



## **Mass Media Monitoring in the Campaign for New Local Elections on May 20, 2018**

Report no.1  
20–27 April 2018

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## **1. General data**

**Purpose and objectives of the project:** monitoring and informing the public about the behavior of mass media during the electoral campaign and the access of the candidates to mass media. Monitoring aims to analyze reporting trends that may affect the performance of media outlets and may compromise their ability to provide accurate, unbiased and pluralistic information to the public.

**Monitoring period:** April 20–May 19, 2018

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

- audience/impact—national, regional
- media type—audiovisual
- form of ownership—public, private
- broadcasting language—Romanian, Russian

**Mass media outlets and broadcasts monitored:**

Moldova 1 (19:00): public TV station, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;

Prime TV (19:00): private TV station, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;

Canal 2 (19:00): private TV station, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian;

Publika TV (online version): private TV station, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;

Jurnal TV (19.00): private TV station, regional coverage, broadcasts in Romanian;

NTV Moldova (19.00): private TV station, regional coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;

RTR Moldova (19.30): private TV station, regional coverage, broadcasts in Russian and Romanian;

TV 8 (20:30): private TV station, regional coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;

Pro TV (20.00): private TV station, regional coverage, broadcasts in Romanian;

Accent TV (20.00): private TV station, regional coverage; broadcasts in Romanian and Russian.

## **2. Methodological framework**

The full content of the main daily news bulletin on each TV station was monitored and analyzed for direct and indirect electoral material to determine whether items were favorable or unfavorable to a candidate/political party. In addition, the material was analyzed according to the following objective criteria.

**Impartiality and objectivity/political partisanship.** According to the Journalist's Code of Ethics, news must be impartial and objective and should not favor parties/groups/persons at the expense of others. The presence of discriminatory elements in news reports is a primary criterion for detecting journalistic bias. Filtering news and a minimal analysis of the background and context of an event also indicate presentations in the interests of certain actors but not of the general public.

**Fairness and balance of sources/pluralism of opinion.** In order to be fair and balanced, the news must present the views of all the parties concerned, especially on controversial subjects, and should treat opponents equally. In addition, the media should provide access to a multitude of perspectives to help the audience formulate their own opinions as to what has happened.

**Language and images.** Deliberate exaggeration and the use of pejorative language or labels for people or organizations as well as images that are manipulated so that certain parties are shown in a negative light raise serious questions about compliance with ethical and professional standards. The ethical behavior of journalists is most often questioned when images do not correspond to reality, when they have been faked, or when the news is illustrated with images unrelated to the text.

**Abbreviations used in the report:**

Action and Solidarity Party – PAS

Democratia Acasa Party – DA

Democratic Party - PDM

Dignity and Truth Party - PPDA

Liberal Democratic Party - PLDM

Liberal Party – PL

National Liberal Party - PNL

National Unity Party – PUN

Progressive Society Party – PSP

Popular Party - PP

Green Ecological Party - PPVEM

Our Party - PN

Socialists Party - PSRM

### **3. Monitoring data**

#### **Moldova 1**

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

From April 20 to 27, public television station Moldova 1 distinguished itself by its active coverage of electoral subjects. The station covered electoral issues in a separate section and clearly classified them under the heading "Local Elections 2018." The eight news bulletins broadcast during this week contained 42 electoral items. The majority concerned launching electoral candidates, the presentation of their programs or priorities, and the problems and solutions they proposed for them. Moldova 1 covered the campaigns for Chisinau mayor and

those for Mayor of Balti and Jora de Mijloc, Orhei District. Coverage was, however, dominated by the local elections in Chisinau at 70% of the items.

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

Most of the 42 electoral newscasts broadcast by Moldova 1 during the reference period presented information in an objective and balanced manner. There were no significant deviations from journalism standards that could have distorted information or that could have led to issues related to separating opinions from facts. Only once in one news story was a violation of the principle of separation of opinion from facts observed. On "Mesager" on April 21 when Valeriu Munteanu, the Liberal Party (PL) candidate for Mayor of Chisinau, announced his initiative to create a new mechanism for the distribution of public money, the reporter said: "Dissatisfied with the mechanism of public money distribution, the PL candidate for the head of the capital, Valeriu Munteanu, proposes to amend the law on public finances." The phrase can be interpreted as a mixture of fact and opinion because the journalist expressed a personal conclusion.

Most of the news covered the campaign launches of candidates, presentations of their priorities, the problems in the localities in which they are running and their solutions for them. Representatives of the following parties made the most appearances: Socialist Party (PSRM) (eight), PL (six) and PPDA/PAS/PLDM (six). It should be noted that in the case of PL and in particular of PSRM, the statements of their representatives were often broadcast directly, but those of PPDA/PAS/PLDM were mostly paraphrased by reporters. The representatives of the PPPN, PUN, DA, PVEM parties and the independent candidate for Mayor of Chisinau Silvia Radu had three live appearances or mentions, and the representatives of PP, PNL and the Russo-Slavic Party had two. All electoral contestants were presented or mentioned in a neutral context. PSRM enjoyed the most coverage. In six of the eight news bulletins monitored on "Messenger," Ion Ceban, the PSRM candidate, was the exclusive subject.

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

Public station Moldova 1 provided airtime for the majority of the candidates; however, most of the newscasts were based on a single source without providing a second source and/or supplementing the material with contextual information (background). In 35 of the 42 relevant news items, the main sources were the candidates themselves (launching their campaigns, presenting priorities or programs, public debates and their registration at the Central Electoral Commission [CEC]). The CEC was the source for three items, and the representatives of that institution, the Democratic Party (PDM) spokesman, civil society and civic activists were the sources for the remaining four.

During the week, the public station broadcast three controversial stories containing accusations targeting candidates, political parties or local and central authorities. In all cases, Moldova 1 failed to present the sides of both parties involved which led to unbalanced coverage: the PDM story in which the party was declared to be "... disappointed with the current electoral campaign and accuses the right-wing parties of selfishness" (April 24); the news on the statements made by Ion Ceban, the PSRM candidate, on the demolition of historic buildings and the construction of residential blocks in their place (April 25); and the news about the PVEM candidate Victor Stratila who wants a clean city and says the authorities are doing too little to achieve this (April 26).

### **Language and images**

During the week there were no cases of using discriminatory language or of images that could distort reality or create doubt about compliance with ethical and professional standards.

### **Canal 2**

## **Involvement in the electoral campaign**

On April 5, Telestar Media LLC, the license holder for Canal 2, informed the Audiovisual Coordinating Council (CCA) that the station, "...will not report on the May 20, 2018 new local election campaigns for mayor in some localities." In the statement the broadcaster also announced that it would not organize televised debates and would not broadcast free or paid election advertising. Nevertheless, from April 20 to 27, Canal 2 broadcast 20 items with direct or indirect electoral content during the main newscast "Reporter" at 19.00. In addition, on April 23, Canal 2 included an "Elections 2018" heading in the news bulletin containing four items with direct electoral content. In each of the 8 editions of "Reporter," direct or indirect electoral material was broadcast; most (14) featured Silvia Radu, the independent candidate for Mayor of Chisinau. The other candidates mentioned each appeared in one item: Ion Ceban (PSRM); Valeriu Munteanu (PL); Andrei Nastase (PPDA/PAS/PLDM); and Andrei Munteanu (PSP, unregistered). Two other items announced the start of the CEC's printing of the ballots as well as the PPEM's position regarding local and legislative elections in the autumn.

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

All 14 items in which Silvia Radu appeared or was mentioned showed the independent candidate in an exclusively positive light. All the events involving the services of City Hall, before the registration of candidates (April 20–24) and after (April 25–27) were related to Silvia Radu. For example, the TV station informed the public that for the first time City Hall had become a partner in organizing a cycling race and that Silvia Radu had promised to take part in it with her whole family (April 20); that more than 500 waste collection sites would be upgraded (as part of a project started in 2016, but the reporter mentioned that, "Previously, the interim mayor of the capital, Silvia Radu, had asked that all the platforms be checked and upgraded, and that inadequate ones be relocated") (April 21); that the problems of mansard roof owners had reached Silvia Radu and the authorities had decided to repair the roofs using public money (April 24); that, "Traffic jams at the intersection of the Balkan Highway and Petricani Street will become a memory," because, "On her last day as acting interim mayor of the capital, Silvia Radu ordered the installation of a traffic light in order to regulate traffic flow " (April 25); that booths in the parks were being evacuated on the initiative of "suspended mayor Silvia Radu, who was notified by the citizens of Chisinau" (April 27).

The news regarding the PSRM candidate for mayor was subjective. Titled "Smart Ideas by Ion Ceban," the item referred to several points in the candidate's electoral platform. The text began, "Old ... innovations. The candidate of the socialists for Mayor of Chisinau, Ion Ceban, has promised to amaze the inhabitants of Chisinau but is late by a few years ... " (April 23).

In addition, on April 26 Canal 2 broadcast a news item featuring Andrei Nastase. It was presented in a biased way as follows: "The PPDA candidate A. Nastase takes on the press again. Journalists from the *Ziarul National* newspaper have been threatened with a lawsuit if they will not publish a refutation regarding the news about an accident in Balti that allegedly involved Nastase's vehicle..." Two other news items were presented in a relatively balanced manner on April 23 and 26 about Valeriu Munteanu (PL) and Andrei Munteanu (PSP).

In conclusion, from April 20 to 27, Canal 2 clearly violated its statement of non-participation in the coverage of new local election campaigns and heavily favored the independent candidate Silvia Radu who appeared in all 14 relevant news items in a positive light. Andrei Nastase (PPDA/PAS/PLDM), although not targeted directly, was treated unfavorably by the station while three other candidates (Valeriu Munteanu PL, Ion Ceban PSRM and Andrei Munteanu PSP, unregistered) benefited from relatively neutral treatment though the treatment of the PSRM candidate was somewhat unfavorable.

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

Canal 2 presented all the material on independent candidate Silvia Radu from a single perspective. Even though citizens and officials were also presented and a relative gender balance was ensured, they all supported or confirmed the same opinion. In the story about Andrei Nastase, journalists made allegations, but the position of the other party was not presented ("It is not the first time that Andrei Nastase has insulted or behaved aggressively against journalists ... especially when asked why he uses a teleprompter during press conferences, why he swears at journalists or how he maintains his 11 houses if he has no income" April 26). In another item broadcast on the same day (about Andrei Munteanu's failure to register), the balance of sources was respected.

## **Language and images**

During the week, items with direct or indirect electoral content included mocking phrases or expressions (The candidate of the socialists for Mayor of Chisinau, Ion Ceban, has promised to amaze the inhabitants of Chisinau but is late by a few years ... " April 23) and/or labels (fugitive criminal, Renato Usatai, April 21) directed at candidates or the representatives of the political parties. The images used in the news about Andrei Nastase presented him in unfavorable situations during moments of aggression, nervousness etc. On the other hand, Silvia Radu appears in videos in all the items in which she is a direct protagonist or is targeted and is shown among the people on the streets, at the town hall giving instructions and scolding subordinates, smiling to the people of Chisinau or planting trees with her family.

## **Prime TV**

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

On April 5, General Media Group Corp. LLC, the Prime TV license holder, notified the CCA that the station, "...will not report on the campaigns for mayoral elections on May 20, 2018 in some localities." In the statement the broadcaster also announced that it would not organize televised debates and would not broadcast free or paid publicity.

Nevertheless, from April 20 to 27, Prime TV covered daily events with a direct or indirect electoral content and on April 21 and 22 added an "Elections 2018" section to the main news bulletin. In the eight broadcasts of "Primele Știri" monitored, Prime TV included 33 relevant stories; bulletins contained between two (April 20) and eight (April 23) items each. Of the total number of electoral news items, 19 were similar to those on Canal 2 with minor differences in the phrases/expressions used and 12 targeted candidates: Silvia Radu (7), Ion Ceban (PSRM- 1), Reghina Apostolova (Shor Party-1), Andrei Nastase (PPDA/PAS/PLDM-1), Vasile Costiuc (DA-1), and Victor Stratila (PVEM-1). Also, the topic on April 26 was the public debate organized by a press agency attended by four candidates: Silvia Radu, (independent), Constantin Codreanu (PUN), Alexandra Can (PNL) and Victor Stratila (PVEM) while the broadcast on April 24 referred to the PDM opinion on local elections and candidates expressed at a press conference.

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

In addition to the 14 items that were similar to those broadcast on Canal 2, Prime TV also broadcast seven in which Silvia Radu was the protagonist, continuing to portray her in an exclusively positive manner, emphasizing the initiatives and actions taken at City Hall. On April 21, for example, Prime TV discussed, "...a strategy that will improve the public transport situation in the city." The source of the news was, "...an announcement made by Interim Mayor S. Radu on a social network," and, "The changes are to be made in the years 2018-2042." Other items referred to the announcements by S. Radu regarding the possibility

of introducing electric buses in Chisinau (April 23), of washing several streets in Chisinau (April 24) or to the fact that, "Trolleybuses in Chisinau will no longer be a danger" (after one caught fire while functioning) because, "The mayor ordered that all public transport units be equipped with air-conditioning (April 26). The way events at Chisinau City Hall were presented was similar to that used by Canal 2; all activities were directly associated with the name of independent candidate Silvia Radu.

At the same time, PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Nastase was targeted on two occasions in a tendentious manner (April 21 and 26). In the first case, the news cited the columnist's doubts about, "...the noble intentions of the DA party leader and candidate for mayor of the capital, A. Nastase." In an article for *Ziarul National* newspaper the journalist wrote that the godson of convicted criminal oligarch V. Topa who had announced a fight against oligarchs is, "...just an oligarch's tool" and it also referred to the wealth of A. Nastase. The second topic was the same as the one broadcast by Canal 2 regarding the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate's attitude toward journalists.

Other subjects with electoral content that mentioned the names of candidates (R. Apostolova Shor Party, V. Costiuc DA, V. Stratila PVEM, C. Codreanu PUN, A. Can PNL and V. Stratila PVEM) were presented in a relatively balanced manner. At the same time, in the report on the public debate by four candidates, Silvia Radu benefited from preferential treatment in relation to the other three. Those three were granted time only for a brief presentation of their campaign intentions while Silvia Radu's message was complemented by that of an analyst present at the debate who referred to the advantages of independent candidates compared with others (April 26). In addition, Prime TV showed bias in at least two other cases. On April 23, the last item on the news bulletin was that, "Tomorrow morning in the Morning Studio we will have Interim Mayor Silvia Radu who will talk about the annual cycling race, Chisinau Criterium, that is to be held on May 13 in the Great National Assembly Square," and on April 25 the subject of the suspension of Silvia Radu was analyzed during the "Primele Stiri" program in the "De facto" analytical segment.

Impartiality and objectivity were also compromised in an item broadcast on April 27 about the intentions of PSRM candidate, Ion Ceban. The news announced that, "The socialist also wants to build a sports palace on Ialoveni Street, even though the authorities have already begun to implement such a project near the capital." The information complements that from April 23 on the "old innovations" of the PSRM candidate, also broadcast by Canal 2.

During the week, Prime TV repeatedly violated its statement of non-participation in the coverage of the elections and favored the independent candidate Radu who appeared in 21 relevant items in a positive and/or neutral light. A. Nastase (PPDA/PAS/PLDM) was disfavored in the broadcasts while seven other candidates (R. Apostolova Shor Party, V. Costiuc DA, V. Stratila PVEM, C. Codreanu PUN, A. Can PNL, V. Munteanu PL, A. Munteanu PSP, unregistered) benefitted from relatively neutral coverage in the news in which they appeared, though the PSRM candidate was slightly disfavored.

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

Prime TV used the same way of approaching topics and using/quoting sources as Canal 2. In the case of independent candidate Silvia Radu, the information was presented from a single perspective supported by citizens or officials each time. In items in which candidate Andrei Nastase was mentioned, his opinion was missing. In the case of Ion Ceban, balance was provided by "authorities" used as a second opinion.

### **Language and images**

Regarding language and images, Prime TV's behavior was similar to that adopted by Canal 2. Silvia Radu was highlighted and appeared in a news story that did not mention her name

(April 25 about road markings that "will be executed by summer, and with quality paint" in which she appears in the video talking to workers). On the other hand, PPDA candidate Andrei Nastase is named on two occasions as the godson of the convicted criminal oligarch Topa (April 21 and 26), and pejorative language is used about him.

## **Publika TV**

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

On April 5, General Media Group Corp. LLC, the license holder for Publika TV, notified the CCA that the station, "...will not report on the new election campaigns for mayors on May 20, 2018 in some localities."

During the reporting period, Publika TV nevertheless broadcast 17 news items with electoral content. They mostly covered allegations made by some candidates against others, information about the registration of candidates, electoral promises, or negative comments from the press about some of the contestants. The station also broadcast indirect electoral material such as the news on the participation of independent candidate Silvia Radu in the annual cycling race (April 24) and the request of PPDA and PAS candidate Andrei Nastase addressed to *Ziarul National* to post a refutation (April 26).

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

Much of the relevant news broadcast by Publika TV was biased and deviated from the basic provisions of the Journalist's Code of Ethics. It was often noted that facts were not separated from opinions with the authors inserting their own views to shift the balance to favor or disfavor certain protagonists. Thus, for example, in the item titled "Nicolae Negru turns Andrei Nastase into dust: the one who announces the fight against oligarchs is himself a tool for oligarchs" (April 23), in addition to the opinion of the columnist from *Ziarul National* there is also erroneous information about Nastase's fortune, i.e., the 11 buildings he is thought to own. More information has been published in the press according to which the number of buildings in the old statement of wealth included adjacent buildings while last year's statement contains separate information about houses and adjacent buildings. In another broadcast, "Integrity questioned. Ion Ceban about Andrei Nastase: He has connections with dubious people" (April 27), the PSRM candidate is quoted for about 40 seconds after which for almost 3 minutes the reporter presents a retrospective of different opinions in support of the hypothesis that Nastase does not have integrity. The selection of information and the ironic tone of the news item indicate the bias of the author.

The item titled "Iulian Chifu: Nastase has stolen the start from Maia Sandu and wants the votes of those he has cursed" (April 24) is based on a commentary in the press from which passages were selected that would put Nastase in a negative light. It is to be noted that the lower third of the screen contained the statement "Nastase, the wrong candidate." In another story titled "Nastase, takes on the journalists again. The DA candidate threatens *Ziarul National* with a lawsuit and asks for a refutation" (April 26), the reporter failed to explain why the politician requested the refutation instead including only a description of the various situations in which Nastase allegedly intimidated journalists.

Another tendentious item refers to the press conference of PL candidate Valeriu Munteanu on April 24: "Valeriu Munteanu wants to control the Chisinau airport." In addition to Munteanu's statement which is balanced with the opinion of an expert, the news says that during the time when his party colleague Dorin Chirtoaca was the mayor, 20% of the housing management companies were bankrupt. It is unclear how relevant this information is to the fact that the material was referring to the airport and not the housing management companies.



In conclusion, Publika TV had a partisan approach to independent candidate Silvia Radu who was favored by both the large number of appearances (six) and the positive tone of coverage (in five items). The TV station selected information in order to present her as a professional person who has more advantages than her fellow candidates: “Silvia Radu – I will continue the cleaning process at City Hall. Those who are unprofessional and just count pencils will leave” (April 26); “Silvia Radu, invited on ‘Prima Ora’” (24 April); “Silvia Radu: There are no political parties behind me. Chisinau must be a modern and a European city” (April 25); “Silvia Radu: The work of Chisinau City Hall should be based on people’s interests, not on political disputes” (April 25); “Silvia Radu: All Moldovan television stations have reported on City Hall activities, and this is normal” (April 25).

In contrast, Andrei Nastase, PPDA/PAS/PLDM, appeared in four items all of which were negative and were not based on electoral events but rather on news compiled from comments from the press or statements of other candidates such as the news including the commentary of Nicolae Negru (April 23), Iulian Chifu (April 24), the opinion of the PSRM candidate Ion Ceban on Nastase regarding his integrity (April 27) and the story of Nastase’s intention to sue a newspaper (April 26).

Ion Ceban, the PSRM candidate for Mayor of Chisinau, appeared once in a negative context (“PSRM candidate for Chisinau City Hall proposes projects that have been in operation for years” April 23) and once in a neutral one when he is accusing Andrei Nastase (April 27). The PL candidate was featured in two news items, both negatively: “Valeriu Munteanu is afraid to be shadowed at Chisinau elections by candidate Andrei Munteanu” (23 April) and “Valeriu Munteanu wants to control the Chisinau airport” (April 24)

Viktor Stratila PVE, and Andrei Munteanu PSP, appeared in neutral items while the other candidates were ignored.

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

Of the six controversial news items, most were unbalanced presenting only one opinion, usually that of those who launched the allegations. For example, most of the news about Andrei Nastase presented the information from a single perspective.

The broadcast about the non-registration of Andrei Munteanu PSP (April 26) and the one about Valeriu Munteanu’s (PL) request not to register Andrei Munteanu (April 23) were balanced, presenting the views of both parties.

### **Language and images**

Some of the relevant material contained descriptors designed to project a negative image of the protagonists. For example, Andrei Nastase was often presented by sources or reporters as the godson of the convicted criminal Topa and the oligarch’s tool. The images selected to illustrate those items were always unfavorable to Andrei Nastase who was presented mostly in aggressive situations from archive materials.

## **RTR Moldova**

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

In the main news bulletins of the day from April 20 to 27, RTR Moldova broadcast a total of 31 items with direct or indirect electoral content. All were simple news items reported in a separate section clearly delineated as “New Local Elections 2018.” Most of the news was about the registration of the candidates, the presentation of their priorities and/or reforms/activities that they would implement after winning the election, the single right-wing candidate for local elections in Chisinau, and the CEC’s refusal to register a candidate.

Indirect election material included news on road repairs in Chisinau (April 23); the news about Chisinau City Hall's intention to cancel the authorizations of the company that rents space in the building where a fire took place and to cancel the authorizations of the companies that dealt with the construction of the mansard roofs from 2009 to 2012 (April 23) and the news about the appointment of a new temporary interim mayor (Ruslan Codreanu), who "will continue the projects already started..." (25 April) for the duration of the electoral campaign.

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

There were no serious deviations from deontological norms that could have distorted reality; however, there were some cases in which the journalist's bias was observed. For example, in the news about PUN candidate Constantin Codreanu who will "... ensure European integration through unification with Romania" (27 April); or in the news regarding the Chernobyl nuclear accident victims' commemoration where representatives of the Shor Party blamed the authorities for not helping those who had suffered from the accident (April 26).

The frequency of the appearance of some candidates and the inclusion of their direct statements (not paraphrasing or stock statements taken from their web pages or Facebook) from events organized by the candidates as well as the approach to the information denotes the editorial sympathy of this TV station to the PSRM and the candidate of this political party as well as to the candidate of the Shor Party. On the other hand, PPDA/PAS/PLDM, PL, PPPN candidates were in many cases either paraphrased or indirectly quoted, or their statements were taken from their social or web networks where they were initially published (stock statements). In all six newscasts during the week, the PSRM candidate was presented at least once daily and in an exclusively positive context. On the other hand, PL and PUN were slightly disfavored and their presentations were in something of a negative context.

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

RTR Moldova provided airtime to the majority of electoral candidates and/or political parties. In nearly all the broadcasts, the news reflected the opinion of a single source without providing a second source and/or balancing the news with contextual information (background). Politicians and/or electoral candidates were sources 26 times and civil servants twice. Experts or representatives of civil society were not quoted as sources on RTR Moldova. In addition, the news of this TV station did not include the opinions of ordinary citizens.

During the week, RTR Moldova broadcast two controversial news stories. On April 24, when Vitalie Gamurari, the PDM spokesman, asked the right-wing parties to identify a single candidate for the local elections in Chisinau, the reporter noted that he had accused, "... some political parties of demagoguery and false information." In this case, in order to respect the balance of sources and the pluralism of opinion, the station was obliged to ask for the opinion of one or more of the parties concerned or of a political expert/analyst.

The second controversial item was on April 23 regarding the request to the CEC of PL candidate for Mayor of Chisinau Valeriu Munteanu not to admit Silvia Radu as a candidate because she "... has not collected the signatures correctly." RTR Moldova did not provide Silvia Radu with the right to reply/opinion.

### **Language and images**

RTR Moldova did not use discriminatory language against electoral contestants in the news. In terms of images, they were largely neutral and respected ethical and professional standards.

## **Jurnal TV**

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

From 20 to 27 April, Jurnal TV broadcast a total of 33 items relevant to this monitoring; most (29) were news stories with direct electoral content. The material that had a direct link to the electoral campaign was included in the news bulletins under the label "Election 2018." They mostly referred to the registration of candidates and their launches into the race, to voter meetings, and to the activities of the CEC.

Material with an indirect electoral content focused on the lives and activities of some candidates and also on activities involving party members that could influence public opinion about the candidates. The indirect material included the news about the selection for the head of Supreme Court of Justice mentioning that previously Andrei Nastase (the candidate nominated by PPDA/PAS/PLDM) had fought against Ion Druta who was running for the position (April 24). Another such item that was not labeled as "Election 2018" but was included in the social section referred to the salary previously received by the independent candidate Silvia Radu as President of Union Fenosa (April 26). Two additional news items with indirect content referred to the decision of the central authorities to allow Transnistrians the means to travel abroad with Transnistrian registration numbers including the opinion of Alexandru Slusari, PPDA Vice-President (April 24) as well as the report on the conflict between traders and the Central Market administration in Chisinau which included the opinion of PPDA Vice-President Inga Grigoriu (April 25). This item contained messages about the PPDA's concern over the Transnistrian issue and about people's problems.

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

During the reporting period, the TV station reported on all the activities carried out by the electoral contestants, showing fairness in the process of selecting the topics. The reports included under the "Election 2018" heading were, as a rule, extensive, including information on the relevant actions of the candidates stating that other events or press releases were not organized/broadcast on that day. Note that all of the items included only statements about contestants' electoral platforms without including context information or expert opinions that may have outlined a clearer picture of the promises.

In most cases, the presentations of candidates were neutral or positive; however, judging by the frequency of the news coverage and the tone of the reporting, there was a slight inclination towards a positive view of the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Nastase and a negative view of Shor Party candidate Reghina Apostolova and of independent candidate Silvia Radu. Andrei Nastase was the protagonist in six news items about campaign activities: a news story about his properties (in which the press information about his fabulous wealth was denied) and the news about the selection for CSJ chief (24 April). In two other items with indirect electoral content, representatives of the PPDA appeared in a positive context.

In contrast, Reghina Apostolova was targeted in two stories, and in both cases she appeared in a negative light (does not speak Romanian, she is included in the Kroll report April 23 and 25). In the six news stories in which Silvia Radu appears, in five there is a negative context: the story about her salary from the "energy domain" which promotes the idea that about 400,000 lei was allegedly paid out of the money paid by consumers (April 26); the two items based on press commentary about PD leader Vladimir Plahotniuc trying to take control of Chisinau City Hall (April 25); the news on the forced collection of signatures in favor of Silvia Radu (April 26); and the information about the complaint by Valeriu Munteanu to the CEC

about verifying the correctness of the signature collecting process conducted by Silvia Radu (April 27). The other candidates appeared in the news on election events and were covered neutrally.

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

Most of the relevant material broadcast by Jurnal TV during the reporting period respected the principle of balance of sources. Much of the controversial material presented both sides involved in the conflict, though there were several cases when reporters deviated from that rule. The two newscasts in which Reghina Apostolova was mentioned reported that her name appears in the Kroll report, but her side of the story was not included. The news on the possible relationship between Silvia Radu and Vladimir Plahotniuc also did not state their opinions. In addition, the news on the forced collection of signatures in favor of Silvia Radu did not include her perspective though it was mentioned that she had not answered her phone when the journalist had tried to contact her.

### **Language and images**

The language and images used in Jurnal TV's electoral reports complied with ethical principles.

## **NTV MOLDOVA**

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

NTV Moldova actively covered the campaigns in Chisinau and Balti both directly and indirectly from 20 to 27 April in 28 reports in the evening newscasts and on the weekly program "Sinteza saptamanii." Direct reports were placed under the label "Election 2018. New Local Elections" and focused on some of the conferences and other electoral campaign activities of the candidates for mayors of Chisinau and Balti and on the activities of the district electoral councils. The newscasts also broadcast reports outside the thematic section that directly and indirectly promoted PSRM candidates.

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

In many of the reports that directly or indirectly focused on the new elections (14 in all), NTV Moldova did not ensure that the accounts were impartial and objective. On one hand, PSRM candidates in Chisinau and Balti were presented in a positive context and the tone of their presentations was one of appreciation of their merits and capabilities while on the other hand, PRSM electoral opponents were presented in a more negative context and in some cases were ridiculed. The partisan character of the reporting was also manifest in language with pejorative elements.

PSRM candidates for Mayor of Chisinau (Ion Ceban) and Balti (Alexandr Usatii) were heavily and visibly favored by NTV Moldova through the extended airtime given to them and their electoral activities, by detailing their electoral promises, by presenting them in a favorable editorial context only, by including interviews with people who praised the candidates, and through the use of positive and/or neutral titles. In contrast, the other candidates for Chisinau mayor were presented, as a rule, in largely unfavorable contexts emphasizing or suggesting certain aspects that cast doubt on their capabilities. Thus, Ion Ceban (PSRM) appeared in a positive context in all 14 news items that targeted him directly or indirectly, and all reports on the PSRM candidate's campaign in Chisinau lasted an average of at least three minutes and were accompanied by positive titles and comments ("A friendly capital for business" April 20;

"Ion Ceban: We want a modern city" and "Street children, the a focus of Ion Ceban" April 23; "Solutions for the preservation of monuments" April 24; "In defense of social-cultural edifices" April 25; "Ion Ceban: Let's develop the suburbs" April 26). The same was observed about Alexandr Usatii, the PSRM candidate for Mayor of Balti who was favored in all three reports that targeted him ("Balti town needs a homemaker" 20 April; "Chaos in the public transport of Balti"—comments by A. Usatii who accuses the city of poor management" April 24; "He will cooperate with businesspeople" April 26). In contrast, the other candidates in the capital were presented in a predominantly pejorative and/or unfavorable context, and the other candidates in Balti generally did not appear on NTV Moldova news or were mentioned most often without images or other details of their electoral programs. Their reports did not focus on their solutions and promises as was the case for Ion Ceban in Chisinau and Alexandr Usatii in Balti but instead highlighted problematic issues such as misunderstandings and different views and the desire of candidates to play politics instead of managing city affairs. ("PAS does not support the PPDA candidate in Balti" April 20; "The last chance for the divided Right" April 23 on the appeal of the candidate Vasile Costiuc for a joint candidate of the Right; "Contested candidates in the Capital" April 23 about the request of candidate Valeriu Munteanu to reject the registration of two other candidates; "With thoughts on politics" April 24 which suggests that right-wing candidates are thinking more about politics than about the city problems and are quarreling with each other; "Codreanu continues to seek support" April 26 which states that other right candidates do not support Constantin Codreanu, the candidate of PUN and that Valeriu Munteanu considers him a dubious political character; and "Praise for himself..." April 26 about the "self-congratulations" in which, according to the reporter, the contestants "tried to surpass each other" in the debates organized by the IPN news agency which also mentions that Ion Ceban refused to participate in these debates stating that only issues regarding the city's infrastructure and other citizens' problems should be debated and that City Hall should not be turned into a weapon to be used in political battles thus presenting the PSRM candidate in a favorable light compared with other candidates.

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

Most controversial reports (10 out of 11) were editorially unbalanced because they presented only one perspective. Thus, pluralism of opinion was lacking which violates journalistic norms. For example, in the item "Vulnerable fire system" released on April 20, allegations were made on the inefficiency and malfunctioning of the fire safety systems launched by the PSRM candidate (who inspected the places where the fires that day occurred), but the reply of the institutions concerned was missing. Instead, it was stressed that Silvia Radu, "...had no reaction to the fire from the central sector of the capital." In the April 24 report on the problems of Balti public transport only the opinion of the PSRM candidate regarding the "chaos in the city" was presented, with accusations about poor management but no replies from the current city administration. The accusation that City Hall "did not lift a finger" and did not react to the destruction of the heritage site, that it had wasted the city's patrimony, that it had not implemented road marking (25 April), and that there was a mafia at City Hall regarding the issue of transport (April 26) all went unanswered.

### **Language and images**

In some cases, the language contained pejorative epithets and labeling targeted at candidates other than those of the PSRM with cases of manipulation in the text of their statements. Thus, in the April 24 report "With thoughts on politics" there were elements of pejorative language and negative labeling against PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Nastase: "... here the eternal fighter against the oligarchy, Andrei Nastase, hits the roof" thus he "does not hide that he will turn City Hall into a tool for fighting his political enemies." In fact, A. Nastase referred to fake news that targeted him and said he was the most attacked

candidate. In the "Codreanu continues to seek support" report broadcast on April 26, the reporter stated that "... Codreanu says that he will continue to walk with a hand extended to those who consider him pro-Romanian and unionist." The phrase "to walk with a hand extended" suggests that he is begging for support from other parties. In fact, Codreanu said, "We in the pre-campaign started talking with all the right-wing parties, and the hand we extended at that time continues to remain extended. We are the people of dialogue ... " In the same edition of the news on April 26, the presenter stated that the participants in the debate organized by the IPN news agency "made a show of themselves" and later added a biased appraisal that the participants "tried to surpass each other in self-congratulations."

## **Accent TV**

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

During the week of 20–27 April, the topic of new local elections in the municipalities of Chisinau and Balti was covered either directly or indirectly in 26 reports on the evening news program "Accent Info." The TV station inaugurated the thematic section "New Local Elections 2018" with reports on the campaign activities of the candidates and also on the activities of the district electoral councils. Some reports that indirectly covered the campaign outside of this section were also broadcast. As at NTV Moldova, Accent TV heavily promoted PSRM candidates, and their deputies and local councilors also enjoyed the greatest visibility and positive coverage in the news. The work of President Igor Dodon was extensively publicized and described in eloquent terms. The other political parties were presented mostly in a negative context or were neglected.

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

In 12 of the direct or indirect reports on the electoral campaign, Accent TV did not ensure the impartial and objective character of the accounts including when selecting the aspects of the candidates' platforms to be detailed. In the case of PSRM candidates, these details were extensive and substantial and in some cases were amplified by reporters; for example, in the report "Ceban presented the program for developing the suburbs" on April 26, the reporter listed how much PSRM councilors had contributed to the welfare of the suburbs adding, "And that's not all. The socialists do not even want to stop at what they have achieved," as well as inserting interviews with citizens who appreciated socialist candidates or their initiatives. In contrast, PRSM opponents were presented in a more negative context and in some cases were ridiculed and their statements distorted.

The PSRM candidate for mayor of Chisinau Ion Ceban was favored in every report that targeted him directly (six cases) and was also indirectly favored in several other reports that presented initiatives of the socialists including the intention of PSRM to challenge in court the demolition of a building in the Rascani District of the capital and the initiative of the socialist councilors to introduce the Eway system for informing on the public traffic schedule among others. The reports on Ceban's electoral program had a duration of about three minutes each, and in some cases were even longer, and their tone was favorable with positive and/or neutral titles.

In contrast, the other candidates in Chisinau were presented, as a rule, in a disadvantageous context, some were ridiculed, and their ability to lead the city was questioned indirectly. Thus, in every newscast, candidate Ion Ceban benefited from extensive reports in which his electoral program was broadly detailed (April 20, "Ceban: The capital must be open for business" promises administrative support for projects, subsidized interest rates for business loans, creating a city development agency, and support for young specialists; 23 April "Ceban: The concept of an 'intelligent city' should be introduced in the Capital" presenting the

*concept* with different applications and programs; April 24, "Ceban: Chisinau has to become a cultural, historical and tourist center" proposes the preservation of historical monuments and the development of the patrimony; April 25, "Ceban: The city needs sport and cultural facilities, not shopping centers" expresses dissatisfaction with the demolition of the Trade Union Palace in the Rascani sector; April 26, "Ceban has presented a development program for the suburbs".

For the opponents of the PSRM, Accent TV embraced a different editorial policy. Thus, their programs were either not presented in as much detail as Ceban's, or they were questioned, and even the candidates themselves were presented in a deliberately distorted way and in negative or ridiculous contexts: April 23, the reporting about the protest of the inhabitants of the Rascani sector against a construction called "The fight for survival" was announced by the presenters as follows: "After the 'simple' Prime Minister Iurie Leanca, during whose term the billion was stolen, the example seems to be picked up in a hurry by Interim Mayor Silvia Radu"; April 25, in the report on the presentation of the electoral program of the candidate of the Shor party Reghina Apostolova titled "Experiments on children with the 'Orhei' trademark, possibly in Chisinau" the reporter said that creating food amalgamates as proposed by the candidate would cost kindergarten cooks their jobs, and the same bulletin stated that Andrei Nastase, the candidate of PPDA/PAS, wanted to change the name of the Bac River although the candidate referred to the need to develop the river banks and create recreational areas; April 26, "The Liberals continue to fight against the Soviet legacy" on the proposal of PL candidate Valeriu Munteanu to remove the railroad from the Chisinau area and "Instead of a program, Codreanu presented a new member of the team" about the press conference of PUN candidate, Constantin Codreanu.

The PSRM candidate for Mayor of Balti, Alexandr Usatii, also benefitted from support at Accent TV. He was directly favored in a two-minute report on a meeting with the teachers at a Balti high school broadcast on April 23 ("Alexandr Usatii: We will hold talks with business"). The report presented the candidate's vision for business development in the city and several interviews with people who greatly appreciated the PSRM candidate. The other candidates were only referred to, and in the April 20 news on the candidates' registration by the district electoral councils; Alexandr Usatii was the only candidate in Balti who appeared in the video.

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

The reports that focused on conflicts or those that contained allegations including those launched by some of the candidates (seven), did not respect the principle of balance of sources and were presented from a single perspective or without replies from those who were accused. For example, in the April 20 report "Attention, electoral agitation," an activist complains about the display of a portrait of Traian Basescu in a high school and accuses the director of acting in an ill-mannered way and of violating the education code that prohibits electoral campaigning in schools, but the reply of the accused was not requested. In the item "Ceban: Chisinau has to become a cultural, historical and tourist center" broadcast on April 24, the PSRM candidate launches accusations of criminal behavior by the municipal administration regarding the patrimony of the city, but the replies of any representative of the current authorities were missing.

### **Language and images**

In some cases, the language used excelled in labeling and in commentary of a pejorative type against PSRM opponents, with cases of manipulation of the text of their statements. The April 20 report "The second 'life' of the flower bed" referring to the flower bed planted in Cathedral Square at the initiative of Silvia Radu which was disassembled after a week, the presenter stated that "Chisinau people are astonished" although no person that was interviewed in any way expressed any "astonishment"; In the April 23 report "The fight for

survival" on the protest of the residents of the Rascani sector against a building, the reporter said that, "People are tired of the impotence of City Hall," and that the, "...protesters' path to the interim mayor proved to be impassable" and that in contrast, "the people's plea for help was not ignored by PSRM local councilor Eugenia Ceban who gave them the necessary support to enter the institution and talk to Silvia Radu," but added that "Silvia Radu has been clearly indifferent to the demands of the people, preferring to speak abstractly about the rule of law and democracy." In the report "Nastase: the name of the Bac River must be changed" (April 25), Accent TV took part of the statement of PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Nastase out of context and interpreted it speculatively. A. Nastase actually said the following: "... maybe the time will come when they will put up the issue of changing this name as well, but you will change the name in vain if you do not change the quality of this river which could be turned into a recreation area and that is what we propose to do. On a very large part of the Bac River, we should have a green area, a recreation area."

## **TV8**

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

From April 20 to 27, TV8 featured electoral topics in the main daily broadcast on each working day at 19.00. In the six newscasts (no news on the weekend), the media institution aired a total of 17 electoral news items: 13 were related to the promises made by candidates during public events they organized, 2 were on accusations against one of the candidates, 1 was on the registration of candidates (April 20), and 1 was about the PPEM leader's opinion who did not nominate a candidate in the elections.

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

In general, the institution maintained balance and a critical approach to the candidates and their promises, although some of the news was from a single source without expert opinions or without passing it through the journalist's critical filter. Examples include the April 27 news story about the promises made by PL candidate Valeriu Munteanu regarding the construction of a boulevard instead of the railway station in which the journalists did not include relevant background information (the fact that the railway station has been administered thus far by the Liberals who have invested public money, and now the party's candidate proposes relocation) and the April 24 item regarding Valeriu Munteanu's promises on changes to the Chisinau airport infrastructure in which the reporters did not ask what the Mayor of Chisinau may have in common with the managing of the airport, an object of national importance, and how he can intervene in this situation since the airport's management has been given over to a private company for an extended period.

In accordance with responsible journalism, a critical attitude of the reporter was observed only in some items. An example is the news on April 23 on the promises of Ion Ceban, the PSRM candidate, when reporters reminded viewers that the government has already acquired software for 20 million lei that would help patients to do online scheduling with a doctor.

During the monitoring period, the PSRM candidate was most often covered in the news (four items) while the rest of the candidates appeared in one or two items only. This can be explained by the frequent public appearances of the Socialist candidate while his competitors rarely held press conferences or other events. Silvia Radu appeared in two neutral news items (about her candidacy and the appointment of an interim mayor) and in two others in a negative context in news generated by events or statements made in public. Andrei Nastase PPDA/PAS/PLDM, Vasile Costiuc DA, Constantin Codreanu PUN, Valeriu Munteanu PL, Reghina Apostolova Shor Party and Victor Stratila PVEM were all covered in one news item each. Numerically, TV8 favored candidate Ion Ceban, but an analysis of content did not



reveal a clear favoring of any candidate or a disadvantage to another. At the same time, it should be noted that other candidates such as Maxim Braila PPRM, Alexandru Matu the Russo-Slavic Party, or Alexandru Rosco Our House Moldova Party made public appearances (press conferences), but they did not appear on TV8 news.

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

During the week, TV8 broadcast two controversial stories: one related to Valeriu Munteanu's allegations that Silvia Radu had accumulated signatures fraudulently via PDM by using administrative resources and the other related to the statements of the energy expert Sergiu Tofilat who announced that there would be a secret report by ANRE regarding irregularities discovered in 2013 at Union Fenosa Company that was administered by Silvia Radu. In both cases, the balance of sources was respected and the opinion of all relevant parties was sought. However, in the news about the ANRE report, Silvia Radu's reaction could have been more widely presented from her posts on Facebook. The editorial staff was limited to saying that Silvia Radu qualified the allegations as lies.

### **Language and images**

The language was generally appropriate and neutral though in one case, a slightly positive nuance was noted: "After praising his achievements at City Hall ..." (April 25). No image or montage manipulations were identified.

## **PRO TV**

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

During the reporting period, in the main news bulletin at 20.00 PRO TV broadcast 19 relevant items all of which were in a special section, and one in which a candidate appeared as a source in an ordinary news report (participation of Alexandru Rosco, Our House Moldova Party at the ceremony commemorating Vladimir Lenin). Of these, 10 items referred to electoral promises made by the candidates and 8 to the process of registering candidates, to other issues related to the election, or to a synthesis of the debates from the day before on the "In Profunzime" talk show where no candidates had appeared but their representatives had. One story involved accusations against a candidate (Silvia Radu, independent candidate).

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

In general, PRO TV covered most of the events organized by the candidates in which they detailed their political programs and made promises. In addition, the relevant subjects in which accusations were made against a candidate were not ignored. The editorial staff also produced news from their in-house talk show "In Profunzime." Most of the electoral news was characterized by a critical attitude towards the candidates. Even in the few items created from a single source, that is, just containing the promises of the candidates, the editorial staff critically addressed the statements of all politicians using either background information or verification questions thus demonstrating objective and balanced treatment of all candidates. Examples include "Valeriu Munteanu says that if he gets to be the mayor, he will make Chisinau City Hall a major shareholder in the airport and the concession contract will be canceled. Munteanu did not tell us why PL deputies, who have the right of legislative initiative, do not do this now, nor did they explain why it would help the mayor's office to take care of the airport" (April 24); "Victor Stratila says he does not make PR on the problems of

the city as the other candidates do, but he will solve them. However, he did not say how" (April 26).

Most news items (four) were about Silvia Radu. One referred to the accusations against her, and the others were short items on the registration of her candidacy and naming an interim mayor. The TV station had short topics about most of the candidates who held public events during this period, inserting short theses about their statements or promises. Two of missing candidates were Andrei Nastase PPDA/PAS/PLDM and Alexandra Can PNL, who did not appear in any PRO TV news from April 20 to 27. Representatives of these two candidates, however, made short appearances on the April 27 news, and were in segments of "In Profunzime" broadcast the day before.

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

It was difficult for press institutions to ensure balance in the news presenting each candidate's platform as these topics were often created from a single source. As a solution, PRO TV in some cases added background recalling at the end of the news on the platform who the contenders were for mayor in the electoral race. Thus, the audience was indirectly told that not only had the candidate developed plans related to the capital, but also that there were 11 more doing the same. This process was intended to ensure a minimal balance in generally positive news about candidates' promises. As for the news that involved charges, the editors asked for all relevant opinions (Silvia Radu and the irregularities that allegedly have been discovered at Union Fenosa). In addition, in the case of the news about the non-registration of candidate Andrei Munteanu PSP, the journalists presented all points of view.

### **Language and images**

The language was consistent with this kind of press: neutral and unemotional. In one case, an appreciative nuance was detected: "At the same time, she boasted about the various distinctions she had received at that time ..." (April 27, news on the accusations against Silvia Radu). No manipulation or attempts to distort reality were found in the images used.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the results of the monitoring from 20 to 27 April 2018, most of the media outlets did not ensure pluralism of opinion to the necessary extent instead promoting the political agenda of some candidates in the new local elections on 20 May 2018.

- Public TV station Moldova 1 was balanced giving access in the news to the majority of the candidates without favoring or disfavoring any in the elections.
- National broadcasters Prime TV, Canal 2 and Publika TV all of which announced that they would not cover the campaign, broadcast many direct and indirect election-related items favoring the independent candidate Silvia Radu. At the same time, Publika TV disfavored the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Nastase.
- Jurnal TV impartially covered all the candidates who organized press events. At the same time, other electoral news disfavored independent candidate Silvia Radu and favored PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Nastase.
- NTV Moldova and Accent TV heavily promoted the PSRM candidate Ion Ceban while at the same time disfavoring Silvia Radu independent, Andrei Nastase PPDA/PAS/PLDM, Valeriu Munteanu PL and Reghina Apostolova Shor Party.
- RTR Moldova was slightly in favor of PSRM candidate Ion Ceban and Shor Party candidate Reghina Apostolova (according to the frequency of reporting).
- Pro TV and TV 8 were balanced ensuring pluralism of opinion and diversity of sources without obviously favoring or disfavoring any candidate.

## APPENDIX 1

### Case study no. 1. Flawed electoral legislation, flawed implementation

This case study analyzes the existing regulatory framework for media coverage of the electoral campaign for local elections on 20 May 2018 and the analysis of the contents of the Editorial Policy Statements presented to the Audiovisual Coordinating Council (CCA) by the TV stations monitored (TV Moldova 1, TV Prime, TV Canal 2, NTV Moldova, Accent TV, RTR Moldova, Jurnal TV, ProTV and TV8).

### Regulatory framework

**Electoral code, Art. 70.** The peculiarities of mass media coverage of elections

(1) During the electoral period, the programs (...) which, in one way or another, target the electoral contestants and/or the candidates are to be broadcast (...) in compliance with the Regulation on the coverage of the electoral campaign in the mass media approved by the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) in the first 7 days of the electoral period.

(2) Within the first 7 days from the approval of the Regulation on the coverage of the electoral campaign in the mass media, each broadcaster submits to the Audiovisual Coordinating Council an Editorial Policy Statement for the electoral campaign, indicating the name of the owner/owners of the institution. Statements are published on the website of the Audiovisual Coordinating Council. Control over compliance with this obligation is exercised by the Audiovisual Coordinating Council *ex officio* according to the provisions of the Audiovisual Code of the Republic of Moldova.

(3) In the electoral campaign for parliamentary elections in uninominal districts, general local elections and local referendums, local/regional broadcasters are obliged, and the national ones have the right, to organize electoral debates.

(10) During the electoral period, any opinion polls on voters' political preferences can be made a subject only after prior notification of the Central Electoral Commission. The results of these polls may be published no later than 5 days before Election Day. On Election Day, until the polling stations are closed, it is forbidden to advertise in mass media, including interviews with voters, about the number of votes casted for the electoral contestants during the day and their chances, including the exit-poll results.

**Audiovisual Code, Art. 40.** Duties of the Audiovisual Coordinating Council

Par. (1), letter c) adopts the concept of covering the electoral campaign for parliamentary elections, general local elections and republican referendums, reports to the Central Electoral Commission on monitoring the manner of covering the electoral campaign by the national broadcasters, according to the provisions of the Electoral Code.

**Concept regarding the coverage of the electoral campaign for the new local elections for the mayors in some localities on 20 May 2018 by Moldovan broadcasting institutions, adopted by CCA Decision no. 8/47 of 26 March 2018:**

p. 27. Local and regional radio broadcasters are obliged, and national ones have the right, to organize electoral debates.

p. 37. During the electoral period, any opinion polls on voters' political preferences can be made only subject to prior notification to the Central Electoral Commission. The results of these surveys may be published no later than 5 days before Election Day, unless they are

accompanied by the following information: the name of the organization that carried out the survey; the date or time frame of the survey and the method used; sample size and maximum margin of error; the survey partner and source of funding; proof of the CEC notification of the conduct of the electoral poll according to art. 64' par. (10) of the Electoral Code. In the case of exit polls, the Central Electoral Commission's decision on the conduct of this poll will be presented.

### **Regulatory framework: findings**

The existing regulatory framework cannot ensure adequate coverage of the new local elections on 20 May 2018 because of the following.

- a. The electoral code in Art. 70 refers to parliamentary elections in uninominal districts, general local elections and local referendums, not to new local elections.
- b. The electoral code in Art. 70 states the obligation of mass media to cover elections in accordance with a regulation approved by the CEC. The CEC did not approve such a regulation for the new local elections of May 20, 2018, probably because the law does not state this expressly.
- c. The electoral code in Art. 70 par. (2) stipulates that each broadcaster must submit to the CCA an Editorial Policy Statement for the electoral campaign in which it indicates only the name of the owner/owners of the institution; the control over the fulfillment of this obligation is exercised by the CCA. It is rather too short for an Editorial Policy Statement in elections to contain only the name of the owner.
- d. The Electoral Code does not make any reference to the Concept regarding the coverage of the electoral campaign, traditionally adopted by the CCA, in accordance with the Audiovisual Code.
- e. The Broadcasting Code states that the CCA adopt the concept regarding the coverage of the electoral campaign for parliamentary elections, general local elections and republican referendums, not for new local elections. At the same time, the Audiovisual Code does not expressly require broadcasters to comply with the provisions of the Concept. Given that the Electoral Code takes precedence in an election, the legal power of the provisions of the Concept approved by the CCA is not clear.
- f. The CEC, in relation to the proper coverage of elections by the media, has shown an indefensible attitude if we take into account that about 60–70% of the total number of radio and TV stations are concentrated in Chisinau and Balti municipalities. Therefore, the new local elections on 20 May 2018 in seven localities, including Chisinau and Balti, were not to be equated with the previous new local elections organized in localities where there is no newspaper, no radio or TV station.
- g. The concept approved by the CCA in p. 27 obliges local and regional broadcasters to organize electoral debates, but for the new local elections on 20 May 2018 the CCA, because it was not stated in the legislation, did not publish a list of local/regional broadcasters nor did it insist that those broadcasters, when they're approving Editorial Policy Statements, may or may not organize electoral debates.
- h. The CCA, in relation to the proper coverage of elections by broadcasters, has demonstrated a cavalier attitude in both the implementation and adoption of the Concept and in the approval of the Editorial Policy Statements presented by the broadcasters. Thus, the concept in p.37 stipulates that any opinion polls on voters' political preferences may be conducted in accordance with Art. 64', par. (10) of the Electoral Code. It must be mentioned that in the Election Code, Art. 64' has been missing for months. This was revealed at a seminar for radio broadcasters organized by the CCA on April 19 with the participation of several officials, including the CEC. However, neither the CCA, nor the CEC (who placed the Concept on their own site) corrected the mistake. The CCA in a public session

“mechanically” approved the statements of the editorial policies of the broadcasters for the new local elections, even if most of the statements were written carelessly. It appears that the CCA approved the statements without reading them or confronting them with the legal rules and those of their own Concept.

### **Editorial Policy Statements presented by the broadcasters monitored and approved by the CCA: findings**

#### **TV Moldova 1:**

p.6.6.: "The electoral debates on TV 1 Moldova will be broadcast in sign language". The wording is ambiguous because it is not clear whether it is only in sign language or in that language in addition to others?!

p. 8.5.: "Electoral contestants who consider that their rights have been breached will have the right to reply under the conditions of Art. 64, par. (6) of the Electoral Code." This article has four paragraphs and refers to something else.

On April 5, 2018, the Observers Council adopted Decision no. 31 on the IPNA Teleradio-Moldova Company regarding publishing policy stating:

"In accordance with the provisions of Art. 64–64' of the Electoral Code (...) The Observers Council decides to approve the IPNA Statement. The statement referring to an article missing from the republished Electoral Code was adopted with 9 votes, and the decision, signed by the president of the Observers Council Nicolae Spataru and by the chairperson of the public company Olga Bordeianu, was subsequently approved by the CCA.

#### **TV Prime (and TV Canal 2):**

"(...) Prime and Publika TV will not cover the electoral campaign (...) will not organize televised electoral debates for candidates and will not broadcast electoral advertising, both free of charge and paid." Legally, these two national TV stations have the right not to organize electoral debates and not to broadcast paid electoral advertising. In fact, the Electoral Code, Art. 70 (5) obliges only public broadcasters to give electoral candidates one minute per day free of charge as airtime for the placement of electoral advertising during parliamentary and presidential elections and republican referendums. Therefore, the law expressly addresses the debates and electoral advertising. The coverage of elections, however, is not limited to debates and electoral advertising. There are news broadcasts and newscasts in the grid of any news or general TV station. In addition, if the TV station, whether local/regional or national, takes care of informing its viewers who are also voters, then they must also have the moral obligation, not just the legal one, to inform them. Ultimately, the public good in the form of the terrestrial frequencies used by the broadcasters, must bring public benefits.

Canal 2 TV submitted an almost identical statement.

#### **NTV Moldova:**

From the request addressed to the CCA and CEC: "According to Art. 38, paragraph (8) of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Moldova (...) We inform you of the following (...)." A clarification: to Art. 38 of the Electoral Code is titled "Ensuring the necessary means for conducting the elections" and contains 7 paragraphs;

From the statement, p. 2: NTV Moldova TV station will cover the electoral campaign (...) according to the provisions (...) of the Law on the Press (...);

From the Final Provisions of the Statement: "In accordance with the provisions of the Electoral Code Art. 64, 64' (...) NTV Moldova will ensure the monitoring of airtime (...)"

**Accent TV:**

p.2: "Accent TV" will cover the electoral campaign in the presidential elections under the conditions stipulated by Art. 47, 64 and 64' of the Electoral Code and Art. 7 of the Audiovisual Code";

"According to Art. 38 par. (8) of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Moldova (...) We inform you of the following (...)" Therefore, either non-existent articles or ones that are irrelevant for the purposes of the Statement have been invoked.

**RTR Moldova:**

Statement, p. 9: "Electoral contestants who consider their rights as breached will have the right to reply under the conditions of Art. 64, par. (6) of the Electoral Code." It is to be pointed out that Article 64 of the Election Code titled "Totalization of the results of voting by the constituency electoral council" refers to another subject and has 4 paragraphs;

p. 10. "In the news programs (...) the events of the electoral campaign will be covered in compliance with the provisions of Art. 47, 64 and 64' of the Electoral Code (...)" It is to be noted that Art. 47 is titled "Collecting signatures for supporting candidates, including independent candidates, and for initiating a referendum," and Art. 64' does not exist. References to Art. 64' par. (10) have been made at p. 35 from the Statement as well.

**Jurnal TV:**

p.1.: "The TV station Jurnal TV will cover the electoral campaign (...) in accordance with the provisions of the Press Law (...)"

**Pro TV:**

Statement – no objections.

**TV 8:**

Statement – no objections.

**Conclusions:**

1. The national normative framework is insufficient and inefficient for ensuring adequate coverage of the new local elections, especially in the case of important localities such as Chisinau and Balti.
2. The authorities responsible for providing adequate information to voters through the media (CEC and CCA) have demonstrated a cavalier attitude in drafting regulations regarding the coverage of the new local elections on 20 May 2018 by broadcasters.
3. The CCA has demonstrated indifference, both in the implementation of the Concept regarding the coverage of the electoral campaign for new local elections and in the analysis and approval of the Editorial Policy Statements of the broadcasters for the new local elections of May 20, 2018.
4. The Observers Council of the IPNA Teleradio-Moldova and the administration of the national public broadcaster have demonstrated a careless attitude in the implementation of the Editorial Policy Statement for the new local elections of 20 May 2018.
5. Eight out of 10 television stations monitored by civil society have admitted inaccuracies in their Editorial Policy Statements for the new local elections of May 20,

2018, thus diminishing the importance of the document for adequate voter information.

**Recommendations:**

1. The national regulatory framework and, first of all, the Electoral Code should be completed in such a way as to eliminate the ambiguities that are present at the moment.
2. The CEC, in cases similar to those for the new local elections on May 20, 2018, should adopt clear playing rules for covering the election by the media.
3. The CCA should treat with responsibility both the legal provisions regarding the coverage of the elections by broadcasters as well as the editorial policies of the broadcasters in election campaigns.
4. The Observers Council of the IPNA and the administration of the national public broadcaster should implement and adopt Editorial Policy Statements that could become a reference for other broadcasters.
5. Broadcasters should abandon cavalier attitudes in drafting Editorial Policy Statements for elections, instead demonstrating care, openness, predictability and respect for voters.