



Centrul pentru Jurnalism Independent

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## Media Monitoring during the Campaign for Local General Elections on 14 June 2015

Report no. 3  
31 May—7 June 2015

*This report has been produced by the Independent Journalism Center with support of the East Europe Foundation from resources provided by the Government of Sweden through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark/DANIDA. The opinions herein are those of authors and may not reflect the opinions of the East Europe Foundation, the Government of Sweden, Sida or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark/DANIDA.*



## 1. General information

**1.1 Project goal:** To monitor and to provide information to the public about mass media behavior during the election campaign, including candidates' access to mass media and pluralism of opinions presented. The monitoring aims to analyze reporting trends that might affect mass media performance and compromise their ability to provide correct, unbiased, and pluralistic information to the public.

**1.2 Monitoring period:** 1 May—7 June 2015

### 1.3 Criteria for selecting media outlets to monitor:

- Audience-impact: national, quasi-national
- Type of mass media: broadcasting, online
- Ownership: public, private
- Language: Romanian, Russian

### 1.4 List of mass media outlets monitored:

#### ***Broadcasting media***

**Moldova 1** “Mesager (Messenger)” newscast at 21:00: public television station, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian

**Prime TV** “Primele Știri (First news)” newscast at 21:00: private television station, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;

**Canal 2** “Reporter” newscast at 19:00: private television station, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian

**TV 7** “Știri (News)” newscast at 20:30: private television station, regional coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;

**Accent TV** “Accent info” newscast at 20:00: private television station, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian.

#### ***Online print media:***

[www.unimedia.info](http://www.unimedia.info) online portal, Romanian language;

[www.omg.md](http://www.omg.md) online portal, Russian language;

[www.publika.md](http://www.publika.md) online portal, Romanian language;

[www.pan.md](http://www.pan.md) online version of *Panorama* magazine, Russian language;

[www.timpul.md](http://www.timpul.md) online version of national newspaper *Timpul de dimineață*, Romanian language.

## 2. Methodological framework

*Monitoring covered the entire contents of online publications and of one newscast of each TV channel daily with an analysis of content of a direct or indirect electoral nature. News items were evaluated according to content and context in order to determine whether they favored or disparaged a political party or political entity. The articles and broadcasts were also analyzed according to the following criteria for objective coverage:*

*Impartiality/objectivity:* According to the Journalist’s Code of Ethics, news stories should be impartial and objective and should not favor any parties/groups/persons to the detriment of others. The presence of elements of discrimination in reports and news stories is the first indication of a lack of objectivity on the part of the journalist. Filtering news and inadequately analyzing the story and the context are also indicative of the protection of certain interests rather than those of the wider public<sup>1</sup>.

*Correctness and balance of sources/pluralism of opinions:* To be correct and balanced, content should present the opinions of all parties concerned, especially on controversial issues, and should treat opponents equally.<sup>2</sup> Also, mass media should ensure access to a multitude of diverse opinions to help the public form their own.

*Language and images used:* Deliberate exaggeration and licentious language such as pejorative terms or labels attached to certain persons or organizations and manipulating images to show certain parties in a negative light raise questions about compliance with ethical and professional standards. The ethical behavior of journalists is in question mostly when images present situations that do not correspond with reality, when images are fabricated, and when news stories are accompanied by images that are irrelevant to the text.

### 3. Monitoring data



#### ***Involvement in the election campaign***

From 31 May to 7 June Moldova 1 public television station covered the elections in their main 19.00 newscast, broadcasting 32 directly or tangentially relevant items. Most of them covered various campaign events of different candidates, but also the work of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), civil society organizations and the Broadcasting Council (CCA). The public broadcaster aired as well several indirectly relevant items such as the news on celebrations organized for children patients of a Chisinau-based hospital with the participation of Speaker of Parliament Andrian Candu (PDM), on the commissioning of a national road segment rehabilitated with money allotted from the National Fund for Regional Development with the participation of PDM Minister of Regional Development and Constructions, or on a visit undertaken by PDM Minister of Transport and Road Infrastructure to the Chisinau-Ungheni road rehabilitated with European support.

#### ***Political partisanship***

The great majority of stories directly or indirectly relevant to elections aired by Moldova 1 during the reporting period were objective and unbiased, without exceptions to the ethical norms. Only in two cases the stance of the author was obvious—in a 31 May story titled “Separatism-tinted decisions in the North of the country” and in a 2 June story according to which two more Moldovan companies will be able to export wines to Russian Federation.

During the reporting period the public station covered 9 candidates: PDM representatives and affiliates were directly featured in 6 stories, where 4 had a positive context and 2 had

<sup>1</sup> Simona Ștefănescu, Riscurile comunicării mediatice în timpul conflictelor

<sup>2</sup> Fico, Sofin, and Dragger, 2007. Fairness and defamation in the reporting of local issues.

neutral context, those of PLDM were featured in 5 stories and were mentioned in 3 other items, where 4 had positive context and 4 had neutral context, and those of PCRM were featured in 4 stories and mentioned in two other, mostly in neutral context (four times), once in negative and once in positive context. PPEM follows with appearances in 3 news items and two mentions, in neutral context. PL had 3 direct appearances and 4 mentions in various contexts—neutral (3), negative (3) and positive (1). PSRM representatives were quoted directly twice and mentioned twice in different contexts—two times in neutral, once in negative and once in positive contexts. Also in neutral context were mentioned PN, PLD and several candidates for the Chisinau Municipal Council.

### ***Pluralism of opinions. Correctness and balance of source***

During the reporting period the public broadcaster partly ensured pluralism and diversity of sources in relevant stories. Most often the reporters of the public broadcaster referred to politicians, who were quoted directly or indirectly 26 times. Public officials were the second most preferred source (16 quotes), then citizen (13 quotes) and experts (3 quotes). Seven more times Moldova 1 used other categories of sources. In terms of gender balance, out of a total 58 sources 11 were women and constituted thus 18 percent, an increase compared to the previous reporting periods.

During the reporting period, Moldova 1 broadcast 5 stories about conflicts, all of them being well balanced in terms of sources.

### ***Language and images used***

The language and images used by the public broadcaster in the reporting period were in line with the ethical norms.

Overall, from 31 May to 14 June 2015 the public broadcaster covered the elections in a fair and unbiased way, ensuring balance of sources and, partially, opinion pluralism. Moldova 1 news did not favor, nor disfavor any candidate in an obvious way.



### ***Involvement in the election campaign***

In the reporting period, the main newscasts of the private station with national coverage Prime TV comprised 32 items directly or indirectly relevant to the campaign. These consisted mostly of stories about campaign activities of certain candidates, mutual accusations of corruption launched by other candidates, but also stories with indirect impact on elections such as those on the celebration of International Children's Day with the participation of Speaker of Parliament Andrian Candu (PDM), the launch of a public housing project for vulnerable families in Ialoveni with the participation of PDM Minister of Regional Development and Constructions, the rehabilitation of roads in Stefan Voda with the participation of Minister of Regional Development and Constructions and of PDM Minister of Transport and Road Infrastructure. It is noteworthy that the number of local election stories presenting issues and solutions of PDM candidates decreased during the reporting period.

***Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship***

Six or 28 percent of 21 news items were biased and presented the information in a partial way, especially in stories where reporters emphasized the achievements and successes of some PDM mayors. Thus, on 31 May the channel spoke about *repaired roads, functional culture house and street lights* in Nisporeni, all due to the suspended mayor. He also fleshed out plans for, among other, *repairing the stadium, rehabilitating the park and creating leisure areas*. On 3 May a story is aired on the projects implemented over the past years by Molovata Noua mayor, in Dubasari district, who *repaired the kindergarten, restored the culture house, provided street lighting, arranged the village museum and opened a family medicine center*. Some cases were also recorded when facts were not separated from opinions, such as the 4 June item on the press conference of PCRM leader Vladimir Voronin titled “Voronin-style pearls” or the 5 June item on the protests at the Bubuieci waste deposit. On 7 June the channel aired news on the protests held in the Great National Assembly Square (PMAN), shifting the accent from anti-government and anti-PD messages to the dissenting positions of representatives of PL and those of Dignity and Truth Civic Platform. Filtering information with the aim of protecting certain candidates is indicative of the manipulation and disinformation in this matter.

During the reporting period Prime TV covered 8 candidates allotting the greatest airtime to PDM. Representatives of this party had direct appearances in 6 items and one mention in another item. In 6 cases the context was positive and in one case neutral. Among the news that favored PDM were those on the surprises offered to children by the Democratic Party candidate for Chisinau mayor Monica Babuc (1 June), presents offered to children in a hospital in Chisinau by Speaker of Parliament Andrian Candu (1 June), the launch of a public housing project for vulnerable families in Ialoveni (2 June), the unfolding campaign Your Family's Mayor (2 June) and so on. PLDM and PCRM representatives had direct appearances in 4 news items and were mentioned one time each in a more neutral context (3 cases). PL appeared in 2 items and was mentioned in 5 items, of which 4 times in negative context and 3 times in neutral context. PPRM, PVE and PPEM representatives were also mentioned in neutral context.

Compared to the previous reporting period a decrease can be noted in the number of stories positive for PDM, as well as a slight increase in the number of items covering other candidates. In most cases the stories covering other candidates contain to a greater extent accusations at other candidates and to a lesser extent information about their election platforms of campaign activities. Thus, for instance the candidates PL, PLD, PPEM and PCRM appeared mostly in stories about conflicts and were accused by their counter-candidates.

***Pluralism of opinions. Correctness and balance of source***

Election stories broadcast by Prime TV in the reporting period delivered the information from the perspective of citizen and politicians, who were quoted 16 and 12 times respectively. Public officials were quoted 6 times and other types of sources also 6 times. A quarter of the number of sources were women, most of them citizen.

In the reporting period Prime TV aired 8 controversial stories, the majority of which (7 items) provided the right to reply to the accused.

### ***Language and images used***

During the reporting period the station Prime TV observed the ethical principles regarding the language and video images used.

As such, during this monitoring period Prime TV covered the campaign with less bias compared to the previous period, ensuring partly opinion pluralism but not a diversity of sources. A slight favor of PDM can be noticed due to higher frequency and positive context in the appearances of this candidate's representatives and affiliates.



The private channel with national coverage Canal 2 broadcast 19 items relevant to the monitoring during this reporting period, and covered subjects such as the celebration of the International Children's Day on 1 June with the participation of PDM candidate Monica Babuc and Speaker Andrian Candu, some campaign activities of candidates, the work of NGOs monitoring the campaign, the work of CEC and the protests in PMAN. A number of stories are covered similarly to Prime TV, using the same approach and the same sources. It is noteworthy that the number of election propaganda items decreased and the presence of other candidates, as a rule in controversial news, increased.

### ***Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship***

Out of 19 relevant news items, 6 or 30 percent were partial, in most cases reporters failing to separate facts from opinions. There are a number of examples to this: the 1 June item on the registration of two candidates with the same name and surname running for mayor of the town of Ialoveni, presented as a *war of clones*; the 1 June item on the number of people using the services of PDM's project Your Family's Mayor, titled "Just launched, already fruitful"; or the 7 June item on the opening of a fitness club in the village of Puhoi, Ialoveni district. Another item broadcast on 2 June focuses on accusations of corruption launched by a PCR representative against PSRM, while the reporter states that PSRM plays into the present government's hands and fakes opposition. In the 3 June item titled "A reading from Voronin..." the author selected PCR's Vladimir Voronin's declarations to present accusations and criticism aimed at PLDM Minister of Defense and PLDM candidate Serafim Urechean, adding that Voronin assigned tags left and right. The 7 June news on the protests held in the Great National Assembly Square focused on the conflict between representatives of PL and those of Dignity and Truth Civic Platform, leaving behind the anti-government and anti-PD messages. Thus, Canal 2 manipulated information by filtering it.

Relevant news covered a total of 8 candidates. The candidate of PDM had the highest number of direct appearances (6), most of them in positive context (5) and neutral context (1). Among the items favoring PDM we can list that of 31 May on the program for children on the occasion of the one-year anniversary of reopening the small circus arena and

concomitantly on Children's Day featuring Monica Babuc (PD), or another item in the same newscast covering the problems encountered by the people of Pelinia village, Drochia district, and the solutions formulated by the candidate running for mayor. On 1 June the channel aired a story on Children's Town program and the surprises offered on Children's Day by Monica Babuc, where the reporter stated that Monica Babuc's team offered children a fairytale day. On 2 June the channel broadcast the news on the number of people having accessed the services of the project Your Family's Mayor, launched by PDM team together with Monica Babuc.

PCRM representatives were quoted directly in 4 stories (mostly in neutral terms—3 times) and PLDM appeared in 2 news items and was mentioned in other 2 stories. The context was neutral (2 times), once negative and once positive. PL was mentioned 4 times, mostly in negative light (3). PLD, PPRM, PSRM and PPEM were also covered each in a story with direct quotes, all in neutral context.

### ***Correctness and balance of sources/pluralism of opinions***

There was a lack of diversity of sources used by Canal 2 in the reporting period. The number of sources in the citizen category increased visibly as they were the most preferred type of source. As such, citizens were quoted 27 times and were followed by politicians—16 times. A public official and a source in another category were also quoted. In 16 cases the quoted sources were women as the gender balance indicator constituted 35 percent.

Five out of 6 stories on conflicts ensured a balance of sources and presented both sides of the conflict. The 2 June story on the protest organized by Marcel Darie, PLD together with his supporters in front of CMC secretary's house remains imbalanced. The candidate and his supporters accused the secretary of corruption and building his house on a lot obtained illegally. Dorin Chirtoaca is also accused of shielding the secretary in his thefts. The author then mentions that neither Chirtoaca, nor Didenco could be found to offer a reply.

### ***Language and images used***

During the reporting period the stories broadcast by Canal 2 did not use images deviant from ethical and professional standards.

Thus, Canal 2's behavior was more balanced than the one recorded in previous reporting periods. The channel provided source balance in controversial stories but failed to ensure pluralism of opinions and diversity of sources. Canal 2 slightly favored the candidate PDM, which had a relatively high frequency of appearances in an invariably positive context.



TV 7

### ***Involvement in the election campaign***

From 31 May to 7 June the television station TV 7 covered the elections in their main newscasts with 25 relevant items. The topics included various campaign activities of

election candidates, the work of the Central Electoral Commission, the Broadcasting Council, civil society organizations, and results of opinion polls during the campaign.

***Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship***

The greatest number of stories directly and indirectly relevant to elections was impartial and covered the topics objectively and impartially.

TV 7 covered the campaigns of 10 candidates who usually had direct appearances but were also mentioned. PLDM benefited from the most appearances and mentions--its representatives were quoted in 4 stories and were mentioned in 2 other pieces. The context of direct appearances was positive (4 pieces) and the context of mentions neutral. The news stories where PLDM is shown in positive light begin with that of 1 June titled "Serafim Urechean promises accessible housing to young families", the 4 June item titled "Serafim Urechean promises to make river Bac navigable", the 5 June item "Serafim Urechean: "The ecologic bomb in Bubuieci can be dealt with", the item in the same newscast titled "Increasingly less women candidate for mayor". PPEM had 4 direct appearances and one mention, all in neutral context, while PCRM appeared 2 times and was mentioned 1 time (in positive, negative and neutral contexts). PL was quoted only once but was mentioned 5 times, preponderantly in negative context (3 times), specifically in the 3 June item where Dorin Chirtoaca and PL were accused of using administrative resources to create obstacles to counter-candidates ("Oazu Nantoi: Our candidates are under pressure"); in the news on the protest organized by PLD in front of CMC secretary's house ("CMC secretary accused of misappropriating public money"); and the 5 June item titled "Members of Green Ecologist Party alarmed by the problem of Bubuieci waste deposit".

***Pluralism of opinions. Correctness and balance of source***

TV 7 partly provided opinion pluralism and diversity of sources in relevant news. All 25 items subject to monitoring referred to several sources, most of them politicians (17). The number of citizen quoted in news increased to 10, followed by public officials (6), experts (3) and sources in other categories (3). Some of these sources were men (28) and 11 were women—an increasing indicator compared to previous reporting periods.

The issue of imbalanced sources persists in stories about conflicts. For instance, out of seven stories about conflicts only in two the right to reply provided and in one the balance was partly ensured. The following stories omitted to present the other part in a conflict: The 3 June item on PLD candidate's picketing of the CMC secretary's house. The journalist claims having tried to obtain a comment from CMC secretary but failing to succeed. The author did not attempt to find Dorin Chirtoaca, who was also accused by Marcel Darie of protecting CMC secretary in the alleged corruption schemes within the public institution. Another news item lacking due balance was aired on 4 June and featured the title "Voronin: Ministers disobey the cabinet" and the 5 June item titled "Members of Green Ecologist Party alarmed by the problem of Bubuieci waste deposit."

***Language and images used***

The language used by TV 7 in the stories broadcast during the reporting period was acceptable. No cases of video manipulation were registered.



Therefore, in the reference period TV 7 covered the campaign fairly and impartially in newscasts, but did not provide a balance of sources in controversial stories. The channel did not favor any candidate by means of appearances or mentions, but PLDM candidate had the greatest number of appearances in positive context.



### ***Involvement in the election campaign***

In the reporting period the channel Accent TV broadcast 27 items directly or tangentially related to elections. The broadcaster covered various candidates who either carried out campaign events or made statements during television shows, which afterwards served as subject for short news. The channel also aired information on the results of opinion polls, reports issued by nongovernment organizations monitoring the campaign, accusations targeted by some candidates at their counter-candidates and so forth.

### ***Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship***

Out of 27 relevant stories broadcast by Accent TV, 10 (or about 40 percent) were biased, as the indicator is rising compared to previous reporting periods. In most cases the authors did not separate facts from opinions and gave their own evaluations and observations, taking on a role of experts. Specifically, on 2 June Accent TV informed slightly ironically that Vasili Chirtoca, PCRM, boasted that he would recover the lost seeds and would sow the entire country with ecologic vegetable seeds. The same newscast features a story on Serafim Urechean's promises to build houses if he won the elections. In the background section the reporter uses statistical data to prove how expensive would be this election promise and how it will affect the municipal budget. This approach is not typical to all the stories, as there are other presenting election promises in detail without being analyzed by the reporter (see the 4 and 5 June news on PSRM Zinaida Greceanii's vision).

The bias is often obvious in the news focusing on the statements made by some candidates during talk-shows. For example, in the case of PSRM representatives quotes are selected from talk-shows to present details of their views concerning certain solutions to the stringent problems of the capital city (as was the case with the newscasts of 4 and 5 June), whereas in the case of other candidates the focus is on various accusations aimed at other candidates. On 3 June Accent TV aired a story based on the statements made by PDA candidate for mayor Oleg Brega during the channel's talk-show "1+1", from which excerpts were selected where Brega suggested Dorin Chirtoaca to stash up some toasts, because he was likely to go to jail for the illegalities committed during his tenancy as mayor of Chisinau. Nor are facts separated from opinions in the 5 June item on Vasili Chirtoca's statement that some candidates plagiarized his ideas.

In total Accent TV covered 12 candidates, including those running for municipal councilors in Chisinau. Most often Accent TV news featured PSRM, PLDM and PCRM representatives, who were quoted in 4 stories each and were mentioned in one story each. The context was largely positive and neutral for PSRM (4 and 1 times, respectively); positive (2), neutral (2) and negative (1) for PLDM; and neutral (4 appearances) and negative (1 mention) for PCRM. Other candidates also had direct appearances: PCNM

appeared in 2 items and were mentioned in one item, all in neutral context; and PPEM appeared in 3 items and were mentioned in one item, also in neutral context. PDM was mentioned 3 times--2 times in negative context and once in neutral context. PL had 7 mentions and 6 of them were in negative context. Other candidates that were covered—PDA, PLD, PVE, PN—were either quoted directly or mentioned in neutral context.

### ***Correctness and balance of source. Pluralism of opinions***

Pluralism and diversity of sources was not ensured in the relevant stories broadcast by Accent TV during the reporting period. Most of the times the sources quoted in news directly and indirectly concerning elections were politicians (25), followed at great distance by experts (4), citizen (2) and other categories (1). The majority of sources were men (25), whereas women were quoted 7 times as the indicator concerning gender balance represented 21 percent.

About 40 percent of stories had controversial subjects and in most cases (6 times out of 11) these did not provide the right to reply. Particularly, the newscast of 3 June featured a story on Serafim Urechean's promises to build houses if he won the elections. He stated that Dorin Chirtoaca did not build any flat, although he promised to build 10 thousand flats, but Chirtoaca's reply is missing. In another story dated 2 June the protagonist, an independent candidate for mayor of Ungheni, claimed that his former PLDM colleagues created obstacles for him, while the reporter stated that the channel did not succeed to contact the accused. In the news aired on 3 June regarding the accusations of corruption launched by PLD Marcel Darie against CMC secretary and Dorin Chirtoaca the journalist stated that according to Marcel Darie, *Didenco was home but did not come out to comment (!)*. The author did not make any effort to find out the opinion of the accused. The 3 June news on Oleg Brega's suggestion for Chirtoaca *to stash toasts* was also left imbalanced. At the end the public is informed that Chirtoaca did not comment in any way this statement, without the reporter trying to contact him. In the story aired on 3 June presenting the opinion of Grigore Petrenco, PCNM concerning CCA's decision to ban the Russian station Rossia 24, where PCRM appears in a negative light, Accent TV announces again that they did not succeed to contact the accused.

### ***Language and images used***

The stories with direct and indirect relevance for elections that were broadcast by Accent TV had no issues with images or sound that could distort messages.

Therefore, the channel Accent TV did not provide unbiased news, opinion pluralism, diversity and balance of sources. At the same time, the number of stories favoring PSRM decreased, although this candidate continued to enjoy the highest rate of appearances in positive light.

## ONLINE MEDIA

### www.omg.md

#### *Involvement in the election campaign*

During the reference period the portal Omg.md published 58 stories directly or indirectly concerning elections, most of them on 1 June (11), 2 June (15) and 5 June (13). Almost two thirds of the number of articles (37 reports equaling 63.8 percent) were short or detailed news on the campaign and candidates; in 20 cases the stories comprised conflicts or accusations made in electoral context, while one article was on election literacy (the public education campaign “I vote, therefore I am” carried out by CEC).

#### *Impartiality and objectivity*

The editorial policy of OMG.md did not suffer changes compared to the previous monitoring periods. As before, the outlet chooses to cover topics about certain candidates, while the approach is indicative of the fact that the editorial policy does not aim at providing comprehensive information on the campaign but rather at promoting some candidates and presenting in unfavorable light other candidates. Every third story published by Omg.md in the reference period was completely biased and the majority of the remaining items presented only one opinion/position on various topics. Thus, news stories on this portal failed to meet the requirements of impartiality and objectivity.

During 31 May to 7 June the news on Omg.md covered a small number of candidates (8 in total). PDM and its representatives had the most visibility but the context was almost every time negative (in 28 out of 30 stories covering them, PDM was criticized and/or presented in unfavorable context). PLDM, PL and PCRM were also presented frequently in negative light, although less often so than PDM (PLDM: mentioned 22 times, including 18 in negative context; PL: mentioned 17 times, including 15 in negative context; PCRM: covered 18 times (4 direct appearances and 14 mentions), including 12 times in negative context). Ravnopravie movement and Ilan Shor were covered more often in the context of accusations and criticism, every time in negative light (7 cases). At the same time, Omg.md actively promoted Our Party, its leader Renato Usatii and other candidates of this political entity (in 13 cases out of 14 when the party or its representatives were quoted or mentioned, the context was positive).

The titles and value judgements included in texts prove that authors are partial and do not intend to provide objective and unbiased information on various topics. Thus, many titles are speculations, statements are made based on suppositions, and protagonists are labeled in order to disfavor them and so on. When mentioning Vladimir Plahotniuc, Omg.md often highlights, without direct connection to the topic of the article, that he is a businessman with dubious reputation and is practically the owner of the Democratic Party (2 June 2015, the story “Unionists announced the start of disorders”). As far as Renato Usatii and Our Party are concerned, they are eulogized using adjectives that are indicative of the authors' and portal's bias (1 June 2015, the story “Residents of Balti show unprecedented attention towards Renato Usatii” narrates about “an unprecedented meeting with voters” and makes reference to anonymous observers when stating that “no meeting with voters organized ever before by Moldovan politicians was attended by so many people”).

### ***Correctness and balance of source. Pluralism of opinions***

All 58 stories relevant to this monitoring were based on declarations/statements made by 58 sources, including 27 politicians, 22 experts and 9 public officials. Only 6 quoted sources were women (10.4 percent and none of them from the political field), thus the principle of gender balance was not ensured by Omg.md during this period.

The stories treating on conflicts or launched accusations in the context of elections in most cases lacked balance. Examples: In the news “Ursachi: Authorities intend to discredit the protest movement” (1 June 2015), with reference to the declarations of lawyer Ana Ursachi, the authors talk about the “cheap tricks” of Cavaliuc (Head of the General Police Inspectorate, IGP) that would be used to discredit the peaceful protests. The text did not include a reaction to these accusations from the part of IGP or any other law enforcement body. On 5 June 2015 the website published the news “Renato Usatii found out about another act of provocation against Our Party”, with reference to a comment of Usatii on Facebook, where he claims that actions to remove Our Party from the campaign are underway and alludes that PLDM leader Vlad Filat, whom the site labels “former PM dismissed for corruption” and Octavian Mahu, PCR’s candidate for mayor in Balti and main counter candidate of Usatii, are behind them. The opinions of those directly accused were not presented and thus the news lacks balance. The same speculative approach was registered in other articles published by Omg.md. In the news “Plahotniuc’s structures prepare the forgery of voter lists” (5 June 2015) it is insinuated that authorities artificially increased the number of voters with 500 thousands compared to 2003 in order to forge the results of the elections and that this was about to happen with the complicity of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, which Omg.md says is “controlled by businessman Vladimir Plahotniuc with a dubious reputation.” The position of those accused of preparing the election fraud is absent, the article thus lacking balance.

Frequently the website publishes the declarations of certain experts criticizing the government and accusing government parties of various violations, but the reaction of the accused is not sought by Omg.md and the principle of opinion pluralism is not observed.

### ***Language and images used***

The language used by the authors of articles on Omg.md is abundant in pejorative expressions and labels, which are intended at ridiculing certain candidates, other public persons, but also some public institutions.

Overall, the majority of Omg.md news were partial, aiming at promoting some candidates and presenting in unfavorable light other candidates. PDM and its representatives were covered almost every time in negative context, whereas PLDM, PL, PCR, Ravnopravie Movement and Ilan Shor were also criticized and presented often in unfavorable context. At the same time, the website actively favored Our Party and its leader Renato Usatii. The stories treating on conflicts or those that launched accusations in the context of elections in most cases lacked balance and presented only one opinion, without the reply of the accused.

**www.pan.md**

### ***Involvement in the election campaign***

During 31 May--7 June 2015 Pan.md published a total of 26 articles directly or indirectly related to elections, including 12 news items on 12 June 2015. Most of the articles (16) were simple news and opinion articles and in 9 articles a conflict was covered or accusations with electoral context were launched. No voter education articles were published in this period.

### ***Impartiality and objectivity***

The website covered the campaign selectively, focusing in their news and opinion articles on a small number of candidates. A total of 10 candidates were covered in Pan.md news in the reporting week, most of them simply mentioned without being directly quoted and only Our Party, PSRM and PCRM having direct appearances (quotes) in the website's articles. Government parties are frequently subject to criticism (PDM and PLDM each in 11 cases of negative coverage out of a total 16 mentions), as is PL (6 mentions in negative context out of 11). PCRM is presented in various contexts, but more often negative and neutral (5 times each out of 12 times when it was covered, other 2 appearances were in positive context). Our Party and PSRM, on the other hand, are favored by being presented in positive context almost every time when they are covered (6 times each out of 9 and 8 articles, respectively). Generally, the articles published in this period complied with the principle of unbiased coverage of subjects, but the selective approach of topics and the angles of coverage are indicative of the tendency to influence the opinion of readers.

### ***Correctness and balance of source. Pluralism of opinions***

All 26 stories relevant to this monitoring were based on declarations/statements made by 32 sources, including 15 politicians, 8 public officials, 6 experts and 3 ordinary citizens. Only one third of stories about conflicts presented both sides and were more or less balanced, the other 6 articles made reference only to one source and were thus imbalanced. The principle of gender balance was totally neglected by Pan.md: only one quoted source out of 32 was female, representing 3.1 percent. All sources from the political field, public administration and expert community were male.

Some stories deliberately covered only one perspective/position in one or another situation, the message conveyed to readers being in these cases manipulative. For instance, on 4 June 2015 a story was published with the title "Dodon: Chirtoaca is the pawn of oligarchs", with a subtitle in quotation marks "PL received order to act", based on a comment published by PSRM leader Igor Dodon on his blog regarding PL's intention to organize a campaign activity in the center of Chisinau at the same time with the protest of Dignity and Truth Platform. In fact, the text of the article is a complete copy-paste of Dodon's comment where he speculates on "oligarchs' panic because of citizens' meeting planned on 7 June" and the order received by PL, Ghimpu and Chirtoaca from them to impede the protest activity and to create confusion in society by provoking "an ideological conflict with DA Platform in order to compromise it." Although the text abounds in serious accusations against PL and its representatives (Ghimpu, Chirtoaca, Dragutanu), Pan.md did not ask for their opinions.

On 5 June 2015, Pan.md published the article “In order to wreak havoc, 500 Romanian citizen came to Chisinau” with the subtitle “Filat and Ghimpu’s parties ready to adhere to the provocations.” Although the text comprises only the declarations of Renato Usatii on a TV station, where he speculates about a coup d’etat with the implication of PL, PLDM (controlled by V. Plahotniuc) and the Romanian citizen who arrived in Moldova with this specific purpose, nowhere does Pan.md try to refer to supplementary sources, nor does it present the opinions of those accused of this illegal action. Moreover, by these affirmative title and subtitle the website credits this information as trustworthy and presents it as a truth. Thus, Pan.md violated the principle of balance of sources and opinion pluralism.

### ***Language and images used***

In most cases the language of articles on Pan.md observed the norms of good practices in journalism; however some opinion articles contained language deviations and labeling of protagonists. The report “The Square for ours” published on the website on 7 June 2015, where the author narrated generally in an impartial manner on the events that took place in the Great National Assembly Square was accompanied by an image resembling a collage of the photos of Vlad Filat, Ilan Shor and Vladimir Plahotniuc, above the slogan “Thieves to prison”. By choosing to publish this image the website emphasized their attitude towards the people in question.

The general conclusion is that the website Pan.md covered the campaign in a selective manner and the preferential approach of subjects and the angles of coverage are indicative of the tendency to influence the opinion of readers. The government parties (PDM and PLDM) as well as PL are frequently criticized, while PCRM is presented in a different context, more often negative and neutral. Our Party and PSRM are instead favored by a positive context in almost every appearance. In some articles, Pan.md violated the principle of balance of sources and opinion pluralism.

### **www.publika.md**

#### ***Involvement in the election campaign***

**In the reporting period Publika.md published 50 articles directly or indirectly related to elections, including 41 news items, 8 stories on controversial subjects and one piece with educational value (the conditions for requesting the mobile ballot box at home). The most productive day was 2 June 2015, when Publika.md published 10 relevant stories, compared to 4 to 8 stories directly or indirectly related to elections being published in the other days of the monitoring period.**

#### ***Impartiality and objectivity***

**Almost half of the news published on Publika.md (23 out of 50) failed to observe the principle of journalistic impartiality, either due to their title or the observations inserted by journalists in their texts. In most cases this happened in articles which presented candidates running for the office of mayor or councilor. As in previous monitoring periods, Publika.md continued to promote PDM candidates. Overall, this**

party and its candidates were covered 27 times in this week, including 23 times in positive context, and 25 times PDM candidates had direct appearances, meaning that they were quoted and/or made declarations (to compare: at great distance, second most covered comes PLDM with 7 articles, including 3 in neutral context and 2 each in negative and positive context.) Judging by the number of candidates mentioned by Publika.md in this period (10) it can be said that the website lacks the interest to be a source of information about the campaign in all its complexity. The majority of candidates is not mentioned at all or is covered extremely seldom compared to PDM.

*The website promotes PDM candidates for elective positions in the localities of the country, frequently using as argument the accentuation (and in some cases the exaggeration) of the accomplishments of candidates, demonstrating the alleged massive support which they enjoy in communities by selecting only positive opinions, trying to catch readers' attention by using capital letters or writing in bold certain ideas, keywords and messages. Thus, on 31 May 2015 the website published the news "MILLIONS invested in the town of Nisporeni. People are proud of the achievements of the last four years", describing the accomplishments of the present authorities of Nisporeni, which are attributed to Ion Gangan, suspended mayor and PDM candidate. Another story "Strategies for DEVELOPMENT in Moldovan villages. What are the solutions of a PDM candidate for mayor" tells readers about the deeds achieved so far by PDM candidate for mayor of Pelinia village (Drochia district) Vasile Morogai, as well as his plans. On 1 June 2015 the website published the article "Local elections 2015: Drinking water and sewerage are still a dream for the residents of Tiganesti", which presents the solutions to the village's problems of only one candidate for mayor, Valentin Taca. On 2 June 2015, in the article titled "LOCAL ELECTIONS 2015. PDM team appeal to people to give their vote for trustworthy mayors" the election promises of mayors from some localities in Anenii Noi district were covered. On 3 June 2015, in the article titled "LOCAL ELECTIONS 2015: What are envisaging two candidates for mayor in Glodeni district" PDM candidates in the localities Balatina and Danu, Glodeni district, are promoted. On other days during the monitoring period, the editorial policy of indirect election support of PDM candidates continued to be applied as the website informed readers on the "achievements" of PDM candidates registered so far and their "solutions" for the hot issues of some localities in the country. 4 June 2015—Lunga, Floresti district (title: "A hope fulfilled for the residents of a village in Floresti. Until now they used "oil"), the town of Criuleni (title: "LOCAL ELECTIONS 2015: The wonder project that changed the life for 70 families in Criuleni") and Cojusna, Straseni district (title: "The problems of Cojusna residents will be solved! What is the solution of one of the candidates for mayor"); 5 June 2015—Cubolta, Sangerei district (title: "LOCAL ELECTIONS 2015: The Moldovan village where residents are satisfied with the work of the mayor") and Mingir, Hancesti (title: "LOCAL ELECTIONS 2015: Residents of Mingir village, SATISFIED with the changes of the last years"). Even though a number of stories are titled "Local elections 2015" these are actually hidden political advertising, because they present in positive context only one candidate for mayor or councilor—usually the official PDM candidate or one that is supported by this party.*

*In several stories Publika.md promoted PDM candidate for mayor of Balti municipality Serghei Chiseliov (1 June 2015: "Music, fun and presents. Exceptional show for hundreds of children in Balti" on his participation in the activities dedicated to International Children's Day; 2 June 2015: "LOCAL ELECTIONS 2015: A candidate*

*for mayor of Balti municipality promises to create thousands of jobs” on the election promises of the candidate, including the “priority” creation of 20 thousand jobs during the next four years). Concomitantly, Chiseliov’s opponents are presented in an unfavorable context. For example, in a story dated 3 June 2015 “The referendum as an occasion for promoting a candidate for mayor of Balti. What the authorities are saying,” the communists of Balti and PCR candidate for mayor Octavian Mahu are accused of violating the law by initiating a local consultative referendum on a special status for the locality and using it in election purposes by promoting it on billboards. PCR’s right to reply was not provided.*

*As in previous periods, Publika.md covers the work and the public visits of PDM candidate for general mayor of Chisinau Monica Babuc every day, presenting her exclusively in favorable and praiseworthy contexts. On 31 May 2015 the website published the story “On the eve of Pentecost the candidate of PDM for mayor of Chisinau Monica Babuc visited her parents”; on 1 June 2015—the story “On International Children’s Day Chisinau turned into a city of FAIRYTALES”, where we find that “The team of Monica Babuc offered the little ones a fairytale day”; on 2 June 2015—the story “Your Family’s Mayor, increasingly more in demand. Monica Babuc takes stock of these ten days”, on the project launched during the election campaign; on 3 June 2015—the story “Monica Babuc wants more color for Chisinau: Residents need a green, clean and lighted city” on the participation of PDM candidate in the action “Let’s color Chisinau!”; on 4 June 2015 —“Monica Babuc visits the factory Bucuria. The promises of PDM candidate for mayor of Chisinau.” The story “Less politics and more good deeds! PDM is ready for local general elections”, published by Publika.md on 6 June 2015 covered the meeting of PDM municipal structure with the participation of party leaders and candidates for mayor and councilors in the municipality.*

*On 7 June 2015 Publika.md published several items on the activities taking place in the Great National Assembly Square, with pictures and regular updates of the information, but the angle of approach was suggestive of the intention to shift accents, as the report focused exclusively on the conflict between the protesters of Dignity and Truth Platform and PL supporters, mentioning only the slogans chanted against PL and ignoring those against PDM, PLDM and their leaders. Specifically, in the story “Clashes in the center of the capital city. Police form a cordon between DA Platform demonstrators and PL supporters” the author emphasizes that “Demonstrators of the DA Platform entered the mass of liberals and chanted “Shame!”, “Down with Ghimpu!”, “Shame on Chirtoaca!”. Also, the demonstrators of the Liberal Party who gathered in the Great National Assembly Square are booed by people who came at the meeting of DA Platform.” However, readers are not informed about the purpose of the demonstration held by DA Platform and the anti-governmental and anti-Plahotniuc slogans of protesters.*

*In the story “Meeting in the center of the capital city. What the protesters chanted”, published during the same day, there are similar elements of manipulative information. Although announcing that a demonstration is held in PMAN by DA Platform at the same time with a meeting with voters of PL, the authors casually mention that there were anti-government messages, choosing to focus instead on the declarations of people contesting DA Platform and therefore its slogans, which Publika.md omits. Reference is made to the declarations of PNL leader Vitalia Pavlicenco, who participated to DA demonstration with a group of unionists but left “as soon as a statement was read from the tribune on changing the status to political movement” along with those of PL leader Mihai Ghimpu stating that*



*the majority of those who came to DA protest are not citizen who advocate the European direction but are “used” and “brought by bus” to the action organized by businessmen Victor and Viorel Topa, PSRM and PLDM. Thus, the website apparently covered the events of 7 June 2015 but did so in a partisan and biased manner, in order to create the erroneous impression that the events in PMAN were a conflict between PL and DA Platform, conducted by Victor and Viorel Topa, PSRM and PLDM. At the same time, PDM and Vladimir Plahotniuc were apparently not involved in this protest, as the protesters' slogans against them did not make it to the foreground of images and video segments uploaded on Publika.md.*

### ***Correctness and balance of source. Pluralism of opinions***

In the 50 items relevant to elections Publika.md quoted 129 sources--the best indicator among the 5 websites monitored. Mostly, the quoted sources were ordinary citizen (68), followed by politicians (42) and public officials (7), an expert and 11 other categories of sources. Publika.md registered the best gender balance indicator: Out of 129 sources 54 were women, representing 41.9 percent. It should be noted that most female sources (38) were in the ordinary citizen category and their quotes were related to the presentation of PDM candidates for mayor or councilor.

The news on conflicts was generally well balanced.

### ***Language and images used***

The language used in election-related news by Publika.md during the monitoring period was fair, without exaggerations, labeling or offensive words towards the protagonists and/or candidates.

*To sum up, Publika.md continues to act as PDM's speaking trumpet, intensely promoting the party's candidates and showing staged massive support that PDM allegedly enjoyed in communities by selecting only positive opinions. A large amount of text is biased and essentially represent hidden political advertising and/or hidden election propaganda. The number of candidates covered by Publika.md is relatively small, while the majority of candidates is not shown at all or are covered very seldom compared to PDM.*

### **www.timpul.md**

### ***Involvement in the election campaign***

**In the reference period Timpul.md published 14 articles directly or indirectly related to elections, most of them (6) on 3 June 2015. The majority of articles (11) were news, detailed reports and opinion pieces, and other 3 stories covered conflicts or accusations against candidates. No voter education articles were published in this period.**

### ***Impartiality and objectivity***

**With a single exception, the items published on Timpul.md (13 out of 14) observed the criteria of impartial coverage of subjects. The articles covered a very small number of**

**candidates (a total of 6) with the highest visibility for PL (3 direct appearances and 3 mentions). PDM follows with one appearance and 2 mentions, PLDM with 2 direct appearances and other 2 candidates (PSRM and the party Our House Moldova) were covered one time each. PL appeared predominantly in negative context (3 times out of 6) and the other candidates in various contexts.**

### ***Correctness and balance of source. Pluralism of opinions***

In the 14 stories relevant to this monitoring Timpul.md made reference to 12 human sources, most of them politicians (7), 3 experts, one public official and one ordinary citizen. All quoted sources were male, meaning that Timpul.md completely neglected thus the principle of gender balance.

One of the three articles about conflicts/accusations was imbalanced as it presented only one side of the conflict situation. The item is titled “Bacioi mayor hauled to CNA: He allegedly requested several lots from a resident” and is published on 3 June 2015 by taking the text from Publika.md. The article tells about the Bacioi mayor’s house searches during the investigation of a case of corruption. The article states that CNA suspects the mayor of requesting several lots from a local resident in exchange for signing the certificate of acceptance of a building. The opinion of the mayor or that of his lawyer on such a serious accusation is absent.

### ***Language and images used***

The language of news published by Timpul.md during the monitoring was relatively fair, without exaggerations.

Timpul.md covered very few candidates the most visible being PL, which appeared in various contexts—from negative to neutral.

### **www.unimedia.info**

### ***Involvement in the election campaign***

In the reporting period Unimedia.info covered the topic of local general elections in 53 articles, including 33 simple and detailed news items, 18 articles on controversial subjects and 2 voter education articles (requests to vote at the place of stay can be submitted until 13 June 2015; the launch of a new motivational video by Promo-Lex urging voters to participate in elections). The days of 3 and 4 June 2015 were the most prolific—Unimedia.info published 13 and 10 stories with tangential relevance to elections, respectively.

### ***Impartiality and objectivity***

During the reporting week Unimedia.info ensured the greatest diversity of candidates among all monitored websites and published articles (news and interviews) that present many candidates running for general mayor of Chisinau municipality. With a single exception, the articles published by Unimedia.info were impartial (52 out of 53 stories). A

total of 17 candidates were covered, of which 3 had greater visibility (PL: covered 13 times, including 5 direct appearances and 8 mentions; PLDM and PCRM: covered 11 times each, including 7 direct appearances and 4 mentions). The context was diverse, for most of the times neutral, showing that during 31 May—7 June 2015 Unimedia.info did not favor, nor disfavor any candidate.

### ***Correctness and balance of source. Pluralism of opinions***

In 53 relevant stories Unimedia.info quoted 50 sources, the absolute majority of which were politicians (42), including candidates for mayor and/or councilor. Five public officials and 3 experts were also quoted. Unimedia.info failed as well to observe the principle of gender balance: out of 50 sources only 5 were women, representing 10 percent.

Only half of the stories about conflicts or accusations of candidates (9 out of 18) made reference to different sources and provided the right to reply. In the remaining 9 cases the articles were more or less imbalanced. Thus, in a story dated 1 June 2015 “The candidate for mayor of the party Renastere admits having lied on 7 April 2009” based on an interview for the portal, readers are told that Elizaveta Moscalciuc admitted having lied on 7 April 2009, when she styled herself as a high schooler whom professors forced to go to the protests. She claims she was obliged to lie by then-president Vladimir Voronin and former presidential counselor Mark Tkaciuk. The opinions of those directly involved were not presented in this story. On 4 June 2015 Unimedia.info published several items from the press conference of PCRM leader Vladimir Voronin, where he launched accusations against several persons, including PLDM candidate for general mayor of Chisinau municipality Serafim Urechean and PDM leader Marian Lupu. The right to reply was not provided to those accused or ridiculed by Voronin, the portal specifying in one of the articles only that “Marian Lupu has not commented so far on the accusations of PCRM’s leader”, although media institutions should not wait for comments but instead ask for them in order to ensure balance of the news. On 7 June 2015, in the story “Mihai Ghimpu accuses DA Platform of taking to the square PSRM members” PL leader Mihai Ghimpu is quoted saying that the people who came on Sunday to express their protest alongside DA Platform do not support Moldova's European direction. “In reality these were members of the Party of Socialists, our members from the countryside recognized them. Others from “Jos Mafia” headed by Mocanu were also present,” Ghimpu added. Unimedia.info did not ask the opinions of those involved, consequently the article was imbalanced.

### ***Language and images used***

During the reference period the language used by Unimedia.info in election-related news was correct; there were no exaggerations or faked images.

***The general conclusion is that Unimedia.info ensured the greatest diversity of candidates among the monitored websites and during the monitoring week, the candidates were covered without obvious editorial preferences. With only one exception, the stories published by Unimedia.info in this period were unbiased, but not all of them observed the principle of balance of sources.***

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

From 31 May to 7 June 2015 a slight improvement could be noticed in the segments concerning impartiality and objectivity, pluralism of opinions, diversity and balance of sources. Also, a number of the media institutions registered better indicators regarding the observance of the principle of gender equality, although there is a steady trend of quoting predominantly male sources.

Some mass media, especially broadcasters, have changed their editorial policies concerning the coverage of elections, giving up on the practice of aggressive promotion of certain candidates. On the other hand, most websites continued to promote actively the political agenda and the candidates of one political entity to the detriment of other candidates, as the stories about them frequently consisted in hidden election propaganda.

During the reporting period the following trends were visible:

- The public broadcaster Moldova 1 covered the campaign in a fair and impartial manner, ensuring a balance of sources and, partly, a pluralism of opinion. Moldova 1 news did not favor, nor disfavor any candidate in an obvious way.
- The private stations Prime TV and Canal 2, both with national coverage, had a similar editorial policy and covered the campaign with less bias than in the previous monitoring period. The stations partly ensured a pluralism of opinion, a balance of sources but no diversity. **Judging by the frequency and context in which candidates and parties appeared in news, the conclusion is that Prime and Canal 2 slightly favored PDM with a greater number of news with direct and indirect relevance to election.**
- The station TV 7 with regional coverage provided a relatively balanced and impartial coverage, partly ensuring a pluralism of opinions and a diversity of sources but no balance. The broadcaster did not favor any candidate by means of frequent appearances and mentions in news.
- Accent TV failed to provide impartial and objective news, a pluralism of opinion, a diversity and balance of sources. The number of stories favoring PSRM decreased, although this candidate continued to enjoy the highest rate of appearances in positive light. At the same time, the number of stories unfavorable to PL is still high.
- Omg.md covered a limited number of candidates, frequently presenting the Democratic Party and its representatives in an unfavorable light. Concomitantly, Omg.md promotes Our Party;
- The website Pan.md covered the campaign selectively, focusing in their news and opinion articles on a small number of candidates. The government parties are often criticized alongside PL, while Our Party and PSRM are favored by the positive context in which they appeared almost every time they were covered;
- Publika.md continued to promote intensely the candidates of PDM, highlighting their accomplishments and showing a massive support that PDM allegedly enjoyed in communities by selecting only positive opinions;
- Timpul.md published a small number of articles about elections and thus covered a limited number of candidates. Consequently, no candidate was favored or disfavored in an obvious way;
- Unimedia.info ensured the greatest diversity of candidates, the articles about elections were balanced and the candidates were covered without obvious editorial preferences.

## **Annex**

### **Case study no. 5: News titles as a means for manipulating viewers**

This case study is based on the existing regulatory framework for media coverage of the campaign for general local elections on 14 June 2015 and on the analysis of the titles of stories about elections in relation to their content broadcast by Canal 2, Prime TV, Accent TV and TV 7 (Moldova 1 airs news without titles) in the special section of the main daily newscasts from 31 May to 7 June 2015.

#### **Regulatory framework:**

The **Electoral Code** Article 64 (1). Broadcasters, in all their programs, and print media founded by public authorities shall comply with the principles of fairness, responsibility, balance, and impartiality in the coverage of elections.

**Regulations** on the coverage of the campaign for general local elections on 14 June 2015 in the mass media of the Republic of Moldova Item 10: Electoral contestants shall participate in the campaign on an equal basis and shall benefit from non-discriminating treatment in the provision of airtime and publication space in mass media.

Item 19: In broadcasters' newscasts, election campaign events shall be covered in compliance with articles 47, 64, and 641 of the Electoral Code and Article 7 of the Broadcasting Code.

Item 21: Electoral events shall be covered in newscasts and in print media without being accompanied by comments and avoiding distortion of electoral contestants' and Central Electoral Commission messages.

From **Declarations on the editorial policy for the election campaign** approved by the Broadcast Coordinating Council:

**TV Canal 2:** 4. Canal 2 television station will cover the campaign for general local elections on 14 June 2015 while ensuring fair, balanced, and impartial coverage; it will strictly abide by the regulations on the coverage of the campaign for general local elections on 14 June 2015 in mass media approved by decision no. 3266 of the Central Electoral Commission on 17 April 2015 and the concept on coverage of the campaign for general local elections on 14 June 2015 by Moldovan broadcasters approved by the decision of the Broadcast Coordinating Council.

**Prime TV:** 4. Prime TV television station will cover the campaign for general local elections on 14 June 2015 while ensuring fair, balanced, and impartial coverage; it will strictly abide by the regulations on the coverage of the campaign for general local elections on 14 June 2015 in mass media approved by decision no. 3266 of the Central Electoral Commission on 17 April 2015 and the concept on coverage of the campaign for general local elections on 14 June 2015 by Moldovan broadcasters approved by the decision of the Broadcast Coordinating Council.

**Accent TV:** 21. Electoral campaign events may be covered in newscasts only in compliance with the law and in a manner that would avoid distortion of electoral contestants' messages.

**TV 7:** In newscasts, election campaign events will be covered in compliance with articles 47, 64 and 64(1) of the Electoral Code and Article 7 of the Broadcasting Code.

## The title: theoretical guidelines

“The title constitutes the most difficult part of a journalist’s job. A good title complies with 5 requirements:

1. To have a very clear message;
2. The message should be excerpted from the main information of the article, not from the background;
3. To have a strong connection between the text and the title;
4. To be formulated accurately and comprehensibly;
5. To be attractive and offer readers an incentive to read.

An article, even written according to all of Aristotle's principles of good style (clarity, concision, originality, diction) is not a finished product that can be published. It needs an entire series of elements that, although not being intrinsic to the body of the article, are completing, complementing and polishing it. These elements are: the title, the headline (the lead), the subtitles, the images, the captions and the information boxes.”  
(<http://www.usefs.md/PDF/Cursuri%20electronice/Jurnalismul.pdf>)

“The value of the title in the economics of journalism writing is not a decorative one. The title, together with the images, constitutes the first level of reading: the media consumer can decide whether to continue or not to read or view an article/TV story depending on the title. For this reason, it is the title that catches one’s attention, clearing the message.

The definition of the concept of the title is given almost invariably in relation to the content, which it individualizes. Leo H. Hoek notes that the title represents “an ensemble of graphemes designating linguistic elements serving to indicate the context and functioning as the text's proper noun<sup>3</sup>” The title functions as a business card, towards which Schneider and Esslinger, quoted in the volume coordinated by Mihai Coman, have the following expectations:

- 1) to have a very clear message;
- 2) the message should be extracted from the main information in the text, not the auxiliary one;
- 3) the text should be closely connected to its title;
- 4) the title should be formulated appropriately, be easy to understand and unambiguous;
- 5) the title should entice to consume.

A good title is short and unique, original, does not comprise other abbreviations except for very well-known and never starts with an indefinite article. The authors of the *Manual for journalists of Central and Eastern Europe* identified four functions of the title: “sums up the news; marks the importance of articles; are elements that draw one’s attention to the design of the page; determines the reader to read the newspaper<sup>4</sup>”

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<sup>3</sup> *Manual de jurnalism*, coordinated by Mihai Coman, Iași, Polirom, vol. II, 1999

<sup>4</sup> *Manual for journalists of Central and Eastern Europe (Manual pentru ziariștii din Europa Centrală și de Est)*, published by World Press Freedom Committee, 1992, p. 100

## **Findings following title analysis:**

From 31 May to 7 June the titles and content of 76 election-related stories broadcast by 4 stations were analyzed (Moldova 1 does not title its news) (*Annex 1*).

The analysis yielded the following findings:

The stations Canal 2 and Prime TV “harnessed” the International Children’s Day making election propaganda for PDM candidate for mayor of Chisinau. Using attractive titles (“Surprises on Children’s Day”, “Magical show”...) the above-mentioned channels brought additional appeal to PDM’s candidate, as well as to the Edelweiss foundation belonging to a PDM leader.

By titling the news on the same election-related topic the monitored channels convey different information to viewers. For instance, an event organized by PLDM candidate S. Urechean was covered by all 4 stations, which formulated the following titles:

Canal 2—“Urechean’s plans”—a title that does not contain information in fact, and if the viewers do not proceed further to see the story, they will not find out anything about the election promise of the candidate. Or, the purpose of dedicated sections is precisely to introduce voters to the candidates’ programs.

Prime TV—“Urechean wants to demolish the central market”. This title already tells us more information but if we do not follow the story we will have the impression that Urechean is a destroyer. This was probably the purpose of the authors, since the title “covers” only half of the content of the story. Assessing this title, we cannot accuse the authors of fake (which is what they could have probably counted on), but rather of half-truths.

Accent TV—“Urechean: We will demolish the central bus station and will build parking lots”;

TV 7—Serafim Urechean: “We will build multi-level parking lots instead of the central bus station”. The last two titles are in line with quality journalism standards and denote the content of the stories concentrated to a maximum.

Another election event—the project “Your Family's Mayor” of PDM candidate Monica Babuc was covered only by Canal 2 and Prime TV. The TV stations titled their stories “Just launched, already fruitful”, and “*Your Family's Mayor*, increasingly more in demand”, respectively. The first title is more hermetic and appeals to the viewer’s curiosity, because it does not tell much, compared to the second one. But in fact, they manipulate the audience. Upon viewing the stories we find that the project “Your Family's Mayor” is a welcome and successful one, as in the few days since its launch people rushed in with a broad range of problems. Some problems are fixed “on the spot”. The stories succeed in polishing up the candidate's image. But eventually, if the journalists pursued journalism, they would have either ignored the event, as other televisions did, or would have asked themselves: Why do these families have so many problems? Why does PDM want to solve them during the

campaign? Since when do families have so many problems? Who took care of families until now, which party's minister? The authors of the stories certainly did not pursue journalism, because in such case they would have reached an elementary conclusion: If the project "Your Family's Mayor" is so much in demand it means that until now things have not worked in this area and the project's authors do not deserve to be praised, but criticized or ignored. Thus, a manipulative practice can turn everything upside down and distort things, counting on the potential viewers' limited capacity to watch television critically.

In election-related stories we witness titles that favor or disfavor the protagonists by using specific linguistic formulas. For instance, when covering candidates other than those of PDM Canal 2 and Prime TV use in their titles words and phrases stirring negative emotions and feelings, according to the authors' wish. Examples: "Socialists accused of illicit money-making", "Protest in front of a public official's house", "Pressures from the part of election candidates", "The protest of moms with strollers", "Protest with strollers in Chisinau", "Didenco accused of corruption", "Illegal electoral billboards", "Iurie Leanca's bloc accuses" and so forth.

If covering PSRM candidates, Accent TV choses the titles so as to add extra appeal to the protagonists. "Greceanii leads elections in Chisinau—opinion poll", "Greceanii: Minibuses must be kept. People expect stability," "Opinion poll: Zinaida Greceanii—leader in local general elections", "Batrancea: PSRM will bring back most social programs" and so on.

For comparison here are a number of titles of Accent TV news covering other candidates: "PPE accuses PL of pressuring its candidates", "Darie: Corrupt civil servants from the mayor's office protected by Chirtoaca", "PP accuses Chirtoaca of building illegal booths (?)", and other such.

Of course, every candidate is accused sufficiently during the campaign and if a television stands up for somebody, it becomes the protector of that person and ceases to fulfill its mission of adequately informing the voters, losing its media institution status.

Some of the titles of election-related stories have a distinct ironic undertone when it comes to the protagonists. Examples: "Clone wars in Ialoveni", "A reading from Voronin...", "Protest and election propaganda amidst waste". "Chirtoaca, too, wants boats on Bac" (Canal 2), "Battle of namesakes in Ialoveni", "Voronin-style pearls", "The 'manager' on a boat on Bac", "Protest amidst waste", "Two candidates with the same dream" (Prime TV), "PCRM started counting socialists' money", "Voronin criticized the government he voted for" (Accent TV).

This is how TV 7 chose to title its news covering the same election events: "Serafim Urechean promises to clean up river Bac", "Voronin prepared the alternative report on the first 100 days of Gaburici's cabinet", "Members of the Green Ecologist Party alarmed by the problem of the Bubuieci waste deposit", "Serafim Urechean: The ecologic bomb in Bubuieci can be dealt with." The only essential difference between the two ways of creating titles lies in the purpose of each television: that of informing or manipulating viewers.



**Conclusions:**

- Four out of five channels monitored (bar Moldova 1) give titles to their election-related stories.
- Canal 2 and Prime often resort to reprobable techniques in formulating titles for election-related stories, which can generate manipulative effects on viewers. A similar regretful practice can be seen on Accent TV, although less frequently.
- The titles used by Canal 2 and Prime TV in stories covering PDM candidates and those used by Accent TV in stories covering PSRM candidates influence the perception of events as positive ones. The titles of stories covering other events influence their perception as either neutral or negative ones.
- When choosing titles for election-related stories, most often Canal 2 and Prime TV and, to a lesser extent, Accent TV have rather an ideological purpose than an informative one.
- The titles of election-related stories aired by TV 7 are in line with quality journalism standards; if we do not take into account that one candidate (S. Urechean) was covered 4 times in 5 stories.

**Recommendations:**

- Accent TV and, especially, Canal 2 and Prime TV should abandon the practice of manipulating viewers and voters by formulating manipulative titles for election-related stories.
- TV 7 should continue the practice of formulating titles for election-related stories which contain sufficient truthful information.

**Annex 1****Titles of election-related TV stories**

Day	TV stations / Titles			
	TV Canal 2	Prime TV	Accent TV	TV 7
31 May	Strategies for development in Moldovan villages (PDM candidate for mayor of Pelinia village, Drochia district)			
	A new show in the capital city's circus PDM candidate M. Babuc at the circus)			

<b>1 June</b>	A ray of hope on Children's Day (A. Candu with presents for young patients in Chisinau)	Surprises on Children's Day	Chirtoca wants to revive agriculture in the city	Ilan Shor launched his campaign for Orhei mayor
	Clone wars in Ialoveni (two candidates with the same name Gheorghe Caracuiian)	Battle of namesakes in Ialoveni	Urechean: municipal budget funds will be spent on housing for needy people	Serafim Urechean promises accessible housing to young families
	Surprises on Children's Day (M. Babuc during the action "Children's town" with 3 direct quotes)	They celebrated Children's Day in hospital (A. Candu)	Iurie Toma—an independent candidate running for mayor of Ungheni (1 source)	
		Magical show at the secondary boarding school in the capital city ("offered by Edelweiss Foundation")	Căldare: The council of civic activists will fight corruption	
			Ecologists want polygraph tests	
			Petresco: Pressures on "Our house Moldova" continue	
<b>2 June</b>	Urechean's plans	Roof for needy people in Ialoveni (with the presence of PD minister)	The Russian market slightly reopened, producers are dissatisfied (R. Usatii)	Serafim Urechean: "We will build multi-level parking lots instead of the central bus station"
	Just launched, already fruitful (M. Babuc receiving requests from citizen)	Urechean wants to demolish the central market	Greceanii proposes changing the work of municipal councilors (biased)	PPE: The government is afraid of plenary Parliament sessions

		PPEM: The law on the cities of Chisinau and Balti of 2019	Urechean: We will demolish the central bus station and will build parking lots	Two more Moldovan companies could export wine to Russia—R. Usatii
		“Your Family’s Mayor”, increasingly more in demand	Cernei: Lawyers from the mayor's office involved in land sales	Oleg Cernei: Public officials from the mayor’s office contributed to illegal sale of lots
			Parliament took a pause due to its incapacity—Carpov	
<b>3 June</b>	Socialists accused of illicit money-making (V. Gurau)	Didenco accused of corruption	Greceanii leads the elections in Chisinau—opinion poll	Nantoi: Our candidates are pressured (in Bacioi)
	Protest in front of a public official’s house (V. Didenco)	Pressure from election candidates (Bacioi)	PCRM started counting socialists' money (Gurau)	CMC secretary accused of building his house on public money
	Iurie Leanca's bloc accuses PL (Bacioi)	Illegal electoral billboards (of PCRM)	PPE accuses PL of pressuring its candidates (Bacioi)	Serafim Urechean promises to clean up river Bac
		No title (?) about Valeriu Sandul, PD suspended mayor in Molovata Noua	Darie: Corrupt public officials in mayor’s office are protected by Chirtoaca	Voronin prepared the alternative report on the first 100 days of Gaburici’s cabinet
			Petrenco: Suspending Rossia 24 is illegal	
			Brega: Minibuses produce a black hole in the municipal budget	
<b>4 June</b>	The protest of moms with strollers	Voronin-style pearls	Voronin criticized the government that he voted for	Serafim Urechean: The ecologic bomb in Bubuieci can be dealt with
	A reading from Voronin...	A protest with strollers in Chisinau	Greceanii: Minibuses must be kept. People expect stability	Vasili Chirtoca wants to solve the capital city’s issues online

		The 'manager' on a boat on Bac	Urechean: River Bac navigable and with leisure area	Renato Usatii claims authorities intend to ban his party from the campaign
		Cojusna will have drinking tap water	Nantoi and Chirtoca will not pass the test on a lie detector	Members of the Green Ecologist Party alarmed by the problem of Bubuieci waste deposit
				Iurie Leanca urges that the pro-European alliance be restored
<b>5 June</b>	Protest and election propaganda amidst waste	Protest amidst waste (Purcel mine)	Opinion poll: Zinaida Greceanii—leader in local general elections	
	Chirtoca, too, wants boats on Bac	Two candidates with the same dream (Urechean and Chirtoca)	Bătrâncea: PSRM will bring back most social programs	
		European roads in Carahasani	Iurie Leancă: PM Gaburici's report lacks consensus (?)	
			Cernei: Independent candidates are discriminated in media	
			Chirtoca accuses opponents of plagiarism	
			Urechean promises to build a waste recycling facility	
			The "green" ask for Purcel mine to be closed down	
			PP accuses Chirtoca of building booths illegally (?)	

<b>6 June</b>	Rolls began to be printed	PMAN, object of dispute		Our Party informed law enforcement agencies about the provocations prepared against the party
	Chirtoaca's video	Election campaign on 2 wheels		V. Iarotchi runs for municipal councilor in order to change the city for the better
	PL and DA Platform can't seem to share PMAN			PDM's municipal organization from Chisinau holds a forum
	Election campaign on wheels			