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

Final Report  
1 May–14 June 2015

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### 3. Monitoring Data



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

From 1 May to 14 June 2015, public TV station Moldova 1 actively covered the campaign: It aired 185 items that directly or indirectly covered the elections. Some of them directly covered the campaign including the activities of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) and the activities of the candidates but also problems at city hall in the capital or at some ministries and public servants. Among the news items that indirectly covered the elections were the ones about the allowances granted to WWII veterans, the new trolleybuses to be in operation by the end of 2015, renovations to several national roads, and the negotiations with farmers and solutions offered by Parliament, among others.

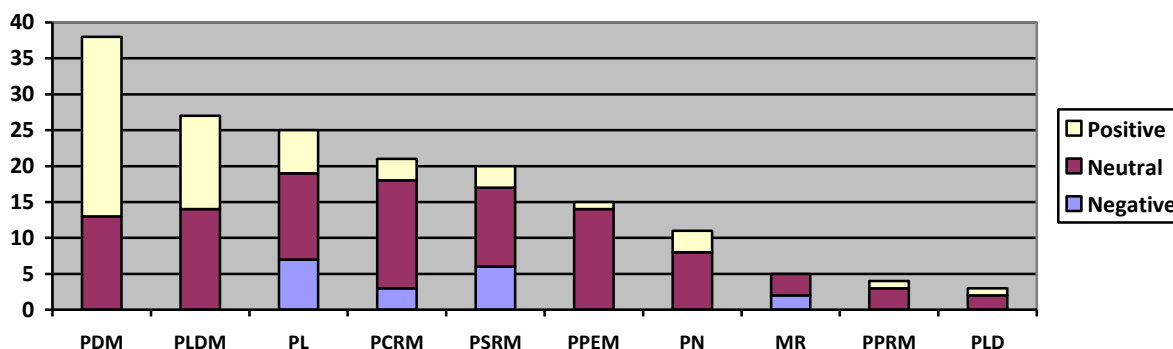
#### ***Objectivity and impartiality/political partisanship***

During this monitoring period, the relevant new items broadcast by Moldova 1 had no deviations from journalistic norms that could distort the information provided to the public. Of the of 175 news items with a direct or indirect electoral content, most presented objective and unbiased information. No significant problems were identified in relation to separating facts from opinions or to discrimination against any candidate. Six stories or 3% of the total were troublesome; in most cases they displayed a lack of separation of facts from opinions. Among those were (i) the item about the quarrel between Mayor Dorin Chirtoacă and the representatives of the Socialist Party (PSRM) and of Our Party (PN) during the last meeting of the Chișinău Municipal Council (CMC) (14 May) in which the reporter displayed his personal opinion about the main subjects of the story in the statement ‘...the representatives of PN and of the PSRM made a common front and impeded starting the last meeting of the Chișinău Municipal Council. They starting fighting as if they had completely forgotten they were in a public institution’ (*.. reprezentanții Partidului Nostru și cei ai PSRM au făcut front comun și au dat peste cap începerea ultimei ședințe a consiliului municipal Chișinău. Ei au sărit la bătaie ca la ușa cortului, uitând că se află într-o instituție publică*); (ii) the story on 15 May about, “...a new scandal involving socialist MPs who chose to make the law with their fists” (“...un nou scandal cu implicarea deputaților socialiști care au ales să facă legea cu pumnul”); and (iii) the items on 26 May and 31 May about the intention of Bălți municipal councilors to hold a referendum in order to gain greater financial autonomy.

Throughout the campaign, the public broadcaster featured 13 candidates in its news pieces including those in races for Chișinău municipal offices. In terms of coverage, the PDM was the most favored party as its representatives were featured in 33 news stories and were mentioned in 5 more in mainly positive (25) and neutral (13) contexts. The PDM got more coverage than other parties due to stories of an indirect nature that featured their members, i.e., the Minister of Transport and Road Infrastructure, the Speaker of Parliament, and the Minister of Culture.

Other candidates were featured less frequently and in different contexts. The Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM) was featured in 14 stories and was mentioned in 13 more in both positive and neutral lights to the same extent; the Liberal Party (PL) was featured and mentioned in 13 stories mainly in a neutral context (12 cases) but also in positive and negative contexts; the Communist Party (PCRM) was featured in 12 stories and was referred to 10 times mainly in a neutral light but also in positive and negative contexts; the PSRM appeared in 9 news stories and was mentioned in 10 others mainly in a neutral context (11 cases) but also negative and positive lights; the Electoral Bloc European Popular Party – Iurie Leancă (PPEM) was featured in 10 stories and was mentioned in 6 more mainly in a neutral light (15 times). Representatives of the PN, the Popular Party of Moldova (PPRM), the Party for Democracy at Home (PDA), the Movement Ravnopravie (MR), the Party of Law and Justice (PLD) and several independent candidates for the positions of Chişinău municipal councilors were also covered.

**Figure 1: Top 10 parties covered on Moldova 1**



PDM=Democratic Party; PLDM=Liberal Democratic Party; PL=Liberal Party; PCRM=Communist Party; PSRM=Socialist Party; PPEM=Elecoral Bloc European Popular Party; PN=Our Party; MR=Movement Ravnopravie; PPRM=Peoples' Party; PLD=Party of Law and Justice.

### ***Pluralism of opinions/fairness and balance of source***

When covering the election campaign, the public broadcaster provided pluralism and diversity of opinions in relevant stories to a certain degree. Most frequently, Moldova 1 featured politicians as sources as they were quoted 116 times. Civil servants were interviewed 57 times, experts 29 times, and citizens 28 times. In 35 cases, Moldova 1 used other sources. It is to be noted that of the total number of 265 sources, 41 were female representing 16%. This indicator reveals an obvious lack of gender balance; it oscillated throughout the campaign revealing the fact that reporters did not take this criterion into account when choosing sources for interviews.

From 1 May to 14 June 2015, Moldova 1 broadcast 22 stories about conflicts; 14 items (63%) were balanced, but 8 failed to present the sides of both parties involved. Examples of unbalanced items were (i) the news story on 13 May about the statements of PN leader Renato Usatîi during the CMC meeting that several lots municipal property were going to be sold for a lower price than their real value; (ii) the item on 14 May about the protests of the PSRM and PN members and their supporters against the CMC intention to pass a package of laws; (iii) the story about discussions in Parliament on this matter (14 May); (iv)

the news report on 15 May about the quarrel between PRSM MPs and employees of a construction company; (v) the news story on 26 May about the intention of the PCRМ councilors of Bălți municipality to hold a referendum in order to gain greater financial autonomy; (vi) the news story on 9 June about accusations launched against Ilan Shor, mayoral candidate for Orhei, for corrupting voters.

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

From 1 May to 14 June 2015, no cases of using discriminatory language against the candidates or of videos capable of distorting reality or creating premises for doubting the observance of ethical and professional standards by Moldova 1 journalists were registered.

In conclusion, from 1 May to 14 June 2015 the public broadcaster covered the elections in a relatively fair and unbiased way, providing some balance of sources and pluralism of opinions. Judging from the frequency and context in which candidates and parties appeared in news items; Moldova 1 provided more coverage to the PDM as its representatives were featured in many stories with indirect electoral content, mainly in a positive light.



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

Prime TV with national coverage actively covered the election campaigns of mayoral candidates for Chişinău and for other town halls across the country. From 1 May to 14 June, Prime TV broadcast 134 stories directly or indirectly related to elections in its main newscast. Most stories directly covered the campaign and were about the activities of the CEC and the campaign events of candidates in the race. Among the news items that indirectly covered the elections but still carried an information load that could influence the electorate's perception of certain candidates were (i) the news story about the construction of European quality roads featuring the Minister of Transport and Road Infrastructure (member of the PDM); (ii) the items about solutions for farmers quoting the Speaker of Parliament (member of the PDM); (iii) the launch of a public housing project for vulnerable families in Ialoveni with the participation of Minister of Regional Development and Construction (member of the PDM); (iv) the reports about various charity activities carried out by the Edelweiss Foundation; and (v) cultural events featuring the Minister of Culture Monica Babuc, the PDM mayoral candidate for Chişinău mayor. This TV station chose, however, not to report the results of the opinion poll conducted by CBS AXA according to which the PDM, PLDM, and PCRМ would get fewer votes together than the PSRM alone.

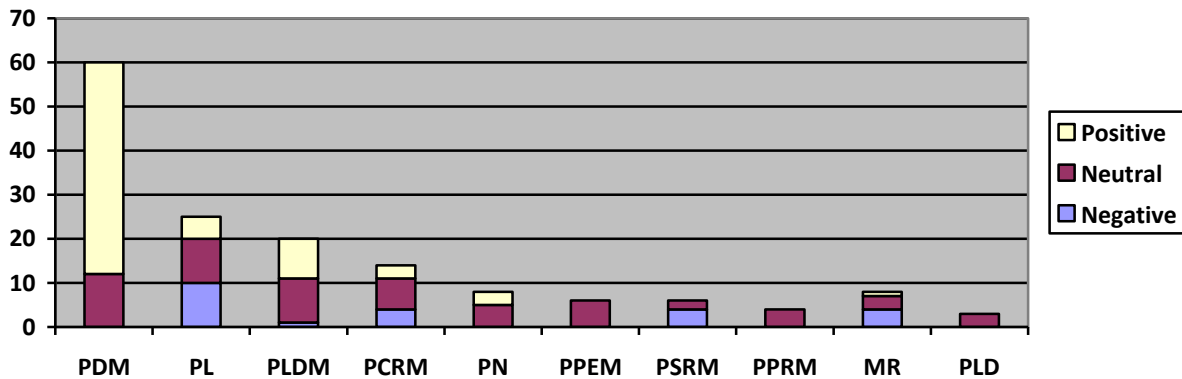
The vast majority of news reports that covered the elections across the country as a rule portrayed various difficulties faced by certain communities followed by information about persons who provided solutions for these problems, mostly members of the PDM. It is to be noted that the number of such stories significantly decreased during the last two weeks of the campaign (31 May to 14 June).

### ***Impartiality and objectivity/political partisanship***

During the monitoring period, Prime TV broadcast 23 (17%) biased items that either failed to separate facts from opinions or displayed the author's attitude. The number of such items increased until the middle of the campaign (15–30 May) then decreased. In most cases, such news reports were about the launches of the campaigns of various candidates for mayor across the country, and the headlines, the crawling titles, and the leads were full of adjectives meant to present their actions in a positive manner such as (i) the story on 31 May about repaired roads, a functional culture house, and street lights in Nisporeni; (ii) the report on 3 June about the projects implemented over the past years by the mayor of Molovata Noua in Dubasari District who repaired the kindergarten, restored the culture house, provided street lighting, arranged the village museum, and opened a family medicine center; (iv) the news item on 9 June about the promises made by Urechean to digitalize city hall; and (v) the story on 11 June about the exciting atmosphere in Bălți during a concert organized by the PDM. There were several cases when reporters did not separate facts from opinions, among them the news story about the launch of the PN team into the campaign on 26 May in which the author drew conclusions about the party's candidates and added personal comments on the lack of integrity of certain candidates on the list. On 7 June the channel aired news on the protests held in the Great National Assembly Square shifting the emphasis from anti-government and anti-PD messages to the dissenting positions of representatives of PL and those of the Dignity and Truth Civic Platform. Filtering information with the aim of protecting certain candidates is indicative of manipulation and disinformation. There are more details in Case Study No. 4 in the Annex.

Overall, Prime TV covered the activities and statements of 13 candidates. The frequency, with which the PDM and its leaders and candidates were featured as sources and the angle of approach to events demonstrated editorial approval of this party. In all, 48 of the 60 items that covered representatives of the PDM were positive; in other cases the context was neutral. It is to be noted that during the second part of the campaign there was a decrease in the number of positive stories about the PDM as well as a slight increase in the number of items covering other parties. The second most covered party was the PL with only 12 features and 12 mentions, mainly in neutral and negative contexts (10 each), and the PLDM that was featured in 17 times and referred to in 3, mainly in neutral and positive lights (10 and 9, respectively). To a greater extent, the stories covering other parties contained accusations against opponents and information about their platforms or campaign activities to a lesser extent. Thus, the candidates of the PL, PLD, PPEM, PCRM, MR, PPRM, the Electoral Bloc the List of People (BeLP), and the Green Ecology Party (PVE) were featured mainly in stories about conflicts and were mentioned mainly in neutral and sometimes negative lights.

**Figure 2: Top 10 parties covered on Prime TV**



PDM=Democratic Party; PL=Liberal Party; PLDM=Liberal Democratic Party; PCR=Communist Party; PN=Our Party; PPEM=Elecoral Bloc European Popular Party; PSRM=Socialist Party; MR=Movement Ravnopravie; PPRM=Peoples' Party; PLD=Party of Law and Justice.

***Pluralism of opinions/fairness and balance of source***

During the reporting period, a large number of stories covering elections on Prime TV presented information from a single perspective without background details and experts' opinions that could have provided comprehensive information about the election. Politicians were the most quoted sources at 119, most of them members of the PDM. The principle of diversity of sources was thus not observed. Civil servants were quoted 45 times, citizens 75 times, and experts 7 times. Other sources were cited 14 times. Citizen sources were quoted in support of actions of candidates outside the capital.

From the perspective of gender balance, the number of female sources and of women as main subjects of the reports increased throughout the campaign. The TV station quoted 78 women or 27% of the total number of 288 sources. The percentage increased as citizens were interviewed more often.

During the reporting period, Prime TV broadcast 21 stories about controversies; 14 (66%) provided the right to reply to the accused. Among the unbalanced news items were the (i) the news report on 15 May featuring the quarrel at a construction site involving several socialist MPs and (ii) the story on 19 May about the request of the communist councilors of Chişinău to revoke the parliamentary immunity of five socialist MPs for their altercations at the CMC and at a construction site in the capital. In the news item on 19 May, at the end of the story the reporter mentioned that, "Socialists haven't so far commented on the accusations," without clarifying whether any attempt had been made to contact them.

***Language and images used***

During the reporting period, no cases were registered on Prime TV of using discriminatory language when addressing the candidates or of videos capable of distorting reality.

In conclusion, Prime TV covered the campaign in a biased way providing pluralism of opinions and balance to some extent but not a diversity of sources. The TV station did balance sources in most stories about conflicts and especially by gender as this was one of

the best scores for this indicator among the TV stations monitored. This TV station obviously favored the PDM as its representatives and members benefited from most features in a positive context and also from biased news items that emphasized the achievements and successes of PDM candidates.



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

From 1 May to 14 June, Canal 2 broadcast 103 stories that directly or indirectly covered the elections. Most were either about press events organized by candidates or about their reactions to statements or accusations launched by their opponents. Canal 2 had relatively fewer reports about CEC activities. This TV station chose, however, not to report the results of the opinion poll conducted by CBS AXA according to which the PDM, PLDM, and PCRM would gain fewer votes together than the PSRM alone. Canal 2 also broadcast several stories with subliminal electoral content such as the story about the activities of the PDM (launch of the Family Month Campaign, Marian Lupu's meeting with citizens in Orhei, his participation in the inauguration of a monument in Cunicea Village, stories about commissioning roads with the participation of Minister of Transport Vasile Botnari, and cultural events featuring the Minister of Culture Monica Babuc). In fact, with few exceptions the news stories were produced in a similar way as those on Prime TV employing the same angles and the same sources. Even the same formula was applied: First present problems faced by communities and then feature candidates who could solve those problems. It is noteworthy that during the last two weeks of the campaign, 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***

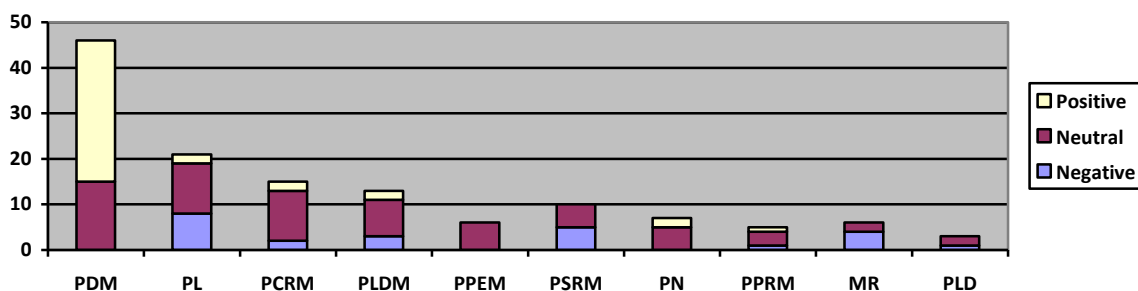
Of the 103 relevant items, 30 had problems in terms of objectivity and impartiality. Among those were items about the proposals of candidates supported by the PDM such as the news report about the mayoral candidate for Șofrâncani Village, Edineț District (17 May); the item with the headline "Successful projects in Ialoveni," about the achievements of the mayoral candidates for Ialoveni and Costești villages; and the item about the achievements of the mayor of Rublenița Village, Soroca District (19 May) during 16 years in office.

There were several cases when reporters did not separate facts from opinions. Here are a few examples: (i) the news story about the declared income of Ilan Șor, MR mayoral candidate for Orhei on 26 May; (ii) the news story on the PN joining the campaign on 12 May; (iii) the story on 12 May about Vasile Chirtoca, PCRM candidate entering the race for mayor of the capital; (iv) the news report on 2 June about the accusations of corruption launched by a PCRM representative against PSRM; (v) the story on 7 June about the protests held in the Great National Assembly Square on the conflict between representatives of PL and those of the Dignity and Truth Civic Platform without the anti-government and anti-PD messages thus manipulating information by filtering it. There are more examples in Case Study No. 4 in the Annex.



The relevant stories covered 13 candidates; the PDM was at the forefront as it was featured in 44 items, 2 in a positive context and the rest in a neutral one. The PL was featured in 12 news items and was mentioned in 9 others mainly in neutral and negative lights, and the PCRM was quoted 11 times and was mentioned 4 times mainly in a neutral context. PLDM representatives were quoted in 8 news reports and were mentioned in 5 more mainly in a neutral context; the PPEM was featured in 6 neutral stories; the PN was featured 5 times and was mentioned once mainly in a neutral light (5 times). The PSRM was quoted and mentioned 5 times each in relevant stories in equally neutral and negative contexts. The other candidates and the events they organized shared the information space of Canal 2 almost equally both quantitatively and qualitatively.

**Figure 3: Top 10 parties covered on Canal 2**



PDM=Democratic Party; PL=Liberal Party; PCRM=Communist Party; PLDM=Liberal Democratic Party; PPEM=Elecoral Bloc European Popular Party; PSRM=Socialist Party; PN=Our Party; PPRM=Peoples' Party; MR=Movement Ravnopravie; PLD=Party of Law and Justice.

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

The relevant news items broadcast by Canal 2 during the reporting period had problems with diversity and pluralism of opinions. Journalists quoted ordinary citizens 127 times, especially in reports about the PDM at local city halls followed by politicians 97 times, most of whom were from the PDM. Civil servants were quoted 39 times and experts 2 times; there were 27 other sources. Female sources amounted to 35%; most of them were ordinary citizens. The increase in number of citizens quoted is notable, however experts were quoted very seldom although their opinions were required in several cases when the news item should have been balanced by details provided by experts, commentators, or political analysts to help viewers better understand the topics discussed.

Of the 22 news stories on conflicts, the coverage of 13 (59%) was balanced, but in 8 cases the reporters failed to balance sources. Among them were (i) the news item on 4 May about the CEC decision to exclude the Reformed Communist Party from the elections; (ii) the news story on 15 May featuring the quarrels at a construction site and at the CMC involving several socialist MPs; (iii) the news story on 19 May about the PCRM request to withdraw the parliamentary immunity of the socialist MPs who were allegedly involved in those quarrels; (iv) the news item on 22 May about the accusations launched by the PPEM candidate Oazu Nanatoi against the PCRM and the PSRM concerning the intention of Bălți municipal councilors to hold a referendum; (v) the news report on 2 June about the protest organized by Marcel Darie of the PLD together with his supporters in front of the CMC secretary's house and a flash mob organized by the same candidate on 8 June.



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

Throughout the monitoring period, Canal 2 did not exaggerate or use inappropriate language in the news pieces aired. The reporters did not label candidates, and images and montage also complied with ethical and professional standards.

In conclusion, Canal 2 performed in a rather biased way providing a balance of sources in controversial stories to a certain degree but failed to ensure a pluralism of opinions and diversity of sources. At the same time, Canal 2 ensured gender balance to some extent as this was the best score for this indicator among the TV stations monitored. Judging by the frequency and context in which candidates and parties were featured in news reports, Canal 2 obviously favored the PDM as its representatives and members were featured the most frequently, all in a positive context.



TV 7

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

TV 7 with regional coverage was engaged relatively actively in the election covering events directly related to the campaign and events/situations that tangentially referred to the elections. Overall, TV 7 broadcast 126 relevant new reports in its main newscast. The following issues were covered:

- the launches of the campaigns of Chişinău mayoral candidates from several parties;
- campaign activities, statements, and accusations launched by several candidates against their competitors;
- opinion polls about the mood of the electorate during the campaign;
- the work of the CEC as well as of non-government organizations monitoring the campaign.

Other stories on the TV 7 newscasts had an indirect electoral connotation tackling, for example, the work of the CMC and the mayor's office, the activities of MPs in the context of farmers' strikes, and developments in the Banca de Economii lawsuit.

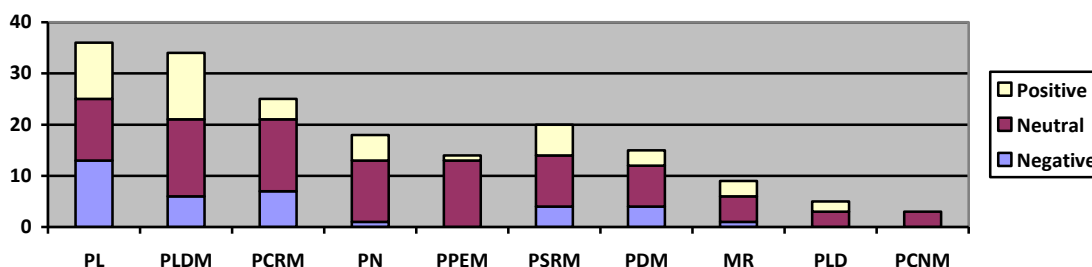
### ***Impartiality and objectivity/political partisanship***

Most news stories broadcast by TV 7 during the reporting period were produced in a correct manner without deviations from journalistic norms that might have distorted candidates' messages. Monitoring did not identify problems related to the separation of facts from opinions or the truncation of information that could modify meanings in the context in which statements were made or in which events took place. In seven cases (5%) the reporter's opinion about the subject was evident. Among these were (i) the story on 14 May about altercations at the CMC in which the narrator's voice said that, "...representatives from Our Party and the Party of Socialists broke into city hall one step from joking to fighting, and the socialists continued attacking after the conflict had subsided" ("*...reprezentanții PN și PSRM au dat buzna în localul Primărie, că de la glume la bătaie nu era decât un pas și că socialiștii au continuat atacurile și după ce conflictul s-a potolit*"), (ii) the news item on 18 May featuring the court hearing in the Banca de Economii lawsuit

in which MR leader Ilan Shor was involved; and (iii) the report on 26 May about the initiative of the communist councilors in Bălți to hold a referendum to gain more rights.

Overall during the monitoring period, the PL and PLDM benefited most. PL representatives were featured in 11 stories and were mentioned in 25 news items in positive, negative and neutral contexts relatively equally; PLDM candidates were featured 18 times and were mentioned 16 more. The contexts varied: 13 times it was positive, 6 times it was negative, and 15 it was times neutral. The PCRM was quoted 10 times and was mentioned in 25 items mainly in neutral (14), but also in negative (7) and positive (4) contexts. The PN was featured in 11 stories and was mentioned in 7 more mainly in neutral contexts (12 times), and the PPEM had 9 features and was referred to 5 times mainly in a neutral light (12). The PSRM was quoted in 8 stories and was mentioned in 12 mainly in a neutral context (8 times). Other candidates had fewer features in different contexts: Overall, the TV station featured 16 candidates in its news pieces including those in races for Chişinău municipal offices.

**Figure 4: Top 10 parties covered on TV 7**



PL=Liberal Party; PLDM=Liberal Democratic Party; PCRM=Communist Party; PN=Our Party; PPEM=Elecoral Bloc European Popular Party; PSRM=Socialist Party; PDM=Democratic Party; MR=Movement Ravnopravie; PLD=Party of Law and Justice; PCNM=Our House Moldova Party.

### ***Pluralism of opinions/fairness and balance of source***

The relevant news broadcasts by TV 7 quoted diverse sources. Most were politicians who were quoted 105 times followed by civil servants 48 times. Experts were quoted 13 times and ordinary citizens 43 times. Other sources were used 27 times. Of the total number of 236 sources, 54 (23%) were female which indicates a lack of gender balance.

TV 7 did not always observe the principle of diversity and balance of sources/positions/opinions, especially in stories about conflicts, accusations, or controversial issues. For instance, of the 35 stories about conflicts, in only 20 (57%) was the right to reply provided, and in one item the balance was ensured to a certain degree. The following stories failed to present the other side in the conflict: (i) the news item on 3 June about Marcel Darie, the PLD candidate, picketing the CMC secretary's house; (ii) the report on 4 June with the headline "Voronin: Ministers disobey the cabinet" ("*Voronin: Miniştrii nu se supun cabinetului de miniştri*"); (iii) the story on 5 June featuring the title "Members of the Green Ecology Party alarmed by the problem of the Bubuieci waste deposit" ("*Membrii Partidului Verde Ecologist sunt alarmaţi de problema gunoiştii Bubuieci*"); (iv) the news item on 8 June about the flash mob organized by Marcel Darie, the PLD candidate,

to protest against tobacco kiosks; (v) the item on 9 June about accusations of Igor Dodon according to which the representatives of SE Registru intended to falsify voter lists; and (vi) the story on 11 June about Grigore Petrenco of the PCNM accusing police of intimidating the party activists.

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

The language used by TV 7 in its broadcasts during the reporting period was acceptable; no deviations from journalistic norms were recorded. There were no cases of video manipulation.

In conclusion, TV 7 performed in a balanced, objective, and unbiased way providing pluralism of opinions to a certain degree; however, not all broadcasts managed to provide a diversity of sources or gender balance. Also, some controversial stories did not provide a balance of sources. This TV station covered the largest number of candidates; the PL and PLDM benefited from the most features and mentions in various contexts showing no evident favoritism for or criticism of any party.



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

From 1 May to 14 June 2015, Accent TV was very actively involved in the campaign broadcasting a total of 162 stories that directly or indirectly covered the elections. Accent TV mainly covered various events organized by the PSRM both in Chişinău and outside the capital, various activities carried out by the PN, the press conferences held by PCNM representatives, and about the launch of the campaigns or the visions of certain candidates for solving specific issues in Chişinău including Dorin Chirtoacă (PL), Oazu Nantoi (PPEM), Serafim Urechean (PLDM), Oleg Brega (Democracy at Home Party [PDA]), Marcel Darie (PLD), and Vasili Chirtoca (PCRM). The broadcaster covered various candidates during campaign events or making statements during television shows that afterwards served as subjects for short news items. Other stories concerned the controversies around the CMC enactment of a package of laws, the attempts of the PSRM to hinder their enactment, the involvement of socialist MPs in the disputes over the construction of an apartment building, and developments in the Banca de Economii lawsuit.

### ***Impartiality and objectivity/political partisanship***

In all, 36 (23 %) of the 162 relevant items were biased as the author's position was obvious. Bias was obvious in the selection of topics for newscasts and in reporters' attitudes as well as in some journalists' comments and their failure to separate facts from opinions. Examples include the item on 11 May about parents of students in a Chişinău school protesting in which the reporter claimed that Dorin Chirtoacă, "...was not worried that parents paid for repairs and that he used the occasion for campaigning, promising that children will remain for four more years." ("*...Dorin Chirtoacă nu s-a arătat deranjat de faptul că părinții au plătit pentru reparații și nu a pierdut ocazia să facă campanie electorală, promițând că copiii vor rămâne încă patru ani* ") and the story on 11 May about the PDMs Family Month Campaign promoting messages that could generate animosity and offensive and

discriminatory treatment of a certain minority group. Other news items that included the reporter's attitude were about the campaign launch of PCRM candidate Vasili Chirtoacă on 15 May, the statements of PN hopeful Ilan Cașu about his competitor Dorin Chirtoacă in which the reporter referred to experts as a whole to present Chirtoacă in a negative light (22 May), and the item about the accusations launched by the independent candidate for Chișinău mayor Oleg Cernei on 27 May who blamed Dorin Chirtoacă for chaos in public transportation. In the background information, the reporter reminded the audience about the decisions of the Mayor Chirtoacă related to changing the routes of public transport and mentioned that, "The mayor was not satisfied, so he changed the minibus routes a few more times overnight without warning thus causing even more inconvenience to the capital's residents.

Bias is obvious also from the way the reporter selectively quoted the candidates leaving out basic information on their party platforms and including statements/accusations of corruption instead (see for instance the statements of Oazu Nantoi, the PPEM candidate, during a TV show on 22 May and the accusations against Mayor Chirtoacă launched by Mihai Cârliig, the PPRM candidate, on 26 May.

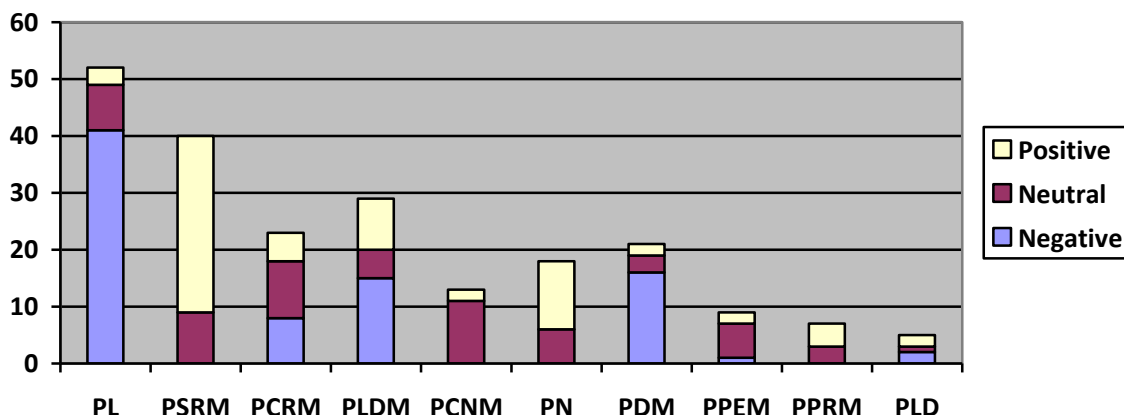
In some cases, the news items presented information based on candidates' statements on TV shows (on Accent TV or other broadcasters) that reporters refuted in the same news story by indirectly quoting anonymous experts. For instance, with respect to the issue of mansards, in the news story on 26 May that presented the opinion of Marcel Darie, the PLD candidate for Chișinău mayor, at the end the reporter referred to anonymous experts who were against mansard roofs. In the news item on 2 June about Urechean's promises to build houses if he won the election, the reporter used statistical data to prove how expensive this election promise would be and how it would affect the municipal budget. This approach is not typical as other election promises were presented in detail without such an analysis by the reporter. For example, quotes of PSRM representatives were selected from talk shows on which they presented details of their views concerning certain solutions for problems in the capital city (as was the case with the newscasts of 4 and 5 June) whereas in the case of other candidates, the focus was on various accusations leveled. See more examples in Case Study No. 3 in the Annex.

During the final week of the campaign, the TV station broadcast election propaganda encouraging the audience to vote for PSRM instead of PL, e.g., the news report on 8 June in which Igor Dodon referred to the Prime Minister demanding the resignation of the leadership of several state institutions including that of General Prosecutor and the story on 10 June about Dodon meeting with businessmen from the Central Market.

In total, Accent TV covered 14 candidates, including those running for municipal councilors in Chișinău. Dorin Chirtoacă, the PL mayoral candidate for Chișinău, had the most features and mentions mainly in negative contexts (41 times), but in most cases he was featured in neutral stories. Next was the PSRM; it was featured 40 times in 31 positive items and 9 neutral ones. The PN was quoted in 16 stories and was mentioned in 3 more; in 12 cases the context was positive; the rest were neutral stories. The party Our House Moldova (PCNM) was featured 11 times and was mentioned in 2 more mainly in a neutral light (11 cases), the PCRM was quoted 15 times and was referred to in 9 other cases mainly in

neutral (10) and negative (8) contexts, the PLDM had 11 features and 18 mentions mainly in a negative light (15) but also in positive and neutral ones. The PDM representatives were quoted in 3 news items and were mentioned in 18 more, mainly in a negative context (16 times). Other candidates were featured either in neutral or negative lights but seldom in a positive context.

**Figure 5: Top 10 parties covered by Accent TV**



PL=Liberal Party; PSRM=Socialist Party; PCRM=Communist Party; PLDM=Liberal Democratic Party; PCNM=Our House Moldova; PN=Our Party; PDM=Democratic Party; PPEM=Elecoral Bloc European Popular Party; PLD=Party of Law and Justice.

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

In most cases, the information was presented from one perspective only, thus Accent TV failed to ensure a diversity of sources. Relevant news stories mainly quoted politicians (167 times). Civil servants were quoted 13 times, experts 14 times, and citizens 40 times. Other sources were used 13 times. Of the 257 quoted sources, 51 were women representing 20%.

Of the 74 stories on controversies, only 27 (36%) presented the opinions of all parties concerned; the rest presented only one side, as a rule that of the PSRM and the PCNM. Among the stories lacking balance were the news items about corruption accusations against Dorin Chirtoacă (12 May), Igor Dodon’s accusations against members of the governing coalition (12 May), protests at city hall organized by the PSRM (14 May), the corruption allegations launched by the PSRM against Chişinău mayor (19 May), the CMC session on 19 May, the accusations of Mihai Cîrlig of the PPRM against Dorin Chirtoacă (20 May), the story about keeping the PCNM candidates in detention (18, 19, 29 May), the news item about Mr. Chirtoacă causing chaos in public transportation (27 May), news stories containing opinions about protests held on 7 June (8 June), and the opinion of Igor Dodon about the resignation of Prime Minister Gaburici (12 June). In the news aired on 3 June regarding the accusations of corruption launched by PLD candidate Marcel Darie against the CMC secretary and Dorin Chirtoacă, the journalist stated that “...according to Marcel Darie, Didenco was home but did not come out to comment (!)” (“..din spusele lui Marcel Darie, Didenco era acasă, dar nu a ieşit afară ca să facă comentarii”) The author did not make any effort to find out the opinion of the accused. In some cases, the reporter mentions at the end of news items that, “At the moment, the persons concerned have not

commented in any way on what happened," or that "Accent TV did not succeed in finding the persons concerned to request their comments and to provide them with the right to reply." This is a vague statement as it does not clarify whether the journalist made any attempts to ensure a balance of sources. See more examples in Case Study No. 6 in the Annex.

### ***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.

To sum up, Accent TV did not provide unbiased news, pluralism of opinion, or a diversity and balance of sources. In addition, from the perspective of gender balance the stories mainly quoted male sources. Judging from the frequency and context in which candidates and parties appeared in news items, Accent TV massively criticized the PL as its representatives were featured mainly in a negative light, and during the last week of the campaign several items of electoral propaganda favoring the PSRM were aired.

### **[www.omg.md](http://www.omg.md)**

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

Omg.md was the most active of the 5 monitored websites as from 1 May to 14 June 2015 it posted 315 stories that directly or indirectly covered the local general elections. Nearly two thirds of articles (206) were short or detailed news stories, 105 referred to conflicts or launched/covered accusations, and 4 postings were voter educational items. The topics were mainly criticism of the work of the current government and of the PL mayoral candidate for Chişinău; the intentions to register and the registration of candidates for mayor of Chişinău and Bălţi from the PN and the PCNM (the Red Bloc); the actions, statements, and accusations of businessman and politician Renato Usatîi; and protests and other street demonstrations held throughout this period.

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

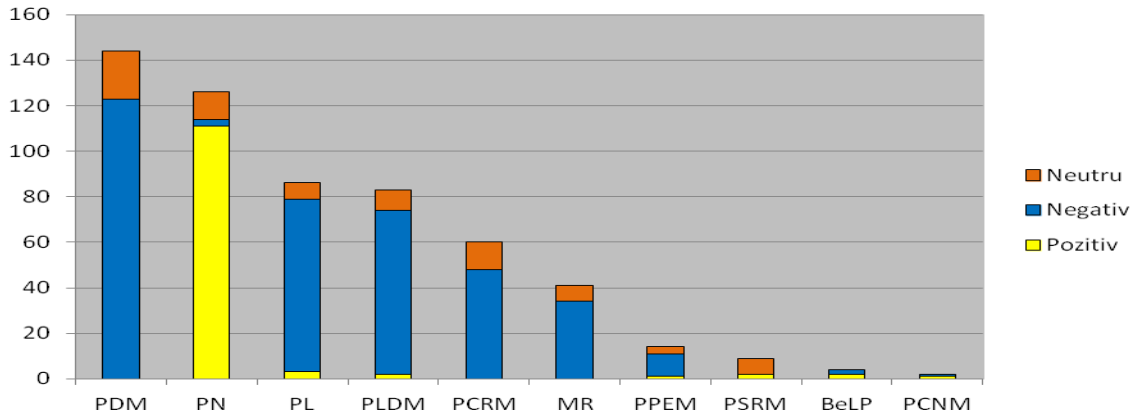
The selection of topics to cover, the approach to them, and the frequency of presenting some candidates in only a positive light and others in only a negative light are indicative of the fact that the editorial policy of Omg.md did not aim to impart comprehensive, objective information about the campaign but instead aimed to promote some candidates and to vilify others. Every third text about the campaign and candidates was biased with tendentious headlines, labeling, speculation, or interpretation of facts by authors. The stories often contained value judgments that are contrary to the standards of professional ethics and good journalistic practice. When mentioning Vladimir Plahotniuc, without a direct connection to the topic of the article Omg.md often highlighted that he is a "...businessman with a dubious reputation" and is, "...the owner of the Democratic Party." Omg frequently mentioned that Vlad Filat was "ex-Prime Minister relieved for corruption," and in some cases, the employees of public institutions were labeled "puppets" and "Plahotniuc's people" (in Russian *-ставленник*). Examples include the postings on 8 June when the website extensively covered the protests of railroad employees headlined "Plahotniuc's puppet considers that it is normal to have delays in paying wages to railroad employees"

*(“Marioneta lui Plahotniuc consideră că este normal să existe restanțe la salarizarea lucrătorilor căilor ferate”), “The enterprise controlled by Plahotniuc doesn't pay wages to its employees” (“Întreprinderea controlată de Plahotniuc nu le plătește salarii angajaților”)* followed by the subtitle “Plahotniuc's servants caused the railroad employees to protest” (*“Funcționarii lui Plahotniuc i-au adus pe feroviari la grevă”*). In the article on 14 June about the incident at the polling station in Topala Village, Cimișlia District, the authors mentioned each time that a PDM candidate belonged to Plahotniuc's party. “Mayor from Plahotniuc's party provoked a fight” (*“Primarul din partidul lui Plahotniuc a provocat o bătaie”*), “Accused of unlawfulness, the PDM mayor...” (*“Acuzat de ilegalitate, primarul PDM...”*), “Enraged by the fact that the candidate from Plahotniuc's party is not punished...” (*“Revoltați de faptul că nu este pedepsit candidatul partidului lui Plahotniuc...”*), and “Unlawfulness provoked by the candidate from the party belonging to Vladimir Plahotniuc” (*“Ilegalitatea provocată de candidatul partidului care-i aparține lui Vladimir Plahotniuc...”*). In addition, the Speaker of Parliament is “Plahotniuc's relative” (news item on 8 June under the headline “Plahotniuc's relative blamed Gaburici for infringing the Constitution” (*“Ruda lui Plahotniuc l-a învinuit pe Gaburici de încălcarea Constituției”*)). In contrast, Renato Usatîi and the PN were praised, for example, the news item on 1 June “Residents of Bălți show unprecedented attention to Renato Usatîi” reports on “an unprecedented meeting with voters” (*“o întâlnire cu alegătorii fără precedent”*) and makes reference to anonymous observers when stating that “no meeting with voters ever before organized by Moldovan politicians was attended by so many people” (... *“la nici una din întâlnirile cu alegătorii, organizate vreodată de politicienii moldoveni nu au fost atâția oameni”*)).

Throughout the monitoring period, the site covered 11 candidates with various frequencies: Some parties and their members were featured several times a day whereas others were referred to 1–4 times throughout the entire campaign and some were completely ignored. The PDM was the party most covered on the site appearing in 144 items including 123 in a negative light (85.4%) and 21 in a neutral context. The PN and its leader Renato Usatîi ranked second with 126 features and mentions including 111 (88.1%) in a positive, 12 in a neutral, and 3 in a negative context. The PN was the most quoted party at 61 times. The PL and its mayoral candidate Dorin Chirtoacă were featured in 86 items mainly in a negative context (76 times or 88.4%) as was the PLDM which had 83 features and mentions including 72 times (86.7%) in a negative context. The PCRM was featured and mentioned in 60 items including 40 times (80%) in a negative light, and the MR was featured and mentioned 34 times (82.9%) in a negative context. Other candidates were featured far less often, and some were not covered at all.



**Figure 6: Top 10 parties covered on Omg.md**



PDM=Democratic Party; PN=Our Party; PL=Liberal Party; PLDM=Liberal Democratic Party; PCRM=Communist Party; MR=Movement Ravnopravie; PPEM=Elecoral Bloc European Popular Party; PSRM=Socialist Party; BeLP=Election Bloc of the People; PCNM=Our House Moldova.

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

The majority of articles published by Omg.md including 81.9% of the 105 items that referred to accusations or conflicts were based on a single source which made them unbalanced.

Overall, Omg.md quoted 303 sources in 315 relevant items. Politicians and candidates were the most quoted (172 sources or 56.8% of the total) followed by experts (78 or 25.8%). Civil servants were cited less often, and ordinary citizens were nearly missing as sources. Gender balance was almost completely ignored as only 8% of the sources were female; this was the worst score for this indicator among the sites monitored. The widest gap was recorded under the source category "politicians" at 169 men and 3 women.

News stories were often based on information or suppositions that disadvantaged some candidates; the portal made no attempt to verify or to ensure pluralism of opinions which is a must in cases of controversies. On 8 May, the portal published a story based on statements by Renato Usatîi that he had made on a live TV show including saying that he was aware of his upcoming arrest, "...but Filat has taken a break and is letting me travel around the country," (*"doar că acum Filat și-a luat o pauză și îl lasă să se plimbe prin țară"*). The opinions of Vlad Filat, of the PLDM, or of the Ministry of Interior were not presented. In the news item "Ursachi: Authorities intend to discredit the protest movement" (1 June), with reference to the declarations of lawyer Ana Ursachi, the authors talk about the "cheap tricks" of Cavcaliuc (Head of the General Police Inspectorate) that would be used to discredit the peaceful protests. The text did not include a reaction to these accusations on the part of the police or of any other law enforcement body. On 5 June the website posted the item "Renato Usatîi found out about another act of provocation against Our Party" with reference to a comment of Usatîi on Facebook in which he claimed that actions to remove PN from the campaign were underway and insinuated that PLDM leader Vlad Filat, whom the site labels "former PM dismissed for corruption," and Octavian Mahu, PCRM's candidate for mayor in Bălți and the main opposition of Usatîi, were behind them. The opinions of those directly accused were not presented. The same approach appears in other

articles published by Omg.md. They insinuate that the authorities artificially increased the number of voters in order to determine the results of the elections (the news report “Plahotniuc’s apparatus prepares forged voter lists” (“*Structurile lui Plahotniuc pregătesc falsificarea listelor alegătorilor*” on 5 June); however there is no reply by the Minister of Communications and Information Technology which Omg.md said was “controlled by businessman Vladimir Plahotniuc with a dubious reputation.” Accusations of falsifying election results were also made on election day (14 June) in the news items “Filat's party transports and bribes voters from all over the country” (“*Partidul lui Filat transportă și cumpără alegătorii în toată țara*”), “Merry-go-round in Bălți: two buses with Moldovan students from Romania go to different polling stations” (“*Caruselul din Bălți: două autobuze cu studenți moldoveni din România circulă pe la secțiile de votare*”) which was taken over from the site ru1.md and “Patients in the psychiatric boarding school in Bălți are forced to vote for Plahotniuc's party” (“*Pacienții de la internatul psihoneurologic din Bălți sunt obligați să voteze pentru partidul lui Plahotniuc*”). No reply to these direct accusations was presented, thus these articles were unbalanced and manipulative.

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

The language used by Omg.md reporters violated journalistic norms which stress accurate language and avoiding the labeling subjects. Several articles posted on Omg.md used pejorative expressions and labels with an obvious intention to disparage certain candidates. Often, the reporters launched broad accusations; the general conspiracy of the government against citizens was insinuated. In some cases, the articles contained personal attacks. On 14 May, the portal republished an article that originally appeared on Pan.md; the text may be seen as representing Dmitri Ciubasenco’s opinion about Chișinău Mayor Dorin Chirtoacă. The article used many pejorative expressions, personal attacks, and associations unfavorable to Mr. Chirtoacă who was compared to a puppy barking at an elephant, the “elephant” being Russian President Putin whom Ciubasenco admires: “Chirtoacă appears as a **Pug barking at an elephant**. But Chirtoacă is not even a Pug for Putin, but rather **a little gnat**. In vain does it **huff and puff; it will fart and blow out**” («*Киртоакэ выступая в роли Моськи, лающей на слона. Но Киртоакэ для Путина даже не Моська, а мелкая мошка. Зря она пыжится, пукнет и лопнет*»).

In conclusion, Omg.md did not cover the elections in an honest way; most of the texts were biased, and pluralism of opinion was sacrificed by presenting unilateral accusations without providing right to reply. The editorial policy of the portal was, on one hand, directed harsh criticism on governing parties, especially the PDM and the PL and the mayoral candidate for Chișinău Dorin Chirtoacă, and on the other hand intensively promoted PN candidates and party leader Renato Usatîi.

[www.pan.md](http://www.pan.md)

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

From 1 May to 14 June 2015, Pan.md published 173 items that directly or indirectly covered the elections, including 132 short or long news items (76.7%), 40 stories about conflicts, and 1 educational item. The main issues selected for coverage by the site administrators were (i) activities and statements of the PSRM and of the PN leader Renato Usatîi; (ii) the campaign launch and statements of Grigore Petrenco; (iii) the protest

organized by left-wing parties; and (iv) information about candidates for mayor of the capital.

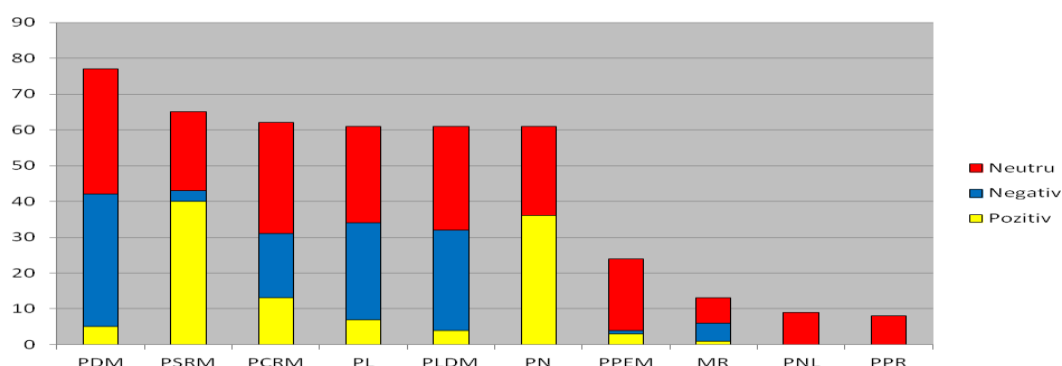
### ***Impartiality and objectivity***

The absolute majority of news stories posted on Pan.md were unbiased (90%), but analyses and various opinion items often were biased. The approach to events was partisan through the selective coverage of events held by certain candidates and through the biased interpretation of candidates' actions. Unconfirmed information was often disseminated on the site, especial about the PN candidate. The authors failed to conduct additional research to objectively inform readers and instead fueled speculation. Thus, the website posted on 4 May the story "Meeting Renato Usatîi at the airport" ("*Îl întâmpinăm pe Renato Usatîi la aeroport*") which was accompanied by the a picture of an airplane signed with Usatîi's slogan "The power is in the truth!" («Сила в правде!»). The text contained references to a statement by Usatîi that he was expecting authorities, "...to arrest me directly at the airport on bogus charges," ("*să-l aresteze direct la aeroport în baza unor dosare fabricate*"), and his supporters said they were ready to help him. The position of the investigating authorities was missing, and the angle of approach of this posting seems to encourage citizens to defend Usatîi. The news item on 28 May "Moldovan Tined Foods Will Return to the Russian Market" ("*Молдавские консервы вернутся на российский рынок*") misled readers, and the lead promoted Igor Dodon and the PSRM party by stating, "With the active participation of Igor Dodon on the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic Cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation, joint work was established on the resumption of tined foods deliveries from Moldova to Russia." In the text, readers find out that the Russian service Rospotrebnadzor said that currently the documentation submitted by the Moldovan companies to resume exports was being examined.

In most cases, opinion pieces and commentaries written by Dmitri Ciubaşenco for Pan.md were based on biased and questionable interpretations of reality. An example of this was the story on 8 June with the headline "Tomorrow will there be war?" ("*Mâine – război?*") in which he speculated on a possible war in the Transnistrian region which, according to the author, would benefit "the war parties" in Moldova, Ukraine, Romania, USA and also Plahotniuc and Filat, however not the EU, Russia, and Moldova citizens. The governing parties are accused of wishing to cancel the elections and outlaw opposition and to establish a dictatorship through a coup d'état that will lead to a war. The scenario described by the author ends with a proposal to create "before it is too late" a popular movement against war. He notes that this initiative was previously launched by the PCRM ex-MP Mark Tkaciuk and the PSRM, PN, and PCRM should adhere. In addition, the author warned one more time that, "Everything is very serious. A war around Transnistria is very likely. The 'Parties of War' in Chişinău, Washington, Kiev, and Bucharest are very strong. Moldovan people should vehemently say 'No'" ("*Totul este foarte serios. Războiul în jurul Transnistriei este foarte posibil. Partidul războiului, și în Chişinău, și în Washington, și în Kiev, și la Bucureşti, este foarte puternic. Poporul Moldovei trebui să-i spună un „Nu!” hotărât*"). The entire text is hidden election propaganda in favor of the PSRM and PN attempting to scare readers and induce the idea that right wing parties could endanger the country.

From 1 May to 14 June, Pan.md covered 25 candidates in its stories; this is the largest number among the sites monitored. Among the parties that were featured in a selective manner and got the most coverage were the PDM, PSRM, PCRM, PL, PLDM and PN. The numbers of positive, neutral, and negative stories revealed the site's sympathy or antipathy towards certain parties. Thus, the PSRM and PN leaders and candidates were obviously favored by Pan.md through positive stories (the PSRM was featured and mentioned 65 times in positive and neutral contexts 40 and 22 times respectively; the PN had 1 feature and was mentioned in a positive context 36 times and in a neutral context 25 times. The same parties were the most quoted sources: the PN was cited 23 times and the PSRM 21, whereas representatives of other parties were quoted or mentioned far less often. In addition, governing parties and the PCRM were featured in various contexts: the PDM and PLDM more often in a negative light but also in a neutral one and the PCRM more often in a neutral light but also in negative and positive lights. During the monitoring period, the PL and their candidate Dorin Chirtoacă were featured 61 times, mainly in negative or neutral stories. Other candidates were seldom featured and then mainly in a negative context.

**Figure 7: Top 10 parties covered on Pan.md**



PDM=Democratic Party; PSRM=Socialist Party; PCRM=Communist Party; PL=Liberal Party; PLDM=Liberal Democratic Party; PN=Our Party; PPEM=Elecoral Bloc European Popular Party; MR=Movement Ravnopravie; PNL= National Liberal Party ; PPR.

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

All 173 stories relevant to this monitoring were based on declarations/statements made by 198 sources. Most were politicians (92 or 46.5%). Civil servants and experts were quoted half as often at 45 and 41 times respectively, and ordinary citizens were cited only 15 times. Gender balance was almost completely ignored as only 12 % of sources were female. The widest gap was recorded under the category "politicians" at 88 men and 4 women.

The majority of news stories about controversies (26 of a total of 40 or 65%) were prepared using one source or several sources that were “on the same side of the barricades” which made them unbalanced. Some news stories were based exclusively on information disadvantaging certain candidates, but their opinions/reactions were not presented thus diminishing their objectivity and revealing a lack of pluralism of opinions. Here are a few examples of unbalanced news items:

- “Usatfi: Chirtoacă is selling the historical center of Chişinău for pennies” (“*Usatfi: Chirtoacă vinde centrul istoric al Chişinăului pe bani mărunţi*”) on 13 May about the statements of Renato Usatfi and Aleksandr Petkov in which Dorin Chirtoacă and some municipal communist councilors are accused of theft;
- the item on 4 June under the headline “Dodon: Chirtoacă is the pawn of oligarchs” (“*Dodon: Chirtoacă este pionul oligarhilor*”), with a subtitle in quotation marks “PL received order to act” (“*PL a primit ordin să acţioneze*”), based on a comment published by PSRM leader Igor Dodon on his blog in which he speculates on “oligarchs’ panic because of a citizens’ meeting planned on 7 June” and the order received by PL, Ghimpu, and Chirtoacă from them to impede the protest and to create confusion in society by provoking “an ideological conflict with DA Platform in order to compromise it”;
- the story on 10 June “Dodon: through nationalization of BEM, they want to steal 15–20 billion lei” (“*Dodon: prin naţionalizarea BEM, vor să fure încă 15–20 miliarde de lei*”) contained the statement of the PSRM leader that Filat, Lupu, and Ghimpu allegedly intended to steal public funds;
- the report on 11 June “Pistrinciuc: Ghimpu works for socialists and for 'Russia's Friends’” (“*Pistrinciuc: Ghimpu lucrează pentru socialişti şi pentru ‘Prietenii Rusiei’*”) in which the PLDM representative launched accusations against the PL leader.

On 9 June Pan.md published an item in which Igor Dodon urged the electorate not to vote for PDM, PLDM, PL, and PCRM candidates. Similar appeals about other candidates were not posted on the website.

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

In the majority of cases, the language in the articles on Pan.md complied with the standards of professional ethics, but there were cases when pejorative and offensive expressions were used, and in some cases the language was discriminatory.

On 7 May the website posted the story titled “Persons with mental disabilities will be allowed to enter politics” («*Лицам с психическими расстройствами разрешат заниматься политикой*») originally published by the Infotag Agency about the intention to modify legislation so as to allow persons with mental disabilities to participate in elections and run for public office. The title discriminated against these persons and was also accompanied by a caricature ridiculing them while the lead incorrectly said that persons with physical and mental disabilities will be able to participate in elections and run for offices. In fact, the electoral rights of persons with physical disabilities have never been limited. This initiative refers only to persons with mental disabilities.

Dmitri Ciubasenco’s articles “Batman from Colonita” and “Putin’s kewpie dolls” («*Бэтмэн из Колоницы*») and «*пупсики Путина*») posted on 14 May contained offensive language and personal attacks. Dorin Chirtoacă was compared to a puppy barking at an elephant, the “elephant” being Russian president Putin (“Chirtoacă appears as a **Pug barking at an elephant**. But Chirtoacă is not even a Pug for Putin, but rather **a little gnat**. In vain does it **huff and puff; it will fart and blow out**”) («*Киртоакэ выступает в роли Моськи, лающей на слона. Но Киртоакэ для Путина даже не Моська, а мелкая мошка. Зря*

она *пыжится, пукнет и лопнет*»). He was also reproached for having no wife or children at 36 years of age and for looking like the “pimpled four-eyes” (“*ochelariștul coșuros*”) from movies (Harry Potter).

The general conclusion is that the website Pan.md covered the campaign in a selective manner; the editorial policy aimed to criticize the governing parties, the PL, and mayoral candidate Dorin Chirtoacă. In addition, throughout the campaign, the website promoted the PSRM and the PN, their leaders and representatives.

[www.publika.md](http://www.publika.md)

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

Publika.md actively covered the campaign. During the monitoring period it posted 268 relevant items an absolute majority of which (240 or 89.6%) were short or long news items; 24 were articles about conflicts or accusations concerning elections, and 4 were educational items. The most frequent topics on Publika.md were the activities of the CEC and of the PDM and its representatives. Other candidates were featured far less often.

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

The majority of news stories on Publika.md (182 reports or 67.9%) complied with the principles of journalistic impartiality; however, the frequency of flattering postings about the leadership of the PDM, its actions, and the plans of its candidates showed that the editorial policy was to intensively promote one party which is contrary to the principle of objective coverage. In all, 86 articles (32.1%), including items about the candidates supported by the PDM, were biased and suggested the author's and website's preferences.

The PDM mayoral candidates were repeatedly presented, often without mentioning their political affiliation, while other candidates were not mentioned in the news items as a rule. Only PDM supported candidates were able to present their electoral priorities in the news items of Publika.md. The site covered the work and the public visits of PDM candidate for mayor of Chișinău Monica Babuc every day, presenting her exclusively in favorable and praiseworthy contexts. Essentially, these items were nothing but veiled election advertising for the PDM and its candidates all following the same script: the most troublesome issues of a community are presented followed by the solutions proposed by a single mayoral candidate, usually without mentioning that this candidate is supported by the PDM. Here are a few examples of partisan coverage of the PDM candidates:

- the story posted on 5 May “How Monica Babuc intends to become mayor. What the PDM candidate says” (“*Cum intenționează să ajungă Monica Babuc în fruntea Primăriei. Ce spune candidatul PDM*”) which spoke about Monica Babuc’s participation in the Fabrika TV show on 4 May. It should be mentioned that no other mayoral candidate was present on Fabrika which is the main debate show on the Publika TV channel.
- on 10 May the news story “Democrats in Ialoveni District joined the campaign for local public offices” (“*Democrații din raionul Ialoveni s-au lansat în campania pentru funcțiile de aleși locali*”) presented candidates for mayor in some localities of Ialoveni District and spoke about their achievements, objectives, and plans.

- on 16 May the news story “Kindergartens and Infrastructure Remain the MAIN Problems of the Ocnița town. Here are the Solutions” (*“Grădinițele și infrastructura rămân problemele MAJORE ale orașului Ocnița. Care sunt soluțiile”*) appeared about the troubles faced by the residents of Ocnița town, but also about the 'efficient solutions' proposed by the mayoral candidate Igor Voleac;
- the 17 May the news story “IT IS A DISASTER” (*“E PRĂPĂD”*) reported that residents of a Village in Edineț, “do not have access to basic services; instead they hear promises about the difficulties of water supply in Sofrincani Village, Edineț District and the solutions provided by the PDM mayoral candidate Valeriu Șipitca,” about whom the author of the item said that, “For 10 years he has run a successful agricultural business and he wished that the troubles faced by his native village could be solved just as quickly and efficiently as they are in the business he manages.” (*“De zece ani, el administrează cu succes o afacere în agricultură și își dorește ca și problemele din satul de baștină să fie rezolvate la fel de repede și eficient ca și în activitatea pe care o desfășoară”*);
- the 17 May story “SOLUTIONS before Elections. People from Cimișlia Still Hope to Get Rid of a Landfill” (*“SOLUȚII înainte de alegeri. Oamenii din Cimișlia mai speră la eliminarea unei rampe de gunoi”*) was about the solutions provided by candidate Olga Coptu who, “...intends to establish a partnership with NGOs” (*“intenționează să dezvolte un parteneriat cu organizațiile neguvernamentale”*);
- on 2 June the story “A candidate for Mayor of Bălți promises to create thousands of jobs” (*“Un candidat la șefia municipiului Bălți promite că va deschide mii de locuri de muncă”*) was about the election promises of the candidate, including the “priority” to create 20,000 jobs in the next four years;
- the 4 June stories “The wonder project that changed the lives of 70 families in Criuleni” (*“Proiectul minune care a schimbat viața a 70 de familii din Criuleni”*) and “The problems of Cojusna residents will be solved! What is the solution of one of the mayoral candidates” (*“Problemele locuitorilor din Cojușna vor fi rezolvate! Ce soluție are unul dintre candidații la Primărie”*);
- on 12 June the site posted “A village left in the lurch! The residents of Step-soci are waiting for better life solutions” (*“Sat lăsat de izbeliște! Locuitorii din Stepsoci așteaptă soluții pentru o viață mai bună”*) about the problem solving strategy proposed by Iulia Coșneanu, the PDM mayoral candidate.

Throughout the campaign many similar stories favoring the PDM candidates were posted while their opponents were often featured in a less favorable light. Examples include the 8 June news item “Serafim Urechean returns to unfinished projects when he used to be a mayor” (*“Serafim Urechean revine la proiectele nefinalizate de pe timpul când era primar”*) that mentions that, “When asked by journalists why he hadn't completed these projects when he was mayor, Urechean got confused” and the story “PARODY in the election spot of Chirtoacă. See who the main character of the short movie is” (*“PARODIE la spotul electoral al lui Chirtoacă. Vezi cine este eroul principal al filmulețului”*) was accompanied by a picture that disadvantaged the PL mayoral candidate. Candidates of other parties were also featured in unfavorable contexts except the ones supported by the PDM.

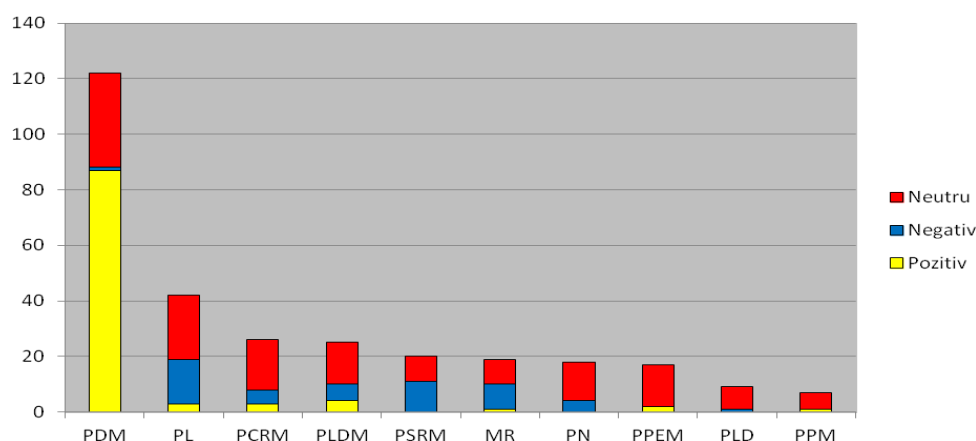
Publika.md covered the protest on the Great National Assembly Square on 7 June from only one perspective: The report focused exclusively on the conflict between the protesters from



the Dignity and Truth Platform and PL supporters, mentioning only the slogans chanted against PL and ignoring those against PDM, PLDM, and their leaders.

During the monitoring period, Publika.md covered 18 candidates; however, the absolute majority was only mentions. In contrast, the PDM candidate and its leaders were extensively covered and promoted in both a direct and indirect manner. Thus, the PDM and its candidates were featured in 122 stories, 87 times in a positive context, and they were quoted 111 times (the second most quoted were PL candidates with 18 quotes). The PL and PSRM candidates were often featured in a negative light (PL 16 times of the total of 42 features and mentions, and the PSRM 11 times of the total of 20 features and mentions).

**Figure 8: Top 10 parties covered on Publika.md**



PDM=Democratic Party; PL=Liberal Party; PCRM=Communist Party; PLDM=Liberal Democratic Party; PSRM=Socialist Party PSRM; MR=Movement Ravnopravie; PN=Our Party; PPEM=Eleccoral Bloc European Popular Party; PLD=Party of Law and Justice; PPM=People’s Party.

***Fairness and balance of sources/pluralism of opinions***

In the 268 relevant election items, Publika.md quoted 602 sources, over 45% of which (273) were ordinary citizens; this was the best ratings for this indicator among the sites monitored. Politicians were the second most quoted source; they were cited 172 times, followed by 68 civil servants, 21 experts, and 68 other sources. Publika.md recorded the best score for gender balance among the sites monitored as 39.4% of the sources quoted were female. In most cases, the female sources were cited in stories that promoted PDM candidates.

Only 24 articles/reports covered a conflict or accusations, and overall these were balanced quoting all parties involved (70%). There were, however, several unbalanced news stories when the right to reply was not granted.

***Language and images used***

The language in news stories posted during the monitoring period was correct without exaggerations, labeling, or offensive expressions about the subjects and/or political parties.

To sum up, Publika.md was PDM's loudspeaker, intensely promoting the party's candidates and staging the massive support that PDM allegedly enjoyed in communities by selecting only positive opinions. A large amount of text essentially was subliminal political advertising and/or election propaganda. Other candidates were featured far less often, and the PL and PSRM were often featured in a negative light.

[www.timpul.md](http://www.timpul.md)

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

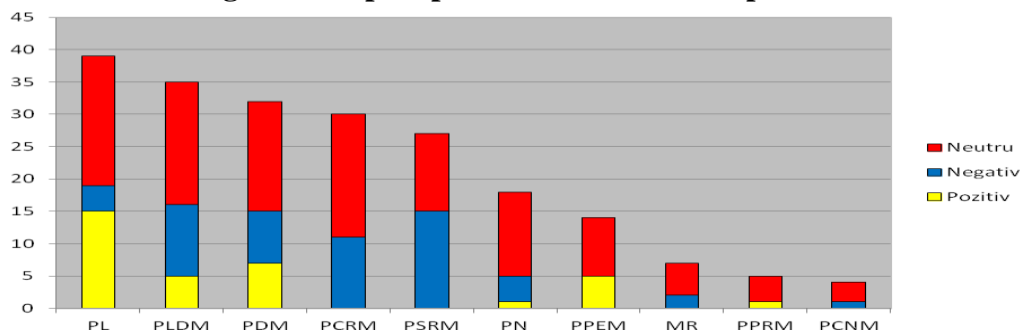
During the monitoring period, Timpul.md published 122 relevant stories: 88 (72.1 %) were short or long news items, 32 were on conflicts or accusations, and 2 were educational items. In terms of topics, the articles focused on the registration of mayoral candidates for Chişinău; Renato Usafii's intentions to return to Moldova and run for mayor of Bălţi; and Vasili Chirtoca, president of DAAC-Hermes company running as a mayoral candidate for Chişinău (10 years ago he sued *Timpul* newspaper after it published an investigation about him hoping to bankrupt the paper, and the author of the investigation was attacked on the street).

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

Most articles about the elections (100 or 82%) met the criteria of impartiality; the other 22 were biased and presented opinions and value judgments rather than facts. Among the biased items was the one published on 13 May with the headline, "Terrorists from Donetsk and Luhansk in the same line of thought with Voronin and Dodon" ("*Teroriştii din Doneţk şi Lugansk, în acelaşi gând cu Voronin şi Dodon*") that associated Moldovan communists and socialists with the terrorists in Eastern Ukraine who propose including into the country's constitution a provision about non-affiliation with any military blocs, like PCRM and PSRM are proposing for Moldova. It should be mentioned that the text of the story said nothing about the candidates mentioned in the headline.

During the monitoring period, Timpul.md featured 11 candidates in its news items; the parties most covered were the PL, PLDM, PDM, PCRM, and PSRM and less often the PN and PPEM. Based on the frequency and context in which candidates and parties were featured, it can be concluded that the PSRM was disadvantaged as of 27 features and mentions 15 were in a negative light. The PLDM and PDM were presented in various contexts mainly in neutral but also in negative and positive lights, the PCRM was featured mainly in neutral stories and often in negative ones, and the PL benefited from the most features in a positive context (15 out of 39 features and mentions) and also was the most quoted party (18 times). The PPEM was covered less often by Timpul.md (14 features and mentions) mainly in a neutral context but also in a positive one.

**Figure 9: Top 10 parties covered on Timpul.md**



PL=Liberal Party; PLDM=Liberal Democratic Party; PDM=Democratic Party; PCRM=Communist Party; PSRM=Socialist Party; PN=Our Party; PPEM=Elecoral Bloc European Popular Party; MR=Movement Ravnopravie; PPRM=People’s Party; PCNM=Our House Moldova.

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

In all, 142 sources were cited in 122 relevant articles; 67 (47.2%) were politicians. Other sources quoted were 29 ordinary citizens, 24 experts and 22 public servants. Gender balance was ignored as only 12% of the sources were female. The widest gap was recorded under the category “politicians” at 65 men and 2 women.

Only 33% of the stories about conflicts (10 out of 32) were covered in a relatively balanced way presenting the views of all parties involved. For instance, the news piece on 3 June “Bacioi mayor hauled to CNA: He allegedly requested several lots from a resident” (“*Primarul din Băcioi luat pe sus de cei de la CNA: Ar fi cerut de la un localnic mai multe terenuri*”) that first appeared on Publika.md was about the mayor’s house searches during the investigation of a case of corruption. The opinion of the mayor or that of his lawyer on such a serious accusation is absent. On 9 June 2015, the story with the headline “The PL makes a frontal assault: the PLDM and PDM gave up on the pro-European coalition as they don’t want to fight against corruption” (“*PL atacă frontal: PLDM și PDM au renunțat la coaliția proeuropeană din lipsa dorinței de a lupta cu corupția*”) was taken from Infotag press agency and referred to the PL leader Mihai Ghimpu who launched accusations against the PLDM and PDM that were against the creation of a governing coalition with the PL after Parliamentary elections in November 2014. It is mentioned in the story that the parties concerned did not comment on the accusations of the PL leader; however, it is not clear whether Timpul.md reporters even attempted to obtain a comment. On 12 June the site published a text that claimed to be a letter signed by 120 residents of the Horodiște Village, Călărași District (the names were not mentioned and an image of the letter was not posted) in which the villagers complain that their mayor, the PLDM representative, transformed their village into a waste dump. Allegedly the letter said “They are definitely mocking villagers. All this gang is part of Filat’s PLDM, supported by Liliana Palihovici (originally from our village)” (“*Ei își bat joc de consăteni definitiv. Toată clica aceasta face parte din PLDM-ul lui Filat, sprijinită de Liliana Palihovici [consăteanca noastră]*”), and “We are forced to ask for your help to knock off the PLDM. We are sick and tired of such a government that impoverished us” (“*suntem nevoiți să apelăm la dvs., poate dăm jos PLDM-ul. Ne-am săturat de așa conducere, care ne-a adus la săpă de lemn*”). The text posted by Timpul.md under the headline “The letter of the week: in the shadows of the Oak”

(“*Scrisoarea săptămânii: La umbra „Stejarului”*”) is an example of negative advertising for a candidate hidden in a letter that was posted without providing the right to reply to persons directly concerned.

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

The language used by Timpul.md during the monitoring period was relatively fair without deviating from linguistic norms accepted in journalism.

In conclusion, Timpul.md covered the campaign in a selective manner. Generally its news items were unbiased; however, the principle of balancing sources was often ignored in articles about controversies. The PSRM and PCRM were criticized in a large number of articles, the PL benefited most from features in a positive context and most quotes compared to other parties' candidates, and the PLDM and PDM were mainly featured in a neutral light but also in positive (more often the PDM) and in negative (more often the PLDM) contexts.

### **[www.unimedia.info](http://www.unimedia.info)**

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

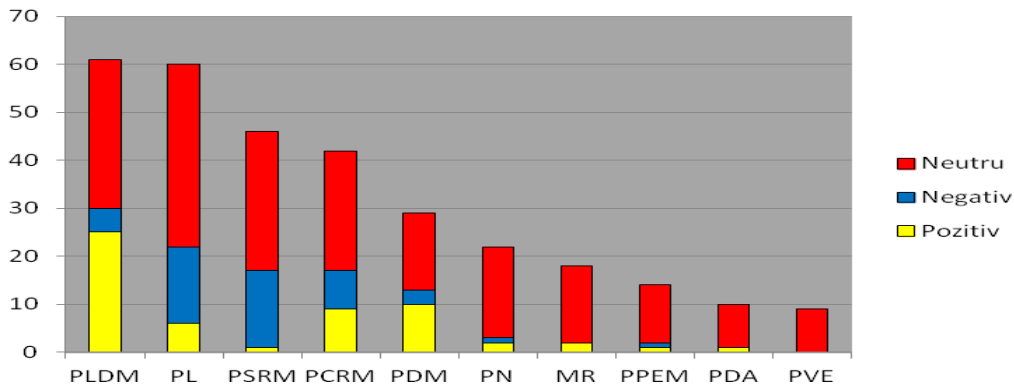
Unimedia.info was among the most active websites covering the campaign posting 253 items: 201 (79.5%) were short or long news items, 46 were about conflicts or accusations, and 6 were educational pieces. The topics of news stories were the most diverse of the websites monitored and included registrations of independent and party-affiliated candidates for Chişinău mayor and municipal councilors; party statements, activities, and protests; and the invitation to Chişinău mayoral candidates to the talk show "White and Black" prepared by the Unimedia team, among others.

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

As a rule, news items published on Unimedia.info were unbiased and covered events in an objective manner. Thus, 95.7% of the stories (242 out of 253) did not display any bias and contained no opinions or value judgments of the authors. In 11 articles, the author's opinion on the subject or the source was obvious.

During the monitoring period, Unimedia.info featured 24 candidates; this was one of the highest ratings for this indicator among the sites monitored. The stories were mainly neutral. The PLDM and PL benefited from the most features. The large number of positive articles featuring the PLDM (25 out of 61 features and mentions) and frequent quotes (30) revealed the editorial bias of Unimedia.info for this party. PSRM and PL candidates were presented more often in a negative light; however, it is not right to claim that these parties were disparaged as neutral stories prevailed, and there were also positive stories (especially about the PL).

**Figure10: Top 10 parties covered by Unimedia.info**



PLDM=Liberal Democratic Party; PL=Liberal Party; PSRM=Socialist Party; PCRM=Communist Party; PDM=Democratic Party; PN=Our Party; MR=Movement Ravnopravie; PPEM=Elecoral Bloc European Popular Party; PDA=Party of Democracy at Home; PVE=Green Ecology Party.

***Fairness and balance of sources/ /pluralism of opinions***

In all, 249 persons were quoted in the relevant news items posted on Unimedia.info; most of them (173 or 69.5%) were politicians. The other sources quoted were 39 public servants, 9 ordinary citizens, and 5 others. Gender balance was ignored as only 12.9% of the sources quoted were female. The widest gap was recorded under the category “politicians” at 156 men and 17 women.

Most of stories about conflicts (65% of the total of 46 items) lacked balance as they cited only one party.

- On 1 May, Unimedia.info posted the news item with the headline “Vladimir Voronin: Renato Usatîi is a ‘soap bubble’” (“Vladimir Voronin: Renato Usatîi este o „bulă de săpun”) referring to the statement of the PCRM leader. The portal did not seek the opinion of Usatîi.
- The news report “The candidate of the Renaissance Party for mayor confessed that she lied on 7 April 2009” (“Candidatul Partidului Renaştere la funcţia de primar general recunoaşte că a minţit la 7 aprilie 2009”) was based on an interview with Elizaveta Moscalciuc in which she confessed that she lied on 7 April 2009 when she introduced herself as a student who was forced by teachers to go to the protests. She claimed 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 Unimedia.info posted several items from the press conference of PCRM leader Vladimir Voronin in which he launched accusations against several persons including the PLDM candidate for Mayor of Chişinău Serafim Urechean and PDM leader Marian Lupu. The right to reply of the persons accused or ridiculed by Voronin was not provided.

Among the news items without response of the accused were the following:

- the story on 8 June with the headline “The PLR condemned the actions of the former liberals” (“*PLR condamnă acțiunile liberalilor de ieri*”);
- the item on 9 June “The Liberal Party was accused of allowing the organization of the concert to celebrate Russia's Day in PMAN” (“*Partidul Liberal, acuzat că a permis organizarea concertului de Ziua Rusiei în PMAN*”);
- the news item “Luxury apartments for the children of Zinaida Greceanîi” (“*Apartamente de lux pentru copiii Zinaidei Greceanîi, din banii de la BEM*”);
- the story on 11 June “Cîrlig accused Chirtoacă: You introduced discredited people to the list of councilors” (“*Cîrlig îl acuză pe Chirtoacă: Ai introdus în lista de consilieri oameni compromiși*”);
- the report on 11 June “Vadim Pistrinciuc: the PL works more for socialists than for its own voters” (“*Vadim Pistrinciuc: PL lucrează mai mult pentru socialiști decât pentru proprii alegători*”).

In several news items, the authors mention that the persons/candidates referred to “haven't yet commented on the accusations,” an excuse that doesn't justify posting unbalanced articles if the journalists did not contact the persons concerned to obtain a comment.

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

The language on Unimedia.info during the monitoring period was correct; there were no exaggerations or falsified images.

In conclusion, Unimedia.info provided complex coverage of the campaign in most cases posting unbiased news items. At the same time, however, most stories about conflicts that contained accusations launched against candidates lacked balance as they failed to provide the right to reply. The candidates were generally featured in a neutral light; however, the large number of positive articles featuring the PLDM and frequent quotes from its members reveal the editorial bias of Unimedia.info toward this party.

## **4. General Conclusions**

From 1 May to 14 June 2015, most of the media outlets monitored covered the campaign for general local elections in a biased manner and did not provide a pluralism of opinions to the full extent. A large share focused on either extensively promoting certain parties or on criticizing/discrediting their political opponents.

Some of the coverage of controversial subjects failed to balance sources and did not grant the right to reply to all the parties involved. Also, gender balance was lacking as mainly men were cited.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the stories that directly or indirectly covered the elections, the experts concluded the following:

- TV station Moldova 1 performed in a relatively balanced and unbiased way providing some pluralism of opinion, diversity, and balance of sources; however, the stories that lacked gender balance mainly cited male sources. Judging from the frequency and context in which candidates and parties appeared in news items, Moldova 1 provided more coverage to the PDM as its representatives were featured in many stories with an indirect electoral content.
- Prime TV and Canal 2 both with national coverage covered the campaign in a biased manner failing to provide a pluralism of opinions or a diversity of sources. The TV stations ensured a balance of sources to some extent in stories about conflicts and regarding gender balance, this was one of the best scores for this indicator among the TV stations monitored. Judging by the frequency and context in which candidates and parties were featured both stations decisively favored the PDM. In many cases, broadcasts could be categorized as open campaigning in favor of a certain candidate.
- Station TV 7 with regional coverage tackled the issues about elections in a relatively accurate and balanced way providing some pluralism of opinions, diversity, and balance of sources. This station covered the largest number of candidates; the PL and PLDM benefited from most features and mentions in various contexts but there was no evident favoritism for any party.
- Local station Accent TV did not provide unbiased news, pluralism of opinion, diversity, or a balance of sources. In addition, from the perspective of gender balance, the stories were unbalanced mainly quoting male sources. Judging from the frequency and context in which candidates and parties appeared in news items, Accent TV heavily criticized the PL as its representatives were featured mainly in a negative light while the PSRM was favored especially during the last week of campaign when several items of electoral propaganda favoring this party were aired.
- The Omg.md portal performed in a biased way posting several partisan stories, using labels, speculation, and interpreting facts. The vast majority of the coverage of controversial items was unbalanced presenting a single perspective only. The sources were many but were not diverse, and gender balance was almost completely ignored. Throughout the campaign, the editorial policy of the portal was on one hand harshly critical of the governing parties, especially the PDM, and disarmed the PL and PCR while on the other hand intensively promoting PN candidates and its leader Renato Usatîi who benefited from most features.
- Pan.md provided unbiased news items; however, the analyses were nearly always biased and partisan. The vast majority of articles on controversial topics did not observe the principle of balanced coverage of all parties involved. The portal provided pluralism of opinions to a certain degree but ignored gender balance. Pan.md criticized the PDM that had most features mainly in a negative light. At the same time, throughout the campaign the website promoted the PSRM and PN as their leaders and representatives benefited from most features and quotes.



- Publika.md performed in a biased way by using selective adjectives, upper case type and bold font to highlight the accomplishments and solutions for the communities provided by PDM supported candidates thus revealing the site's preference. Most stories about conflicts were covered in a balanced way as all parties involved were quoted. The site provided pluralism of opinion and diversity of sources to a certain degree, and it recorded the best score for the gender balance indicator among its peers. In terms of coverage, the PDM was the most favored party as its representatives and candidates were extensively covered and promoted in a direct or indirect manner. The PL and PSRM candidates were often featured in a negative light.
- Timpul.md was objective and impartial in covering news items to some extent, and offered a pluralism of opinion and diversity of sources. At the same time, most stories about conflicts lacked balance, and gender balance was not observed. Based on the frequency and context in which candidates and parties were featured, it can be concluded that PSRM was denigrated and the PL benefited most from features in a positive context.
- Unimedia.info covered the campaign in an unbiased way providing some pluralism of opinion and diversity of sources. At the same time, a large share of stories on controversial issues cited only party and did not provide the right to reply in the same report. Male sources prevailed. The PLDM and PL benefited from the most features. The large number of positive articles featuring the PLDM and frequent quotes of its members revealed the editorial bias of Unimedia.info for this party.

## ANNEX

**Case study no. 1:** The television stations monitored failed to fully comply with the principles of fairness and balance in the coverage of elections.

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 quantitative/qualitative analysis of the content of the main daily newscasts on five televisions (TV 7, Prime, Canal 2, Moldova 1, and Accent TV) from 1 to 14 May 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 64<sup>1</sup> 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 7:** In newscasts, election campaign events will be covered in compliance with articles 47, 64 and 64<sup>1</sup> of the Electoral Code and Article 7 of the Broadcasting Code.

**Prime:** Prime 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.

**Canal 2:** 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

**Moldova 1:** (1.1) The company will cover the general local elections on 14 June 2015 according to conditions in Article 47 and articles 64 and 64<sup>1</sup> of the Electoral Code, Article 7 of the Broadcasting Code, and the Central Electoral Commission regulations while complying with (i) the principle of fairness applied within the limits of the company's responsibilities and possibilities; (ii) the principle of responsibility applied in accordance with the Broadcasting Code and the company's statute; (iii) the principle of balance—balanced presentation of electoral contestants; (iv) the principle of impartiality—objective and unbiased treatment of electoral contestants; (v) the principle of freedom of expression and political pluralism.

(1.2) Electoral events of the contestants in local elections will be covered in newscasts on Moldova 1 television channel and on Radio Moldova under the headings "Election campaign 2015" and "Local elections 2015." Broadcast items will be up to 40 seconds long on Moldova 1 and up to 120 seconds on Radio Moldova. News stories about conflicts will be up to 120 seconds long on Moldova 1 and up to 180 seconds on Radio Moldova.

**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.

**Findings following content analysis:**

**TV 7** "Cotidian" (Daily news) newscast at 22.30:

- Broadcasts election news and articles but does not put them into a special section.
- The total duration of election news stories/articles and direct appearances on the screen of candidates as subjects varied. Example: In the newscast of 14 May, the segment about candidates for Chisinau mayor D. Chirtoaca and M. Babuc was 1 minute 44 seconds long. The direct appearance of D. Chirtoaca lasted 16 seconds and M. Babuc 11 seconds. The second item was about the Party of Progressive Society's refusal to participate in the elections and was 48 seconds long including a direct appearance by party leader Marin Livadaru lasting 22 seconds. The third item was about I. Shor's intention to participate in the elections and lasted 1 minute 02 seconds. Similar examples were found in all newscasts about the elections.

**Prime**, "Primele stiri" (First news) newscast at 21.00:

- Broadcasts election news and articles in a special section under the heading "Local elections 2015."
- The total duration of the stories and of the direct appearances of candidates as subjects varied. Example: In the newscast of 6 May, the segment "Chirtoaca, gripped by Cirlig" which lasted 1 minute 16 seconds showed only M. Cirlig on the screen for 32 seconds. The reporter is the one who says that D. Chirtoaca rejects accusations. The second item, "Renato Usatii came back and wants to become mayor of Balti" lasted 58 seconds, including 23 seconds of a direct appearance by R. Usatii. Other examples: In the newscast of 12 May, the section "Local elections 2015" included an item about the priorities of candidate V. Chirtoca that lasted 2 minutes 55 seconds, while the candidate spoke for 40 seconds. In the newscast of 14 May in the special section, candidates for Chisinau mayor or municipal councilors appeared directly as follows: Dorin Chirtoaca for 17 seconds; Monica Babuc for 28 seconds; Eugen Brad for 23 seconds; Marin Chersac for 12 seconds; John Onoje for 13 seconds; and Sergiu Barcari for 5 seconds. The question is: How much balance and fairness is there in the items that lasted 58 seconds, 1 minute 16 seconds, and 2 minutes 55 seconds, or in direct appearances with durations that varied between 5 and 40 seconds?

**Canal 2**, "Reporter" newscast at 19.00:

- Broadcasts news stories and articles in the special section "Local elections 2015."
- The total duration of stories/items and direct appearances of candidates as subjects varied. Example: In the newscast of 12 May, the special section included two items. The first referred to PCRM candidate V. Chirtoca and lasted 1 minute 57 seconds, and V. Chirtoca appeared directly for a total of 52 seconds. The second referred to candidate M. Cirlig and lasted 1 minute 25 seconds, and the candidate spoke on the screen for 12 seconds. In contrast with the first item, the latter was about a conflict but was shorter while the person it mentioned—D. Chirtoaca—did not appear on the screen; the reporter briefly mentioned his reaction. It should be mentioned that

unlike Prime, on 14 May when covering the submission of documents by D. Chirtoaca and M. Babuc to the district electoral council Canal 2 gave 17 seconds to each candidate for direct appearances. It might have been a coincidence and not an intended act, however, because in items that followed in the special section of the newscast that referred to four candidates for councilors, airtime for their direct appearances varied between 5 and 27 seconds.

**Moldova 1**, “Mesager” (Messenger) newscast at 19.00:

- Broadcasts election news stories and material in a special section titled “Election campaign 2015.”
- The total duration of news/stories and direct appearances of candidates as subjects varied. Example: In the newscast of 6 May the special section included an item about candidate Mihail Cirlig, who accused the current mayor of Chisinau of fraud over the sale of land lots. The piece lasted 1 minute 40 seconds. Unlike other television stations, Moldova 1 offered direct appearances to both sides—M. Cirlig and D. Chirtoaca—of 19 seconds each. On 12 May, the special section contained an item about V. Chirtoca participating in the election. There were no accusations, and it lasted 1 minute 18 seconds including a direct appearance of 10 seconds, although according to commitments in the declaration on editorial policy, such items should last up to 40 seconds only as was true for next item in the section about candidate O. Brega that lasted 23 seconds. In addition, the news about V. Chirtoca joining the campaign was preceded by the newscaster’s comment: “... Chirtoca has some big plans (?) for municipal development. He intends to create jobs by developing small and medium-sized enterprises, improving road infrastructure, attracting foreign investors, and providing advantageous loans to young people to buy homes.”
- This information, in addition to its biased nature, was unnecessary since the candidate appeared on the screen and could explain his plans although he has difficulty speaking Romanian. It is not the newscaster’s obligation to speak for a candidate.

**Accent TV**, “Accent info” newscast at 21.00:

- Has broadcast election news stories/material in a special section “Election campaign 2015” since 7 May, although similar items were broadcast earlier, too.
- The total duration of news/stories and direct appearances of candidates as subjects varied. Example: In the newscast of 11 May, the special section contained three articles referring to the change of PCNM’s name to Red Bloc, PSRM candidates in three towns in the Gagauz autonomy, and the list of candidates of the European People’s Platform of Moldova – Iurie Leanca electoral bloc. The first was 2 minutes long including a 1 minute 12 second direct appearance by the bloc’s leader Gr. Petrenco. The second lasted 3 minutes 13 seconds including a 1 minute 20 second direct appearance by PSRM leader I. Dodon. The third was 1 minute 13 seconds long including a 20 second direct appearance by the bloc’s leader Iurie Leanca. It should be noted that the caption “Election campaign 2015” appears at the beginning of the section and between the items in it but does not appear at the end. On 8 May in the special section “Accent info” broadcast articles about Renato Usatii and Sergiu Barcari of approximately equal duration (1 minute 44 seconds and 1 minute 36 seconds, respectively).

**Conclusions:**

- All the television stations monitored covered the campaign for general local elections on 14 June 2015 in their main newscasts.
- Four of the five stations monitored (not TV 7) broadcast election news and stories in special sections in accordance with the law.
- During the main newscasts, the stations monitored failed to fully comply with the law and with the commitments they made in the declarations on editorial policies for the campaign.
- The stations covered the campaign in a manner that could favor or denigrate certain candidates or parties and thus implicitly not adequately provide information to voters.
- There must be a certain balance in the coverage allotted to candidates and parties as required by the regulatory framework and by journalistic professionalism.

**Recommendations:**

- TV 7 should broadcast election news in a special section to comply with the law and to better orient viewers on the topics of newscasts.
- Accent TV should end the section on election news by repeating the caption "Election campaign 2015."
- Television stations should comply with the principles of fairness and balance when producing election news.

**Case study no. 2. Prime and Canal 2: journalism or propaganda**

This case study is based on the existing regulatory framework concerning the media coverage of the campaign for general local elections on 14 June 2015 and on the qualitative/quantitative content analysis of the main daily newscasts of two television stations, Prime and Canal 2, from 1 to 14 May 2015.

**Regulatory framework:**

Electoral Code, Article 64 (4): Mass media shall not adopt preferential treatment of electoral contestants by virtue of their social status and/or the functions of their candidates.  
(5) During an election, broadcasters and print media outlets shall clearly distinguish between the exercise of official functions and campaign activities of persons who do not fall within Article 13 (3).

**Regulations** on the coverage of the campaign for general local elections on 14 June 2015 in Moldovan mass media, Item 20: The activities of central public authorities and local public authorities, including the activities of the mayor's office/mayor, village/commune/town council, and district/municipal council shall be covered separately, in shows other than debates and campaign advertising, in compliance with the Electoral Code, the Broadcasting Code, and these Regulations. No candidates shall have priority by virtue of their functions.

21. Election events shall be covered in newscasts and print media without being accompanied by comments and avoiding distortion of political party and Central Electoral Commission messages.

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

**Prime:** Prime 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 a decision of the Broadcast Coordinating Council.

**Canal 2:** Station Canal 2 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 a decision of the Broadcast Coordinating Council

#### **Findings following content analysis:**

**Prime, 1 May,** “Primele stiri” (First news) newscast at 21.00:

The item “Democrats, face to face with the people of Orhei” (duration 1 minute 23 seconds) referred to the meeting of PDM leader M. Lupu with mayors, councilors, and supporters in Orhei District in an informal atmosphere in a woods near Ivancea Village. M. Lupu had two direct appearances for a total of 27 seconds. During the spot, the PDM leader either spoke or was filmed in the foreground or in general views, and in the end he appeared with a child in his arms. The question is why Prime went to a place where the PDM leader went?

**Prime, 2 May,** “Primele stiri” (First news) newscast at 21.00:

The item “Veterans and politicians remembering war (?)” contained the following direct appearances:

- One veteran – 26 seconds
- Another veteran – 10 seconds,
- M. Lupu, PDM leader – 21 seconds,
- Vl. Vitiuc, Deputy Speaker of Parliament – 16 seconds,
- I. Vlah, Bashkan of Gagauz Yeri – 11 seconds.

**Canal 2, 2 May,** “Reporter” newscast at 19.00:

The station broadcast the same item about veterans with the same duration of direct appearances but titled it “70 years of victory”. It would probably be advisable for mass media in general to promote the idea of peace which has a universal value and not victory which suggests the thought of revenge, but in the end, it is for mass media to decide.

**Prime, 7 May**, “Primele stiri” (First news) newscast at 21.00.

In the segment “New apartments for affected people in Cantemir” (50 seconds), the PDM Minister of Construction and Regional Development Vasile Bitca was omnipresent, including a direct appearance of 20 seconds.

**Canal 2, 7 May**, “Reporter” newscast at 19.00:

The station aired an identical segment about apartments including the headline.

**Prime, 8 May**, “Primele stiri (First news) newscast at 21.00:

The station aired a detailed news story with the same headline “New apartments for affected people in Cantemir” lasting 38 seconds, in which minister V. Bitca was mentioned, and his image appeared on the screen at the end of the story.

**Prime, 9 May**, “Primele stiri (First news)” newscast at 21.00:

The station aired a segment with two addresses titled “They remembered their heroes at the restored monument” that lasted 3 minutes 20 seconds. It referred to the military meal on 9 May in Stauceni and to Cunicea, Floresti District, where the monument in the headline actually is. The subjects included the PDM leader M. Lupu in the foreground with a direct appearance of 25 seconds when he, among other things, remembered that it was the 15<sup>th</sup> monument restored with contributions from his team. The other subjects’ appearances on the screen lasted between 3 and 10 seconds.

**Canal 2, 9 May**, “Reporter” newscast at 19.00:

Canal 2 divided the same news item into two parts: one in Cunicea Village in Floresti District and one in Stauceni. The title of the segment in Cunicea is “Remembering the village’s heroes”. PDM leader M. Lupu appeared in it directly for 25 seconds. The other 5 subjects appeared directly for up to 10 seconds. It should be mentioned that only one veteran—aged 91—still lives in the village and the only thing he said on the air was “Thank you.” M. Lupu reminded viewers that it was the 15<sup>th</sup> monument restored. In the end, we learned that, “The monument was restored with the support of the Tyumen regional administration and of local authorities.” Let’s remember that the Tyumen Region is in Russia, and without more details, the piece raises the question of what that region has in common with the restoration of the monument in Cunicea. Why was the contribution of M. Lupu’s team necessary too? Is it true that the PDM has restored 15 monuments? How much money and how many years did it take—a lot or a little considering that we have over 1000 localities in the country and 43 parties? Why do monuments have to be restored by parties, and if they are restored by parties, why does this need to be publicized on that scale? Why do party leaders overshadow the most appropriate and relevant protagonists for news on 9 May, i.e. war veterans? Is it just because we are having elections?

In the same newscast on Canal 2 on 9 May in the story “Commemoration day,” the PDM leader appeared again after the reporter said that, “In the sea of people, there were some members of political parties,” but the only party member to support this statement was M. Lupu. It should be mentioned that the country’s president had a direct appearance of 9 seconds in the story, while the PDM leader had 20 seconds, the same time as a war veteran.

**Prime, 11 May**, “Primele stiri” (First news) at 21.00:

The newscast contained the story “Better roads in Straseni” in which the PDM Minister of Transport and Road Infrastructure Vasile Botnari had two appearances on the screen for a duration of 22 seconds. The duration of the story was 2 minutes 10 seconds. Another segment was titled “Project in support of Moldovan families” with a duration of 1 minute 40 seconds. The only protagonist was PDM leader M. Lupu. First, for 11 seconds he shook hands with a group of people, kissed several children on the crowns of their heads, then for 33 seconds he spoke into the camera. It was not in the “Election campaign 2015” section, but it had a marked electoral character.

**Canal 2, 11 May**, “Reporter” newscast at 19.00:

The station aired an identical story to the one on Prime with the title “Better roads in Straseni.” The story about the PDM’s project was also broadcast, but its title was slightly changed to “Campaign of support to families.” We learned from the story and from its only subject that it is important to have united, strong families; about the number of draft laws in support of families the PDM will bring to Parliament; and that the duration of the project in support of families will last for one month. The initiative is praiseworthy, but there is still the question about the opportunistic launch of the project during the election campaign and especially about its efficiency. Television stations again had no doubts before producing such a story; however, viewers could have doubts if they are those who have families and know firsthand about the care they receive and how much time parties have before elections to think/care for families’ needs.

**Prime, 14 May**, “Primele stiri” (First news) at 21.00:

The newscast contained a story titled “Liberalized transport to the Black Sea” in light of the two-day meeting of ministers of transport from the countries of the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) that took place in Chisinau. The topic was important. Delegations from 12 countries participated in the meeting, but only Minister Vasile Botnari and Secretary General of the BSEC Victor Tvircun made direct appearances in the segment. Unlike on other television broadcasts, even the Armenian minister did not appear although Armenia is the only one of the 12 countries with which Moldova has concluded a transport liberalization agreement. This situation raises a reasonable suspicion that the goal was not to inform the public about the economic benefits of Black Sea cooperation but to once again showcase a minister from the PDM.

**Canal 2, 14 May**, “Reporter” newscast at 19.00:

The station aired a similar story, but titled it “The meeting of transport ministers in the capital.”

### **Conclusions:**

- Despite their commitments to statements on editorial policy, Prime and Canal 2 over-represented important representatives of the PDM in their main newscasts, thus distorting the media message delivered to the public.
- Stories with the PDM leader’s presence in newscasts during the reporting period can be viewed as election propaganda rather than as journalistic products.
- The biased approach to some topics erodes certain values such as social memory or family.



**Recommendations:**

- Prime and Canal 2 should stop broadcasting party propaganda and comply with journalistic requirements when covering various topics.
- Prime and Canal 2 should diversify the media products they deliver to the public by refraining from regularly re-broadcasting each other's stories.
- Prime and Canal 2 should use frequencies that are national rather than party controlled in order to serve the nation rather than the party.

**Case Study No. 3: Accent TV prepares a special section “Electoral 2015” that seriously violates legal and journalistic norms**

This study is based on the existing regulatory framework for media coverage of the general local elections on 14 June 2015 and on the quantitative and qualitative content analyses of the main daily newscast on Accent TV from 15 to 30 May 2015.

**Regulatory framework**

**Electoral Code** Article 64 (1) Public broadcasters, within all program services, and written media founded by public authorities are obliged to observe the principles of fairness, balance and impartiality while covering elections.

**Regulations** on the Coverage of the Election Campaign during general local elections on 14 June 2015 by media outlets in the Republic of Moldova, paragraph 10: Electoral competitors shall participate in the election campaign under equal conditions and shall enjoy non-discriminatory treatment when allotting air time and using the space in mass media outlets.

Paragraph 19. In the informative and news programs of the audiovisual institutions, events about the election campaign will be reflected respecting the provisions of articles 47, 64 and 64 (1) of the Election Code and Article 7 of the Broadcasting Code.

Paragraph 21. In the newscasts and articles of print media, election-related events will be covered without commentaries and in such a way as to avoid distorting the message of the electoral contestants and of the Central Electoral Commission.

From the **Declaration regarding editorial policy for the election campaign** approved by BCC:

**Accent TV:** 21. Election campaign events may be covered in the news edition (newscasts), only in line with the legal provisions and in such a way as to avoid distorting the message of the electoral contestants.

**Findings from the content analysis:**

During the reporting period in the main news program “Accent info,” Accent TV broadcast a wide variety of items and stories under the special headline “Electorală 2015” that with few exceptions featured the candidates for the position of Chişinău mayor. Analyzing this segment and the news program as a whole highlighted the following points:

- Accent TV has opinions about candidates that are displayed in the headlines and the length of items, by comments on the statements of certain persons, by the lack of relevant sources for controversial topics, and by using techniques better suited for disinformation and propaganda than for journalism.

Here are a few examples.

- a) In the newscast of 18 May, Accent TV broadcast the subject “The PSRM launched the campaign: Moldova without oligarchs, Moldova without unions” (“PSRM lansează campania: Moldova fără oligarhi, Moldova fără unioniști”) with a total length of 2 min 7 seconds, but not as part of Electorală 2015 in spite of the fact that PSRM is participating in the election.
- b) In the same edition, during the Electorală 2015 segment the item “Urecheanu promised to fire all employees of Mayor's Office” (“Urechean promite concedierea tuturor colaboratorilor din primărie”) appeared with a length of 1 min 18 seconds. In the story, however, we found out that Urecheanu intended to fire only incompetent officials, not all of them. The question is, did the author of the report wish to inform or misinform the audience? Misleading headlines are a propaganda technique; those who use it know very well that people in a hurry very often read only the headlines.
- c) Among the 5 subjects in the special segment was the item with the headline “Chirtoacă is proud of the roads in the capital” (“Chirtoacă este mândru de drumurile din capitală”) with a length of 2 min 18 seconds. At the end of the item, the reporter reminded viewers about the “big” scandal about the purchase of the new trolleybuses making reference, maybe for greater balance and credibility, to anonymous experts who believed that a fraud was committed. The reporter did not consult competent authorities to confirm or to rule out the alleged fraud. It is obvious that the reporter had the right to enrich the subject with additional information, but it should have been done according to professional ethics. On 18 May, candidates Gr. Petrenco, Z. Greceanii, V. Chirtoacă, were also featured, all of whom at certain times had been involved in scandals.
- d) On 20 May Electorală 2015 contained 5 items, 2 of which used images from the talk show “Glavnoe” on TV 21. This is a common practice for Accent TV. We don't know under what conditions these images are “borrowed,” but it seems like the TV station does its best to pack as many subjects as possible into the special segment. Often this looks awkward. For instance, one headline was “Cernei: city hall needs Oleg Cernei” (“Cernei: primăria are nevoie de unul ca Oleg Cernei”) in which the subject actually is a candidate for the municipal council. Or the item “The budget depends on the level of happiness of Chişinău residents: Chirtocă” (“Bugetul depinde de nivelul de fericire a chişinăuienilor: Chirtocă”) in which at the end the reporter found it necessary to repeat the candidate's “ambitious” (cited) engagements.
- e) On 21 May, the first item under Electorală 2015 had the headline “Urecheanu promises new schools and kindergartens” (“Urechean promite noi şcoli şi

grădinițe”), and at the end the reporter reminded viewers about his promises in 2009 to increase wages and pensions. It would not be incorrect to apply the same technique to all candidates, especially in cases when campaign promises are not fulfilled.

- f) The edition of 22 May contained 9 more stories with electoral content that are relevant to this case study for multiple reasons. Let us quote a few headlines: “Who will be the first to be released from detention, Shor or Amerberg and Grigoriuc” (“Cine va ieși primul din arest: Shor sau Amerberg și Grigoriuc?”); “Greceanii: Our pride is our professional team” (“Greceanii: mândria noastră este o echipă profesionistă”); and “The PL infringed the provisions of the Electoral Code” (“PL a încălcat prevederile Codului electoral”). The authors of these items definitely enriched the written Romanian language: “Victor Cebotari, candidat la *f-ția* (?), *al cărui echipă* este una demnă..” , ”necesită lucrări ample de solubrizare (?)”, ”ca candidatul”, ”s-a majorat *simțibil*”, ”blocurile au fost ridicate pe *trenurile* de joacă pentru copii *și parcuri*.., iar *ridicare* (?) lor...”. Additionally, in a report we learned that the editorial office contacted Iurie Ciocan, the head of the *District* (instead of Central) Election Commission. In another edition we learned that we have a “National Anti-corruption *Council* (instead of Center). The final straw in this edition was the subject “Nantoi urges the population not to vote for the parties in power” (“Nantoi îndeamnă populația să nu voteze pentru partidele de la putere”) produced by using images from the talk show on TV station “1+1” in which the participants talked in Russian with no subtitles in Romanian. A similar situation was the news item about the concerns of PCNM leader Gr. Petrenco about the destiny of Amerberg and Grigoriuc who were not released from detention to run for municipal councilor.
- g) Of the 7 subjects in Electoral 2015 on 27 May, some are noteworthy. For instance, the first item began with the reporter's statement, “In the middle of the election campaign, the PSRM was overwhelmed by a wave of frustrations” (“În toial campaniei electorale la adresa PSRM a început lansarea unui val amplu de provocări”); you start doubting that these words were from the party's lawyer. In another item, the reported says at the end, “Even if Urecheanu's plans seem to bring freshness to the capital, there is no doubt that the politician avoided revealing from where he would collect the necessary funds for implementing the projects” (“Chiar dacă planurile de viitor ale lui Urechean par a readuce prosperitatea capitalei, cert este că politicianul a evitat să declare de unde va lua sursele financiare suficiente pentru a demara proiectele vizate anterior.”) We would like to point out that in the same edition in an election-related report based on the “1+1” talk show, another mayoral candidate (M. Darie) also spoke about future plans, however the question of where he would find the funding for bus stations; for bigger, faster, and more comfortable transport; and for compensation for poor people and when the taxes would increase was not raised, although it would have been appropriate to do so. In a different item about elections featuring candidate for municipal council O. Cernei, three persons are criticized: an employee of the mayor's office (V. Butucel), a councilor (Iu. Topal) and the incumbent mayor (D. Chirtoacă). The reporter said, however, “Accent TV did not manage to contact D. Chirtoacă (only?) to comment on the accusations.” (“Postul Accent TV nu a reușit să ia legătura cu D. Chirtoacă (numai?) pentru a comenta acuzațiile.”) Instead, the reporter reminded viewers one

more time that without notice, the mayor had changed several minibus routes causing a lot of inconvenience to the residents of the capital; this was also mentioned by Cernei in the same news item. The final gem in that edition was “Free public transportation will solve the traffic jam problem: Brega” (“Transportul public gratuit va rezolva problema ambuteiajelor: Brega”). The report presented a segment from the talk show "Glavnoe" on TV 21. In a speech, Brega talked about transport and the reporter filled the space in between with information that the municipal mayor should be a member of the government movement. O. Brega spoke about transport whereas the reporter spoke about the current members of the Government (Bashkan and head of AŞ). Was this a mistake or was it done on purpose?

Nearly every edition of Accent info that included Electorală 2015 was full of examples of inappropriate coverage of the elections, but we will highlight one case we believe is an unusual one and which we consider to be far outside any journalistic rules. The case is about two subjects broadcast on 29 May.

The first item had the headline “Turned upside down, the Final Bell at Sadova Gymnasium” (“A răsunat ultimul clopoțel în gimnaziul Sadova”), lasted 5 min 16 seconds (the longest one so far), and covered to a great extent the participation of PSRM leader I. Dodon at the celebration of the final bell (graduation) in his native village. In the news report, the length of speaking time for the gymnasium principle, Ludmila Dodon, was 1 minute while that of I. Dodon was 1 minute 30 seconds. The PSRM leader not only congratulated students on finishing the school year but also handed out “Igor Dodon” diplomas to the best ones. What is troublesome? Television should cover such events, however it is not proper to trail after political candidates, especially to show them on the screen for long stretches during an election campaign. The right approach is either the presence or the absence of all party leaders in the race, otherwise Accent TV is guilty of political partisanship and thus is not performing in line with legal provisions or its own editorial policy adopted for this period.

Another item had the headline “Political campaign now even at the Final Bell?” (“Agitație electorală chiar și la ultimul sunet?”) and a length of 2 minutes 30 seconds. The report apparently was about the final bell at the Gh Asachi Lyceum in Chișinău. Its authors, however, in a strange and awkward way embellished it with images of Principal B. Volosatîi, who was featured a week ago and introduced as an avid supporter of the PLDM and who gave a speech at the launch of the election campaign of Urechianu. That speech was also incorporated. Later, the authors of the item got back to the lyceum and told us that the same principal during a school gathering, “...made a more or less political speech.” Actually, the principal had read an innocuous quatrain. The graduation was actually attended by Mayor D. Chirtoacă who gave a nonpolitical speech.

The way this subject was covered raises a lot of questions that have only one answer: the authors misled and misinformed the audience. The subject is political and is presented in an awkward way that had nothing to do with journalism. The headlines flipped two situations as campaigning was extensive at the Sadova Gymnasium but not at the Gh. Asachi Lyceum. We thus see reality in a false mirror.

### **Conclusions:**

- In the way it produced most of the items broadcast in the Electorală 2015 segment, Accent TV gave the impression that contrary to its journalistic vocation it is

politically affiliated and favors some candidates and is critical of others thus denying appropriate information to voters, again contrary to journalistic principles and contrary to professional norms and legal provisions.

- Accent TV featured some electoral subjects during the reporting period by awkwardly using disinformation techniques that might have brought dividends to certain candidates but did not help voters to get a better understanding of their electoral options.
- The way Accent TV performed demonstrates its inability to stand by the commitments made in its declaration to the CCA and the CEC and to its audience during the election campaign. These commitments, which are very good in and of themselves, are thus discredited.

**Recommendations:** Accent TV should honor its commitments in the declaration on editorial policy for the 2015 general elections and should faithfully follow them in order to demonstrate their respect for the law, for their profession, and for their audience.

#### **Case Study No. 4: During the election campaign, Prime TV and Canal 2 continue to be the mouthpieces of the PDM**

This study is based on the existing regulatory framework for media coverage of the election campaign for local general elections on 14 June 2015 and on the quantitative and qualitative content analyses of the main newscasts of the day from 15 to 30 May 2015 on two TV stations: Prime TV and Canal 2 .

#### **Regulatory framework**

**Electoral Code** Article 64 (4): Media outlets will not adopt privileged treatment toward electoral competitors due to their social status and/or the positions held by its candidates.

(5) During the electoral period, public broadcasters and written media founded by public authorities will make a clear distinction in their products between fulfilling official duties and the electoral activities carried out by persons who do not fall under the incidence of Article 13, paragraph (3).

**Regulations** on the Coverage of the Election Campaign during local elections on 14 June 2015 by media outlets in the Republic of Moldova, paragraph 20: The activity of the central public administration, including the activity of the mayoralty, village/town/city councils and of the district (*rayon*)/municipal councils shall be presented separately from debates and electoral advertising, according to the provisions of the Election Code, Broadcasting Code and this Regulation. No candidate in the elections will have priorities despite his function.

Paragraph 21. In the newscasts and articles of print media, election-related events will be covered without commentaries and in such a way as to avoid distorting the message of the electoral contestants and of the Central Electoral Commission.

From the **Declaration regarding editorial policy for the election campaign** approved by CCA:

**Prime TV.** 4. The TV station Prime will cover the election campaign during the local general elections on 14 June 2015 in a fair, balanced, and impartial way, will strictly observe the Regulation on the Coverage of the Election Campaign during the local general elections on 14 June 2015 by media outlets approved by the decision of the Central Electoral Commission No. 32266 as of 17 April 2015 and the Concept on the Coverage of the Election Campaign during the local general elections on 14 June 2015 by the audiovisual institutions in the Republic of Moldova approved through the Decision of CCA.

**TV Canal 2** 4. The TV station Canal 2 will cover the election campaign during the local general elections on 14 June 2015 in a fair, balanced, and impartial way, will strictly observe the Regulation on the Coverage of the Election Campaign during the local general elections on 14 June 2015 by media outlets approved by the decision of the Central Electoral Commission No. 32266 as of 17 April 2015 and the Concept on the Coverage of the Election Campaign during the local general elections on 14 June 2015 by the audiovisual institutions in the Republic of Moldova approved through the Decision of CCA.

### **Findings as a result of content analysis:**

**Prime TV 22 May** Primele știri (First News) at 21:00.

The segment “Alegeri Locale 2015” (Local Elections) contained:

- An item about the PCRM mayoral candidate for Chișinău V. Chirtoca with the headline “Hit the deck DJ Vasili” (“Hai dă-i bătaie DJ Vasili”) with a length of 1 minute 56 seconds in which the subject is portrayed as somebody who loves and sings songs.
- A report about the PPEM candidate for Chișinău mayor with the headline “Nantoi will deal with communist councilors in Bălți” (“Nantoi se ia de consilierii comuniști din Bălți”) with a length of 54 seconds in which the subject attacks the initiative to gain autonomy for Bălți municipality through a referendum.
- An item about the initiative of PDM women to hold a fair with the headline “Charity Fair in Chișinău” (“Târg de caritate la Chișinău”) with a total length of 2 minutes 5 seconds. The first subject is a young beneficiary of the charitable event, but her name is mentioned only in the subtitle. The PDM candidate for Chișinău mayor, M. Babuc, is featured twice in the same image, gently patting her. The story continues with M. Babuc and then PDM leader Marian Lupu speaking.
- An item with the headline “European conditions in a village in Moldova” (“Condiții europene într-un sat din Moldova”) referred to Fundurii Vechi Village in Glodeni District. The length of the item was 1 minute 38 seconds. The intro of the story read “A community center, modern educational institutions and places for leisure time. This might sound like a description of place in a European country, but we are talking about Fundurii Vechi village in Glodeni District. Local people say that you can make a decent living here, you can find a proper job, and you have places to spend your free time.” (“Un Centru comunitar, instituții de învățământ moderne și

locuri de agrement. Pare o descriere a unei localități dintr-o țară europeană. Însă este vorba despre Fundurii Vechi din raionul Glodeni. Localnicii spun, că aici poți trăi decent, îți poți găsi un loc de muncă și ai unde-ți petrece timpul liber.”) The story continued with three persons speaking—one from the recreation center, one from the kindergarten, and one from the community center—without being introduced either verbally or in subtitles. Only the final speaker is introduced, i.e., Emilia Vieru who has been mayor of the village for 8 years during which over 20 infrastructure projects were completed with a total budget of 16 million lei. Nothing is mentioned about the PDM mayoral candidate running for a third term; the icon on her shirt is the only indication of her affiliation.

Of the 2 items that featured PDM candidates, 1 can be categorized as veiled political campaigning. The way in which the headlines were formulated set certain tones for the content.

**Canal 2 22 May Reporter at 19:00.**

The segment *Alegeri locale 2015* contained:

Item 1: “Nnanto criticizes communist councilors in Bălți” (“Nantoi îi critică pe consilierii comuniști din Bălți”), length 52 seconds.

Item 2: “Musical talent of Vasile Chirtoca” (“Talentul muzical al lui Vasile Chirtoca”), length 2 minutes 3 seconds.

Item 3: “Charity Fair by PDM women” (“Târg de caritate de la femeile democrate”), length 2 minutes 41 seconds.

These items are nearly identical to those on Prime TV, only they are presented in a different order with somewhat different headlines and sometimes with changes in the content. For instance, the third item in addition to PDM candidate M. Babuc and PDM leader M. Lupu also featured Dm. Parfentiev, Deputy Minister of Information Technology and Communication.

Item 4: “Projects for Talmaza, Ștefan-Vodă District” (“Proiecte pentru Talmaza”), length 2 minutes 31 seconds.

Even though the fourth item was placed under the *Alegeri Local 2015* rubric, it did not mention that Vl. Pleșca, mayor of the village for 6 years, was running again on the PL list. Instead, on the same day in an item aired on Publika.TV “A village in Ștefan Voda is full of problems. Children freeze in schools, roads are very bad” (“Un sat din Ștefan Vodă, plin de probleme. Copiii îngheață în școli, iar drumurile sunt foarte proaste”), we learn that “Renovating the lyceum is among the priorities of mayoral candidate Vladimir Pleșca” (“Reparația liceului este una dintre prioritățile candidatului pentru funcția de primar Vladimir Pleșca”); however, not a single word is mentioned about the party supporting him. The lyceum was built 30 years ago, the windows had not been replaced, and the roads are bad, but the candidate in 6 years had managed to repair 2 kindergartens. If we unravel the message we find that in Fundurii Vechi where the mayor is a PDM member there are European living conditions whereas in Talmaza, where the mayor is a PL member there are tons of troubles. Because the items were broadcast on national channels, they have a great

deal of relevance for the communities involved; however, we have reason to believe the aim was to persuade the residents of the two communities to vote “in the right way.”

**Prime TV 25 May** Primele știri the Alegeri locale 2015 segment:

The first and only item “Education: the priority of democrats” (“Educația: o prioritate a democraților”), length 1 minute 55 seconds is about the PDM mayoral candidate for Chișinău, Monica Babuc at a meeting with the teachers of the Education and Science Institute.

**Canal 2 25 May** Reporter at 19:00

Item 1: “Check-ups before the elections” (“Verificări înaintea alegerilor”), length 35 seconds was a news report from CEC.

Item 2: “They will rest in a modern summer camp” (“Se vor odihni într-o tabără modern”) length 2 minutes 8 seconds was a boastful item, just like the headline, about Bobeica Village, Hâncești District where PDM member Lilian Musteață is mayor.

We note that, on 1 June 2014, TV Publika informed viewers that, “Residents of Bobeica community, Hâncești District will have tap water by the end of the year. A construction project on water supply and sewage for this community was launched today,” and also that, “The work was made possible due to the support of MPs of the PDM.” Also here, PDM MP Mihail Socan is quoted: “From the national budget, thanks to the support of MPs of the PDM, 2,700,000 lei were allocated for this project. We also received funding from the Environmental Fund. We help many mayors, not only the ones from our party.” ([http://www.publika.md/motiv-de-bucurie-pentru-locuitorii-comunei-bobeica--raionul-hancesti-in-curand--oamenii-vor-avea-apa-potabila-la-robinet\\_1952651.html](http://www.publika.md/motiv-de-bucurie-pentru-locuitorii-comunei-bobeica--raionul-hancesti-in-curand--oamenii-vor-avea-apa-potabila-la-robinet_1952651.html))

We also note that on 17 January 2015, the publication *Ziarul Național* mentioned in one article among others that, “The biggest profits from contracts signed with state institutions in 2014 were gained by PDM MP Mihail Solcan,” and that “The most profitable contract was signed in April 2014 with the town hall of Bobeica Village, Hâncești District” to implement a project on water supply and the removal and discharge of waste water. The publication concluded that despite the fact that the construction work should have ended in autumn, “The residents of Bobeica community still had neither water, nor sewage facilities.” (<http://ziarulnational.md/interese-licitatii-de-125-de-milioane-de-lei-castigate-de-deputati-si-ministri/>)

On 3 April 2015, the head of an NGO in the village made a post on the platform anticorupție.md: “Fraudulent schemes with land at Bobeica Town Hall, Hâncești District” with the involvement of “SRL Mirconcord from Bobeica (who is very close to Bobeica Mayor Lilian Musteață).” (<http://anticoruptie.md/sesizare/scheme-dubioase-cu-terenuri-la-primaria-bobeica-hancesti/>)

After learning these details, we rhetorically ask the questions, How do we choose addresses and subjects? How do we do the research? and Is this media product the result of a journalistic effort or of a party order?

**Prime TV 26 May** Primele știri the Alegeri locale 2015 segment:



Item 1: “Essential solutions for problems in Bălți” (“Soluții *esențiale* pentru problemele din Bălți”) length 1 minute 15 seconds about the PDM candidate for Bălți mayor Serghei Chiseliov. The adjective in the headline suggests that he has the best solutions for all the problems faced by the city. To avoid extensive presence on the screen, the moderator sums up the list of grandiose proposals by the candidate.

Item 2: “PN launches its campaign” (“Partidul Nostru's-a lansat în campanie”), length 1 minute 6 seconds. The item ends with candidate for Chișinău mayor I. Cașu telling viewers about his team which is committed to personal integrity. The moderator doubts the candidate's words and reminds viewers that one member of the team, Al. Petcov, was fined for offending a prosecutor and for aggression against policemen.

**Canal 2 26 May** Reporter at 19:00 the Alegeri locale 2015 segment:

Item 1: “Millionaire Shor with an annual income of 25 thousand lei” (“Milionarul Shor cu venit anual de 25 de mii de lei”), length 1 minute 8 seconds.

Item 2 “Candidates with personal integrity but not really” (“Candidați integri și nu prea”), length 1 minute 12 seconds was an item aired by Prime TV with the headline “The PN launches its campaign.”

Item 3: “Solutions for problems in Bălți” (“Soluții pentru problemele orașului Bălți”), length 1 minute 18 seconds was aired by Prime TV with the headline “Essential solutions for problems in Bălți.”

Item 4: “Successful Projects in Ialoveni” (“Proiecte de succes în Ialoveni”), length 2 minutes 47 seconds is a flattering story about mayor Gh. Caracuian who managed to spend 8–10 million lei each year for the needs of the community, and “the results are visible.” It is not noted that in 2011 Gh Caracuian stood as an independent candidate. Judging from the headlines we find that in the case of the PN, their candidates “have personal integrity but not really” whereas in the case of Ialoveni, the projects are “successful.”

Let us do the job of the television station and remind ourselves that last year the platform moldovacurata.md published the article “Bread from the company of the son-in-law” (“Pâine de la firma ginereului”) that states that “at the end of 2013, Ialoveni town hall organized only one public tender and on that basis selected the company that would supply food to three kindergartens in the town for half a year. Only one company submitted a bid; it was Ialpanis Ltd. run by mayor's son-in-law. Moreover, with respect to this case, CNI conducted an internal investigation and found that the mayor ‘created a conflict of interest by signing the acquisition contract.’” (<http://www.moldovacurata.md/interese-avere-la-vedere/integritatea-persoanelor/contractele-de-achizitionare-a-painii-semnate-de-primarul-orasului-ialoveni-cu-ginerele-sau-ar-putea-fi-anulate>)

It appears the TV station was not interested in learning all the information but instead had another goal. So, from Ialoveni we move to nearby Costești where investments in the past 4 years amounted to 37 million lei, and mayor V. Bortă is standing for re-election though this time it is not clear on behalf of which party. Of course “he will not stop

here.” The mayor of Costești was elected from the list of the PL. In 2013, the Court of Accounts accused him of purchasing an official car costing 250,000 lei from the funds intended for the day care center for children with special needs. Why is there so much reverence for a PL mayor? Maybe because the procurement of the Skoda car was decided by the PL and PDM councilors? (<http://www.jc.md/s-a-pricopsit-cu-skoda-din-banii-destinati-copiilor/comment-page-1/>)

#### **Conclusions:**

- Prime TV and Canal 2, contrary to legal and journalistic norms, cover election subjects in a selective way.

In their Alegeri Locale 2015 segments, both stations continued to feature electoral contestants favoring PDM candidates in a disproportionate manner.

When preparing the Alegeri locale 2015 segments, Prime TV and TV Canal 2 often and consciously told half the truth which is the equivalent of lying on a national level, thus enormously compromising the information appropriate for voters.

**Repeated recommendation:** Prime TV and TV Canal 2 should use the terrestrial frequencies through which they broadcast and which are national patrimonies for the benefit of the voters and not the parties.

#### **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>1</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>2</sup>,"

### **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 I*).

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.

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<sup>1</sup> *Manual de jurnalism*, coordinated by Mihai Coman, Iași, Polirom, vol. II, 1999

<sup>2</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

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
<b>31 May</b>	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 Caracuian)	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	

			Petrenco: 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 Chirtoaca 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			

**Case Study No. 6: Bad practices in providing a balance of sources on controversial items at Accent TV**

This case study is based on the analysis of the election-related stories that tackled conflicts broadcast by Accent TV in the main newscast of the day from 1 to 12 June 2015. The analysis followed the presence/lack of relevant sources based on the requirements of the existing regulatory and self-regulatory for media.

**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.

**Broadcasting Code, Article 7** paragraph 4 (c): In covering controversial issues, the principle of providing information from all sources must be observed.

Regulation on the Coverage of the Election Campaign during the local general elections on 14 June 2015 by media outlets in the Republic of Moldova, paragraph 19: 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.

Paragraph 21. In the newscasts and articles of print media, election-related events will be covered without commentaries and in such a way as to avoid distorting the message of the electoral contestants and of the Central Electoral Commission.

From Declarations on the Editorial Policy for the Election Campaign approved by the Broadcast Coordinating Council:

**Accent Tv**: 21. The election campaign events may be covered in the news edition (newscasts) only in line with the legal provisions and in such a way as to avoid distorting the message of the electoral contestants.

### **Regulatory framework:**

#### **Moldovan Journalist Code of Ethics (new edition)**

2.1 The journalist shall present the information in an honest and balanced manner and only after having taken steps to verify it.

2.2 The journalist shall request the opinions of all parties relevant to the subject.

2.5 The journalist as a rule shall verify the information from two sources independent of each other. The journalist shall publish only the information that he is convinced, after verification, is truthful.

2.6 The journalist as a rule shall indicate the source of his information and shall take steps to obtain information from quotable sources.

#### **Code of Conduct of Broadcasters**

Chapter I. Fair, complete, appropriate information and political and social pluralism

Art.1. Broadcasters have the prime duty to tell the truth, regardless of the consequences for them, this is a duty stemming from the constitutional right of the public to be informed in a fair, complete and appropriate way. In line with this right, broadcasters are obliged to communicate only fully checked facts.

Art.3. The information presented within newscasts and current affairs programs must be based on facts and data whose veracity can be established through corresponding verification methods.

Art.4. Informing on matters of public interest with political, economical, social and cultural impacts, must provide impartiality and balance and encourage the free formation of opinions by presenting the views of all parties involved, and if needed, the main opposition points of view.

Art.6. Broadcasters are obliged to provide the right to reply and to rectify to any individual or legal entity whose legitimate rights and interests were violated through false or inaccurate information presented during a broadcast.

Art.7. The broadcaster that intentionally distorts information, makes baseless accusations, uses picture and video images or any other source without permission, or maligns is committing the most serious professional misconduct.

### Findings of the analysis:

The controversial items broadcast from 1 to 12 June 2015 under the Election section of the main daily newscast on Accent TV were subject to analysis. Of the total number of stories, we selected 17 broadcast in 7 of the 10 newscasts. These items are relevant for the purpose of this case study because they all have a similar ending.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Controversial issue</b>	<b>End of the story</b>
1/06	<b>Iurie Toma—an independent candidate running for mayor of Ungheni</b>	<b>The reporters of Accent TV could not get in touch with the press service of the PLDM in order to comment on the statements made by Iurie Toma.</b>
2/06	<b>Do Unionists wish to establish chaos in Chişinău?</b>	<b>Accent TV made numerous attempts to contact MIA in order to receive a comment on the information presented, however our efforts came to nothing.</b>
3/06	<b>Parliament took a pause due to its incapacity—Carpov</b>	<b>So far, the PLDM, PDM and PCRM have not commented on the statements of the independent candidate Eugen Carpov</b>
	<b>Darie: Corrupt public officials in mayor’s office are protected by Chirtoacă</b>	<b>Neither V.Didenco nor his two daughters who were all on the house grounds during the protest met the media outlets to comment on the situation... Accent TV attempted to find mayoral candidate D. Chirtoacă in order to get a response to the accusations launched by Marcel Darie against the former mayor; however, Chirtoacă could not be found.</b>
	<b>Petrenco: Suspending Rossia -24 is illegal</b>	<b>Accent TV tried to get in touch with the PCRM leader to get feedback on the statements made by Grigore Petrenco; however, our efforts came to nothing.</b>
	<b>Brega: Minibuses produce a black hole in the municipal budget</b>	<b>Currently, the PL mayoral candidate has not commented the statement made by Oleg Brega.</b>
5/06	<b>Iurie Leancă: the report of Gaburici Prime Minister -lacks consensus</b>	<b>To date, the press service of the Prime Minister Chiril Gaburici has not commented on the statements made by unattached Member Iurie Leancă</b>
	<b>Urechean promises to build a waste recycling facility</b>	<b>Despite the fact that S. Urechean spoke about building a waste recycling facility, the PLDM candidate did not clarify the project costs and where from such funds would come from</b>
	<b>PP accuses Chirtoacă of building booths illegally</b>	<b>Accent TV attempted to find the mayoral candidate D. Chirtoacă in order to get his response to information mentioned, however Chirtoacă could not be found.</b>

9/06	<b>Veterans from Orhei Shor bribe the residents of Orhei with soap and detergent</b>	<b>In order to get a response about the accusations launched against Ilan Shor, we tried to contact his spokesperson; however, our efforts came to nothing.</b>
11/06	<b>Petrenco: Police intimidate the candidates of "Our Home Moldova"</b>	<b>Press service of the General Police Inspectorate did not pick up the phone when Accent TV called to get a comment on the statements made by the leader of Our Home Moldova</b>
	<b>Popular Party demands the arrest of Dorin Chirtoacă</b>	<b>The former mayor has not as yet commented on the accusations launched by the young people of the PPEM of Moldova</b>
	<b>Cîrlig: PL puts forward offenders as candidates</b>	<b>Accent TV made numerous attempts to contact the Vice Chair of the PL concerning the statements made by M. Cîrlig however, our phone calls were ignored</b>
12/06	<b>Usatîi: Gaburici left his "masters"</b>	<b>So far the Chair of the PLDM has not commented on the statements made by Renato Usatîi</b>
	<b>Usatîi announced that several provocations directed at Our Party have been prepared</b>	<b>Accent TV did not manage to get in touch with the press service of the State information Resource Center "Registru" to get a comment on this matter.</b>
	<b>The residents of Ulmu Village boycott the local elections</b>	<b>Accent TV did not manage to get in touch with the press service of the Ministry of Justice to get a comment on this matter.</b>

Accent TV often broadcast three or even four controversial items (3 June) in one newscast that had an identical ending though the language differed. Instead of attempting to provide effective coverage of all relevant opinions about the conflict, the TV station used clichés which instead revealed professional incompetence or a lack of genuine desire to balance the sources. Simply and frequently stating that the source could not to be found cannot be perceived by television viewers as anything other than dereliction of professional duties.

It is true that sometimes sources cannot be found before going on the air, but these are precisely the cases when TV viewers must be informed that the newsroom wanted to provide full information but failed because not everything depends on the newsroom. Images can be used as evidence, e.g., journalists knocking at a gate or a door that was not opened. Otherwise, the question arises why television viewers should believe the TV station that merely repeats the clichéd excuse? The audience may be confused if they are told in 3 or 4 stories that the liberal candidate for mayor D. Chirtoacă could not be found, or that the newsroom could not get in touch with the press service of the PLDM or that Accent TV did not succeed in getting in touch with the PCRML leader, or that the phone calls made by Accent TV were ignored, etc.

In six cases Accent TV "justified" the lack of relevant sources in the stories about conflicts by mentioning that at the time of the broadcast, the persons concerned had not commented on the accusations launched against them. This referred to political parties (3 June), the press service of the Prime Minister (05 June), and candidates (3 June, 11 June, 12 June). Thus, the TV station "delegates" the responsibility to balance sources to those who did not comment (at a time convenient for the newsroom). It is, however, the direct

responsibility of the journalist to find all relevant opinions on a controversial item instead of waiting for them.

**Conclusions:**

- In the stories on conflicts broadcast by Accent TV during the monitoring period, the TV channel revealed its professional incompetence by not providing all relevant opinions to enable the viewer gain a comprehensive image of the event.
- Instead of relevant information sources, Accent TV employed methods able to challenge viewers' credibility.

**Recommendations:**

- When producing stories on conflicts, Accent TV must stop employing practices that do not provide an effective balance of information sources.
- When when a source can not be found, the viewer should be provided evidence of attempts to make contact.