally neutral news stories about the election campaign. In the report week, this portal inserted one story that presents the candidate Igor Dodon in positive light, including the declarations/statements of some persons who say they would support him in the second round of the elections. However, one

cannot say that this portal favors him editorially because the number of news stories that present Igor Dodon in a negative context is higher than of the positive news stories about him. The same can be said about the candidate Maia Sandu.

- **Jurnal.md** launched a broad campaign for mobilizing the citizens to participate in the second round of the presidential elections by conveying encouraging messages from art people and other personalities. At the same time, the portal directly disfavors the candidate Igor Dodon who is criticized and accused of joint illegal business affairs with Vladimir Plahotniuc. Overall, the portal published 43 stories that presented Igor Dodon in negative light. By contrast, the newsroom supports Maia Sandu and presents her as the best candidate for the presidential office (43 times).

- **Moldova24.info** continued to publish texts having the obvious goal of discrediting the candidate Maia Sandu, accused of lying and betrayal in each text that mentions her. Such texts do not meet the criteria of objective journalist items, are not documented from more than source independent from each other, convey opinions and not facts, label the protagonists and oftentimes are not signed.

- **Newsmaker.md** informed the citizens in a balanced manner about the most important events of the presidential elections, including on the day of the first round when presenting the pictures of the candidates who had voted, their messages after voting, reactions from the social networks, video items, graphics etc. Subsequently, they presented the official results and of the parallel counting of the votes, the reports of the OSCE and national observers. The portal presented live texts from the first debates between the candidates Igor Dodon and Maia Sandu for the second round of the presidential elections. The two candidates were generally presented in a balanced manner and in different contexts.

- Until the second round of the election was announced, the portal **Noi.md** covered the subjects related to the elections generally in a neutral manner. Subsequently, however, the editorial policy suffered changes and the editorial balance principle is neglected most of the times. The portal favors the candidate Igor Dodon and editorially disfavors the candidate Maia Sandu.

- **Realitatea.md** has an editorially balanced behavior, without obvious editorial preferences. The voting in the first round, the announcement of the results, the public reactions of the candidates, the preparations for the second round were presented in detail and objectively. The two candidates of the second tour are presented in different contexts. The candidate Igor Dodon had a high number of appearances in negative contexts; however, this is explained through the multiple public statements of various political players that mentioned Dodon in a negative context.

- **Sputnik.md** favored the candidate Igor Dodon and disfavored the candidate Maia Sandu.

- **Today.md** provided selective information about the election process and the candidates of the second round of the elections, editorially disfavoring the candidate Maia Sandu.

- The portal **Unimedia.info** informed in a detailed and diverse manner about the election campaign, the voting in the first round and the preparations for the second round of the elections, the news stories generally being unbiased. At the same time, by the number and frequency of appearances of the candidates, one notes the editorial favoring of the candidate Maia Sandu, mainly presented in a positive context, and the disfavoring of the candidate Igor Dodon, more often presented in negative context.

- **Ziarulnational.md** published a relatively high number of news stories that presented the two election candidates left in the run. This portal displays a clear tendency of editorial

disfavoring of the candidate Igor Dodon (29 appearances in negative context) while it presents Maia Sandu in a different context, more often in positive (16 cases) rather than negative ones (10 cases).

2.3 Print media:

- The 4 newspapers monitored in the report period cumulatively published 40 items that directly or indirectly referred to the presidential elections, which is half as many as in the previous monitoring period. The newspaper *Panorama* did not come out in the week following the first round of elections.

- The most relevant items appeared in the weekly *Timpul* (18 texts) and in the daily/five issues per week *KP v Moldove* (16 texts). *Săptămîna* published 6 stories relevant to this monitoring.

- Opinions continued to prevail over news stories. Thus, the space allocated to various commentaries, editorials and other opinions was three times higher than the space for news stories. The newspaper with the highest disproportion between the amount of opinions and that of news stories remains *KP v Moldove*.

- The 40 stories published in the newspapers monitored had a total of only 50 sources and protagonists, most of whom from among citizens (18) and foreign and local experts (9).

- The gender unbalance of sources and protagonists of newspapers decreased compared to the previous period and accounted for 60% men and 32% women.

- In the report week, the most frequently disfavored candidate by frequency of appearances and negative context as a whole in all 3 newspapers was Igor Dodon (15 times disfavored and 5 times favored).

- **KP v Moldove** editorially favored the candidate Igor Dodon, directly and indirectly. By contrast, the candidate Maia Sandu was obviously disfavored in the stories published in this newspaper.

- **Săptămîna** editorially disfavored the candidate Maia Sandu, especially in the editorials in which she was labeled ("automated doll", "Virgin of Risipeni"). The candidate Igor Dodon was slightly favored.

- **Timpul** obviously favored the candidate Igor Dodon (14 cases) and visibly favored Maia Sandu.