



# MEDIA MONITORING in the Campaign for 2019 Parliamentary Elections

*Report no. 1  
9–24 January 2019*

(General Conclusions)



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*The opinions expressed therein belong to the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the donors.*

## I. GENERAL DATA

**1.1 Objective of the project:** monitor and inform the public about media behavior in the pre-election period and during the campaign for the 2019 parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova.

**1.2 Monitoring period:** 9 January 2019 – 24 February 2019.

**1.3 Criteria for selecting the media outlets to be monitored:**

The media outlets were selected based on the following criteria: a) form of ownership; b) geography; c) broadcasting language; d) audience. Consequently, public and private media outlets, with national, quasi-national and regional coverage, in Romanian and in Russian are monitored.

**1.4 Media outlets monitored:**

**Audiovisual**

Moldova 1, GRT, Prime TV, Canal 2, Canal 3, Publika TV, Jurnal TV, NTV Moldova, Pro TV Chişinău, TV8, Accent TV, TV Centrală.

**Online portals and print media**

Agora.md, Aif.md, Deschide.md, Diez.md, Esp.md, Gagauzinfo.md, Jurnal de Chişinău (ziar), Kp.md, Moldova.org, Newsmaker.md, Noi.md, Realitatea.md, Sputnik.md, Timpul.md, Unimedia.info, Zdg.md

**1.5 Subject-matter of monitoring**

**TV (18:00-22:00 interval)**

- A. One newscast in Russian and one in Romanian;
- B. Programs (talk shows) with electoral character;
- C. Election debates.

**Online portals and print media**

The entire editorial content, without the publicity marked accordingly.

**1.6. The team**

The project is implemented within the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections by the Independent Journalism Center (TV monitoring) and the Association of Independent Press (online and print media monitoring).

**1.7 Methodological framework**

The data were collected and analyzed based on a monitoring methodology developed by Oxford Media Research Center for the monitoring projects of the international organization Article 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression. The methodology was updated at the end of 2018 and beginning of 2019 with the assistance of the experts of the Italian organization Osservatorio di Pavia.

This methodology's characteristics are as follows: use of indicators 1) *quantitative*, including type, duration, topic of coverage, news sources, frequency and duration of appearance of election candidates in news, and 2) *qualitative*, designed to evaluate the tone of coverage: neutral, positive or negative, considering the attitude of the media outlet and/or journalist to each protagonist. The tone is assigned by assessing the presence 1) of *explicit opinion*, expressed by the media towards protagonists, and 2) of the *framing*<sup>1</sup>, by selecting the event or subjects that may favor or disfavor the protagonists.

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<sup>1</sup> Framing – selecting and highlighting certain sides of an event or subject and connecting them in such a way as to show a certain interpretation or solution <http://www.revistasociologie.ro/pdf-uri/nr3-4-2011/07-N%20Corbu.pdf>

The monitoring focuses on two main components: assessment of *social pluralism* and of *political pluralism* in the media, which implies measuring the diversity of opinions and plurality of voices in the items with electoral content. All items with direct or indirect election content are monitored and all items in which representatives of parties or candidates appear, even though the items are not directly related to the elections. In addition, all items dealing with the work of the Government, the Parliament and of the President's Office are monitored, as these protagonists play an important role in the public space.

Each item was subject to a content and context evaluation, to determine if it favored or disfavored the candidates. The item's positive content and/or context does not necessarily indicate the bias or partisanship of the media outlet broadcasting the news. Only if there is trend of favoring or disfavoring certain subjects for a certain period can we speak about lack of balance.

**Case studies:** Taking into account the major impact of the media on building the public opinion and their high credibility among the population, we have also made a content analysis of the items that tackled the most important subjects broadcast by the media monitored. We aimed at identifying the angles of approach and manner of presentation of the relevant subjects. The items have been analyzed in terms of observance of quality journalism principles (fairness, impartiality, multiple sources, separation of facts from opinions) as well as from a technical aspect, from the perspective of resorting to technical processes to amplify or diminish certain messages.

## II. DATA ANALYSIS

### 2.1 AUDIOVISUAL

**Frequency of coverage.** Between 9 and 24 January 2019, the 12 TV stations monitored broadcast in total 1,079 items with direct or indirect election content, of which 1,041 news items, 39 programs and 5 debates. The total amount of the items was 73.5 hours, of which about 39 hours accounted for the news and 32.5 hours – for opinion programs.

**Topical diversity.** The subjects tackled by most media monitored most of the times concerned the election process – filing of signature lists and registration of candidates for the elections; the voting procedure inside and outside the country etc. Another part of the items treated political subjects – activities with the involvement of the candidates and political parties, most of the times dealing with the allegations launched by some against the others. The outlets covered many social subjects with election content as well as presented culture and entertainment items – various activities related to the winter holidays, with the participation of the political players, the candidates and representatives of the main state institutions – the Parliament, the President's Office and the Government.

The items with indirect electoral content included snow cleaning activities in Chişinău and in the entire country, with the involvement of Government representatives, charity activities by various foundations, interdictions of fruit export to Russia etc.

**Social pluralism.** In documenting their items, besides the political players and the candidates, most of the stations used various social sources, including citizens, local and foreign experts, representatives of civil society (CSOs), of the Central Election Commission (CEC), of the Local Public Administration (LPA), state officials, business people, police, judges and lawyers.

**Gender balance.** Most items strongly lacked balance in terms of gender ratio, with most of the sources of the protagonists quoted or mentioned by the 12 TV stations being males (59%), while female sources accounted for 23%.

**Political pluralism.** In terms of frequency and duration of screen appearance and of direct interventions, the most visible political players and candidates in the national constituency were the Electoral Bloc “ACUM”, PSRM, PDM, the “Șor Party” and PCRM. Of the candidates registered for the elections in the uninominal constituencies, Andrei Năstase, Vladimir Plahotniuc, Ilan Șor, Zinaida Greceanîi and Pavel Filip were covered the most.

Sources and protagonists	Frequency	Amount of appearance, sec.	Duration of direct speech, sec.
Electoral Bloc ACUM	529	10026	4884
Socialists Party of Moldova (PSRM)	451	12042	9910
Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM)	356	4873	2647
Șor Political Party	165	1482	355
Communists Party of Moldova (PCRM)	120	1693	886
Liberal Party (PL)	117	2032	1302
Partidul Nostru (Our Party)	57	564	175
Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM)	40	465	324
Anti-Mafia People’s Movement	38	419	100
“Democrația Acasă” (Democracy at home) Party	27	404	163

Sources and protagonists / Political affiliation	Frequency	Amount of appearance	Duration of direct speech
Andrei Năstase, Electoral Bloc ACUM	31	454	169
Vladimir Plahotniuc, PDM	28	182	24
Ilan Șor, Șor Political Party	21	440	158
Zinaida Greceanîi, PSRM	21	709	420
Pavel Filip, PSRM	18	235	103
Maia Sandu, Electoral Bloc ACUM	15	206	50
Vlad Bătrîncea, PSRM	11	758	674
Andrei Nastas, independent candidate	10	259	62
Constantin Țuțu, PDM	9	67	27
Maria Ciobanu, Electoral bloc ACUM	7	69	0

### Tonality of coverage:

The national public station **Moldova 1** offered space to many political players and candidates in the national and uninominal constituencies as well as to the main state institutions. The tonality of coverage was mostly neutral for most of them, except for the Cabinet of Ministers, towards whom the tonality was rather positive.

The public regional station **GRT** had a passive behavior in the reporting period, broadcasting few items relevant to this monitoring, without displaying any tendencies of favoring or disfavoring certain political players.

The private stations with national coverage **Prime TV, Canal 2, Canal 3** and **Publika TV** mainly covered subjects with the participation of various power representatives. The PDM, candidate in the national constituency, and Vlad Plahotniuc and Pavel Filip who are competing in uninominal constituencies were the ones to appear the most on these stations, the tonality of their coverage being mainly positive and neutral. The representatives of the Electoral Bloc ACUM, candidate in the

national constituency, and Andrei Năstase, candidate in an uninominal constituency, often appeared in images, mainly in items with negative connotation and with an insignificant duration of personal interventions.

The private TV station with regional coverage **Jurnal TV** has allocated much space to the members of the Electoral Bloc ACUM and to Andrei Năstase, the tonality of coverage being mainly neutral and positive. PDM representatives and implicitly its candidate Vladimir Plahotniuc had many screen appearances and fewer direct interventions on the same station, with a neutral or negative tonality in coverage.

**NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV** granted the most air space to representatives of PSRM, a candidate in the national constituency, and to candidates in uninominal constituencies affiliated to this party as well as to President Igor Dodon, the coverage tonality being mostly positive and neutral. In contrast, the members of the Electoral Bloc ACUM, of the PDM, and of Șor Political Party were presented in images more, with small duration of their direct interventions and with rather negative tonality.

The private stations with national coverage **Pro TV** and **TV 8** granted access to a large range of political players – parties and candidates in the national and uninominal constituencies, ensuring balance between the duration of their appearances and their direct interventions. In most cases, the tonality of the coverage of the political protagonists on these stations was neutral.

The regional station **Televiziunea Centrală** granted more space to Șor Political Party, candidate in the national constituency, and to Ilan Șor who is competing in an uninominal constituency, for whom the tonality of coverage was rather positive and neutral. The members of the Electoral Bloc ACUM and of the PSRM, and the representatives of the President's Office, were rather mentioned than directly quoted, most of the times the tonality of coverage being negative.

## 2.2. ONLINE PORTALS AND PRINT MEDIA

Between 9 and 24 January, the 16 print media outlets (newspapers) and the broadcast media (online portals), monitored under the project, published 1,440 articles in total that directly or indirectly concerned the candidates and the campaign for the 2019 parliamentary elections. Most of them (1,392) were news items but the outlets also inserted opinions (42) and some relevant interviews (6).

The media outlets with most journalistic items on the monitoring topic were the portals **Deschide.md** (175 articles) and **Unimedia.info** (166); the fewest relevant items in this period appeared in the newspaper **Jurnal de Chișinău** (9) and on the regional portals **Esp.md** of Bălți (11) and **Gagauzinfo.md** of Comrat (31).

The portals and newspapers monitored mainly covered political activities, including the statements, allegations and reactions of potential candidates and of those registered in the national constituency and in some uninominal constituencies (772 items); they intensely covered the election process as such i.e. the work of CEC and of some constituency election councils (240). In an election context, they also tackled some social topics (69), the situation/problems of the Moldovan diaspora (51), the economic situation (47) etc.

The print media and broadcast media monitored quoted as sources or mentioned/referred to as protagonists to a total number of 5,535 persons, including over 2,900 representatives of the political parties competing in the national constituency, and covered the candidates in uninominal constituencies 427 times. At the same time, their items regularly showed (364 appearances) the state leaders (President's Office, Parliament, Government/ministers), some of them also being candidates in the elections, who conveyed indirect election messages. Of the source categories and of social, apolitical, protagonists, the outlets monitored most frequently broadcast the election officers (443 cases), they often making reference to other media outlets (370), more often quoted the citizens

(161) and civil society representatives. In general, there was no variety of sources and protagonists from the social area that would be concerned in an electoral context.

None of the print or broadcast media outlets monitored secured at least an apparent gender balance of the information sources and protagonists, with the lowest shares of gender representations registered in the items published by **Gagauzinfo.md**.

**Agora.md** covered the political protagonists and candidates in the national constituency and in the uninominal constituencies on a generally neutral editorial tonality.

**Aif.md** intensely promoted the Socialists Party and its candidates. It often presented the Democratic Party on a negative tonality, more rarely the Electoral Bloc ACUM, Our Party, Șor Party, and the Communists Party.

In the case of **Deschide.md**, the tonality of coverage of the candidates in the national constituency was different, with frequent presentation of Șor Political Party, of the Electoral Bloc ACUM and of the Socialists Party in negative context standing out. At the same time, the Democratic Party was presented on different tonality, most often neutral.

**Diez.md** had a generally neutral editorial approach to the election campaign and the candidates.

All the items published by **Esp.md** in this period had a neutral and balanced tonality.

The portal **Gagauzinfo.md** published items with different tonality: rather negative than neutral in relation to the Democratic Party and slightly favoring the Socialists Party.

The stories in the newspaper **Jurnal de Chișinău** had a different tonality: neutral or positive for the Electoral Bloc ACUM and neutral and negative for the Socialists Party, Democratic Party, and Liberal Party.

**Kp.md** editorially favored the Socialists Party and massively disfavored the Electoral Bloc ACUM. The items were not balanced and many headlines contained insinuations and manipulative statements. In relation to the Democratic Party, the tonality of the items was different, most often neutral.

**Moldova.org** provided neutral coverage tonality in relation to all the candidates in the national constituency covered as well as in relation to the candidates/potential candidates in the uninominal constituencies.

**Newsmaker.md** provided neutral coverage tonality in relation to most candidates, except for Șor Political Party which it represented rather in a negative than neutral context.

**Noi.md** used an obviously negative editorial tonality to Șor Political Party. Igor Dodon, implicitly the Socialists Party, were editorially favored through the number and positive tonality of the coverage. The Electoral Bloc ACUM was presented neutrally as well as negatively, while the Democratic Party was mainly presented neutrally.

**Realitatea.md** published/relayed many information items and releases related to the work of some representatives of the Democratic Party who are also candidates in the elections (the Prime Minister, the Minister of Economy and Infrastructure etc.), the tonality of such items being positive. Thus, the Democratic Party was editorially slightly favored. Other candidates were presented in different contexts, mainly neutrally.

**Sputnik.md** omitted covering many of the election events. The Democratic Party and some of this party's candidates were frequently covered, mainly neutrally as well as positively.

**Timpul.md** editorially favored the Democratic Party and its leader by the number and positive tonality of the coverage. The Electoral Bloc ACUM and its leaders, on the contrary, were disfavored and presented on a negative editorial tonality.

**Unimedia.info** had a relatively balanced editorial behavior, presenting the candidates on an editorially neutral tonality in most of the cases. At the same time, in relation to the Democratic Party, news that presented this candidate rather in a negative context prevailed.

In its news, the portal **Zdg.md** had an editorially neutral approach. Its editorials stood out through their rather negative tonality to the Socialists Party of Moldova, the Democratic Party, and Șor Political Party.

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[www.alegeliber.md](http://www.alegeliber.md), [www.api.md](http://www.api.md), [www.media-azi.md](http://www.media-azi.md)