

Media Monitoring in the Campaign for the Presidential Elections of 2016

(General Conclusions)

Report no. 4
14–20 October 2016¹



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¹The 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

14–20 OCTOBER 2016

2.1 Broadcast media:

- Between 14 and 20 October 2016, the 12 TV stations monitored broadcast a high number of items of direct and indirect electoral character – 801, of which 719 news stories, 53 programs, 16 election debates and 13 Vox Populi. The total amount of the items was of 242,365 sec. or circa 67.3 hours, of which 91,840 sec. (25.5 hours) accounted for, 99,744 sec. (27.2 hours) – for program opinions, and 48,980 sec. (13.6 hours) – for election debates. The Vox Populi took 1,801 sec. in the newscasts.
- The highest amount of news of direct and indirect electoral character was broadcast by Publika TV – 13,733 sec. (3.8 hours), NTV Moldova – 11,373 sec. (3.1 hours) and Jurnal TV – 10,096 sec. (2.8 hours), which also allocated the largest space for programs. The private stations with national coverage did not broadcast election debates in the interval monitored. The station N4 covered the election campaign very summarily, thus depriving the public of information about the election process.
- The subjects covered by the 12 broadcasters monitored referred more to the political area and the election process. These included the results of a number of election surveys, the electoral meetings of some candidates, CEC decisions, reports on the monitoring of the campaign by civil society organizations etc. Most of the stations broadly covered the decision of three parties – the Demnitate and Adevăr Platform Party (PPDA), the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS), and the Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM) – to appoint Maia Sandu as a joint candidate, and the subsequent decision,² made on 21 October, of the PPDA leader Andrei Năstase to withdraw from the election run. A part of the items mirrored the activities of the political parties, the meetings of Government members with the citizens in various localities. The stations also kept an eye on the various allegations launched by some candidates against the others. The items of indirect electoral character broadly broadcast by some TV stations also included those about the allegations of involvement in a murder attempt, launched by the Russian banker Gherman Gorbunțov against the leader of Our Party Renato Usatîi; the apprehension of some persons suspected of involvement in the murder attempt; the reopening of the criminal case against the lawyer Ana Ursachi, suspected of involvement in a murder case; etc.
- In documenting their items, most of the stations most of the times resorted to citizens (619 times), judges/lawyers (111 times), businesspeople (75 times), CEC (63 times), experts (57 times), ministers (40), civil society (36 times), LPA representatives (35 times) etc. Of the election candidates and political parties, the candidate Maia Sandu enjoyed the highest number of appearances (186 screen appearances for 4743 sec., with direct interventions of 1621 sec.) and so did Marian Lupu (168 times of screen appearances, for 5760 sec, with direct interventions of 3092 sec.). Marian Lupu was leader by the space allocated to his direct interventions. He is followed by the Democratic Party (PDM) representatives (153 appearances, 4517 sec. of screen appearances and 2653 sec. of personal interventions) and Igor Dodon (144 appearances for 4,573 sec., directly quoted for 2,057 sec.). Andrei Năstase appeared on the screen 122 times for 4,457 sec, with direct interventions of 2,081 sec.
- In the report period, the gender unbalance remained, with the balance inclined to masculine gender sources. Overall, on the 12 TV stations analyzed, one registered 27% women sources

² The PPDA leader Andrei Năstase officially withdrew from the election run on 21 October. Until 21 October, Năstase continued his campaign activities as an election candidate during which he urged the electorate to support Maia Sandu.

and 73% men sources. On some stations, one noted an increase in the rate of items that made reference or quoted feminine gender sources while this rate declined on others.

- The most favored election candidates by frequency and duration of appearances and positive context was Marian Lupu, followed by Igor Dodon and Maia Sandu at a big distance. The ratio between the number of appearances in positive and negative contexts for these election candidates is of 2.1 for Marian Lupu, 1.3 for Igor Dodon and 0.5 for Maia Sandu who were disfavored rather than favored. Dumitru Ciubașenco was disfavored most of the times – 109 relevant items.
- In the reference period, the private stations with national coverage **Prime TV**, **Canal 2**, **Canal 3** and **Publika TV** continued promoting the PDM candidate Marian Lupu, both by frequency of appearances and duration of appearances on the screen and direct quotes as well as through the positive context of items. Marian Lupu was favored in 38% of the news items and programs on Prime TV; 53% - on Canal 2; 36% on Canal 3, and 43% on Publika TV. By contrast, the PAS candidate Maia Sandu, the Our Party candidate Dumitru Ciubașenco, and the PPDA candidate Andrei Năstase were the ones to be disfavored the most in the items. They often appeared on these stations' screens and mainly in items with negative connotation, with short personal interventions.
- The TV station with regional coverage **Jurnal TV** favored the candidates Andrei Năstase and Maia Sandu, both by the space granted to their personal interventions and by the positive context of the items. These 2 candidates were favored in 24% and 30% of the relevant items on Jurnal TV. Marian Lupu in the vast majority of cases was disfavored (53% of items), especially through news of indirect electoral character in which the members of the PDM and of the governance appeared in negative light.
- **NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV** favored the Socialists Party (PSRM) candidate Igor Dodon both by space granted for direct interventions to the PSRM candidate and members and through the positive context of the direct or indirect electoral items (44% and 49% of items accordingly). Both stations mainly disfavored Maia Sandu who, after being designated as the only candidate, became the protagonist of a number of news stories and programs that put her in negative light (30% and 23% items accordingly).
- The public broadcaster **Moldova 1** and the private stations **Realitatea TV**, **Pro TV Chișinău** and **TV 7** had a relatively balanced behavior without displaying any trends of obvious favoring or disfavoring of the election candidates.
- In conclusion, the stations Prime TV, Canal 2, Canal 3, Publika TV, Jurnal TV, NTV Moldova and Accent TV 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)³ which stipulate that the election campaign must be covered in a responsible, balanced and impartial manner.

2.2 Online portals:

- Between 14 and 20 October 2016, the 12 web portals monitored published a total of 494 stories referring directly or indirectly to the campaign and the presidential elections, this number being approximately equal to the one registered in the previous weeks. The absolute

³ 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.

majority of items (462 texts or 93.5% of the total) were simple or elaborate news stories relevant to the subject of this monitoring; the other 29 items (5.9% of the total) were commentaries, editorials or other opinion stories, an interview with a candidate for the presidential office, a Vox Populi survey, and a round of election debates.

- Jurnal.md continues to be the leader among the portals by the number of stories of political and electoral character. In the report week, Jurnal.md published 102 relevant items, followed by Ziarulnational.md (61), Unimedia.info and Agora.md (58 and 57 accordingly), Deschide.md and Noi.md (38 and 36 accordingly), Newsmaker.md and Sputnik.md (30 and 29 accordingly), Realitatea.md (26), Gagauzinfo.md (21), Today.md and Moldova24.info (18 items relevant to this monitoring each).
- The topics of the items published generally remained unchanged and focused on covering the campaign activities of various election candidates, the statements made thereby, the mutual allegations among the candidates but also the allegations by third parties or by the journalists themselves (425 items or 86% of the total. The CEC activity and the unfolding of the election process was covered in 43 items (8.7% of the total) while in the other 26 items (5.3% of the total) the authors, in an electoral context, referred to some economic and social issues and to the fight against corruption.
- In total, all the 12 portals quoted 816 sources or protagonists, 521 of them (63.8%) being politicians, representatives of parties/political entities or party press releases (the leaders and representatives of the following parties were quoted or referred to, in positive or negative contexts: PPDA (104 times); PAS (103 times), PSRM (64 times); PDM (63 times); European People's Party (52 times); PL (37 times)).
- Maia Sandu was the candidate with the highest visibility on the portals monitored in the report week. She was referred to or quoted 112 times and the context of her appearances was rather favorable (75 times) than unfavorable (37 times). The frequency of appearances in positive context as a whole on all the 12 portals monitored was higher for Andrei Năstase as well, with 54 items that favored rather than disfavored him and 25 stories that presented him in a disfavoring context. The candidate Marian Lupu was presented much more often in a negative context (89 cases) than in situations favoring him (20 cases), the same for the candidate Igor Dodon (63 items in a negative context and 16 in a positive context); the candidates Iurie Leancă and Mihai Ghimpu were also more often disfavored than favored.
- The gender discrepancy in the items published by the portals increased as compared to the level of the previous weeks. Thus, the rate of men quoted as protagonists or sources accounted for 65% (532 of the total of 746 sources/protagonists) and of women – 20% (158 of the total).
- Very many items, especially those that reflected certain allegations against the candidates were unbalancing because they failed to observe the multiple sources principle and did not offer the right to respond to the ones mentioned.
- Some portals cover the election campaign in a selective manner, covering in a mainly positive context only the actions/statements of some candidates and/or disfavoring editorially the other candidates.
- **Agora.md** has a relatively balanced editorial policy, without favoring/disfavoring any of the candidates in an obvious manner. At the same time, in the monitoring period, the former candidate Andrei Năstase and candidate Maia Sandu were more often presented in a context favoring rather than disfavoring them.

- The stories published this week by **Deschide.md** were in general neutral and the portal did not obviously favor or disfavor any of the candidates. At the same time, the stories that mentioned the candidate Igor Dodon presented him rather in a disfavoring context.
- **Gagauzinfo.md** has a generally neutral editorial policy and it presented the candidates in an unbiased manner. At the same time, in the report week, the candidate Maia Sandu appeared more often in a favoring context while the candidates Marian Lupu and Igor Dodon – in different contexts but more often in disfavoring ones.
- **Jurnal.md** massively disfavored the candidate Marian Lupu first of all by associating him and the party he represents with Vladimir Plahotniuc. At a lower frequency but generally disfavored were the candidates Igor Dodon, Iurie Leancă and Mihai Ghimpu. The candidate Maia Sandu, on the contrary, is favored in the items and so is the former candidate Andrei Năstase.
- **Moldova24.info** continued to attack editorially the opponents of the current governance Maia Sandu and Andrei Năstase in items with accusing and ironic headlines. The other candidates are not present in this site's items.
- In the report week, **Newsmaker.md** indirectly disfavored the candidate Marian Lupu, mainly by publishing accusing statements launched by other politicians and candidates against the First Deputy President of the PDM Vladimir Plahotniuc.
- **Noi.md** does not have obvious editorial preferences and the news authors are not biased. At the same time, through the campaign news and events selected in the report week, the candidate Igor Dodon was more frequently disfavored than favored while the former candidate Andrei Năstase more often enjoyed a favoring than disfavoring presentation.
- **Realitatea.md** covered the election campaign in a relatively balanced manner, without obvious editorial preferences. At the same time, in the report week, the candidate Igor Dodon more often appeared in a disfavoring context while the candidate Maia Sandu was more often presented in a positive context.
- **Sputnik.md** maintained the editorial policy of disfavoring the candidate Mihai Ghimpu, in “the same package” with Dorin Chirtoacă, by publishing texts with ironic elements that doubted their legal capacities. The candidate Maia Sandu was also disfavored.
- **Today.md** mainly disfavors the opponents of the current governance (Andrei Năstase, Maia Sandu, Dumitru Ciubașenco, Igor Dodon). The candidate Marian Lupu, on the contrary, is favored each time when referred to.
- The authors of the news stories on **Unimedia.info** are usually unbiased; however many of their items are documented from one source, which affects the editorial balance of the portal. The frequency and selection of news for publication points to the trend of disfavoring the candidate Marian Lupu and of favoring the candidate Maia Sandu.
- **Ziarulnational.md** editorially favored the former candidate Andrei Năstase, the candidates Maia Sandu and Mihai Ghimpu. The candidate Igor Dodon was mainly presented in a context disfavoring him; the same for the candidates Marian Lupu and Iurie Leancă.

2.3 Print media:

- Between 14 and 20 October 2016, the 4 newspapers monitored published a total of 41 stories that directly or indirectly referred to the presidential elections. Traditionally, the highest number of relevant items appeared in the weekly *Timpul* (14 texts) and in the

daily/five issues per week *KP v Moldova* (12 texts). *Săptămîna* published 8 stories and *Panorama* – 7.

- Most of the texts (17 items or 56% of the total number) and more than half of the area reserved by the newspapers monitored for election topics (11,254 sq.cm. or 66% of the total area) was covered with editorials and other opinion stories. At the same time, the news covered only 32% of the total area. 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 one relevant news stories but 10 commentaries and other opinion items).
- In the relevant items, the newspapers quoted/referred to 60 sources and protagonists, with 41.7% of them being politicians, leaders or representatives of political parties, candidates for the presidential office. The citizens, other media, foreign and local experts were also quoted as sources.
- The gender unbalance in favor of men grew up to 75% of men as sources and protagonists while women accounted for 17%.
- The election candidates disfavored more often by frequency of appearances and negative context as a whole in all the 4 newspapers were Mihai Ghimpu (in 8 out of 9 cases they were mentioned in a negative context), Marian Lupu (7 times disfavored and 3 times favored) and Igor Dodon (5 times disfavored and 3 times favored). The other candidates were referred to fewer times or the contexts were both negative and positive.
- The multiple sources principles is not observed by the print media monitored and the news stories that reported conflicts in the election campaign context were unbalanced.
- **KP v Moldova** continued to disfavor editorially Mihai Ghimpu in commentaries and other opinion items. The candidate Maia Sandu is also disfavored.
- As usual, the newspaper **Panorama** criticized the current governance but also other governments after 2012. The candidates Marian Lupu and Mihai Ghimpu were mainly presented in a negative context, thus being disfavored.
- **Săptămîna** published an editorial that disfavored some candidates by labeling them or making offensive hints at them. The magazine also publishes stories of hidden publicity in favor of the candidate Silvia Radu.
- **Timpul** editorially favored the candidate Maia Sandu, and partially the candidate Iurie Leancă, but disfavored Igor Dodon. The candidates Inna Popenco, Ana Guțu, Maia Laguta and Dumitru Ciubașenco were presented several times in a context that disfavored them.