



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

Report no. 4  
12–19 May 2018

*This report is part of the project "Media in Support for Democracy, Inclusion and Accountability in Moldova" (MEDIA-M), funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Internews in Moldova, aimed at promoting the development of independent and professional media and at creating a media sector that is more resilient to political and economic pressure. The content of this material is the responsibility of the Independent Journalism Center and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or of the United States government.*

## 1. General data

**Purpose and objectives of the project:** Monitor and inform the public about media behavior during the election campaign and the access of the candidates to the media. The aim of monitoring is to analyze reporting trends that may affect the performance of media outlets and compromise their ability to provide accurate, unbiased and pluralistic information to the public.

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

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

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

**Media outlets and programs monitored:**

- Moldova 1 at 19:00: public TV station, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;
- Prime TV at 19:00: private TV station, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;
- Canal 2 at 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 at 19.00: private TV station, regional coverage, broadcasts in Romanian;
- NTV Moldova at 19.00: private TV station, regional coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;
- RTR Moldova at 19.30: private TV station, regional coverage, broadcasts in Russian and Romanian;
- TV 8 at 19.00: private TV station, regional coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;
- Pro TV at 20.00: private TV station, regional coverage, broadcasts in Romanian;
- Accent TV at 20.00: private TV station, regional coverage; broadcasts in Romanian and Russian.

## 2. Methodological framework

The full content of the main daily newscasts on each TV station was monitored, and any items with a direct or an indirect electoral character were analyzed by content and context to determine whether they were favorable or unfavorable to a party or political entity. In addition, the items were analyzed according to the following criteria.

**Impartiality and objectivity/political partisanship.** According to the Journalist's Code of Ethics, news must be impartial and objective and not favor certain parties/groups/persons to the detriment of others. The presence of discriminatory elements in reports and news items is a primary criterion for subjective reporting. News screening and a minimal analysis of background and context also contribute to presenting the interests of certain actors and not of the public at large.

**Fairness and balance of sources/pluralism of opinion.** In order to be fair and balanced, news items must present the perspectives of all parties concerned, especially when it comes to controversial subjects, and must treat opponents equally. In addition, the media must

provide access to a variety of opinions to help viewers create their own opinions about what has happened.

**Language and images used.** Deliberate exaggerations and obscene language such as pejoratives or labeling as well as images manipulated so that certain parties appear 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 display aspects that do not correspond to reality, when they are simulated, and also when news stories are illustrated with images unrelated to the text.

### **Acronyms used in the report:**

Action and Solidarity Party – PAS  
Dignity and Truth Party – PPDA  
Democratic Party – PD  
Democracy At Home Party – DA  
Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova – PLDM  
Liberal Party of Moldova – PL  
Our Party – PN  
National Liberal Party – PNL  
People’s Party – PP  
Russian Slavic Party – PRS  
Socialists Party of Moldova – PSRM  
Progressive Society Party – PSP  
National Unity Party – PUN

## **3. Monitoring data**

### **Moldova 1**

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

Between 12 and 19 May, public TV station Moldova 1 continued actively covering election items. In the eight newscasts reviewed, Moldova 1 had 34 items with direct and indirect electoral content. Most of them presented the statements of candidates made either in press conferences or in meetings with the electorate or via posts on social media. The public station also included items about the electoral process in its newscasts: printing ballots; manner of verifying the correctness of electoral lists; Court of Appeals judgment upholding the judgment of the court of first instance to exclude Șor Party candidate Reghina Apostolova from the elections; civil society and BCC monitoring reports on Moldova 1’s behavior during the campaign; opinion surveys, and others. Most of the items concerned the campaign for Mayor of Chișinău, but there was also one on a candidate’s campaign for Bălți mayor.

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

Of the 33 items with direct electoral content, the majority presented information impartially and without deviations from ethical norms. Facts were separated from opinions; most of the time only candidates’ statements were included in the news.

Most of the items presented the promises of the candidates who had identified problems in Chișinău and had devised solutions for them. In total, the largest number of direct appearances was enjoyed by Ion Ceban PSRM (six), Silvia Radu independent (five), followed by Valeriu Munteanu PL (four), Andrei Năstase PPDA/PAS/PLDM (three), and Constantin Codreanu PUN (three). This TV station also broadcast direct appearances by Alexandra Can PNL (one item) and Maxim Brăila People’s Party (one item). Of Bălți candidates, only Pavel Verejan from the Șor Party had one direct appearance.

The other four candidates running for Chişinău mayor who did not appear in newscasts did, however, make public appearances either in debates (including those organized by the public broadcaster) or on social media. For example, on 15 May, Vasile Costiuc DA posted an allegation on social media that the media had boycotted him; the public station ignored that post. In contrast, Moldova 1 did report on posts by Silvia Radu and Ion Ceban several times and also covered their campaign events in nearly daily appearances in its newscasts. This indicates a preferential treatment for some candidates and a failure to provide equal access to all. Moldova 1 did not, however, include the item about the campaign monitoring report of Promo-Lex in its newscast on 18 May that referred to infringements by some candidates, including Silvia Radu and Ion Ceban.

For Valeriu Munteanu PL, most of items in which he had direct appearances included allegations against other candidates with only one item focusing on his platform. Similarly for Constantin Codreanu PUN, the items either contained allegations against other candidates or were replies to allegations against him, with only one item presenting actions from his platform.

Most of the direct appearances in a positive context (6) were enjoyed by Ion Ceban PSRM; he was also mentioned in three items in neutral, negative and positive contexts. Silvia Radu had five appearances in a positive context and was mentioned once in a neutral and once in a positive context. Valeriu Munteanu was mentioned three times neutrally and once positively; Andrei Năstase three times positively but also in neutral and negative contexts; Constantin Codreanu neutrally (two) and positively (one), and Maxim Brăila and Alexandra Can in one direct appearance each in positive contexts.

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

Moldova 1 provided air space to 7 of the 11 candidates for Chişinău mayor and to 1 of the 8 candidates for Bălţi mayor. Generally, the news aired included the opinion of just one source (usually the candidate) without background information when it was necessary. Other sources included representatives of the Central Election Commission (CEC), of constituency election councils, of PDM, or of civil society.

During the monitoring period, the public TV station broadcast five controversial news items containing direct allegations against some candidates. In four of the five, Moldova 1 included the opinions of both parties involved thus balancing the information. The only item lacking balance was the one on 14 May in which Valeriu Munteanu PL accused Ion Ceban PSRM, Silvia Radu independent, and Andrei Năstase PPDA/PAS/PLDM of having weak platforms with only Ion Ceban's reply included in the item. The reporter noted that Silvia Radu and Andrei Năstase had not commented on the allegations, but it was not clear if the reporter had approached them directly and they had refused to comment or if they simply had not made public statements on this subject.

### **Language and videos**

From 12 to 19 May, no discriminatory language or videos that could have distorted reality and created doubt about the observance of ethics and professional standards were registered on Moldova 1.

### **Prime TV**

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

On 5 April, General Media Grup Corp. S.R.L., holder of the broadcast license for station Prime TV, notified the Broadcast Coordinating Council (BCC) that the station, "...will not cover the campaign for the new location election of mayors in some localities on 20 May 2018." In its statement registered by the BCC on 6 April, the broadcaster also announced that it would not organize campaign debates and would not broadcast free or paid election publicity.

Between 12 and 19 May 2018, Prime TV nevertheless broadcast 24 items with direct or indirect electoral content in its daily newscast “First News” (“*Primele știri*”) at 21.00. Only the newscast on 13 May did not contain news relevant to this monitoring period. The news items broadcast mainly concerned the campaign activities of independent candidate Silvia Radu and some business operators’ support for her campaign “Do something good for Chișinău.” Prime TV aired many items about public works in the city funded from the municipal budget, and in most cases the reporters mentioned that they were actions started by Silvia Radu when she was acting mayor. In addition, the station selectively covered some allegations launched by the other candidates, the results of opinion surveys, the exclusion of Șor Party candidate Reghina Apostolova from the election, the work schedule of the Public Services Agency on the day of elections and on the day before, interviews with first voters, and also items that put Silvia Radu’s main opponents in a bad light. Most of the news items with electoral content were similar to those on Canal 2 with just minor differences in the wording. Prime TV also broadcast the interviews given by various protagonists to Publika TV and Canal 3.

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

Despite its decision not to cover the election campaign, Prime TV covered it actively but selectively with only some campaign activities—mainly events that promoted directly or indirectly independent candidate Silvia Radu or those that discredited her opponents and those of the Democratic Party. The nine reports that concerned Silvia Radu presented her exclusively in a positive context with information about her personal involvement in various activities, her advantages over the other candidates and the support people give her. In the report, suggestively entitled “Flowers for Silvia Radu” (12 May) about the planting of flowers in the city center, the reporter emphasized the candidate’s personal involvement: “The independent candidate for capital mayor Silvia Radu together with her daughter Nicoleta gave a hand to the volunteers who planted the flowers.” In addition, various sources interviewed praised her. One said, “We are admiring this amazing beauty as well as Mrs. Silvia working, ” and another said, “She delivers, she proves through her actions rather than words and billboards that cost. Better a flower, a tree, or to do something else beautiful for Chișinău residents.”

Other newscasts also included a least one and often two or three reports containing exclusively positive assessments by citizens of Ms Radu. On 15 May the item “Culture House in Tohatin endowed with air conditioners by business operator who supports Silvia Radu’s campaign ‘Do something good for Chișinău’” was broadcast, and on 16 May “Playground on Alba Iulia Street arranged by business operator who supports Silvia Radu’s campaign” and “Traffic signs in Valea Morilor Park” mentioned that the order to carry out this work had been signed by Silvia Radu when she was acting mayor. In the two items aired on 17 May “Streets under repair in many neighborhoods, they say the municipality has allocated 85 million lei for repairs this year” and in “Installation of lights on Petricani Street,” the reporter noted that the municipality had paid 600,000 lei as a result of the last order issued by Silvia Radu as acting mayor and that she had visited the place as a citizen to convince herself that the lights were working. On 18 May, three items were broadcast: 1) Silvia Radu’s statements on the last day of campaigning (she was the only candidate so covered) included the candidate’s achievements and intentions in detail, 2) A business operator arranged a volleyball field as part of her campaign “Do something good for Chișinău!” that included the interview given by the businessman to Publika TV after which the reporter recalled other achievements of this campaign showing Silvia Radu and her daughter planting flowers in the background; and 3) the report about the electric bus trial run in the capital which mentioned that the bus came to Chișinău after negotiations by Silvia Radu with the Belarusian President Alexandr Lukașenko.

All these items were covered by reporters in a praiseworthy tone which proves the biased character of the reports.

In contrast, the items that concerned some of Silvia Radu's opponents in the elections contained information presenting them in a negative light, mocking them, and in some cases distorting information clearly aiming to discredit them. PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase was covered nearly as many times as Silvia Radu with eight direct mentions. Each time, however, he was presented in a negative context. The station's reporters and anchors included their own opinions and labeled the candidate, deliberately distorting some data and information in order to discredit him. For example, the newscast on 15 May included a biased item referring to Năstase's statements about being harassed by media controlled by the parties in power. "He feels harassed" started with the statement, "Living large, owning 11 houses, leader of a political party and former candidate for president but feeling harassed in the Republic of Moldova," followed by statements about his family and especially about his assets without saying anything about the basis for his declarations on media harassment. Prime TV insisted that the politician owned 11 houses, although the structures in question are shown in his declaration as auxiliary constructions, not residential houses. In its newscasts on 16 and 17 May, Prime TV aired two additional items lacking balance and aiming to discredit Andrei Năstase based on a story published by the portal Deschide.md about the legality of the privatization of the current premises of the Dignity and Truth Party by Vasile Năstase, the candidate's brother. The items speculated that an illegal act had been committed with the involvement of Vasile Năstase and some former staff of Chişinău City Hall during privatization. In its newscast on 18 May, the station aired another report that presented Năstase in a context discrediting him. This was the act by Vadim Ungureanu of setting up a statue similar to the "Manneken Pis" in Brussels across the street from Chişinău City Hall but with Andrei Năstase's face to draw attention to the lack of public toilets in Chişinău. The report on this action also presented the image from a previous protest in Chişinău with Năstase's "wet pants."

The other candidates were featured more rarely by Prime TV. Şor Party candidate Reghina Apostolova, who was excluded from the elections, was presented more in a negative context in a detailed report from the Court of Appeals (14 May). PL candidate Valeriu Munteanu was also covered once (15 May) in the context of the allegations he made that Andrei Năstase did not want to participate in the debates with him "out of fear" and that his platform was anti-European. At the end of the report, the station noted that according to the election surveys, neither Năstase nor Munteanu would accede to the second tour. Two items concerned Nicolai Grigorişin, the candidate for Bălţi mayor from Our Party, in a negative context. On 14 May, the report "Meeting with a scandal" on the anti-crisis cell meeting on the problems in Bălţi with the disposal of garbage made many allegations against city hall whose leadership is provided namely by representatives of Our Party, and an item aired on 17 May reported on the declaration from Moscow by Renato Usaŭ, the party's leader, in which he announced that he would not be a candidate from the diaspora in the upcoming parliamentary elections because the law now required candidates to appear personally for registration. Prime TV suggested that he was hiding from the Moldovan judiciary.

Two of the news items on Prime TV reported on opinion surveys publicized during this period; each presented Silvia Radu as the campaign favorite, even though only one of the surveys actually showed that she was. On 14 May, one report presented two surveys: one conducted by Intellect Group showing that in the first round independent candidate Silvia Radu would get 31% and PSRM candidate Ion Ceban would get 22.8%; and the other by Public Opinion Barometer (POB) that showed that Ceban would get 30% and Silvia Radu would get 23%. Nonetheless, the essence of the report was that Silvia Radu was the favorite and the reporter said only, "POB confirmed that Silvia Radu and Ion Ceban would contest the second round," without noting the big discrepancy between the two surveys. Director of Intellect Group Ian Lisnievski was presented in the report only to analyze the strengths of Silvia Radu and the weaknesses of Andrei Năstase who ranked third in this survey. The station came back to these surveys in its newscast on the following day in the editorial program "De facto" of Valeriu Frumusachi which was included in the newscast. The anchor analyzed the survey results in a very biased and unbalanced manner, presenting the candidates in a partisan way, e.g., that

Silvia Radu's rating was due to her non-involvement in political shows and that the PPDA candidate would score below expectations: "Although unleashing all his weapons in the battle and making use of great fanfare, Andrei Năstase will collect less than 18% of the votes, way too little for the self-declared savior of the nation or the nation's Prince Charming, as his fans have nicknamed him." About PSRM candidate Ion Ceban, the anchor said that he had a controversial and sometimes hysterical approach and at the end recalled a saying attributed to Aesop: "The smaller the mind, the greater the arrogance," clearly alluding first of all to Andrei Năstase. The inclusion of editorial comment with subjective and manipulative reviews as a rubric in its main newscast underscores Prime TV's wish to highlight the biased electoral messages it has conveyed during this election campaign.

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

Most of the items monitored presented just one viewpoint on the subject tackled; pluralism of opinion was not secured as the items often were drawn just from one source. In addition, in the six controversial items the right to reply was either not broadcast or was simulated with replies that did not specifically refer to the allegations. The item on 12 May on the crisis on the disposal of garbage in Bălți made allegations against city hall and municipal services, presented indignant citizens and doctors warning about the dangers of epidemics, and showed images of overflowing garbage bins taken from TVN Bălți but did not present the positions of the municipal authorities/services to explain the reasons for the situation. On 15 May, the station presented the statement of the Democratic Party saying that PSRM and PL, "...do not have the moral right ever to claim to rule again," but the replies of these two parties were missing. The same newscast failed to present the opinion/position of PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase about the allegations launched by Valeriu Munteanu PL that Năstase's platform was anti-European. The same was true of the report on his assets.

### **Language and videos**

During the reporting period, the items aired on Prime TV contained inappropriate language about certain candidates including labeling and offensive expressions and images. The editorial program "De facto" incorporated into the newscast on 15 May labeled Andrei Năstase as, "the self-declared savior of the nation or the nation's Prince Charming as his fans have nicknamed him," and said that he was arrogant and alleged that he had resorted to, "furious attacks, sometimes indecent ones, against unionists." The same part of the newscast about Ion Ceban alleged that he "sometimes" had "a hysterical" image. In regard to candidate Andrei Năstase, the station selected images that put him in a negative light or ridiculed him (15 May the report "Feeling harassed" about the candidate's assets; 18 May the report about Vadim Ungureanu's action).

## **Canal 2**

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

Telestar Media S.R.L., the holder of the broadcast license for Canal 2, notified the BCC that the station, "...will not cover the campaign for the new local elections of mayors in some localities on 20 May 2018." In the statement registered on 6 April by BCC, this broadcaster also announced that it would not organize debates and would not broadcast free or paid election publicity.

According to the monitoring data, from 12 to 19 May Canal 2 broadcast 20 items directly or indirectly concerning the election campaign in its main newscast "Reporter" at 19.00. Most referred to events involving independent candidate for mayor Silvia Radu and promoted her directly or indirectly. The station also reported the final exclusion of Șor Party candidate Reghina Apostolova from the elections and the results of the opinion surveys published during

this period, and also aired items presenting the other candidates, mainly PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase, in a negative context.

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

The election items aired on Canal 2 were the same as those on Prime TV—some almost identical—with just minor differences in structure and wording. The reports also used interviews given by various protagonists to Prime TV, Publika TV, and Canal 3 from an angle similar to that on Prime TV highlighting the achievements of Silvia Radu. In total, Silvia Radu was concerned directly or indirectly in 11 of the 20 relevant items broadcast by Canal 2, 7 of which promoted her directly. Such items included the report on 12 May entitled “Central Park takes color” about planting flowers as part of the campaign “Do something good for Chişinău” with the same positive assessments of Silvia Radu as those on Prime TV, including the statements of a city resident: “We are admiring this amazing beauty as well as Mrs. Silvia working,” and “She delivers more, she proves through actions rather than words and billboards that cost.” ; On 15 May the station broadcast a report on equipping the Culture House of Tohatin with air-conditioners by a business operator supporting Silvia Radu’s campaign, and on 16 May a report on the traffic signs in Valea Morilor Park mentioned that the order for carrying out this work had been signed by Silvia Radu, independent candidate. One of the sources interviewed by Canal 3 stated: “Good job, Silvia Radu, she gets an A.” The item entitled “More and more people support the campaign launched by Silvia Radu” reported on the playground on Alba Iulia Street arranged by a business operator who supported Silvia Radu’s campaign. On 18 May, the news was about a business operator who had arranged a volleyball court in Ciocana District in support of the campaign “Do something good for Chişinău”; the item also included details about additional actions under this campaign and images of Silvia Radu and her daughter planting flowers.

The second candidate in terms of visibility on Canal 2 was Andrei Năstase, the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate. He was concerned in a total of six items but in a negative context in all of them. They included the one on 14 May on the opinion surveys produced by Intellect Group and the POB highlighting that Silvia Radu would compete in the second round and Andrei Năstase would not underlining his “weaknesses.” On 15 May two items were aired: a report about Andrei Năstase’s assets with a biased interpretation of some data and figures, and an item from which one gets the impression that Andrei Năstase refused to participate in the debates next to Valeriu Munteanu because he is afraid of his platform. On 16 May the item, “Andrei Năstase and Jurnal TV harass Silvia Radu” was broadcast, and on 18 May the station aired a report about Vadim Ungureanu’s action and the statue in the “Manneken Pis” genre with videos with Năstase’s wet pants.

The other candidates were either ignored or covered much more infrequently. Valeriu Munteanu PL was mentioned twice, once in a rather neutral context (when launching allegations against Năstase on 15 May) and once in a negative context (PDM’s statement that PL and PSRM did not have the moral right to lead Chişinău on 15 May). Ion Ceban, PSRM was referred to twice in a negative context in “Radu, before Ceban” about opinion survey results on 14 May and the PDM statement that PL and PSRM did not have the moral right to lead Chişinău on 15 May. Reghina Apostolova of the Şor Party was featured negatively in most cases in news items about her final removal from the elections (14 May). Our Party candidate for Bălţi mayor Nicolai Grigorişin was indirectly concerned in three items, all of them in a negative context (the garbage crisis in Bălţi on 12 May and 16 May and the comments on Renato Usatîi’s declaration that he would not be able to run on behalf of the diaspora in the 2018 parliamentary elections).

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

As on Prime TV, most of the items with electoral content on Canal 2 did not secure a pluralism of opinion. In addition, the six relevant controversial items failed to include the replies of those accused or criticized. For example, on 12 and 16 May the reports on the garbage crisis in Bălți did not include the positions of the municipal authorities/services who could explain the reasons for it. On 15 May the assertion of the Democratic Party that PSRM and PL, “Do not have the moral right to claim to rule ever again” did not include the replies of these parties and the opinion/position of PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase was missing in the report about Valeriu Munteanu’s allegations against him as well as in the report on his assets.

The station also failed to present the reactions of the candidates to the results of the opinion surveys presented in the newscast on 14 May.

### **Language and videos**

Canal 2 selected videos that put PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase in a negative light and ridiculed him (15 May report about his assets; 18 May report about Vadim Ungureanu’ action). In addition, Canal 2 resorted to labeling in an item concerning him on 16 May (Silvia Radu as victim of harassment by Andrei Năstase and TV station Jurnal TV, owned by the “fugitive criminal Victor Țopa who is Andrei Năstase’s godfather.”

### **Publika TV**

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

On 5 April 2018, General Media Grup Corp. S.R.L., holder of the broadcast license for Publika TV, notified the BCC that the station, “...would not cover the campaign for the new local elections for mayors in some localities on 20 May 2018.” In the statement registered on 6 April by the BCC, this broadcaster also announced that it would not organize debates and would not broadcast free or paid election publicity.

From 12 to 19 May, however, this private station with national coverage broadcast 30 items with electoral content. They referred to the campaign activities of independent candidate Silvia Radu (12), allegations against PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase (12), the results of the opinion surveys presented during this period, the final decision to remove the Șor Party candidate Reghina Apostolova from the elections, PDM’s call to the electorate, and general information about the election process.

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

Publika TV observed the principle of impartiality and objectivity only when presenting general information about the election process (two items broadcast on 18 May and two on 19 May). The station failed to follow this principle when reporting on all its election-related items. Independent candidate Silvia Radu was clearly favored in all her items while PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase was obviously disfavored in all his. Two candidates for mayor of Chișinău (Ion Ceban PSRM and Valeriu Munteanu PL) and two for mayor of Bălți (Alexandr Usatâi PSRM and Nicolai Grigorișin PN) were mentioned in neutral contexts though Ion Ceban was somewhat disfavored in the story about the opinion polls published during the monitoring period as was Valeriu Munteanu in an item related to his assets and his chances of winning the mayor’s office. The station reported that Silvia Radu, “planted a flower bed in Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt Park” with the help of a business operator after “...many consecutive years in which public money had not been spent on such actions” (12 May) and “...would get most of the votes in the local elections” (14 May). In addition, “persons living on Haltei Street have started to be employed,” and that “the idea came from Silvia Radu when she was holding the office of capital acting mayor” (14 May). Also thanks to the, “...campaign launched by the independent candidate Silvia Radu, air-conditioners have been installed in the Culture House in the Village of Tohatin” (15 May), “a children’s playground has been arranged in the district of Buiucani,” another one was “refurbished on Silvia Radu’s call” (16 May) and “a sports field

will be arranged in the District of Ciocana” (18 May). Publika TV further stated in an item broadcast on 18 May that, “Silvia Radu is the only candidate for mayor who has not promoted herself through banners but through concrete things done for the city.” In total, Silvia Radu was favored in 12 positive items.

On the other hand, the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate appeared in only negative contexts and was disfavored by the 12 news items that concerned him. For example, the item about the opinion survey data quotes the director of the company that conducted the study as follows: “Among (Andrei Năstase’s) weaknesses we may note the fact that he has not succeeded in getting the support of the right-wing electorate, and more specifically, of the unionist party; his second weakness is that he launched himself in the elections without consulting with his coalition party PAS” (14 May). Beyond partiality, it is not clear how such conclusions were drawn, and the director does not attest that these statements were made by citizens surveyed. The same item said, “Valeriu Munteanu and Andrei Năstase are the candidates people trust the least.”

Lack of impartiality and denigrating Andrei Năstase’s are obvious in other items as well. An item broadcast on 15 May starts, “Andrei Năstase complains that he feels harassed in Moldova although he has 11 houses, a political party, and protests all day long.” On 16 May, the station broadcast an item stating, “Năstase declares that he will fight against Chișinău mafia but first made sure to illegally take over the building housing his party. Andrei Năstase’s campaign declarations may cost him a lot. PPDA may be left without premises while his brother Vasile Năstase may be criminally investigated. At least this is what we derive from the statements made by the PPDA candidate. Năstase promised to hold liable all the persons who had taken over public buildings by fraud...” Furthermore, on 18 May this TV station broadcast an item entitled “Andrei Năstase humiliates his own mother. He obliged her to come to Chișinău to participate in his launch in the campaign.” The same tone is also used in the content of the news item: “He introduces himself as a dignified and honest person and says that he loves his mother very much. But in reality...he continues humiliating the one who brought him into this world”... On the same day, Publika TV broadcast videos accompanied by the following text: “Novel protest with Andrei Năstase in the capital center. Embarrassing circumstances in which passersby saw the PPDA leader.” This item was about a statue of the type of “Manneken Pis” in Brussels with Andrei Năstase’s face. Năstase and Valeriu Munteanu were also the subjects of the item “Andrei Năstase’s and Valeriu Munteanu’s impressive assets: thousands of euros, expensive houses, and land plots,” broadcast on 18 May based on stories in other media. Andrei Năstase is called “the godson of the convicted criminal oligarch Victor Țopa.”

In addition, violations of objectivity were obvious when Publika TV presented opinion survey data. Only vaguely referring to the fact that this was a poll with an error margin that presented trends and not facts, the station announced in an item aired on 14 May that “Radu and Ceban WILL go to the second round,” adding that Silvia Radu “is favored because she decided to not participate in political shows.” Then in the same context it added, “POB confirms that Silvia Radu and Ion Ceban WILL BE the ones TO CONTEST the second round. Andrei Năstase ranks a distant third.” With regard to trust by city residents, Publika TV announced that Silvia Radu was in front again with, “AS MANY AS 38% of residents” trusting her “distantly followed by Socialist Ion Ceban.” The station presented the survey data on the elections in Bălți in the same manner stating, “The mayor will be elected after the second round when Nicolai Grigorișin (PN) WILL DUEL with Alexandr Usatâi (PSRM).”

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

Pluralism was missing in most of the items broadcast on Publika TV. Taking into account that the station had announced it would not cover the campaign but has been doing so anyway, one notes the absence of the voices of most of the candidates; instead the station covers only a few of them and does so in completely opposite contexts. Of the nine controversial items broadcast during the reference period, three presented the opinions of all the parties concerned, though one, “avoided replying as usual” (17 May item about the value of the PPDA

premises). In the other items (“Valeriu Munteanu turns Andrei Năstase to dust” 14 May; “Andrei Năstase complains about being harassed in Moldova, although he has 11 houses, a political party, and protests all day long” 15 May; “Năstase states he will fight against Chişinău mafia but first made sure to illegally take over the building that houses his party” 16 May; “Andrei Năstase humiliates his own mother” 18 May; “Andrei Năstase’s and Valeriu Munteanu’s impressive assets” 18 May), the opinions of those concerned were not presented.

### **Language and videos**

The language used in the election items broadcast by Publika TV was tendentious and biased, as the station used labeling for PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase or his environment (“godson of the convicted criminal oligarch” 18 May “oligarchs Victor and Viorel Țopa, convicted in Moldova” 15 May), allegations against him (“the value of the PPDA premises is four times higher than what Năstase said” 17 May; and mocked him (“Năstase, in an idea crisis” 17 May; “He obliged the old woman to come early in the morning to the capital... to take pictures with her” 18 May; “even if some write that Năstase drives a Porsche for fun, he did not find a car to bring the old woman to the city” 18 May). Videos, although not faked, were selected in such a way as to favor one candidate and disfavor another.

## **RTR Moldova**

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

Private station RTR Moldova broadcast 29 news items with direct or indirect electoral content, actively covering the election during the reporting period. A great deal of the news concerned polls, candidates’ platforms, allegations launched by some against others, CEC activities, and the Court of Appeals decision to exclude Reghina Apostolova, Şor Party, from the campaign. At the same time, RTR Moldova also broadcast items with an indirect electoral content that favored some candidates such as those about Ilan Şor, Orhei Mayor, in the context of Orhei success stories; items about the PSRM decision to sue those responsible for demolishing the Trade Union Palace in Chişinău; and items about the disastrous situation of the streets in Chişinău.

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

The vast majority of the election items were presented neutrally, inserting candidates’ statements without highlighting the reporter’s bias or opinion on the subject or of protagonists. Several items with indirect electoral content did, however, have somewhat biased tones, containing information selected to convey a particular message to the electorate. On 17 May the station broadcast an item about the *E-Primăria* (E-mayor’s office) software, implemented on the initiative of Orhei Mayor Ilan Şor which, “...secures transparency in the officers’ work and makes their work less bureaucratic.” Other stations included this report under the rubric “Publicity,” but RTR Moldova included it in its newscast. The item largely presents the benefits of the software for processing requests and petitions, subtly passing on the message that such things are possible in the city where Ilan Şor is mayor. A relatively similar item was also broadcast on 18 May about the “Your yard” action in Orhei with citizens included in Vox praising Ilan Şor. This could have influenced the electorate, especially taking into account that the Orhei mayor appeared in all the press conferences and publicity billboards next to Pavel Verejan, the party’s candidate for Bălţi mayor.

The only item in which one noted a mix of facts with opinions referred to a conference in which Ion Ceban, PSRM, summed up his election campaign on 18 May. “He not only knows which projects must be implemented to improve the situation in the city but also realizes precisely where to take the money to implement his campaign promises. This is Ion Ceban, the PSRM

candidate,” the anchor stated without making reference to a source which gives the impression that it was the anchor’s assessment of the candidate.

RTR Moldova covered the activities of 9 of the 11 candidates for Chişinău mayor and of 1 candidate for Bălţi mayor. Ion Ceban, PSRM, enjoyed the most appearances in a positive context (six items). He was also favored by an item with indirect electoral content about the announcement made by a PSRM member about filing a complaint with the General Prosecutor’s Office on the liability of those who had demolished the Trade Union Palace.

Silvia Radu, independent candidate, made two appearances: one in a news item and one live in the RTR Moldova studio as a guest on the program “Week’s News” (“*Vesti Nedeli*”) on 12 May in a rather neutral context. An indirect item that could have disfavored her was the one about the disastrous repair of streets in the capital on 15 May. Andrei Năstase, PPDA/PAS/PLDM, made three appearances in a positive context in the news about his campaign events; Valeriu Munteanu made one item on summing up his campaign; Constantin Codreanu had two appearance in positive and neutral contexts; and Maxim Brăila PP made two appearances in positive contexts. Candidates Alexandra Can PNL, Aleksandr Roşco Our House Moldova, Vasile Costiuc DA, and Pavel Verejan Şor Party candidate for Bălţi mayor were covered in one news item each.

Judging by the greater number of appearances in positive contexts, one noted a slight favoring of Ion Ceban and especially via indirect news about Orhei of Pavel Verejan.

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

The two controversial items broadcast by RTR Moldova had balanced sources presenting the opinions of both parties involved. This was the item on 12 May about Court of Appeals upholding the decision of the court of first instance removing Şor Party candidate Reghina Apostolova from the elections, and the item on 15 May in which Constantin Codreanu PUN replies to the allegations from his opponents. Two items with indirect electoral content lacked balance: the item about the disastrous repair of Chişinău streets (14 May) and the one about the Trade Union Palace (14 May).

### **Language and videos**

With regard to language and videos, RTR Moldova’s behavior complied with ethical and professional standards.

### **Jurnal TV**

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

Between 12 and 19 May, the private TV station with regional coverage aired 39 items with direct or indirect electoral content both under the special rubric “2018 Chişinău Elections” (16 items) and outside it (23 relevant items). The news under the rubric referred to the candidates’ platforms, allegations made by some candidates against others, court judgements on removing a candidate from the elections, and campaign summaries made by some candidates. Of the 11 candidates for Chişinău mayor, 7 appeared in topical news on Jurnal TV; two items also concerned the Şor Party candidate excluded from the campaign. The most appearances in the bloc of election news were by Andrei Năstase PPDA/PAS/PLDM (five) followed by Ion Ceban PSRM (four); Constantin Codreanu PUN (three); and Alexandr Roşco Our House Moldova, Maxim Brăila PP, Valeriu Munteanu PL, and Silvia Radu independent with one appearance each.

The protagonists of the 23 items aired outside the special rubric were Andrei Năstase (in 12), Silvia Radu (in six), Valeriu Munteanu PL (twice), Constantin Codreanu PUN (once), and Ion Ceban, PSRM (once). Other items referred to the electoral process, the Promo-Lex report on

the campaign, the discussions of some PDM members about the elections, and one item that quoted a story about manipulations through surveys that had been published on a website.

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

All 16 items broadcast under the “2018 Chişinău Elections” rubric were impartial and objective. Candidates’ actions were presented neutrally, and texts met the requirements of news without journalists adding subjective notes, comments, or opinions.

The station behaved differently, however, in the 23 items aired outside the rubric. One noted obvious favoring of PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase in all 12 of the direct or indirect items in which he appeared, portrayed as a victim of a derogatory media campaign and calling directly or indirectly on the electorate to vote for him. Special emphasis was placed on fake videos in which the station took the position of candidate’s advocate presenting in detail, “the avalanche of fakes and propaganda” (14 May) using these items also for the candidate’s publicity (“The only chance is a high turnout. They cannot steal as much as we can vote,” Andrei Năstase said in an item broadcast on 15 May that concerned a fake video about him. The TV station showed its bias not so much through subjective intervention in its news texts as by granting air space to Năstase on a priority basis and by inserting extracts from other Jurnal TV programs in which guests support the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate. For example, the newscast on 17 May started with Andrei Năstase’s call to the voters and candidates in which he in a Facebook message calls on the electorate and the other parties to support him. The second item in the same newscast was the address of Maia Sandu, PAS leader, taken from Facebook. Another example is the newscast on 18 May in which Jurnal TV granted nine minutes to the subject of tapping the telephone conversation between Andrei Năstase and his mother. The candidate spoke less than 30 seconds; the rest of the time was allocated to the reactions/opinions expressed by other people.

Independent candidate Silvia Radu was, in contrast, disfavored in all 6 items about her aired outside the special rubric by Jurnal TV during the reference period. The six were obviously biased: “Silvia Radu’s election campaign is marked by the massive presence of persons affiliated with the Democratic Party, even if the VIPs of this entity insist that Radu is running independently in the elections... A surprising element is the abundance of alcohol and the high number of bodyguards...” (14 May); “Jurnal TV requests the publication of the electoral lists (of Silvia Radu), and after verification, to have this candidate excluded from the elections... Silvia Radu—an exponent of the criminal oligarchy...” (15 May); “Silvia Radu hides from journalists. Silvia Radu’s entourage tries to limit the rights of media. Virgiliu Radu accuses Jurnal TV of harassment... Silvia Radu, who avoids engaging the inconvenient press” (16 May). In addition, all the references to Silvia Radu aired by Jurnal TV put her in a negative context.

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

In general, Jurnal TV secured a certain level of pluralism of opinion by granting air space to most of the candidates under its special rubric “2018 Chişinău Elections.” At the same time, however, the voices of candidates for Bălţi mayor were completely missing. Of the seven items with controversial content, six presented the opinions of all the parties involved including mentions in two cases that those concerned had not answered the phone or could not be found. When presenting the Promo-Lex’ report on the infringements committed by candidates before the elections, five parties were concerned (PSRM, PL, PUN, Şor Party, and independent candidate Silvia Radu), but no opinions of any parties were presented in the news item (18 May).

### **Language and videos**

Jurnal TV used biased phrases and expressions (“a surprising element is the abundance of alcohol” on 14 May, about a campaign meeting of Silvia Radu); labeling (“Silvia Radu, (exponent of the criminal oligarchy” 15 May); and quotes containing derogatory and offensive words (miserable, bugger, nastiness, you are twerps, you are foul, scum lost in the Universe,

I hate you from the bottom of my heart) in regard to the journalists who had tapped the telephone conversation between Andrei Năstase and his mother. The videos that accompanied the election items were balanced. The station did not use fake or edited videos that could distort reality and mislead the viewer.

## **NTV Moldova**

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

NTV Moldova broadcast 21 news items with electoral content during the reporting period, 19 of which referred to the elections in Chișinău or to preparations for voting (printing of ballots) and two that were about the elections in Bălți. Most of the items were under the special rubric “2018 New Local Elections” that mainly broadcast news items about the candidates’ activities. Outside this rubric, the station broadcast two news items with indirect electoral content, both favoring the Socialists’ candidate.

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

In its relevant news items, NTV Moldova presented in exclusively positive light the PSRM candidates for Chișinău and Bălți mayor, Ion Ceban and Alexandr Usații. All the election news blocs started with positive stories about Ion Ceban taken from events where he extolled his promises and platform. Ceban was presented positively in seven news items: five had his plans for the city, in another Director of the Institute for Diplomatic, Political and Security Studies Valeriu Ostalep called people on Facebook to vote for Ceban, and the seventh one campaigned indirectly for him by presenting an initiative of a Socialist municipal councilor to renovate the “City Gates” buildings.

All the items about Ion Ceban’s promises were at least three minutes long and rich in video inserts and details while the items about his opponents were much shorter and generally did not refer to their concrete promises but rather to contradictions and fights among them during debates held by other TV stations or by radio stations. The tone used by reporters to present Ceban’s plans was slightly biased, and some of the tickers (crawlers) were also biased. “Achievable election promises” was the message on the ticker that appeared throughout the news item on 17 May about Ion Ceban and his plans for artists. In another item directly concerning the elections, journalists presented the initiative of Socialist councilor Alexandr Odințov for renovating and conserving the buildings making up the “Gates of the City.” The reporter said at the end, “So far, none of the city hall leadership has launched any initiatives for renovating this architectural complex.” The news item presented the initiative as exclusively positive without the opinions of other relevant sources. The suggestion was thus made that if Socialists led city hall, this would be another one of their concerns. This news item was aired right before the electoral bloc that traditionally on NTV Moldova started with a positive item about Ion Ceban. On 18 May, the reporter said, “In the run-up to the elections on 20 May, Ion Ceban has held 30 press conferences. The PSRM candidate specified that the current campaign was an additional opportunity to present his solutions for the capital’s problems. This is because, unlike the other candidates, he has always been on the side of city residents during the past three years as president of the PSRM faction in Chisinau Municipal Council.” On the same day, the news item about Valeriu Ostalep’s post on social media campaigned for Ion Ceban: “The PSRM candidate for capital mayor has all the qualities to lead Chișinău municipality, to stop illegal construction and the destruction of parks. This is the opinion of the Director of the Institute for Diplomatic, Political and Security Studies Valeriu Ostalep. He says that only the Socialists’ candidate can restore people’s trust in the city administration.”

In addition, while Ceban’s opponents were mainly shown offering polemics and defending themselves from attacks in election debates, Ion Ceban was not shown in the debates, so the viewers did not see him talk, argue, or reply to inconvenient questions.

In contrast, the station disfavored all of the other ten candidates who appeared in its news. They were shown in seven items on the electoral debates on other TV and radio stations. NTV Moldova journalists selected only the moments when they hurled replies at each other or squabbled while Ion Ceban with his concrete plans appeared as a counterweight to the others. The audience thus did not find out what the other candidates proposed but only how they attacked each other. On 14 May, an item taken from the program "In Depth" (*"În Profunzime"*) on Pro TV showed PNL candidate Alexandra Can offering toilet paper to PUN candidate Constantin Codreanu while the ticker said "Unionist Candidates' Circus." In addition, the news item on 16 May about a debate on Radio Moldova between Alexandra Can, PP candidate Maxim Brăila and the PPDA representative Alexandru Slusari presented the reporter's opinion: "After nearly two months of campaigning, the unionists have not understood why they have not found enough insight to support a joint candidate of all pro-Romanian and unionist parties," and the ticker read "Problems without solutions."

An approach lacking balance was also found on 18 May, the last day of the campaign, when some candidates held press conferences to sum up their campaigns. While Ion Ceban was presented making his summary numerically and qualitatively in a separate item and the report offered an overview of his main projects, only extracts from the campaigns of the other candidates in which they criticized each other were broadcast: Silvia Radu criticized Valeriu Munteanu and Valeriu Munteanu criticized Andrei Năstase.

NTV Moldova used biased language especially regarding two candidates: "The Liberal candidate for Chişinău mayor acts like an analyst" (14 May); "Andrei Năstase did not find the right words to reply to Munteanu. His political partner Maia Sandu did it for him" (18 May). Actually, this is a false statement as further on Andrei Năstase replied: "I don't comment on aberrations."

The other two items broadcast on this station concerned Şor Party candidate Reghina Apostolova who was removed from the campaign. The news items were very short and referred to the authorities' decisions to exclude her and were not illustrated, not even with the candidate's picture. In both cases, reporters made unfavorable assessments regarding the "dubious funding" due to which the candidate allegedly was removed from the elections.

The two items about the elections in Bălţi exclusively concerned Socialist candidate Alexandru Usatâi who was presented in a positive light. The reporters did not recall that there were other candidates and did not announce how many persons were running for mayor. The news items were made in such way as to include the PSRM candidate and omit the others. For example, the item on 16 May about the poor conditions of some streets in Bălţi noted, "It was the PSRM candidate for Bălţi mayor Alexandru Usatîi who replied to the city residents' call. He proposed a temporary solution to help the people not remain isolated." Even though a representative of Bălţi City Hall was also present, he was not asked if Alexandr Usatîi's proposal was feasible. The candidate was thus protected from opinions that could put him in a negative light. The news item on 18 May about an exhibition of domestic products organized in Bălţi was made similarly. It started with a fragment from Usatâi's speech delivered during an inauguration event and included a declaration of the head of the Trade and Industry Chamber of Bălţi. Other direct sources relevant to the subject—visitors, business operators—were missing which made us conclude that the news item was made to show the PSRM candidate from a single, positive perspective and not to inform viewers about the event.

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

In this period, several news items on NTV were controversial concerning the attacks among the candidates during the debates. Most of them also presented the reactions of the parties

concerned. The items about Reghina Apostolova's removal from the elections lacked balance and failed to include her opinion.

## **Language and videos**

With the few exceptions for the bias listed above, the language used was neutral and complied with the style appropriate for newscasts. Labeling was not used. Video manipulation was found in one case: the item on 14 May about printing ballots showed a video from a printing house with a big sheet of paper on which one could see the parties' logos in the margin. A woman passed over all the logos with a stamp and stopped above the Socialists' logo (a star). Such a shot may be interpreted as suggesting that viewers vote for the Socialists.

## **Accent TV**

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

During the monitoring period, Accent TV broadcast 12 news items with electoral content under the special rubric "2018 New Local Elections," all of which referred to the campaign for capital mayor. The station closely followed the activities of PSRM candidate Ion Ceban and presented the other candidates less frequently, and some candidates—Alexandru Roșco Our House Moldova, Constantin Codreanu PUN, Alexandra Can PNL, and Maxim Brăila PP—were not covered at all. PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase was covered only in passing in the news about election poll results.

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

Of the 12 news items, 5 referred to the campaign promises of Ion Ceban, PSRM. His intentions were widely reported and explained by the journalists in items lasting around three minutes, sometimes with tickers suggesting the population's support: "Ceban thanked Chișinău residents for openness" (18 May). As in the case of NTV Moldova, these items opened all the blocs on election reporting. Both numerically and in its positive-neutral approach, the station presented Ion Ceban in a positive light while his opponents were shown only in semi-negative contexts. As a result, TV viewers did not find out what these candidates proposed but only that they either criticized each other or had platforms they could not follow.

In its news item on 14 May about the POB Survey the station highlighted Ion Ceban's high rating; for his opponents, the reporters used slightly ironic and speculative language: "Only 20 percent like Andrei Năstase." Another example was, "Valeriu Munteanu decided not to speak about his platform anymore but to analyze or rather criticize his opponents' platforms instead" and "The Liberal did not like Ion Ceban's geo-political vector" (14 May); "Calling Chișinău residents to vote for the Liberal candidate, Chirtoacă stated that Valeriu Munteanu was different from the other participants in the pre-election fight, specifying that his ace up his sleeve was his four daughters" (17 May). The video extract following this sentence, however, made it clear that Dorin Chirtoacă referred to Munteanu's family as something positive but not as the main reason to vote for him: "One can see from a distance that he has proved through his participation in the debates everywhere that he has the right training, can do and knows things, has a beautiful family behind him, his four little angels, is proof as no one else has."

In another item about a debate among Victor Strătilă (PVEM), Vasile Costiuc (DA) and Alexandru Mățu (Russian-Slavic Party), the station headlined in the tickers: "The candidates admitted that their platforms were to put up appearances." Only extracts in which the candidates said that the actions set out in their platforms might change along the way depending on the evolution of the situation in the city were selected for this news item. The station presented them as people who do not keep their promises and, in contrast, only the promises of one candidate (Ion Ceban) were not to be doubted. Similarly, in the case of the

news item about Silvia Radu (18 May) the station used an ironic tone as the ticker announced: “Radu got to know the municipality thanks to her pre-election campaign,” and “The candidate admitted during her last press conference before the local anticipated elections that she did not know the area she led.”

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

Both news items in which Valeriu Munteanu appeared involved a conflict. In the first one in which the Liberal candidate disapproved of Ion Ceban’s geo-political vector (14 May), the reporters requested the opinion of the person concerned. In the second case when Dorin Chirtoacă called on the people to vote for Valeriu Munteanu saying that otherwise they would be Vlad Plahotniuc’s subjects, journalists did not ask for the PDM opinion resorting instead to the statement, “So far, the President of the Democratic Party Vladimir Plahotniuc has not commented in any way on the statements of the Deputy President of the Liberal Party Dorin Chirtoacă.” One may thus understand that the newsroom wanted to show that the PDM leader simply ignored the PL deputy considering that his statements were unworthy of his attention.

### **Language and videos**

In general, the news items used neutral language with minor examples of bias towards Ion Ceban’s opponents. The station did not use labeling or editing tricks in its videos.

## **TV 8**

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

From 12 to 19 May, private station TV 8 actively covered the campaign in its five newscasts (no news was aired on the weekend of 12 and 13 May) airing a total of 21 news items—18 with direct and 3 with indirect content. With three exceptions, TV 8 election news was under the rubric “2018 New Local Elections.” Outside this rubric, it broadcast news that did not concern the candidates but referred instead to the election process: about the public information hot line that had been set up by the CEC, about voting procedures for persons without identity cards, and about the election monitoring report by Promo-Lex. Direct election news included under the rubric referred to such subjects as the Public Opinion Barometer and favorite candidates, allegations launched against some candidates and their replies, candidates’ press conferences on campaign summaries, priorities from candidates’ platforms, the exclusion of a candidate from the elections, and the publishing of phone taps of a candidate.

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

TV 8 for the most part covered direct and the indirect election items neutrally, impartially and objectively. TV8 included relevant background information in its reporting, thus providing objective and neutral content to media consumers so that they could have a comprehensive picture of the items aired. Most of the election news referred to the candidates and campaigns in Chişinău.

A few times reporters did not separate facts from opinions: “Does PDM ‘disfavor’ its ex-partner?” on 15 May: “This is after PDM and PL appointed the challenged Filip Government at midnight in January 2016 and then governed in tandem until May 2017”; “Silvia Radu, the horse and the brush,” on 16 May: “As if she has already won the elections, Radu wrote... ”; “Election fight with criminal touch” on 18 May: “The transcript of the phone tap has been disseminated by many TV stations close to the governors showing that Andrei Năstase had attacked his mother,” “Radu totals up her campaign” on 18 May: “Silvia Radu already sees

herself in the mayor's seat. During her last press conference she boasted having spent little money in the election campaign."

TV 8 did not favor any candidate in its news. Of the 11 running for Chişinău mayor, 8 were protagonists or mentioned in this station's news. PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase was the subject in three cases (twice neutrally; once positively) and was mentioned four times in other items in a neutral context. PSRM candidate Ion Ceban was featured in three news items and in three mentions. In most cases he was covered neutrally, except for the item on 14 May "Ceban wants to reform the SELs" (municipal housing management companies), when he was presented in a slightly negative light. Independent candidate Silvia Radu was presented in a negative rather than a neutral context in four of her seven appearances/mentions including in the three items that had her as protagonist: "Silvia Radu, the horse and the brush" (16 May); "Fraud in Silvia Radu's nominating petitions?" (17 May); "Radu sums up her campaign" (18 May 2018).

Constantin Codreanu PUN appeared in three cases: twice neutrally and once negatively. Valeriu Munteanu was presented more in a negative context: "Does Munteanu attack his opponents" (14 May); "Does PDM 'disfavor' his ex-partner?" (15 May) and once neutrally to negatively. After her exclusion from the elections, Şor Party candidate Reghina Apostolova, was covered in two items and mentioned several times in background news that listed the candidates for city mayor. Alexandru Roşco Our House Moldova Party enjoyed one news item (16 May) in which he was presented and covered neutrally. Maxim Brăila PP was also a news subject once (17 May) in a neutral to negative context: TV 8 headlines explaining the item's ticker "Brăila, who does not appear in POB, says he does not believe surveys." Vasile Costiuc DA was the subject of one news item on TV 8 (16 May "Tactics of allegations that break apart") in a neutral context.

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

During the period monitored, TV 8 aired eight controversial news items, six of which granted the right to reply. When unable to get an opinion, TV 8 reporters said, "Silvia Radu did not answer her phone to enjoy her right to reply while Andrei Năstase told us that he did not want to comment on what he called Munteanu's aberrations. The same attitude was displayed by the PSRM candidate in a press conference where he stated..." (14 May); "...we asked Ion Ceban's opinion but he redirected us to his party's press service. But the PSRM spokesperson did not answer the phone to give us a reaction" (15 May); "We contacted Andrei Năstase today to grant him the right to reply by he did not answer his phone" (16 May); "Contacted by TV 8, neither PSRM spokesperson Irina Astahova nor Ion Ceban answered the phone to enjoy their right to reply" (17 May).

In the other two cases, TV 8 did not secure a balance of sources or the right to reply of those concerned in the allegations. In its news item on 17 May, "Fraud in Silvia Radu's electoral lists?" TV 8 did not include the opinion of Silvia Radu; and in the item on 18 May about the monitoring report by Promo-Lex, TV 8 did not grant the right to reply to President Igor Dodon who was said to have been involved in the campaign in favor of a candidate.

### **Language and videos**

TV 8 used correct and neutral language in most of its reporting; nonetheless, we identified a few cases when TV 8 reporters used irony. For example, in the item on 18 May "Radu sums up the campaign," TV 8 said "To impress their electorates on the eve of the election, candidates for mayor resorted to gestures unrelated to this office. Silvia Radu, for example, displayed herself as a good homemaker, posted pictures on her Facebook page in which she colored little houses in a kindergarten class... Radu is so sure of her victory that she even made a working plan to implement from the mayor's seat... Silvia Radu again boasts about not posting

herself on billboards.” Another example of a mixture of facts and opinions was found in the ticker of the news item “Ceban wants to reform the SELs” on 14 May: “He did not miss the opportunity to promise an increase of 20% in salaries.” The videos used by TV 8 were neutral and were not subject manipulation or editing that would disfavor or favor any candidate.

## **Pro TV**

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

Pro TV broadcast 27 news items and reports with direct or indirect electoral content. All election news items were under the rubric “2018 New Local Elections.” The only day when Pro TV did not air election news was 13 May. On 19 May (no campaigning allowed), Pro TV aired eight items about voting procedures on election day and information about ballots without mentioning the candidates on them, the latest arrangements at voting stations, the monitoring process and observers, and three reports about the problems faced by Chişinău residents that the future mayor will have to solve and, implicitly, how children, youth and adults see the future mayor (without mentioning names or suggesting candidates). The other 21 direct news items and reports tackled such subjects as the POB poll and its figures, the survey published by “a person close to Vlad Plahotniuc,” the exclusion of a candidate from the elections in Chişinău, points and priorities of platforms, phone taps on some candidates, the third report on election monitoring by Promo-Lex, and four news items based on the election debates organized by Pro TV titled “I want to be mayor.”

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

In most of the relevant news and reports, Pro TV presented the information neutrally and objectively, at the same time providing background information to media consumers to help them better understand the situations and the items analyzed. Nonetheless, in some situations the manner of presentation of the information and text formulation indicated a biased attitude toward some candidates. In its item on 14 May, “Another survey,” Pro TV note “...a survey launched by a person close to Vlad Plahotniuc places Silvia Radu way ahead of Ion Ceban. Both of them are followed by Andrei Năstase.” Only toward the end of the item did Pro TV explain that this was the company “...Intelect Group, about which *Ziarul de Gardă* writes that it has a Vlad Plahotniuc’s supporter among its founders.” In this way, the viewer was first offered interpreted information and only then factual information with reference to another media outlet (the priority information technique). On 15 May in the item “Do not vote PL and PSRM!” Pro TV used lightly mixed facts and opinions: “Socialists’ candidate says that the Democrats’ call does not have any value as the citizens have already made their choices,” without indicating where, when and in which context such a statement was made. In addition, in its item on 16 May about the participants in the election debates on Pro TV, the reporter said “...and Alexandru Mîţu says he knows all the problems of Chişinău although he lives in Moscow,” allowing a value judgment that somewhat disfavored this candidate.

The news items and reports quoted or mentioned 9 of the 11 candidates left in the running. Ion Ceban, the PSRM candidate, was subject of news and/or mentioned in items eight times. Three of them showed Ceban in a negative context while the others presented him in a neutral context. At the same time, in its newscast on 16 May in the item about the Family Festival (item with indirect electoral content that was included under the topical rubric), when Ion Ceban appears on the stage beside Igor Dodon, Pro TV said, “...the PSRM candidate in local elections for Chişinău has also come up on the stage.”

Silvia Radu was covered and/or mentioned in eight items, four in a negative light and neutrally in the others. Andrei Năstase, the joint candidate of PPDA/PAS/PLDM, was protagonist and/or concerned in seven items in contexts equally neutral, negative and positive. Valeriu Munteanu, the PL candidate, was the subject of the news or was mentioned in six cases equally neutral,

positive and negative. Alexandru Roșco, the candidate of Our House Moldova Party, and Maxim Brăila, the PP candidate, were the subjects in two items, in one case covered neutrally but in another one negatively. Vasile Costiuc (PDA), Victor Strătilă (PVEM) and Alexandra Can (PNL) were covered in one item each.

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

In most of the controversial items (four), Pro TV granted the right to reply to the persons accused. When they could not be contacted or interviewed for various reasons, Pro TV noted, “Valeriu Munteanu and Constantin Codreanu claim that the surveys are manipulative and Ion Ceban says that he does not believe these figures. The other candidates did not comment” (14 May); “...Andrei Năstase did not answer the phone to comment. The other candidates did not have reactions” (15 May); “Responsible persons from the Șor Party told us that the party will comment on the Supreme Court judgment later on in a press conference” (16 May); “The two [editor’s note: Andrei Năstase and Silvia Radu] did not comment on Ceban’s proposal” (18 May).

The only deviation from the principle of balance of sources was noted in the item on 18 May (“Irregularities in the Campaign”) about the third report on election monitoring launched by Promo-Lex. Independent candidate Silvia Radu and PSRM candidate Ion Ceban were directly mentioned: “Silvia Radu gave an air-conditioner as a campaign present, and the head of the state campaigned for Ion Ceban. These are some of the violations flagged by Promo-Lex experts in the latest election monitoring report.” Pro TV included the opinion of presidential counsellor Maxim Lebedinschi but did not mention if it had tried finding Silvia Radu to grant her the right to reply.

### **Language and videos**

With the exceptions of some ironic comments, Pro TV news items and reports used language compliant with the professional standards, and its videos did not use editing tricks that would have disfavored certain election candidates.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the monitoring from 12 to 19 May, one finds that most of the media outlets monitored did not provide equal access to the candidates, did not secure a pluralism of opinion, and did not cover the campaign correctly and impartially.

- In the last week of the campaign, public station Moldova 1 was slightly biased, failing to provide equal access to all candidates. Judging by the frequency and context of the appearances of the candidates, one noted a slight favoring of PSRM candidate Ion Ceban and of independent candidate Silvia Radu.
- National broadcasters Prime TV, Canal 2 and Publika TV that had announced they would not cover the campaign continued to broadcast items with direct or indirect electoral content that directly promoted independent candidate Silvia Radu and disfavored PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase.
- Jurnal TV impartially covered all the candidates in its news under the election rubric. In other items, it directly promoted PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase and disfavored independent candidate Silvia Radu.
- NTV Moldova and Accent TV promoted PSRM candidate for Chișinău mayor Ion Ceban who enjoyed extended air time and positive contexts in the presentation of his activities. NTV Moldova favored PSRM candidate for Bălți mayor Alexandr Usații.
- RTR Moldova slightly favored PSRM candidate Ion Ceban and Șor Party candidate for Bălți mayor Pavel Verejan who enjoyed most of the appearances and mentions in comparison to the other candidates.

- Pro TV and TV 8 were relatively balanced, securing pluralism of opinion and providing access to most of the candidates in their newscasts. In the last week of campaigning, both stations slightly disfavored independent candidate Silvia Radu through a relatively higher number of appearances and/or mentions in negative contexts.