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

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1. General information

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

1.2 Monitoring period: 1 May–14 June 2015

1.3 Criteria for selecting media outlets to monitor:

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

1.4 List of mass media outlets monitored:

Broadcasting media

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

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

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

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

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

Online print media:

www.unimedia.info online portal, Romanian language;

www.omg.md online portal, Russian language;

www.publika.md online portal, Romanian language;

www.pan.md online version of *Panorama* magazine, Russian language;

www.timpul.md online version of national newspaper *Timpul de dimineață*, Romanian language.

2. Methodological framework

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

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

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

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

¹ Simona Ștefănescu, Riscurile comunicării mediatice în timpul conflictelor

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

3. Monitoring data



Involvement in the election campaign

From 1 to 14 May 2015, Moldova 1 public television station actively covered the elections. In the 14 newscasts during this period, Moldova 1 broadcast 52 items either directly or tangentially relevant. Some of them referred to the start of the campaign and to the process of registering candidates (22 stories), and some covered current issues concerning the work of the capital's mayor's office. They included stories about the allowances provided to World War II veterans, bonuses to be offered for building apartments without debt to the state, new trolleybuses that will be functioning by the end of this year, and the settlement of the Tintareni waste deposit problem among others.

Impartiality and objectivity/political partisanship

Out of the total of 52 news stories, the majority presented information in an objective and impartial manner. There were no evident violations of ethical norms that might have distorted or truncated the information provided to the public. There were no major problems in terms of separating facts from opinions or discriminating against a candidate either. A single problematic news item was broadcast on 14 May; it concerned the altercation between Mayor Dorin Chirtoaca and representatives of the Party of Socialists (PSRM) and Our Party (PN) at the most recent meeting of the Chisinau Municipal Council. The reporter claimed that, "Our Party and PSRM representatives joined forces and wrecked the start of the latest meeting of Chisinau Municipal Council. They gracelessly fell over one another, forgetting that they were in a public institution." The reporter thus expressed his own opinion about the incident.

The presence of news stories referring to the work of local authorities (about one third of the total) favored Mayor Dorin Chirtoaca who thus got wider coverage than the other candidates for mayor of Chisinau about whom there was no news or who were mentioned only in general stories such as those about registration. Overall, Liberal Party (PL) representatives directly appeared in 11 items and were mentioned in 6. The context was positive in 9 cases, negative in 2, and neutral in 6 cases. For example, in the newscast on 6 May, the current mayor appeared in 4 stories: the conflict between the Ministry of Education and the Chisinau Municipal Education Department concerning the rules for appointing school managers; the corruption accusations launched by People's Party of the Republic of Moldova (PPRM) candidate Mihai Cirlig against Dorin Chirtoaca; the bonuses to apartment buildings without debt; and the settlement of the problem of Tintareni waste deposit with European funding. It was similar on other days when the mayor was the focus in several stories (2 on 10 May and 2 on 11 May). Considering that Mr. Chirtoaca had not been officially registered as candidate at that point and thus was still the mayor, his increased media presence seems partially justified.

Another group that got repeated direct appearances was the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) whose representatives appeared in 6 stories and were mentioned twice. In 4 cases the context was positive, and in 4 it was neutral. The representatives PSRM directly appeared in 2 stories and were mentioned in 5 others, mostly in a negative context (5 times). PN had 3 appearances and 5 mentions, all in a neutral context, and PPRM was quoted 3 times in a neutral context. The other parties referred to in the news were either quoted once or mentioned several times in different contexts.

Pluralism of opinions/correctness and balance of sources

The public television station used several sources to prepare news stories, to a large extent ensuring pluralism and diversity of opinions. Most often Moldova 1 referred to politicians who were quoted 28 times in relevant stories; in 26 cases the sources were men. Public officials were quoted 20 times (18 men and 2 women), experts were quoted 12 times (3 women), and citizens 9 times (8 women). Thus, the gender balance strongly favored men.

During the reporting period, Moldova 1 broadcast 6 stories about conflicts, 3 of which were balanced and 3 that failed to present both sides. The unbalanced stories concerned the following topics: the statements of PN leader Renato Usatii, that several municipal lots were going to be sold at much lower prices than their real cost (13 May); the protests of the PSRM and NU and their supporters against the Chisinau Municipal Council's intention to vote on a package of laws (14 May); and the discussions in Parliament about this situation (14 May). It should be noted that Ion Ceban, the PSRM MP who organized the protest, held a press conference on the same day and explained that morning's events, but Moldova 1 did not include his opinion in the story.

Language and images used

From 1 to 14 May 2015, no discriminatory language was used about candidates or parties, and there none of the images created questions about Moldova 1 journalists' compliance with ethical and professional standards.



Involvement in the campaign

From 1 to 14 May 2015, Prime television station broadcast a total of 29 relevant items; many of them (23) were basic news stories. The majority directly related to the campaign referred to the work of the Central Electoral Commission, the registration of candidates, and events launching candidates' campaigns. Items indirectly related referred to the commissioning of the road in Voinova Village in Straseni District with the participation of Minister of Transport and Road Infrastructure Vasile Botnari (11 May); new roads to be built in Bahmut and Vulcanesti with European support also with participation of Vasile Botnari (5 May); cultural events with the participation of Minister of Culture Monica Babuc who is also the PDM candidate for Chisinau mayor (the start of the "Cronograf"

documentary film festival on 13 May and the start of the European Spring of Poets in Chisinau festival on 6 May).

Impartiality and objectivity/political partisanship

During the reporting period, the items broadcast by Prime did not seriously violate professional ethics; however, there were four instances when the reporters' bias was evident. For example, in the story about altercations at the Chisinau Municipal Council, the reporter expressed his opinion at the start saying that "wild fights" occurred (14 May). Also, on 11 May, the story about the inauguration of the road in Voinova presented reality through the eyes of the reporter who appreciated the "European quality" of the road though the survey conducted among the villagers supported the reporter's statements. The item about the launch of the Family Month Campaign by the PDM contained elements with no informational value such as the statement that Marian Lupu personally welcomed the attendees while the video showed the PDM leader kissing the children present at the ceremony (11 May). Prime also broadcast a segment pointing out that at the launch of his campaign a candidate, "...had a difficult time reading his speech in the Romanian language (the story on 12 May about the Communist Party of Moldova [PCRM] candidate for Chisinau mayor). This offered irrelevant information to viewers because it did not refer directly to the candidate's electoral platform and showed him in a poor light.

The frequency of appearances of certain candidates and parties and the approach to events clearly showed the channel's editorial affinity for the PDM. Thus, in 10 of the 12 spots concerning the PDM, the tone of coverage was positive. The channel covered PDM leader Marian Lupu's meetings with citizens in Orhei (1 May), his meeting with a group of veterans (2 May), his participation in the dedication of a monument in Cunicea Village in Floresti District (9 May), and the launch of the Family Month Campaign by the PDM (11 May) among others.

Another political party often covered by Prime was the PL. The representatives were directly quoted in 3 items and mentioned in 7 others equally in positive and negative contexts (5 each). Indirectly relevant news stories mainly presented PL in a positive context such as the one about the loan that local authorities will receive to solve the problem of the Tintareni waste deposit (11 May) and allowances for World War II veterans (4 May) but also in a negative context like the fine for illegally parking a PL car (1 May) and accusations of corruption by PPRM candidate Mihai Cirlig against Dorin Chirtoaca (6 May, 12 May). In contrast, other political parties such as the Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM) and the PCRM appeared once in a positive context each, the PSRM appeared once in a negative context, and PN appeared once in a neutral context.

Pluralism of opinions/correctness and balance of sources

The majority of electoral news broadcast by Prime during the reporting period complied with the principle of diversity and balance of sources, but it was unbalanced in terms of gender representation. Most of the relevant stories quoted politicians (17 overall including 2 women) and public officials (14 overall including 3 women). News stories also included the opinions of 6 ordinary citizens (3 men and 3 women). Five of the 6 were related to

controversies; all sides in the conflicts were quoted. The only unbalanced story concerned the parking fine for a PL car (1 May).

Language and images used

During the reporting period, Prime did not use discriminatory language about candidates or parties or images that distorted reality.



Involvement in the electoral campaign

During the monitoring period, television station Canal 2 broadcast 23 relevant stories. The majority directly related to the campaign referred to the registration of candidates and to launching their campaigns. Canal 2 also broadcast several stories indirectly relevant stories such as those concerning 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, cultural events with the participation of Minister of Culture Monica Babuc while she was still in office).

Impartiality and objectivity/political partisanship

Of the 23 relevant items, 3 had problems in terms of objectivity and impartiality. One of them referred to the renovation of roads in Straseni District (11 May). Praise for the Ministry of Transport whose head is a member of the PDM was evident in the headline ("Exceptional road"), while the text on the screen said "Village roads like those in Europe." Also on 11 May, in the news story about the PDM launching the Family Month Campaign in Moldova, the reporter emphasized that all participants, "...were welcomed by the PDM leader Marian Lupu." The story of 12 May about Vasile Chirtoca entering the contest for Chisinau mayor showed the reporter's bias. The attempt was to show him in a negative light by saying, "PCRM candidate Vasile Chirtoca had a difficult time reading his speech in the Romanian language."

During the monitoring period, the channel clearly favored the PDM by the large number of items—10 out of 23—in which this party's representatives either appeared directly (8) or were mentioned (2); the context was mostly either positive (7) or neutral (3). The items that showed the PDM in a positive light referred to Marian Lupu's meeting with veterans (1 May); his participation in the inauguration of a monument in Cunicea (9 May); Monica Babuc's designation as PDM candidate for Chisinau mayor (4 May) and her registration as candidate (14 May) among others.

PL representatives were directly referred to in 5 news stories and mentioned in 2 others; the context was mostly neutral (5) or negative (2). The PPRM made 4 direct appearances (1 in a positive context and 3 in a neutral context), the PSRM had 2 appearances and 2 mentions in negative and neutral contexts, PN made 2 direct appearances and 1 mention, 2 in a positive context and 1 neutral. The other candidates and the events they organized shared the information space of Canal 2 almost equally both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Correctness and balance of sources/pluralism of opinions

The relevant news items on *Canal 2* most often quoted politicians (19 times, 16 men) and public officials (12 times, 10 men). Citizens were quoted 7 times (6 men). There were also 9 other sources, including 5 women. Thus, gender representation was significantly unbalanced.

Of the 7 news stories on conflicts, the coverage of 6 was balanced. The one that wasn't was the story of 4 May about the Central Electoral Commission's decision to exclude the Reformed Communist Party from the list of parties that can compete in elections as the party's opinion was not included.

Language and images used

Canal 2 did not use exaggerated language in news broadcasts nor did reporters use labels for candidates or parties. Images and montage also complied with ethical and professional standards.



TV 7

Involvement in the campaign

In the first two weeks of monitoring, television channel TV 7 was engaged relatively actively in the election covering events directly related to the campaign and events/situations that tangentially referred to the elections and to the competition among candidates. Overall, in 10 newscasts, TV 7 presented 26 news stories directly or indirectly referring to the campaign. They mainly covered the statements, actions, and disputes of candidates for Chisinau mayor. The work of the Central Electoral Commission was regularly covered in news about the registration of candidates in Chisinau, in reports on parties' spending, and about the exclusion of the Reformed Communist Party from the elections. At the same time, the station aired a number of news stories about the work of the mayor's office and of the Chisinau Municipal Council.

Impartiality and objectivity/political partisanship

News stories broadcast by TV 7 during the reporting period were produced in a correct manner without deviations from the rules of professional ethics 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 only a single case was the reporter's opinion about the subject evident, and that was in the story about the altercations at the Chisinau Municipal Council 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 (14 May).

Overall during the monitoring period, the political party and candidate most covered was the PL and Dorin Chirtoaca appearing directly in 4 items and indirectly in six others. The contexts varied: 3 times it was positive, 2 times it was negative, and 5 it was times neutral. News about the conflict between the Ministry of Education and the Chisinau Education Department accused of making the hiring of school headmasters political (6 May) and about the National Integrity Commission suspecting Dorin Chirtoaca of conflict of interests (7 May) criticized the PL candidate for Chisinau mayor, while stories about the new trolleybuses that would be launched by the end of the year (7 May) and the settlement of the problem raised by parents at a school in Chisinau favored Dorin Chirtoaca. PLDM representatives appeared and were mentioned in 3 news stories, once in a positive context and twice in a neutral context. The item directly favoring the PLDM referred to the new road in Cociulia with participation of PLDM representatives (8 May). The PSRM was directly quoted 2 times and mentioned 4 times in 1 positive, 1 negative, and 4 neutral contexts. This party appeared especially in stories presenting electoral initiatives and in the context of altercations at the Chisinau Municipal Council. PN made 5 direct appearances and was mentioned 4 times, 8 times in a neutral context and once in a positive context (PN leader's return to Chisinau and supporters meeting him at the airport).

Other candidates appeared less frequently. Monica Babuc appeared once and was mentioned twice, the PCRM appeared once and was mentioned 5 times, and the Ecological Green Party appeared once. The other 8 parties were only mentioned.

Pluralism of opinions/correctness and balance of sources

Most of the time TV 7 complied with the principle of diversity and balance of sources/positions/opinions, especially in the 7 stories about conflicts, accusations, or controversial issues. In only one instance in which sources made accusations did reporters not offer the right to reply. It was the story about the Minister of Education's accusations against the local public administration, claiming that the competitions organized to hire headmasters were being transformed into campaign events and that headmasters were being hired according to political criteria. Although it was a story about a conflict, it contained only the statement of Minister Maia Sandu; the right to reply was not provided to the accused (6 May). Also, the story of 14 May in which socialist MP Ion Ceban accused the PL and the PCRM of corruption was somewhat unbalanced since it contained only the opinion of the PCRM.

The relevant news broadcasts by TV 7 quoted diverse sources. The majority of them were public officials (19 times, 16 men) followed by politicians (16 men and 1 woman). Experts were quoted twice (both women) and citizens four times (three women). Other categories of

sources were used 3 times (2 men and 1 woman). Female sources were thus under-represented.

Language and images used

The language used by TV 7 in its broadcasts during the reporting period was acceptable. There were no cases of video manipulation.



Involvement in the electoral campaign

From 1 to 14 May 2015, Accent TV broadcast a total of relevant 28 stories. Many of them (about 50%) concerned three political parties: PN, PSRM, and Casa Noastra – Moldova (Our Home – Moldova) (PCNM). Accent TV informed viewers about various statements by PN leader Renato Usatii; PN representatives joining the campaign in Chisinau and other localities; various actions of the PSRM; and about Grigore Petrenco, former communist MP, launching the Red Bloc which will participate in elections on behalf of the PCNM.

Impartiality and objectivity/political partisanship

Of the 28 news stories broadcast by Accent TV, many especially favored two parties: PN and PSRM. PSRM was directly referred to in 6 news stories, all in a positive context, and PN directly appeared in 6 stories and was mentioned once, mostly in a positive context (6) and once in a neutral context. Items that favored PN concerned the following topics: Renato Usatii's press conferences and interviews in Moscow about his intention to return to Moldova and save the local people (1 May), his coming to Chisinau (6 May) and other actions after his return including his support of some candidates in Gagauzia (4 May), registration for elections for Balti mayor (6 May), and Usatii's opinion about the Kroll report (7 May) among others. PSRM was favored in news stories about joining the electoral campaign (4 May), Igor Dodon's presentation of candidates for mayor supported by PSRM in Comrat, Ceadir-Lunga, and Vulcanesti (11 May), and support for independent candidates in Gagauzia (12 May). Also, the station covered Igor Dodon's claims that he would send all oligarchs to jail (12 May). It should be mentioned that the story of 11 May about the PSRM decision to support certain candidates in Gagauzia lasted three minutes, and much of that time was given to PSRM leader Igor Dodon.

PL representatives made 3 direct appearances and were mentioned in 4 news items, mostly in a negative context, e.g. stories about PPRM candidate Cirlig accusing Chirtoaca on 6 and 12 May, and the story about parents' protests at city hall (11 May). When news concerned other parties, the information was usually general in nature like registering for elections.

Accent TV aired 3 items in which the authors' views about the protagonists were evident. Bias was obvious in the selection of topics for newscasts and in reporters' attitudes as journalists sometimes made comments and failed to separate facts from opinions. An example is the story about parents of students in a Chisinau school protesting in which the

reporter claimed that Dorin Chirtoaca, "...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." (11 May). Another story in which the author's opinion was clear was the one on 11 May about the PDM's Family Month Campaign. Moreover, the manner in which this topic were covered, included messages capable of regenerating animosity and offensive and discriminatory treatment of the LGBT community. From the start, attempts were made to create confusion in the perspective and angle of approach. "Since three years ago the MPs of the governing coalition, including the Democratic Party of Moldova, voted to adopt the law on equality of opportunities and legalize sexual minorities, the party headed by Marian Lupu has been worried about the institution of the family," the lead said, but the quote was not attributed to anyone. The manner in which the story was structured and the information it presented might lead to the conclusion/insinuation that the PDM is against families since it supported that draft law which, according to the reporter, scandalized society and church representatives. The story should have contained the PDM opinion about the topic from the perspective of the law on the equality of opportunities. Another biased story referred to the campaign statements of PCRM candidate Vasile Chirtoca on a TV show in which the reporter failed to separate facts from opinions and intervened with a comment: "However, he did not mention where he will get the money for projects."

Correctness and balance of sources/pluralism of opinions

During the reporting period, Accent TV failed to ensure a diversity of sources. Relevant news stories mainly quoted politicians (34 total, 31 men). Public officials were quoted 5 times (all men), and citizens 4 times (3 men and 1 woman).

According to Article 7 (c) of the Broadcasting Code, if articles refer to conflicts, they should comply with the principle of informing the public about the views of all relevant parties. Out of the 9 stories on controversies, only 3 presented the opinions of all parties concerned. They included corruption accusations against Dorin Chirtoaca (12 May), Igor Dodon's accusations against members of the governing coalition (12 May), and protests at city hall organized by the PSRM (14 May). The story about Renato Usatii's accusations that Vlad Filat was trying to provoke him in order to arrest him later (8 May) was unbalanced as the reporter mentioned that, "So far, Vladimir Filat has made no comments about Renato Usatii's statements."

Language and images used

The relevant broadcasts by Accent TV showed no problems in terms of the use of images and sounds that might have distorted messages.

ONLINE MEDIA

www.omg.md

Involvement in the campaign

During the reporting period, Omg.md was actively engaged in covering the elections posting 67 directly or indirectly relevant articles. The dates 8 and 13 May were the most productive in this sense with 11 articles about the elections and the candidates on each day. The majority of the articles (52) were short or detailed news stories; 7 referred to conflicts or accusations concerning candidates or potential candidates and 1 was on voter education (the fact that Moldovans residing abroad cannot vote in local elections). The topics were mainly criticism of the work of the current mayor of Chisinau; the intentions to register and the registration of candidates for mayor of Chisinau and Balti as well as in some localities in the Gagauz autonomy from PN and PCNM (the Red Bloc); the actions of businessman and politician Renato Usatii; and the activities organized by some parties on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II.

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 information about the campaign but instead to promote some candidates and to vilify others. Every third news story posted by Omg.md in the reporting period was completely biased, and the majority of the rest presented a single opinion/position on the issue. Thus, news stories on this portal failed to meet the requirements of impartiality and objectivity.

News on Omg.md referred to a small number of political parties and potential candidates; PN and its leader Renato Usatii were the most preferred and intensely promoted on the website. He was directly quoted or mentioned 62 times during the two weeks, including 55 times in a positive context. On 6 May, for instance, the topic of Renato Usatii returning to Moldova was covered in 7 stories including a live broadcast from the airport, videos and news stories with his speeches quoted in full, information about his intentions to run for mayor of Balti municipality, and about people meeting him at the airport.

In contrast, PL and its candidate for Chisinau mayor Dorin Chirtoaca appeared almost exclusively in a negative context (17 times out of a total of 19 direct or indirect references). PCRM appeared in only a negative context (5 times); representatives of PDM and of PLDM were presented in a negative light in 8 out of 9 and 5 out of 6 stories concerning them, respectively.

Here are some examples of the biased presentation of topics:

1 May: The story “Renato Usatii’s party turned out to beautify Chisinau” promoted PN at the expense of the current mayor by saying that, “Participants proved that the city’s administration with Dorin Chirotaaca at its head does not work to clean the city.”

4 May: The story about Monica Babuc running for Chisinau mayor was titled “Plahotniuc’s candidate for mayor of Chisinau is Monica Babuc,” and the text contained the following reference to the PDM: “The Democratic Party, controlled by businessman Vladimir Plahotniuc with a dubious reputation.”

12 May: The story titled “Announcement: The largest theft in the history of the Chisinau mayor’s office” presented information about a press conference of PN candidates for local elections. This suggests manipulation and shows the portal’s intention to say that the “theft” either had happened or was about to happen, although it is only an assumption of some political forces that Omg.md supports.

Correctness and balance of sources/pluralism of opinions

The majority of news stories published by Omg.md including the 7 that referred to accusations or conflicts were based on a single source which made them unbalanced and lacking pluralism of opinion. The stories often contained value judgments which is contrary to the standards of professional ethics and good journalistic practice.

The 67 relevant items were based on the statements of 88 sources including 68 politicians—the majority from PN and PCNM—and the most often quoted were Renato Usatii and Grigore Petrenco. Election news stories also quoted or mentioned 12 public officials, 5 experts, and 3 ordinary citizens. The principle of equal gender representation was neglected: out of 88 sources, only 6 were women making up 6.8% of the total.

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 4 May, the story “Ghimpu and Chirtoaca are promoting a participant of the ‘royal hunt’ on the Chisinau Municipal Council” says that the list of PL municipal councilors includes Iurie Nastas who participated in the hunt in the Padurea Domneasca (the Royal Forest) during which businessman Sorin Paciu was shot to death. The text claims that Iurie Nastas and the leadership of Chisinau mayor’s office shared some business interests. The article did not contain statements from Iurie Nastas, Dorin Chirtoaca, or Mihai Ghimpu, although the story concerned them directly.

On 8 May, the portal published a story based on statements by Renato Usatii that he had made on a live TV show including saying that he was aware of his upcoming arrest, “...but now Filat has taken a break and is letting me travel around the country.” Omg.md did not seek the opinions of Vlad Filat, the PLDM, or the Ministry of Internal Affairs, so the story was unbalanced.

Language and images used

The language used by Omg.md reporters was full of pejorative expressions that were clearly intended to criticize the subjects by ridiculing them before readers thereby challenging their capacity to think and act rationally. Labels and broad accusations were frequent, the general conspiracy of the government against citizens was insinuated, and personal attacks were made. News stories contained value judgments and exaggerated some information in order to present some candidates and parties in bad light.

Here are some examples of language unfavorable to political opponents (emphasis by authors of this report):

On 12 May, Omg.md published an article about the change in some public transport routes, the headline and lead of which were biased and contained value judgments (headline: “Chirtoaca **keeps creating chaos** in the movement of the capital’s minibuses”; lead: “Chisinau residents **again need to adapt to the whims of Mayor Dorin Chirtoaca** who changed the routes of public transport **again**”).

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 Chisinau mayor Dorin Chirtoaca. The article used many pejorative expressions, personal attacks, and associations unfavorable to Mr. Chirtoaca, who was compared to a puppy barking at an elephant, the “elephant” being Russian president Putin whom Ciubasenco admires (“Chirtoaca appears as a **Pug barking at an elephant**. But Chirtoaca 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**”).

www.pan.md

Involvement in the campaign

From 1 to 14 May, Pan.md posted a total of 43 directly or indirectly relevant items including 42 news stories and 1 article about a conflict. The majority were posted on 4 May (7), and on 7 and 14 May (5 each). The favorite topics for website reporters were PSRM and PN activities and statements, especially those of Renato Usatii; Grigore Petrenco joining the campaign and his statements; activities organized by some parties on occasion of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II; and information about candidates for Chisinau mayor.

Impartiality and objectivity

In the texts posted on Pan.md, candidates and political parties were presented selectively, and two were especially presented in almost exclusively a positive context: PN (26 appearances including 17 in a positive context and 9 in a neutral context) and PSRM (23 appearances including 14 in a positive context). At the same time, the main opponents of these parties were usually presented in a bad light. Thus, the PL and candidate Dorin Chirtoaca appeared on Pan.md 16 times including 9 times in a negative context. Articles critical of PDM and its representatives were also posted (6 appearances in a negative context out of 13 total). The website had an ambivalent attitude toward the PCRM; it was most often presented neutrally (8 out of 18 cases), sometimes negatively, and sometimes positively (5 cases each).

Overall, the website’s editorial policy was not impartial; some news stories posted during the reporting period revealed bias in their headlines and angles of approach. On 4 May, the website posted the story “Meeting Renato Usatii at the airport” about a group of Usatii’s supporters on Facebook. The information was accompanied by a photo of a plane with Usatii’s slogan, “The power is in the truth!”, and the text contained references to a statement by Usatii that he was expecting authorities, “...to arrest me directly at the airport on bogus charges,” and his supporters said they were ready to support him. The position of the

investigating authorities was missing. On 14 May, the website published Dmitri Ciubasenco's article "Batman from Colonita" and "Putin's kewpie dolls" in which the reporter referred to the fact that the mayor used the words "Putin's kewpie dolls" to refer to the members of the PSRM and PN that interrupted the municipal council meeting. Positioning himself with PSRM and PN, the author criticized Dorin Chirtoaca, ridiculing him and using offensive expressions.

Correctness and balance of sources/pluralism of opinions

The 43 relevant articles during this monitoring period were based on the statements of 45 sources including 37 politicians (mainly from PSRM and PN), 6 public officials, and 2 experts. The majority of news stories were prepared using one source or several sources that were "on the same side of the barricades" which made them unbalanced. Equal gender representation was not present: Out of 45 sources, only 5 were women which is 11.1% of the total.

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. Thus, on 13 May, the website published the story "Usatii: Chirtoaca is selling the historical center of Chisinau for pennies" about statements by Renato Usatii and Aleksandr Petkov concerning the intention of the municipal council to approve 800 decisions on the sale of real estate and lots. The sources quoted accused Dorin Chirtoaca of theft; accusations also concerned former mayor Serafim Urechean and some communist councilors who were allegedly partners in these crimes. The opinions of persons directly concerned were not sought, although the text was accompanied by Chirtoaca's photo.

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" 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 offices. 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" posted on 14 May contained offensive language and personal attacks. Dorin Chirtoaca was compared with a puppy barking at an elephant, the "elephant" being Russian president Putin ("Chirtoaca appears as a **Pug barking at an elephant**. But Chirtoaca 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**"). He

was also reproached for having no wife or children at 36 years of age and for looking like the “pimpled four-eyes” from movies (Harry Potter).

www.publika.md

Involvement in the campaign

During the monitoring period, Publika.md posted 45 articles directly or indirectly about the campaign including 39 news stories and 6 articles on controversial topics. The majority of relevant news stories (9) appeared on the website on 14 May; on other days, 1–4 stories were posted. The most frequent topics on Publika.md were the activities of the Central Electoral Commission (approval of rules for campaign funding, registration of candidates for Chisinau mayor, presentation of financial reports by candidates), the activities of the PDM and its representatives, and some criticism of the current municipal administration.

Impartiality and objectivity

The majority of news stories on Publika.md complied with the principles of journalistic impartiality. At the same time, however, the frequency of postings about the leadership of PDM, its actions, and the plans of its candidates are indicative of the fact that the Publika.md editorial policy was to intensively promote one party which is contrary to the principle of objective coverage. PDM candidates for mayors were repeatedly presented, often without mentioning their political affiliation. At the same time, the intention was to diminish the chances of other candidates by providing only general information about them or by highlighting their negative aspects. During the two weeks of monitoring, PDM and its representatives were mentioned 22 times including 13 times in a favorable context and 9 times in a neutral context. Next was PDM and Dorin Chirtoaca who were mentioned 17 times (including 10 in a neutral and 6 in a negative context). More infrequent subjects in news stories were the representatives of PCRM (10 appearances including 8 neutral) and PSRM (5 times in a neutral context and 4 times in a negative context).

The story posted on Publika.md on 5 May 2015, “How Monica Babuc intends to become mayor. What the PDM candidate says” which spoke about Monica Babuc’s participation in the Fabrika TV show on 4 May, is an eloquent example of editorial bias. “Achievable and vital projects for Chisinau, not empty promises. This will be the campaign strategy of Monica Babuc, Democratic Party candidate for Chisinau mayor,” the lead said followed by several statements by the candidate. It should be mentioned that no other candidate for mayor was present on the Fabrika show which is the main debate show on the Publika TV channel.

Other PDM candidates were also promoted on Publika.md. On 9 May the site posted the story “In the memory of those who fell on the battlefield. The people of Stauceni Village celebrating the holiday” that presented the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II in Stauceni with a military lunch and a concert organized by the mayor’s office with the support of the Ministry of Defense. The article said that, “the people of Stauceni enjoyed the meal” and presented an interview with Mayor Valentin Sitnic to whom

the reporter attributed the organizational efforts. (Note: V. Sitnic was elected mayor on the list of PCRM, then he joined PDM, and on 8 May 2015 he was registered as PDM candidate for Mayor of Stauceni.)

On 10 May, Publika.md posted two items directly promoting PDM. One of them spoke about the “family festival” in the town of Ialoveni, a PDM initiative, where a festival banner and the PDM logo were set up on the stage. The text of the story mentioned that the head of Ialoveni District Lilian Popescu and PDM MP Sergiu Sirbu participated in the event and addressed congratulations to the attendees. (Note: Lilian Popescu had been elected member of the district council on the list of the PL but in 2013 joined the PDM.) On the same day, the site posted the news story “Democrats in Ialoveni District joined the campaign for local public offices,” which presented candidates for mayor in some localities of Ialoveni District and spoke about their achievements, objectives, and plans. The article pointed out that, “An important place in the list of PDM candidates is given to active young people,” which is a form of campaigning. The candidates of other parties did not benefit from such presentations on Publika.md.

Correctness and balance of sources/pluralism of opinions

In the 45 relevant articles, Publika.md quoted 79 sources including 24 politicians, 24 ordinary citizens, and 19 public officials. Equal gender representation was generally complied with as out of 79 sources, 27 were women, making up 34.2% of the total, although some categories needed some gender balancing.

The news stories about conflicts were generally balanced although there were some cases when the balance of sources was not ensured. For example, the story “Mystery disappearance on Chisinau streets! How drivers hope to avoid fines” posted on 1 May spoke about the disappearance in the past two months of 60 road signs prohibiting parking pointing out that, “Ministry of Internal Affairs representatives believe that municipal authorities fail to fulfill their duties.” One of the drivers interviewed directly blamed Mayor Dorin Chirtoaca for the situation on Chisinau streets, but the administration’s response to these accusations was not presented. On 11 May in the story about the protest in front of city hall organized by the parents of the students of Miguel de Cervantes School in Chisinau, the portal said that “Dorin Chirtoaca came to blows with one of the protesters,” trying to present him in an unpleasant light although the mayor’s reaction was the result of an attack by PSRM leader Sergiu Corobceanu who participated in the protest and criticized him for not having children.

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.

www.timpul.md

Involvement in the electoral campaign

Timpul.md posted 38 relevant articles during the monitoring period, the majority on 4 and 13 May (7 each), and 14 May (8). More than one third of the articles (14 out of 38) covered conflicts or included accusations against candidates and political parties. In terms of topics, the articles focused on the registration of candidates for Chisinau mayor; Renato Usatii's intentions to return to Moldova and run for mayor of Balti municipality; and Vasili Chirtoca, president of "DAAC-Hermes" company, running as a candidate for Chisinau mayor (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

Two thirds of the items posted on Timpul.md (26 out of 38) met the criteria of objective and impartial presentation; the other 12 were biased and presented opinions and value judgments rather than facts. Two political parties—PCRM and PSRM—were often criticized while the PL and its candidate Dorin Chirtoaca were favored. The PCRM was mentioned 13 times, including 7 times in a negative context and 6 in a neutral context while the PSRM was mentioned 5 times in a negative context and 5 times in a neutral context. In an article on 13 May, the headline "Terrorists from Donetsk and Luhansk in the same line of thought with Voronin and Dodon," associated Moldovan communists and socialists with 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 asking for Moldova. It should be mentioned that the text of the story said nothing about the candidates mentioned in the headline.

The "People's European Platform of Moldova – Iurie Leanca" was rarely mentioned by Timpul.md but was always presented in a favorable context while the PDM and the PLDM were presented in various contexts: negative (PDM 5 times, PLDM 4 times), neutral (PLDM 4 times, PDM 2 times), and positive (2 times each).

Correctness and balance of sources/pluralism of opinions

The total number of sources for the 38 relevant articles was 68, the most sources among the websites monitored. Timpul.md quoted 28 sources from the sphere of politics, 19 ordinary citizens, 13 public officials at various levels, and 8 experts. At the same time, however, the site failed to represent genders equally: only 13 sources were women which is 19.1% of the total, and the majority of women quoted (11) were citizens.

Half of the articles covering conflicts (7 out of 14) were more or less balanced while the rest presented one side only so were unbalanced.

Language and images used

The language in news stories during the monitoring period was relatively correct.

www.unimedia.info

Involvement in the electoral campaign

During the monitoring period, Unimedia.info covered the general local elections in 48 articles, including 38 news stories, 9 articles on controversial topics, and 1 on voter education (launch of the “Electoral Test” project). The most prolific day was 14 May with 12 articles. The topics of news stories were the most diverse of websites all monitored and included registration of independent and party-affiliated candidates for Chisinau mayor and municipal councilors; parties’ declarations; and parties’ activities and protest actions.

Impartiality and objectivity

Overall, Unimedia.info covered the first two weeks of the electoral campaign in compliance with the main standards for posting material on election topics: impartiality and objectivity. Candidates and parties were most often covered in a neutral context (PL in 10 appearances in a neutral context and 2 each in a negative and positive context; PSRM in 8 neutral appearances and 4 negative ones; PCRM with 6 neutral appearances, 3 negative, and 2 positive ones; the PLDM in 6 neutral appearances, 1 negative and 1 positive; PDM with 3 neutral appearances, 2 positive, and 1 negative one; “People’s European Platform of Moldova – Iurie Leanca” in 3 neutral appearances and 1 positive one).

Unimedia.info had the best indicator among the websites in terms of journalists’ position: out of 48 items 42 (87.5%) were presented in an unbiased manner. The remaining 6, however, contained authors’ opinions and value judgments which made them biased.

Correctness and balance of sources/pluralism of opinions

Sources of information were 52 persons, most of them (35) politicians. Other sources were 15 public officials, 1 expert, and 1 citizen. Gender representation was not equal as of the total of 52 only 8 were women which is 15.4%.

Fewer than half of the texts about conflicts (4 out of 9) were relatively balanced from an editorial point of view as they presented both sides; the other 5 presented one side only, so they were unbalanced. Examples: on 1 May, Unimedia.info posted the story “Vladimir Voronin: Renato Usatii is a ‘soap bubble’” referring to the statement that PCRM leader Vladimir Voronin made on a TV show saying that Renato Usatii is like a soap bubble: “I don’t know how to say it in Moldovan, but in Russian they say ‘мыльный пузырь’ [soap bubble]. He gets full of himself and then goes about with nonsense and concerts...,” the communist leader said. The portal did not seek the opinion of Usatii. On 8 May, in the story “Elizaveta Moscaliciuc doesn’t give up her dream to become mayor. She is running for the office with another party,” the portal talks about Elizaveta Moscaliciuc’s intention to run for Chisinau mayor with the “Renastere (Renaissance)” Party, after she gave up the intention to run for the office with the Reformed Communist Party that had meanwhile been removed from the election. The video attached to the story, which first appeared on Jurnal TV, suggests that Moscaliciuc is an untrustworthy person who gave false evidence in the propaganda videos of NIT television channel after the protests of 2009. The story did not present Elizaveta Moscaliciuc’s opinion, so it was unbalanced.

Language and images used

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

4. General conclusions

Based on these results, the conclusion is that from 1 to 14 May 2015, the majority of mass media outlets monitored failed to ensure the necessary degree of pluralism of opinions while promoting the political agenda and candidates of certain political entities.

- Moldova 1 and TV 7 television stations offered relatively balanced coverage ensuring both a pluralism of opinions and a diversity of sources. Judging by the frequency and context in which candidates and parties appeared in news, the conclusion is that Moldova 1 slightly favored the PL and the PDM.
- TV stations Prime and Canal 2, both with national coverage, favored the PDM in the large number of articles about the party, the positive context in which they appeared, and the manner of selecting and presenting news.
- Accent TV favored PSRM and PN with positive news stories and image-oriented stories with the presence of party leaders Igor Dodon and Renato Usatii. At the same time, Accent TV coverage of PL was unfavorable as its representatives were presented mostly in a negative context.
- The editorial policy of Omg.md focused on promoting PN and PSRM and on discrediting the PL and candidate Dorin Chirtoaca as well as the governing parties.
- Pan.md openly favored PSRM PN and denigrated the PL candidate for Chisinau mayor.
- Publika.md openly and indirectly promoted the PDM candidates for mayors and councilors providing only general information about other candidates and focusing on criticism against them.
- Timpul.md often criticized PCRM and PSRM and favored the PL and its candidate for Chisinau mayor.
- Unimedia.info presented electoral contestants mostly in a neutral context without evident editorial preferences.

- The majority of articles on controversial topics or accusations failed to provide both sides in the conflict.
- All the media outlets monitored provided virtually no voter education.
- All outlets had problems in terms of equal gender representation; men were sources of information in the absolute majority of cases.

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 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 7: In newscasts, election campaign events will be covered in compliance with articles 47, 64 and 64¹ 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 64¹ 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 15th 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 15th 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.