

Media Monitoring In the Campaign for the Presidential Elections of 2016

(General Conclusions)

Report no. 7
6–11 November 2016¹



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¹ The full report will in Romanian language 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

6 – 11 NOVEMBER 2016

2.1 Broadcast media:

- In the last week of election campaign, the 12 broadcasters monitored broadcast 588 items of direct or indirect electoral character, in the total amount of 217570 sec. or 60.4 hours. Of them, 524 were news stories; 57 – programs, 3 – Vox Populi; and 4 – election debates.
- The largest space for news stories of direct and indirect electoral character was allocated by NTV Moldova – 18349 sec. (5 hours) and Jurnal TV – 12632 sec (3.5 hours), while the largest space for programs was provided by Accent TV – 31535 sec. (8.7 hours), Jurnal TV – 29042 sec (8 hours), Realitatea TV – 25291 sec. (7 hours) and NTV Moldova – 19280 sec. (5.3 hours). Vox Populi were inserted by Jurnal TV and Pro TV Chişinău. Moldova 1, TV 7 and Pro TV organized election debates. To note that the TV stations with national coverage Prime TV, Canal 2, Canal 3 and Publika TV did not organize election debates in the monitoring interval.
- Most of the times, the topics tackled by the 12 stations referred to the political area – 486 items, and the election process – 65 items. A part of the stations covered the work of the Central Election Commission (CEC) and of civil society organizations; they informed about the results of the last opinion survey; about the petition requesting the taxation of the Church as reaction to the involvement of Church representatives in the election campaign; the “Adopt a Vote” campaign; the campaign activities of the election candidates; and the opinions of President Nicolae Timofti and of the Speaker of the Parliament Andrian Candu about the election campaign. Another part of the broadcasters mainly focused either on the allegations launched by the election candidates or on the support they are enjoying from various political and apolitical players.
- In documenting their items, a part of the stations resorted to citizens (358 times), civil society representatives (78 appearances), CEC (62 times), experts (61 times), media (52 appearances), LPA (41 appearances), foreign diplomats/observers (32 times), representatives of the President’s Office (17 times), of the Church (17 times), of the Government (13 times), of the Police (11 times), businesspeople (8 times), and MPs (6 times). 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 304 times, for 11162 sec., the duration of her personal interventions being of 3784 sec. The candidate of the Socialists Party (PSRM) Igor Dodon was quoted or mentioned 252 times, for 8414 sec. and the space allocated for his direct quotes constituted 4273 sec. Of the political parties, the PSRM members were quoted and/or appeared on the screen the most (160 times), followed at a big distance by PAS (63 times) and PDM (62 times).
- In the reporting period, the rate of female sources in the relevant news stories and programs slightly decreased as a whole on the 12 TV stations analyzed, from 32% to 30%. To note that this indicator fluctuates depending on the number of appearances of the candidate Maia Sandu in news stories, without the media making efforts to quote female sources from other categories as well.
- The PSRM candidate Igor Dodon was the most favored candidate by the context of appearances. Igor Dodon appeared 158 times in positive light, which accounts for 27% of the total number of relevant items (an increase of 10% compared to the previous week). At the same time, Igor Dodon was disfavored 87 times or in 15% of the items (an increase of

3%). The report between the number of appearances in positive and negative contexts for Igor Dodon was of 1.81.

- The candidate of PAS, PPDA and PLDM Maia Sandu was rather disfavored and appeared in negative light in 229 items (39% of the total number of relevant items), an increase of 18% compared to the previous week. Maia Sandu was presented in positive light in 91 or 15% of items, with this indicator being at the same level as in the previous week). The ratio between the number of appearances in positive and in negative context for Maia Sandu was of 0.39.
- In the reference period, the private stations with national coverage **Prime TV**, **Canal 2**, **Canal 3** and **Publika TV** broadcast a relatively small number of news stories and programs of direct and indirect electoral character. The vast majority of their items disfavored Maia Sandu who appeared in negative light in 81% of items on Publika TV; 72% - on Prime TV; 62% - on Canal 2 and 61% - on Canal 3. Igor Dodon was covered rather in neutral and positive contexts: 20% of items on Publika; 19% on Prime; 25% on Canal 2 and 26% on Canal 3 favored the PSRM candidate.
- The TV station with national coverage **Jurnal TV** favored Maia Sandu; the PAS, PPDA and PLDM candidate appeared in positive light in 49% of the relevant items on Jurnal TV. The PSRM candidate Igor Dodon was disfavored in 56% of items on Jurnal TV.
- **NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV** had a similar editorial policy, focused on disfavoring Maia Sandu and on favoring Igor Dodon. The context of appearances of the PAS, PPDA and PLDM candidate was disfavoring in the vast majority of cases – 76% of items on NTV Moldova and 69% - on Accent TV. By contrast, Igor Dodon was favored both by space granted to his direct interventions and the positive context of the items of direct or indirect electoral character. Thus, 67% of the items on NTV Moldova and 49% on Accent TV were favorable to Igor Dodon.
- **Moldova 1** showed the two candidates in positive rather than in negative light, in an equal number of items – 26%.
- Twenty three percent of the total number of relevant items on **TV 7** were favorable to Maia Sandu and 21% - disfavoring of Igor Dodon.
- **N4** was noted to favor both candidates: Igor Dodon – in 30% of items; and Maia Sandu – in 20%.
- **Realitatea TV** and **Pro TV Chișinău** had a relatively balanced behavior, without obviously favoring or disfavoring either of the election candidates. On Realitatea TV, Igor Dodon appeared in negative and positive contexts in an equal number of items, while Maia Sandu more often appeared in positive light – 16%. Pro TV Chișinău showed both candidates in a number of neutral news stories but sometimes also in positive and in negative light. Igor Dodon was favored by the context in 15% of the items.

2.2 Online portals:

- In the last days of the election campaign, the 12 web portals monitored published 465 journalist items referring to the presidential elections. The share of news stories was of 92.5% of the total number thereof (430 simple or elaborate news stories). The portals also published 22 comments, editorials or other opinion stories (4.7% of the total), 8 interviews with the candidates for the presidential office (including 7 – on Jurnal.md) and 5 election debates, taken over by the portals from the programs of some TV stations.

- With 126 topical items, the portal Jurnal.md was by far the most active one in publishing stories of political and electoral character. It is followed, at a big distance by: Agora.md (69 items relevant to this monitoring), Unimedia.info (57), Deschide.md, Noi.md and Ziarulnational.md (42 each), Realitatea (22), Sputnik.md (21), Newsmaker.md (20), Gagauzinfo.md (11), Moldova24.info (10) and Today.md with 3 items that directly or indirectly referred to the presidential elections.
- As in the previous monitoring periods, the vast majority of items referred to the declarations/actions of the election candidates that were covered and/or commented (392 of stories or 83.4% of the total). The unfolding of the election process was covered in 46 of the items (9.9% of the total). In the other 27 stories, the authors, in an election context, referred to the social issues, the situation in the economic areas, education, the functioning of the rule of law, crimes and corruption, culture, our country's foreign relations etc.
- Overall, the 12 portals quoted 764 sources or protagonists, and in over half of the cases (408 or 53.4%) these were the candidates for the presidential office, representatives of the parties or press releases of parties. Thus, the PAS leader and other representatives were quoted or mentioned 188 times while the PSRM leader and other representatives – 153 times. In the context of the presidential elections, sources from other parties were quoted as well. In this period, the sources from outside the political environment, most often quoted, were representatives of the civil society and NGOs – 60 times; citizens – 53 times, other media outlets – 48 times, foreign diplomats, officials and observers – 37 times. The CEC and other representatives of the election authorities were quoted in the report period 27 times, representatives of the police – 20 times, of the local public administration – 16 times, and of the church – 13 times.
- The gender discrepancy in the items published by the portals remained at the level of the previous period: 61% (469 of the total of 764 sources/protagonists) and 29% women (221 of the total) – with a slight increase in the rate of representation of women, explainable by the frequent appearances of the candidate Maia Sandu; in 74 of the cases (10% of the total), the sources of information were not specified.
- By the number and frequency of appearances in positive or negative contexts, as whole for the 12 portals monitored, one can consider that in the report period the candidate Igor Dodon was mainly presented in a disfavoring context (126 cases), with the number of appearances in positive context being 5 times lower (25). The candidate Maia Sandu more often was presented in a positive context (116 times) but also in a disfavoring context, but 2.3 times more rarely (50 cases).
- The portals monitored had tens of news stories documented from a single source and in most cases this was about the messages of personalities announcing their support for one candidate or another.
- In the last week of the election campaign, the portal **Agora.md** had a relatively balanced and unbiased editorial behavior to the election candidates and the political forces represented thereby. At the same time, by the number and frequency of appearances in positive or negative contexts, Igor Dodon was disfavored (14 cases) rather than favored (6 cases) while Maia Sandu, on the contrary, was more often presented in a positive context (13) rather than in a negative one (7).
- **Deschide.md** covered the end of the election campaign in a relatively balanced manner and in most cases the authors were unbiased. The candidates for the presidential office were generally presented in a neutral manner.

- The regional portal **Gagauzinfo.md** obviously favored Igor Dodon by publishing broad reports that presented him in positive light and the declarations of officials that urged the citizens to vote for Dodon. Maia Sandu, on the contrary, was disfavored through news stories and the opinions of experts stating that she was not interested in the life of the autonomy's residents.
- **Jurnal.md** intensified the campaign for mobilizing the citizens to participate in the second round of the presidential elections and posted encouraging messages from the art people and other personalities from Moldova and Romania. The portal directly and frequently disfavored Igor Dodon (76 stories presented him in negative light) and favored Maia Sandu (67 times).
- **Moldova24.info** broadly covered the allegations brought by Igor Dodon against Maia Sandu, without giving her the right to respond. As in the previous periods, Maia Sandu was criticized and ironized in comments and other texts without sources of information.
- **Newsmaker.md** informed about the end of the election campaign in a balanced and objective manner, without any election preferences.
- **Noi.md** editorially disfavored Maia Sandu (9 cases), especially through editorials and other opinion stories. Igor Dodon, on the contrary, was favored, mainly by publishing declarations supporting this candidate.
- **Realitatea.md** presented in a balanced manner the information about the election candidates, using as basis the public declarations and events organized by the candidates or by their supporters.
- By the number and frequency of appearances of the candidates in various contexts, **Sputnik.md** disfavored the candidate Maia Sandu (5 appearances in negative context).
- **Today.md** published only three relevant items in this period and all of them editorially disfavored the candidate Maia Sandu.
- The portal **Unimedia.info** informed in a detailed and relatively balanced manner about the end of the election campaign. By the number and frequency of appearances of the candidates, Maia Sandu was editorially favored more often (7 appearances in positive contexts vs. 2 appearances in negative contexts).
- **Ziarulnational.md** massively disfavored Igor Dodon (21 appearances in a negative context and one appearance in a positive context) and favored Maia Sandu (17 appearances in positive contexts and two appearances in negative contexts).

2.3 Print media:

- Between 6 and 11 November 2016, the three newspapers monitored (*after the first election round, the newspaper Panorama suspended its appearance in print version*) cumulatively published 41 stories that directly or indirectly referred to the presidential election, with a total area of 19.063 sq.cm.
- The highest number of items appeared in the daily/five issues per week *KP v Moldove* (20 texts with the total area of 8840 sq.cm.) and in the weekly *Timpul* (19 texts with the total area of 9720 sq.cm.), while the magazine *Săptămîna* published only two items relevant to this monitoring with the total area of 503 sq.cm.

- As in the previous monitoring periods, in the newspapers, opinions prevailed over news stories/facts. Thus, two of three stories published (63.5% of the total number of stories and 79% of the area reserved for such stories) were opinions, editorials and commentaries.
- The publication *KP v Moldove* registered again in this period the highest disproportion between the amount of opinions and news stories (19 of the 20 relevant items published in this newspaper were opinions and commentaries).
- The 40 stories published in the monitored newspapers had a total of 60 sources and protagonists, most of whom citizens (27) and foreign and local experts (12). The candidates of the second election round and their representatives were quoted more rarely: Igor Dodon and PSRM – 5 times, Maia Sandu and PAS – 4 times.
- The rate of gender representation of newspaper sources and protagonists constituted 60% for men (36 of the total of 60 sources/protagonists) and 37% for women (22 sources/protagonists). In other 2 cases (3% of the total) the gender of the source was not specified.
- In the report week, Igo Dodon was the most disfavored candidate by the frequency of appearances and negative contest as a whole in all 3 newspapers (10 times disfavored and 5 times favored), while the candidate Maia Sandu was presented nearly equally in various contexts (9 times favored vs. 7 times disfavored).
- **KP v Moldove** editorially favored the candidate Igor Dodon, in an obvious, direct and indirect manner, while the candidate Maia Sandu was massively disfavored, with most of the stories referring to her containing interpretation and speculations without a real factual base. Thus, one story stated that if Maia Sandu became president, the country would turn into a colony and everything that could be optimized would be optimized, such as pensions, allowances etc., and at the end of the story, the author says: “thanks God the punishment by shooting has been cancelled in Moldova!”; another story wrote that M. Sandu would turn the country into an American colony; speculations were made that she had become depressed “after having been booed in Bălți.”; some texts labeled and offended Maia Sandu. By contrast, the candidate Igor Dodon was massively favored in many stories, including of hidden election publicity.
- **Săptămîna** disfavored the candidate Maia Sandu in an editorial in which the author labeled her (“*rubber doll, a combination of Nicolae Timofti with earrings and Dorin Chirtoacă in a skirt*”).
- **Timpul** massively disfavored the candidate Igor Dodon who was criticized for his actions and declarations; it published a two-page story about the questions that Dodon avoided to answer (Plahotniuc’s businesses; the privatization of the “Codru” hotel; the party’s funding etc.). The candidate Maia Sandu, on the contrary, was visibly favored (*the newspaper published a big picture on front-page, with the question: “Do we have another chance?”*).