



## **Media Monitoring in the Campaign for New Local Elections on 3 June 2018**

Report no. 5  
21 May – 2 June 2018

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## 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, 20 May – 2 June 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**

Public TV station Moldova 1 continued its active coverage in the second round of the elections for Chişinău mayor under the rubric “2018 New Local Elections” in each edition of its newscast “Mesager.” In the 12 newscasts broadcast between 21 May and 2 June, Moldova 1 broadcast 36 items with direct and indirect electoral content. Most of them presented the candidates’ election promises made either during press conferences or in meetings with the electorate or in posts on social media. After the first round of voting, the station broadcast the declarations made by some of the candidates after the results were announced and the calls by some of the first round candidates to support PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase in the second round. The public station also included items and reports about the election process including data about the date of the second round, the results in all localities nationwide where elections took place on 20 May, the election monitoring report of Promo-Lex, PAS challenging the results of the elections for mayor in the village of Jora de Mijloc in Orhei District, and the court judgments in this case (22 May, 28 May).

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

The vast majority of the 36 election news items broadcast by Moldova 1 presented information impartially and objectively without compromising professional standards. Relevant items reported on the promises of the two candidates—Ion Ceban PSRM and Andrei Năstase PPDA/PAS/PLDM—and on their solutions for Chişinău’s problems. Andrei Năstase was the protagonist in 11 reports that concerned him directly and in which he was quoted and was also

referred to in 3 reports in the context of allegations and replies made by his opponent. The context in which the PPDA/PAS/PLDM appeared was rather positive in eight items mainly about meetings with the electorate and about Năstase's campaign promises: 24 May about the meeting with the electorate and the anticorruption measures he proposed; 25 May about his declaration that officials with integrity problems would have to leave office; 26 May with a call for securing the voting on 3 June; 27 May on declarations that they would deal with the Nistru River problems; 28 May about the campaign "Chişinău collects smiles"; 29 May when Năstase declared war on unauthorized construction; 30 May his declaration about capitalizing on the city's historical, architectural and archeological heritage; and 31 May on proposals for clusters and a digital city. In other three cases, the context was neutral. Andrei Năstase also enjoyed three indirect appearances in a positive context in the news about his support from other parties and candidates in the second round.

PSRM candidate Ion Ceban was quoted and/or mentioned 11 times, 7 in a positive context: 23 May on his proposals for construction in the capital; 24 May about his declarations about the situation of public transportation; 25 May on his promises for higher salaries for state employees and housing for young families; 28 May about his meeting with the mayors of the Chişinău suburbs; 29 May on his solutions for rehabilitating and eliminating the bad smell at the wastewater treatment plant; 30 May on his proposals for rehabilitating parks in the municipality; and 31 May about his promise to secure openness and transparency at the mayor's office. The other four items mentioned him in a neutral context.

Moldova 1 did show a discretionary attitude when covering supportive statements as it covered those made by political parties but not those for both candidates from various professional groups and organizations that were made public during a press conference. Thus, "Mesagerul" on 21 May covered calls to support Andrei Năstase by Valeriu Munteanu PL and Anatol Şalaru, PUN, and the newscast on 22 May covered the support shown for the same candidate by PPEM (quoting the message on social media by party leader Iurie Leancă).

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

The news broadcast by Moldova 1 generally followed the principles of balancing sources, documenting subjects and pluralism of opinions when covering a controversial situation. On 23 May in the report about Andrei Năstase's allegations against Ion Ceban that the latter had done nothing to remove traffic barriers illegally installed in the capital by PDM representatives, the station not only included the telephone reply by Ion Ceban who said that he would answer any of Năstase's questions but that he should come to the debates (an allusion to Năstase's refusal to participate in the debates organized by Ceban) as well as the statements made by PDM spokesperson Vitalie Gămurari that he would not comment on political exhibitions. Both candidates spoke in the newscast of 25 May that covered the incident from Năstase's election event to which Ion Ceban came to invite him to the debates he had organized. The report aired on 29 May about the allegations made by the Socialists against the PPDA about the illegal privatization of the party's current premises by Vasile Năstase, Andrei Năstase's brother, included the opinions of all parties.

At the same time, there were a few cases during the reference period when information was not presented in a completely balanced manner. Many news items that referred to the statements by Ion Ceban during the debates he organized stressed that Andrei Năstase had refused to participate but did not mention the reasons invoked by Năstase which were that those were not debates organized within the framework of the legislation in force but had rather been conceived by Ion Ceban for self-promotion. In the absence of this information, the viewer's perception may have been that Năstase was afraid of an open verbal confrontation with his opponent, an idea insistently suggested by Ceban during the run-off. For example, in the newscast of 31 May, the item about Ion Ceban's promise to secure openness and

transparency in mayor's office stressed that, "This time, again, Năstase rejected the invitation to participate in the debate," without any background information.

Similarly, in its newscast on 22 May, Moldova 1 announced that PAS had challenged the elections results in Jora de Mijloc in Orhei District offering details about the arguments invoked by PAS to support its challenge but not the reply of the Șor Party that was directly accused of breaching the law.

### **Language and videos**

Between 21 May and 1 June, Moldova 1 did not use discriminatory language or images that would have distorted reality or created premises for doubting its respect for ethical and professional standards.

### **Prime TV**

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

From 21 May to 2 June, Prime TV aired 22 items with electoral content on its main newscast at 21.00. Most of them (16) directly referred to the two candidates for mayor of Chișinău: Ion Ceban the PSRM candidate and Andrei Năstase the joint candidate of PPDA/PAS/PLDM. The six other items were about the election results in other localities; about the fact that, "PDM has won the local elections in four new localities"; the result of the local elections for Bălți mayor; the counting of votes in the first round of elections in Chișinău; the results of elections for mayor in the village of Jora de Mijloc and the appeal lodged by PAS in this case; and about the resignation of independent candidate Silvia Radu from the office of Vice Mayor of Chișinău.

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

Prime TV, which had announced it would not cover the local election campaigns, aired news with electoral content favoring Ion Ceban and disfavoring Andrei Năstase and covered the PDM candidates that had won in the first round in four localities in an exclusively positive light. In its news item on 21 May ("Elected on the first try"), Prime TV reporters highlighted that, "In yesterday's elections, PD obtained most of the mayor's seats. In the first round, four PDM candidates won handily in villages in the districts of Hîncești, Soroca and Ungheni..." In its news item on 22 May, ("Helped to make changes"), Prime TV noted that "The four democratic mayors who won local elections on Sunday... will receive all the necessary support from PDM to realize their platforms."

Silvia Radu, independent candidate for the capital's mayor, was presented in a positive light in the news item dedicated to her while Valeriu Munteanu, the PL candidate, and Constantin Codreanu, the PUN candidate, were presented in a slightly negative light. Marina Tauber, the Șor Party candidate in the village of Jora de Mijloc, was presented in a positive light, while Maia Sandu and PAS were portrayed in a negative light: "Ilan Șor made a post on Facebook in which he reminded the PAS leader that he had funded her campaign and that Maia Sandu had lived on his money" (22 May "Maia Sandu's request").

In the two items about the results of elections in Bălți, Prime TV covered the subjects in a biased and unbalanced manner. In the first item, Prime TV covered Nicolae Grigorișin, the PN candidate who had won the elections, in a negative light using a mixture of facts and opinions and labeling: "In his campaign, Nicolai Grigorișin promised to continue the reforms started by the administration of the fugitive criminal Renato Usatîi" (21 May "Elected in the first round"). In the second item, a report entitled "Bălți Mayors" (21 May) taken from regional television station TVN, Prime TV covered the information in a biased manner presenting Nicolae

Grigorişin in a bad light and stressing that he was the representative of PN led by Renato Usatîi. In this case again, Prime TV used a mixture of facts and opinions and the technique of generalization: “Historians say that Bălţi has been mismanaged in past years and investors are not really queuing up at the city’s gates.”

The PSRM candidate Ion Ceban was concerned in and/or was the subject in 16 news items. They presented him in a positive (14) or a neutral light (2) which leads us to believe that Prime TV directly favored Ion Ceban in the second round. In six items, Prime TV reiterated that Andrei Năstase had refused to participate in the public debates organized by Ion Ceban, but Prime TV did not say that the debates were not obligatory and that it was up to Năstase to accept the invitation or not: “Invitation refused. Andrei Năstase does not attend the debates organized by PSRM” (23 May); “They cannot meet. Ceban: Năstase also refused a TV debate” (24 May); “Debates without Năstase” (25 May); “The suburbs’ problems discussed by Ion Ceban and local elected officials – The PPDA candidate for the capital’s mayor did not show up today in the debates organized by the Socialist Ion Ceban. The PSRM candidate tackled the problems of the suburbs’ residents again in the absence of his opponent” (27 May). In addition, Prime TV broadcast two news items that stressed that, “...a number of veterans’ organizations made a call to voting citizens to support the Socialist candidate for the capital’s mayor” (29 May); “A number of organizations, including Voievod, called on the youth not to be indifferent and to vote on 3 June when the second round of the new local elections takes place in Chişinău” (“Call to the citizens” 30 May).

Andrei Năstase was the subject of and/or concerned in 13 news items; the majority presented him in a negative light. While Ion Ceban was shown in many items speaking about “...his election promises and priorities,” Prime TV in six items stressed Năstase’s failure to appear at the debates organized by his opponent (see above). In these items, Prime TV harped on the “fraudulent privatization” of which the PPDA candidate was accused. In some items, Prime TV presented information about Năstase in an ironic manner: “Ceban also advised the PPDA leader not to be afraid of or run away from debates” (“They cannot meet” 24 May); “Also on Facebook, Năstase called on the people to smile more as according to him, the city is as his people are” (“Suburbs’ problems” 28 May).

In addition, in the item on 30 May about the debates organized by Promo-LEX, Prime TV selectively covered the statements made by the two candidates. In Ion Ceban’s case, Prime TV emphasized his platform priorities placing him in a positive light: “...the PSRM candidate spoke about the measures he would take if he won the mayor’s seat”; “Ion Ceban says he wants more transparency in the mayor’s office.” In Andrei Năstase’s case, on the other hand, Prime TV attempted to discredit him: “...the first part of the debates unfolded in the absence of the PPDA leader who arrived late”; “...while one of the participants in the debates proved to be informed, the other one showed the contrary...” (mixture of facts and opinions); “...Andrei Năstase wears expensive clothes although he does not have an official job.”

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

Prime TV broadcast seven controversial news items, two of which referred to the election results in the village of Jora de Mijloc and the appeal filed by Maia Sandu and PAS against them at the Chişinău Court of Appeals. The other five were about Andrei Năstase. In five controversial news items, Prime TV either broadcast or tried to request the opinion of all those directly concerned or noted that: “Phoned by our TV station, Sandu refused to comment on Ilan Şor’s statements” (“Maia Sandu’s request” 22 May); “On the other hand, Andrei Năstase said in a press conference that he would go to debates only in the studios of certain TV stations” (“Refused invitation” 23 May); “PPDA representatives did not answer the phone to comment on the allegations. Andrei Năstase was repeatedly asked how the premises of the DA Platform had been privatized, but each time he refused to answer” (“Socialists’ allegations” 28 May); “Năstase, however, claims, that the premises were privatized legally” (“PPDA

accused by PSRM” 29 May); “Asked whether he would follow the Socialist’s example, Ceban’s opponent, the PPDA leader avoided answering” (“Socialist’s announcement” 1 June).

In two cases, Prime TV did not present the replies of those concerned and against whom allegations were made. In the item on 28 May, “Tauber remains mayor,” Maya Sandu, PAS president, was directly concerned in the news: “The protesters came with placards and chanted slogans against Maia Sandu”, but Prime TV did not broadcast her reply noting only that, “In a message posted on social media, PAS said it would challenge the decision at the Supreme Court of Justice.” In the news item on 29 May “PPDA accused by PSRM” in which the Socialists accused Andrei Năstase of the “fraudulent privatization” of some property and alleged that Judge Marina Anton from the Chişinău Court of Appeals was the one to help him in this sense, Prime TV did not broadcast the latter’s reply. In addition, in many cases Ion Ceban was featured in news items with his direct statements while Andrei Năstase and/or Maia Sandu appeared with quotes paraphrased either from their statements posted on Facebook or from their statements made in press conferences.

### **Language and videos**

Prime TV used labeling in two news items. In the item on 21 May, “Elected in the first round,” about the results in Bălţi, Prime TV noted that “In his campaign, Nicolai Grigorişin promised to continue the reforms started by the administration of the fugitive criminal Renato Usatii”. In the news item on 25 May, “Debates without Năstase,” the Prime TV reporter used labeling again: “Ion Ceban asked him how Năstase came to be the lawyer of the fugitive criminal Ţopa”.

In this monitoring period, Prime TV used videos compliant with professional principles.

### **Canal 2**

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

TV station Canal 2 aired 18 news items with electoral content. Their topics referred to the results of the elections in the first round for Chişinău and Bălţi mayor; the voting results in other localities where elections had taken place; the infringements registered in the first round of the elections; the PAS request to cancel the election results in the village of Jora de Mijloc (Orhei District); and the printing of ballots for the second round of elections in the capital. Most of the news items (10), however, referred to the second round of elections for Chişinău mayor. Canal 2 covered Ion Ceban, the PSRM candidate, in a positive and/or neutral light and covered Andrei Năstase, the joint candidate of PPDA/PAS/PLDM, in a negative light.

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

In the two news items about election results in localities other than Chişinău, Bălţi and Jora de Mijloc, Canal 2 directly favored the PDM candidates: “In the new local elections, PDM won four of the seven mayor’s seats on the line” (“Four mayor’s offices out of seven” 21 May); “Four local officers from PDM won on Sunday in the first round and will receive all the necessary support to realize their platforms... PDM vice president Vladimir Cebotari announced that that subject had been discussed at the party’s weekly meeting” (“Support for new mayors” 22 May). In the two items about the results of elections in Jora de Mijloc and the challenge by PAS (“Maia Sandu’s request” 22 May; “Marina Tauber remains mayor,” 28 May), Canal 2 presented the information in a biased and unbalanced manner. Marina Tauber, the candidate of the Şor Party was presented in a positive light and Maia Sandu and PAS were covered in a negative light: “Ilan Şor posted a reaction on Facebook in which he reminded the PAS leader that he had funded her campaign and that Maia Sandu had lived on his money”; “Marina Tauber also mingled with the crowd; “Marina Tauber remains mayor in the village of Jora de Mijloc... Tauber came to the proceeding with her party boss Ilan Şor but also with a cortege of supporters.”

In the news item on 21 May (“No second round in Bălți”) about the results for Bălți mayor, the winner Nicolae Grigorișin was covered in a neutral to negative light using a mixture of facts and opinions and labeling: “In his campaign, Nicolai Grigorișin promised to continue the reforms started by the administration of the fugitive criminal Renato Usatîi.”

Ten of the 18 news items with electoral content had as sources and/or directly referred to the two candidates in the second round for Chișinău mayor: Andrei Năstase and Ion Ceban. In five items, Canal 2 highlighted the election debates that Ion Ceban had organized in which Andrei Năstase refused to participate: “Refused invitation” (23 May); “Ceban, alone again at the Arc de Triumph” (24 May); “Ceban went to Năstase” (25 May); “Promises in exchange for votes” (29 May); and “Ceban’s offer” (31 May). Two news items were based on information that Andrei Năstase and the PPDA had illegally privatized certain property: “Socialists’ allegations” (28 May); “Andrei Năstase accused of illegalities” (29 May).

Canal 2 clearly presented Andrei Năstase in a negative context in eight items while Ion Ceban, was covered in a positive light eight times and in a neutral light twice. In some cases, Canal 2 used irony to present information about Andrei Năstase: “Promo-Lex representatives asked Andrei Năstase how much money he had spent in the election campaign. The answer was simple: Not a single leu” (“Ceban and Năstase face to face” 30 May). In the same item about the debates organized by Promo-LEX, Canal 2 implied that Andrei Năstase’s was incompetent and unsuitable: “A participant asked how they would solve the problem with the wastewater treatment plant... One of the candidates commented, but the other one, not really”; “Ion Ceban asked Năstase many questions but the latter refused to answer. Ion Ceban referred to the fraudulent takeover of PPDA premises but also to how Năstase came to be the lawyer for the fugitive criminal Țopa.” At the same time, favoritism for Ion Ceban’s was obvious because the station stressed that, “Two nongovernment organizations, the National Movement Voievod and Traditions and Patriotism, announced today that they are supporting Ion Ceban in the elections. Their leaders urged the youth to come to vote on Sunday,” even though the topic of the news item was completely different.

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

In this reporting period, Canal 2 broadcast six controversial news items. In four, the station requested or secured the right to reply of the persons concerned, paraphrasing their statements: “Previously, when asked about the privatization of the PPDA premises and whether his brother Vasile was liable for punishment, Andrei Năstase avoided giving a clear answer...” (“Ceban went to Năstase” 25 May); “On the other hand, Andrei Năstase said in a press conference that he would go to debates only in the studios of certain TV stations” (“Refused invitation” 23 May). In some cases, the station mentioned that the ones concerned could not be contacted/found or that they had refused to answer: “Phoned by our TV station, Maia Sandu refused to make any comments” (“Maia Sandu’s request” 22 May); “PPDA representatives did not answer the phone to comment on the allegations” (“The Socialists’ allegations” 28 May). In most cases, those who were paraphrased and/or could not be found were Andrei Năstase and Maia Sandu.

In two news items, however, Canal 2 did not broadcast the replies of those concerned. In “Elections for capital’s mayor” on 21 May, Canal 2 noted: “On the other hand, the liberal candidate Valeriu Munteanu who had collected only 3.6% of votes announced he would support Andrei Năstase, although one week ago he was claiming that Năstase had the most non-European platform.” Canal 2 should have presented Năstase’s opinion, which it did not do. In the item on 28 May, “Marina Tauber remains mayor,” Canal 2 did not broadcast the reply of Maia Sandu who was directly concerned and accused.

### **Language and videos**

As with Prime TV, Canal 2 repeatedly used labels that favored a certain candidate and disfavored the other one. In the item on 21 May “No second round in Bălți,” Canal 2 noted: “In his campaign, Nicolai Grigorișin promised to continue the reforms started by the administration of the fugitive criminal Renato Usatîi.” In the item on 25 May “Ceban went to Năstase,” Canal 2 reporters again used labeling: “Ion Ceban asked Năstase many questions but the latter refused to answer. Ion Ceban referred to the fraudulent takeover of the PPA premises but also how Năstase came to be the lawyer for the fugitive lawyer Țopa.” Similarly, in the item on 30 May, “Ceban and Năstase face to face,” Canal 2 used pejorative language and labels: “...Accidentally or not, Andrei Năstase’s campaign chief of staff is Alexandru Machedon, the Director of Starnet. Media have written that he is also the godfather of Lucian Chirtoacă, Dorin Chirtoacă’s brother.”

Canal 2 also used videos of other media outlets but presented them as its own. In its news item on 1 June, “Ceban will leave the PSRM if he becomes mayor,” Canal 2 reporters noted, “Asked by our team whether he would follow Ceban’s example, his opponent from PPDA, Andrei Năstase, avoided answering,” but the reporter who made the report was from Publika TV and was holding this television’s microphone in his hands.

## **Publika TV**

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

On 5 April, General Media Grup Corp. S.R.L., holder of the broadcast license for PublikaTV, notified the BCC that the station, “...would not cover the campaign for new local elections for mayors in some localities on 20 May 2018.” In its declaration filed with the BCC, the company also announced it would not organize TV election debates and would not air free or paid election publicity.

Between 21 May and 2 June, Publika TV broadcast 16 news items with electoral content in its main daily newscast at 19.00. Seven of them referred to the results of the elections on 20 May in Chișinău, Bălți and several villages. The rest referred to the open air debates in the center of Chișinău to which PSRM candidate Ion Ceban invited PPDA/PS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase; Ion Ceban’s meeting with the mayors of Chișinău suburbs; the proposal made by Ion Ceban to Andrei Năstase to take the office of deputy mayor; the announcement made by Ion Ceban that after the elections he would suspend his PSRM membership; and the allegations made by the socialists that the PPDA premises had been privatized “fraudulently.”

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

In the news item about the election results on 21 May, Publika TV presented a fragment from Ion Ceban’s invitation to Andrei Năstase to debate in the capital’s center, but Năstase’s reaction was paraphrased and presented without any video. The item continued in a negative tone for Năstase as the reporter announced that he was now supported by PL candidate Valeriu Munteanu who had previously “mocked Năstase” and then broadcast shots of Munteanu’s statements and listed some of Năstase’s proposals that Munteanu had previously considered unfeasible. The item went on to focus on Ceban’s declarations and the proposals he had made in connection with Chișinău’s future administration. In all news items that concerned the candidates, Ion Ceban was the one who proposed something and who had initiative while Andrei Năstase was put in a situation of having to react or comment.

Of the eight new items that concerned the two candidates, seven presented Ion Ceban in a positive context, and one presented Andrei Năstase in a negative context (the allegations made by the Socialists about the PPDA premises (29 May). The seven items with and about Ion Ceban referred to the debates that the Socialist candidate had organized and the promises

he had made, the meeting with suburban mayors (28 May), and his statement that he would suspend his party membership if he won the elections (1 June). Four of these items mentioned Andrei Năstase reacting in a neutral context, and the other three presented his reactions in a negative context. Reporters included a short video showing Andrei Năstase saying that he refused to come to the debates (23 and 24 May); in one case they mentioned he could not be reached by phone to comment (31 May) and in another case they showed him refusing to comment for Publika TV on a declaration made by Ion Ceban. Of the seven news items in which Ion Ceban appeared in a positive light, only one was produced in a balanced manner: After they spoke about the Socialist candidate's concern about the bad smell in the capital and the solution he proposed, Publika journalists also included a video from a conference of Andrei Năstase's about illegal construction, both broadcast with the candidates' promises (29 May).

In the item on 1 June when Ion Ceban announced he would suspend his party membership to focus on the work of the mayor's office, the Publika reporter asked Andrei Năstase, "Are you ready to withdraw your party membership if you are elected mayor?" The way this question was formulated denotes the biased attitude of the reporter who used Ion Ceban as an example whose actions were to be followed by all means. If he had truly wanted to find out Andrei Năstase's opinion about Ion Ceban's intention, the question would have had to have been formulated differently, for instance: "What is your opinion about this declaration made by your opponent?" Andrei Năstase's refusal to answer the Publika reporter's question instead presented another opportunity for the station to broadcast a video with Ceban criticizing, "...this stand taken by Năstase."

Even though the news did not include direct calls to vote for the Socialist candidate, the videos and contents of the reports suggested it. For example, the news item on 28 May about the meetings of mayors from Chişinău's suburbs with Ion Ceban showed the following statement of the mayor of the Village of Tohatin: "I am concerned that if someone comes from outside, from the political arena, how would he cooperate with the Municipal Council?" That was a reference to the Socialist candidate's campaign message in which he stated that he knew the city's problems because he had been on the Municipal Council for a long time while Andrei Năstase, in his opinion, was an outsider from the political sphere.

The language used by Publika reporters denoted various attitudes toward the candidates. Andrei Năstase in some cases is presented as "PPDA's candidate for the capital's mayor's seat," while Ion Ceban is the "candidate for the capital's mayor's office." The word "seat" used in this context has a rather negative connotation since it is semantically associated with the concepts of rest or of bureaucracy.

Other examples of biased language and the presence of the journalist's opinion in the news include the following: "Andrei Năstase already runs away from TV debates with the Socialist Ion Ceban" (24 May); "Previously when asked by our TV station for details on the privatization of the PPDA premises and whether his brother should be held liable, Andrei Năstase, as usual, avoided giving a clear answer and said that the magazine *Glasul* owned the property legally and constitutionally" (25 May).

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

In tackling campaign subjects, Publika TV showed a predilection for some sources and scant interest in others. When allegations were made against the PPDA and Andrei Năstase, the reaction was quoted briefly or not at all. For example, on 24 May the Publika reporter announced: "The PPDA candidate for the capital's mayor's seat Andrei Năstase is already running away from TV debates with the Socialist Ion Ceban. It was Ion Ceban who wrote on Facebook about Năstase's lack of desire to come out for a confrontation on a private TV station. The Socialist also wrote that he had had an understanding with Năstase back on Sunday about participating in a debate at a TV station but had since found out that Năstase

would not come.” After these statements, the journalists did not ask Andrei Năstase about his perspective or whether it was true what Ceban had said about the TV debates. Reporters at the end said that the PPDA leader had previously said that it was early to “spin around the Arc de Triumph,” which does not cover the allegation of his refusal to participate in the TV debates. In addition, in the same item Ion Ceban said that, “He is cut up each evening on Jurnal TV” which required a reaction from that outlet not included in the news item.

A news item broadcast on 29 May with the title “Năstase, accused of illegalities,” broadly set forth the allegations by the Socialist councilors in the CMC that the property in which the publication, “*Glasul Națiunii*” led by the brother of the PPDA leader and where PPDA rents premises was allegedly privatized illegally in 2006.” Andrei Năstase’s reaction is summarized, and he says in Russian: “The European Court’s decisions are executed, not debated. This is all I want to say to the people who have problems with Romanian.” This fragment does not make it obvious that Năstase is referring to an ECHR judgment that had ruled in favor of the publication *Glasul Națiunii* and had confirmed the legality of the transaction. Presenting just a summary of the candidate’s reaction showed that journalist aimed to publicize the allegations but not his explanation. The same item also included allegations against a judge: “The same judge is alleged to have appeared in both dubious schemes: Marina Anton from the Chișinău District Court,” but the reporters did not present her reaction. The judge’s explanation may have changed the general perspective on the information contained in the item.

### **Language and videos**

In the news item on 25 May about Ion Ceban’s coming to a campaign meeting organized by Andrei Năstase, journalists used the label “the fugitive criminal Țopa” with reference to businessman Victor Țopa, the godfather of Andrei Năstase: “During the event, Ion Ceban asked Năstase many questions. The latter, however, refused to answer. Ion Ceban referred to the fraudulent takeover of the PPDA premises but also to how Năstase came to be the lawyer for the fugitive criminal Țopa”.

In the news item on 21 May about the results of the first round, Andrei Năstase was shown in the background of the text read by the reporter trying to avoid the questions of a journalist from Canal 2 while Ion Ceban was shown standing behind the rostrum in a civilized manner and inviting his opponent to debates. Such videos could create the impression of an unbalanced person who refused to answer questions for Andrei Năstase in contrast to his opponent who, as the station suggested, sought an open dialog.

### **Jurnal TV**

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

Jurnal TV actively covered the campaign in the second round of elections for Chișinău mayor. Between 21 May and 2 June, it broadcast 46 news items during its main newscast of the day at 19.00. Initially after the first round, news items about the elections were grouped in blocs, but later they were broadcast throughout the newscast along with general items. The station covered the candidates’ activities and the process of preparing for the second round with the printing of ballots and the CEC establishing the date of the election. Andrei Năstase appeared not only in the news about campaign activities but also in items about subjects of a general character.

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

Of the 46 items, 11 referred to the preparations for the elections on 3 June and the appeals filed after the first round of voting (Maia Sandu’s request to cancel the results in Jora de Mijloc,

Silvia Radu's statements after the first round, and others). The rest of the 35 items directly or indirectly concerned the two candidates Andrei Năstase and Ion Ceban.

From a numerical point of view, Jurnal TV favored PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Năstase broadcasting 20 news items about him with exclusively positive content. Most of the items appeared in the last days of the campaign. Viewers found out that the PPDA leader was concerned with "Nistru's fate" (28 May), that "Năstase declared war on illegal construction" (29 May), and that Andrei Năstase had participated in the march "Big Cleaning" and in the "Children's Cherry Festival" (1 June). In addition, people were informed that many Romanian and Moldovan personalities were urging Chișinău residents directly or indirectly to participate in the elections and to vote for Andrei Năstase: the Romanian boxer Cătălin Moroșan said he was friends with Andrei Năstase and called on people to vote for him (1 June); the Mayor of Oradea in Romania said he would help Chișinău with expertise and even resources or development projects if the city were led by a pro-European (29 May); the historian Octavian Țicu said that Andrei Năstase could become the engine of the pro-European forces for the autumn elections (30 May), and so on. The station did not quote messages in support of Ion Ceban that appeared in the public space. Early news items openly campaigned for Andrei Năstase: a meeting with the electorate in Cricova (23 May); solutions for the traffic barriers installed in elite city neighborhoods (23 May); meetings with the doctors in the district of Botanica (24 May); his intention to apply a three-step program following the model of the Romanian municipality of Cluj (31 May). News items about Năstase's plans for Chișinău and his opinions were broadly presented and lasted longer than other news items (3–5 minutes) and those about his opponent.

In the 17 items about PSRM candidate Ion Ceban, he was presented neutrally and positively in eight: about the first round results (21 May); about the election debates on other TV stations (30 May); his declarations at a conference in which he said he would observe, "...the commitments set forth in two documents proposed by a number of civil society organizations" (31 May); the message in which he summed up his election campaign (1 June), and others. In nine other news items, Ceban was presented in a negative context. For example, in the item presenting Ceban's profile (22 May) reporters used biased language and included allegations without his reactions:

The candidate for Mayor of Chișinău Ion Ceban reappeared before the public as he is—a specialist in making speeches, nothing more, according to the description of him by his former party leader Vladimir Voronin. His grouchy character and political instability have made Ceban famous. In 2015, for instance, the press reported in detail a meeting in the mayor's office when Ion Ceban lunged at former mayor Dorin Chirtoacă.

The ticker meanwhile read: "Aggressive behavior in Ion Ceban style." This item also included an allegation: The reporter announced that Vladimir Voronin allegedly had said in the past that he did not know "why Ceban had committed that foul act," without specifying precisely where and in what context the PCRМ leader had said that, and without including Ion Ceban's reaction/comment. Another news item that again presented the PSRM candidate in a negative manner and again used Vladimir Voronin's words was aired on 31 May. It included a video in which Vladimir Voronin said that Ion Ceban was incompetent and a "*balamut*" (trouble maker in Russian). Additional items with negative connotations about Ion Ceban were the following: an item about Socialist councilors' properties (31 May); the item in which Jurnal TV investigated whether Ceban might have invited only suburban mayors who were PDM members or werew supported by this party to a meeting in Chișinău (29 May); and the findings of the Watchdog community that GBC stations allegedly promoted Ceban intensively although they had announced they would not cover the election campaign (29 May).

In general, the language of the news was neutral. Nonetheless, in addition to the news item mentioned above that contained a profile of Ion Ceban (22 May), there were other exceptions

where one could notice the reporters' opinions and biased attitudes towards the Socialist candidate: "He can never give up. He keeps waiting for Andrei Năstase by the Arc de Triumph in the capital. We are speaking about ..." (24 May); "The television stations controlled by the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc have found another hero for themselves for the second round of voting. Ion Ceban has replaced the loser Silvia Radu. According to Watchdog experts who monitored a number of newscasts between 21 and 25 May, the promotion of the Socialist Ceban is obvious" (29 May). In such statements, the reporters do not quote any sources when using the qualifying terms "hero" and "loser." This indicates the presence of the journalist's opinion in the text.

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

Most of the news about the election promises of the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate offered just one perspective/source without the reporters doubting the feasibility of the proposals or verifying in any way the statements made by the candidate. The same was true of the reporting about the statements and plans of PSRM candidate Ion Ceban.

As for controversial news, the reporters generally included the reaction of the party concerned; however, there were two cases when the reaction was missing. In the item in which Vladimir Voronin said that Ceban had previously committed "a foul act," the reporter did not mention if the Socialist had ever commented on that allegation and failed to present his reaction. In addition, in his campaign summary Andrei Năstase launched allegations against the BCC and GBC TV stations that, "...continued their lynching while the BCC grotesquely applauded," and also against Ion Ceban who allegedly had, "copied the exact style, means and deceitful information of Plahotniuc's holdings from the presidential campaign." The item did not contain reactions from the BCC, GBC or Ion Ceban. At the end, the reporter said, "The PD and PSRM leaderships had previously denied being in a partnership."

### **Language and videos**

The language used by Jurnal TV reporters included the label "the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc" but also the qualifier "the candidate of the pro-European and anti-oligarchic forces" without noting that the candidate identified himself as an "anti-oligarch." No other deviations from news language norms were found, nor did we register any video tricks that would have distorted reality.

### **RTR Moldova**

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

Private TV station RTR Moldova broadcast 22 news items with direct or indirect electoral content in its daily newscasts and on its analysis program "Vesti nedeli." In addition, between 22 and 25 May and on 30 May it posted eight items with direct or indirect electoral content on its website. The station continued actively covering the campaigns of the two remaining candidates under the rubric "2018 New Local Elections." RTR Moldova also presented the official results of the elections that took place on 20 May in Bălți; the Promo-Lex' report on election monitoring; and a detailed account of the controversy after PAS challenged the elections in Jora de Mijloc in Orhei District. On 26 May "Vesti nedeli" included many items reviewing the results of the first round of voting in Chișinău with the participation of experts and also separate interviews with candidates Ion Ceban and Andrei Năstase.

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

Most of the election items were presented neutrally and included the statements made by the candidates without showing any obvious bias or the opinions of the journalists. Nonetheless,

there were several cases when items were presented with a certain bias in the selection of information for publication and the angle of approach.

In general, both candidates were presented in an approximately equal number of items: Andrei Năstase had 15 appearances (8 in a positive context, 5 in a neutral context, and 2 in a negative context), and Ion Ceban had 14 (8 in a positive context, 5 in a neutral context, and 1 in a rather negative context). Viewers found out that Ion Ceban would dismiss Deputy Mayor Nistor Grozavu (23 May item taken from Tribuna.md); that he had hundreds of initiatives for the municipality and would solve the residents' problems (26 May interview with the candidate); that he would contribute to solving the problems faced by the suburbs and would appoint a deputy mayor with a special mandate for such matters (28 May); that he knows how to get rid of the bad smell in the city and how to modernize the wastewater treatment plant (29 May); that he had been and would remain open to residents and would secure transparency in the work of the mayor's office and its decisions; that he was supported by a group of representatives of civic associations of people with disabilities (31 May); and that he was happy with the campaign he had carried out in the interests of Chişinău residents (1 June). Regarding Andrei Năstase, viewers learned that he would not participate in the debates organized by Ceban because they were not organized by media outlets and that the Socialists avoided meeting with the people and organized such debates out of despair (22 May item taken from Deschide.md); that PPEM, PL and PUN would support him in the second round (26 May including an interview with the candidate); that he had a solution for the problem of public transportation in the capital and proposed implementing new technologies for easing traffic (28 May); that he promised to restore legal permitting for construction (29 May); that he was supported by a group of teachers' representatives and promised to offer grants to suburban entrepreneurs, especially to those who would create jobs for people with disabilities (31 May); and that he aimed to employ only professional and essential people in the mayor's office (1 June).

On 25 May, the station took a biased story from the website Aif.md affiliated with the PSRM and posted it on its own website [www.rtr.md](http://www.rtr.md). The story was entitled "During the campaign Năstase spoke on a Bucharest-based TV station." In it the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate was presented in a negative context through such statements as, "He either forgot which capital he was running for mayor of or decided he had nothing to talk about with Chişinău residents and in full campaign mode instead went to our neighboring country to ask for help from his 'Romanian brothers'."

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

During the monitoring period, RTR Moldova broadcast/published four items with controversial subjects. In two of them (22 May from the website about Năstase's refusal to participate in the debates organized by Ceban and 29 May from the press conference organized by Socialist councilors in front of the PPDA premises with allegations that this property was illegally privatized), the station observed the principle of balance of sources presenting the opinions of both parties involved. In the other two items, however, pluralism of opinion was not secured. These were the item about Năstase's participation in debates on a TV station in Bucharest (25 May) in which he was not given space for a reply and the interviews with the two candidates on the weekly program "Vesti nedeli" on 26 May. In a separate interview with Ion Ceban he said that Andrei Năstase needed a springboard for Parliament and did not have any initiatives for solving the city's problems and also that Năstase had black marks in his biography. There were no replies from Năstase nor were there any from Ceban to statements made by Năstase in the separate interview with him that was broadcast on the same program.

### **Language and videos**

Regarding the videos used, RTR Moldova was balanced and complied with ethical and professional norms. The same was true for the language used in its newscasts. At the same time, however, the news item re-posted on Rtr.md from the website Aif.md (25 May) contravened professional standards and contained many labels and pejoratives that mocked Năstase (examples: “He stated unabashedly that our co-nationals who live in Romania should convince their relatives in Chişinău to vote for him,” “Social media users drew a parallel line between him and Chirtoacă wondering if the candidate of the pro-European forces brought with him a bucket of Moldovan soil in the best traditions of the Liberal,” “...to remind you that Andrei Năstase has previously refused three times to participate in open public debates with Ion Ceban” among others.).

## **NTV Moldova**

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

In the second round of voting, private TV station NTV Moldova was actively involved in covering the campaign broadcasting in total 40 items with direct or indirect electoral content both under the rubric “2018 New Local Elections” and outside it. The items concerned the results of the first round, the platforms of the two remaining candidates, messages of support and allegations from groups and civil society organizations, items about the election process, and the results of campaign monitoring by civil society. The station also had a few news items with indirect electoral content that put the PSRM candidate in a positive light: opinions about the demolition of a house and architectural monuments, a news item about the children’s playground saved from destruction by the PSRM faction on the Municipal Council, President Dodon’s opinion about the traditional family, and others.

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

Most of the relevant items (27) breached the principle of impartiality and objectivity. They presented the facts in a biased manner, filtered/selected information, and in some cases manipulated the information to denigrate one of the candidates. Reality was often presented from the perspective of one candidate, and many news items and reports contained discriminatory elements. In many cases, reporters mixed facts and opinions and took information out of context.

The news concerning Ion Ceban, the PSRM candidate, was usually lengthy and included detailed information about his platform and presented him as the only candidate capable of making changes for the better in Chişinău. Starting on 21 May, the station almost daily covered Ion Ceban’s initiative to organize public debates with Andrei Năstase, the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate, as well as the latter’s refusal to participate in them. The failed debates were covered in detailed items that presented extracts from Ion Ceban’s platform. NTV Moldova reported on PSRM initiatives and protests against “the wrongdoings of the local public administration of the past years” and the solutions for the capital’s problems (22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29 May). The viewers found out in other items that Ion Ceban had the spirit of initiative (25 May); his presence intimidated Năstase (25 May); and Ceban was the only candidate capable of solving the capital’s problems and was supported by officers (29 May), by people with disabilities (31 May), by Moldova’s patriots (31 May), by athletes (31 May), by President Dodon (31 May, 1 June); by the science and art community (31 May), and by doctors (1 June). In total, Ion Ceban was the protagonist or was mentioned 24 times: 3 times in a neutral context and 21 times in a positive context. One may conclude that NTV Moldova campaigned for the PSRM candidate for mayor of Chişinău.

In contrast, Andrei Năstase was quoted and/or mentioned 22 times: 18 times in negative contexts and 4 times neutrally. The absence of the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate from the debates organized by Ion Ceban was commented on in negative terms as he was accused of, “hiding in the bushes,” “being afraid of Ceban,” “having no solutions,” and of “having no initiative/plans for solving the city’s problems.” The viewers were also informed that Andrei

Năstase appreciated the support of Dorin Chirtoacă, Iurie Leancă, and Anatol Țalaru, the latter two who were labelled “thieves and corrupt” (22, 23 May); that Năstase appreciated what Dorin Chirtoacă had done for the health system (22 May); that Dorin Chirtoacă had become an ally of Andrei Năstase (23 May); that if elected, Năstase would be concerned not with the city’s problems by with parliamentary elections (25 May); that he was “supported by all the corrupt ones” (25 May); that “Năstase could not formulate a clear thought” (25 May); that Năstase’s team called for hatred and discrimination (28 May); that the PPDA premises had been illegally privatized (29 May); that Năstase lied when he claimed there was an ECHR decision on the PPDA premises (30 June); that Năstase was financially supported by Chirtoacă’s godfather (1 June); that Năstase was corrupt and unprofessional and would continue the schemes started by the previous mayor (30 June); if elected Năstase would do what Chirtoacă did (31 May); that Năstase was a populist (31 May); that he had breached the Elections Code (1 June), and that Năstase lacked solutions or a team (1 June).

The bias of authors was obvious in the news item on 22 May about Andrei Năstase’s absence from debates in which Ion Ceban launched allegations that Năstase was supported by “Iurie Leancă, a highway thief,” by Anatol Țalaru who was also a thief, and that Vasile Năstase had illegally privatized the PPDA premises.

We found manipulative news items structured in such a way as to place the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate in negative light. In an item broadcast on 22 May, NTV Moldova informed viewers that Andrei Năstase praised what Dorin Chirtoacă had done in healthcare. The item built a scenario around a statement made by Năstase at a meeting with doctors that progress had been made in healthcare in the past years. The journalist aimed to replace this statement with details designed to show the disastrous situation in this system instead. The item contained images from social media that showed the unsanitary conditions in Chișinău hospitals (images with “rats eating from the patients’ plates”), followed again by the statement made by Năstase who “has promised to do the same.” The manner in which this item was produced contravenes professional norms and also the Broadcast Code that provides that reality shall not be distorted by editing tricks, comments, manner of formulation or titles (Art.7(4)).

Another news item that put PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase in bad light was broadcast on 25 May. The anchor stated, “Andrei Năstase will use his office for political purposes in order to get better results in the parliamentary elections in autumn,” referring to Maia Sandu, the PAS leader. According to the anchor, Sandu had allegedly stated that the “PAS and PPDA electorate is discouraged as the mayor’s office will be a suitable tool to accumulate political points in the autumn.” Actually, Maia Sandu’s statement said something different: “Andrei Năstase’s win for the mayor’s office would bring back the trust of many people who are thinking today that it is too late for a change and that nothing else can be done. This would bring back the trust of these people and we would be stronger in the parliamentary elections, Maia Sandu said.”

The item on 30 June in which Năstase is accused of lying about the ECHR decision on the privatization of the PPDA premises subjectively presented the subject from the debates organized by Promo-Lex selecting only the information that supported the thesis that Năstase could not answer clearly and that Ceban had proved that the former was lying. The news item on 28 May with the biased and manipulative title “Hatred, Năstase’s electoral offering” also stated from the very beginning that civil society condemned the hate speech promoted by Năstase’s team. Further on in the text, however, we found that it was not Andrei Năstase but rather his supporters who had allegedly called those who had voted for Ceban “sheep” and that some considered that those people should have been “killed.”

During the reporting period, NTV Moldova resorted to manipulation by selecting negative information and using image transfers. In several news items, Andrei Năstase was aligned with former Chișinău mayor Dorin Chirtoacă (PL) who had resigned under investigation for alleged corruption in order to transfer the negative image of the PL onto the PPDA/PAS/PLDM

candidate: 22 May Andrei Năstase praises Chirtoacă; 23 May Chirtoacă beside Andrei Năstase; 28 May Electoral bargaining (Năstase promises not to dismiss PL representatives in exchange for PL's support); 30 May The patriots vote for Ion Ceban (Năstase will do what Chirtoacă did); 30 May Năstase funded by Chirtoacă's godfather.

In many news items facts were mixed with opinions; for instance, the news item on 23 May about a supposed alliance between Năstase and Chirtoacă said that, "The terrible failure suffered by PL did not impede Dorin Chirtoacă from becoming allies with Andrei Năstase. Andrei Năstase's fans tried today to raise their spirits while Ion Ceban showed spirit again." On 25 May in the item about Ion Ceban's participation in one of Andrei Năstase's campaign meetings, the author opines that, "Năstase hid from Ion Ceban all week long," and that "Ion Ceban's presence disoriented the PPDA candidate who could not think clearly in Ion Ceban's presence."

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

Between 21 May and 3 June, 13 of the 40 items with electoral content aired by NTV Moldova concerned controversial subjects; it failed to present replies in 11 of them. In some cases reporters mentioned that Năstase "did not answer his phone," "has not commented yet on the allegations," or allegedly had "failed to confirm or deny the allegations in social media." For example, in the item on 22 May about the debates organized by Ion Ceban and Andrei Năstase's absence, various allegations are made against the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate and other politicians without including their replies, noting that he had not commented yet on those allegations. It is not clear whether the reporters made any effort to obtain the opinions of the accused. In the same item toward the end, the station included information about Năstase's cars and property and said that he had not answered his phone to comment. On 22 May the item conveying the message that Năstase would do what Dorin Chirtoacă did when mayor did not contain Năstase's reply. On 23 May, the item from Ion Ceban's public debate included allegations of corruption against some political leaders but did not include their reactions. On 25 May, Andrei Năstase was accused of being corrupt by a guest on an NTV program, but Năstase's opinion was missing. The item on 28 May (Electoral bargaining) about the flash mob organized by the PSRM in front of PL headquarters was unbalanced. It launched allegations of corruption against Năstase and the PL, noting that Năstase allegedly had reached an understanding with the PL to offer protection to PL representatives in the mayor's office. Năstase had neither denied nor confirmed this in social media the item said. The news item on 28 May entitled "Hatred, Andrei Năstase's campaign offering" did not contain the opinions of those concerned.

### **Language and videos**

The election news broadcast by NTV Moldova during the period included adjectives, qualifiers, subjective notes and emphasis all meant to distort facts and influence public opinion. Some items included labels assigned to Andrei Năstase: a nobody, an amateur (29 May), thief – all the thieves and corrupt ones have joined forces, the big unification has taken place (28 May), Iurie Leancă is a thief (22 May), Șalaru is a thief (22 May, 23 May), Năstase—corrupt, unprofessional (30 June).

The differences in the language used in relation to the candidates for Chișinău mayor were obvious in many items. In addition, the station used videos—the one with rats in hospitals—to mislead viewers (22 May).

### **Accent TV**

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

From 21 May to 3 June, this private station with regional coverage broadcast 45 items with electoral content both under the rubric "2018 New Local Elections" and outside it. Most of the items covered the same subjects as NTV Moldova: failed debates organized by the PSRM

candidate Ion Ceban; the platforms of the two candidates; the press conferences of some groups who had announced their support for Ion Ceban and criticized his opponent Andrei Năstase; and other items about the election process. The news items with indirect electoral content covered a children's playground saved from destruction by PSRM councilors, President Dodon's support for the traditional family, and the demolition of an architectural monument in Chișinău.

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

The angle of coverage was the same as that on NTV Moldova. The vast majority of items—32 out of 45—contained breaches of professional and ethical norms with an obvious lack of impartiality and objectivity. Many times reporters mixed facts with their personal opinions and selected information in a biased manner so that one candidate was favored while the other one was disparaged.

PSRM candidate Ion Ceban was favored in the majority of items that concerned him directly or indirectly. He appeared 21 times in a positive context and 5 times in a neutral context. When opening the election news bloc, the anchor frequently announced that two candidates were running in the second round and that Ion Ceban had bested Andrei Năstase by 10% in the first round. The items that quoted or mentioned Ion Ceban provided detailed information about his platform with news from the public debates in which his opponent did not participate; they contained support messages from various groups (athletes, doctors, veterans, patriots, consumers, artists, scientists) and President Dodon's call to vote for the PSRM candidate.

At the same time, Andrei Năstase was covered using subjective titles and texts or comments and/or opinions in 17 news items in which he appeared in a negative context and in 6 in which he was covered in a neutral context. Examples include the news item on 22 May about the fact that Năstase failed to show up for the public debates organized by Ceban. The reporter referred to the first round when another candidate also avoided participating in the debates and suffered accordingly, i.e., independent candidate Silvia Radu who did not make it into the second round although she had been projected to do so. On 24 May, the news item about Năstase's meeting with the electorate emphasized his refusal to participate in the debates and not what he said in the meeting. On 29 May, Accent TV reported that Năstase had divided his team based on ethnicity which created confusion as it became clear in the text that Năstase did not see a problem with the fact that many PPDA members were from different ethnic groups while the title, as formulated, left the impression that there were indeed problems.

In 17 cases, facts were not separated from opinions, and the reporter emphasized various aspects of events. In the item on 25 May entitled "Ceban: PSRM has always been of the people," referring to the inconvenient questions asked of Ion Ceban the reporter noted, "The Socialist candidate did not duck those questions and answered them very clearly." In the item on 25 May "If the mountain does not go to Mohamed, Mohamed goes to the mountain" the anchor talked about Ion Ceban's participation in one of Andrei Năstase's campaign meetings. The item included fake information stating that the participants had applauded Ceban's appearance. The soundtrack contains applause, but the video does not clearly show if they are meant for Ceban or for Năstase while videos broadcast by other TV stations made it clear that the participants were applauding after Andrei Năstase's presentation. On 25 May, the item about Andrei Năstase's visit to Bucharest said that he went to Bucharest instead of meeting with the people. The information was selected in such a way as to put the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate in a bad light implying that he had confused the terms *mayor* and *prime minister* (*primar* and *premier*, in Romanian): "Năstase thinks he had competed for the office of prime minister!" On 26 May, Accent TV aired a biased item entitled "Chirtoacă makes a common front with Andrei Năstase" that reviewed the percentage obtained by the PL in the first round, then spoke about scandals and Dorin Chirtoacă's arrest and ended with problems in healthcare and videos with rats taken from social media.

Additional examples of news items in which facts were not separated from opinions include the following: “Although the debates even had a moderator, Andrei Năstase said he had other things to do” (26 May), “Andrei Năstase could not give a clear and unambiguous answer” (29 May), “A few days before the election, Năstase suddenly remembered illegal construction,” and “PSRM representatives are de jure those fighting against illegal construction” (29 May), “the closer to the election, the more resonant the promises,” “Năstase promises to turn people’s lives into endless holidays” (31 May), “Năstase could not answer any question coherently” (30 June).

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

In the period monitored, Accent TV broadcast 10 controversial election items, eight of which were unbalanced. For instance, the news item on 23 May about the public debates organized by Ion Ceban contained allegations of corruption against many politicians without including their reactions, and the news item about Ion Ceban’s support by the Consumer Protection Agency alleged that Andrei Năstase had asked the agency for support but did not want to listen to their wishes. The opinion of the PPDA representatives was missing. The item on 26 May in which Maia Sandu allegedly claimed that Andrei Năstase would use the mayor’s office to accumulate political points for the parliamentary elections lacked balance as did the news items about the alleged alliance between Dorin Chirtoacă and Andrei Năstase (26 May), about the allegations regarding PPDA hate speech (28 May), the flash mob organized by PSRM in front of the PL premises (28 May), about the conference of people with disabilities, and about the conference of Moldova’s patriots (30 June).

### **Language and videos**

The language used in relation to the candidates was laudatory about Ion Ceban most of the time, but for Andrei Năstase, the station in some cases resorted to ironic and pejorative language: “Năstase promises to turn city residents’ lives into endless holidays; he wishes to make a Moldovan economic wonder” (31 May), “Năstase unable to conceive coherent answers” (29 May). The station also precisely quoted some sources that used labels in regard to Andrei Năstase or other politicians: “thief,” “corrupt,” and “a nobody.” In one case, the item included manipulative videos that could mislead the public (26 May “Chirtoacă makes a common front with Andrei Năstase”).

## **TV 8**

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

Between 21 May and 2 June, this private TV station with regional coverage covered the campaign in 10 newscasts at 19.00. Overall, the station broadcast 29 direct election items and 2 items with indirect electoral content. The subjects concerned the results of the first round of voting; the announcements made by the parties and the candidates that did not make it to the second round in regarding the candidate they supported; the platforms and activities of the two candidates who remained; and information about the election process. An item broadcast outside the special rubric dedicated to the elections referred to the billboards of the candidates who did not make it to the second round, and in another one dedicated to International Child Rights Protection Day, children were asked what the future mayor should do for them.

The two candidates who continued the run for Chişinău mayor appeared directly or indirectly in the election news on TV 8 as follows: Andrei Năstase (PPPDA/PAS/PLDM) in 14 items and Ion Ceban (PSRM) in 10. Two items concerned Silvia Radu, independent candidate in the first round (21 May), and four items covered the election results in the village of Jora de Mijloc, Orhei District.

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

In general, TV 8 followed the principle of impartiality and objectivity in its election coverage; no obvious political partisanship was noticed. Neither of the candidates was openly favored or

disfavored. Nonetheless, the journalists sometimes displayed slight elements of subjectivity, both in news titles (in tickers) and in some texts. An election item broadcast on 25 May was entitled “Năstase, Ceban’s obsession,” and facts were not separated from opinions in the text about how Ion Ceban “broke into Năstase’s meeting with his electorate.” In an item broadcast on 30 May entitled “Supporters mobilized them,” the text said, “Several NGOs, some completely unknown, announced their support for Ion Ceban”, but also, “a group of teachers has called on Chişinău residents to vote for the pro-European right-wing candidate Andrei Năstase.” In this way, the Socialist candidate Ion Ceban was disfavored in relation to Andrei Năstase. The same manner of presentation of facts was found in the item aired on 1 June entitled “Campaigning on the last day, Ceban and Năstase receive messages of support.” More precisely, the introduction was presented as follows: “Many doctors call on the people to go to their polling stations and to vote for the Socialist Ion Ceban. They argue that his platform is better.” This happened after a few weeks ago Ceban promised medical workers salary increases and even social housing. After airing a declaration made by Ion Ceban on 7 May about the actions he would take as mayor with regard to doctors, the item continued, “This is what Ion Ceban declared on 7 May...., and today, the representatives of a doctors’ association have decided to campaign in his favor.” On the other hand, the text stressed that;

Andrei Năstase, in his turn, has received messages of support from over the Prut from the Mayor of Cluj-Napoca Emil Boc and also from the sportsman Cătălin Moroşanu... And the leader of the European People’s Party has tweeted that Andrei Năstase is an anti-oligarchic candidate, capable of modernizing the capital...

This case, too, shows some favoring of the PPPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate compared with the PSRM one. In total, Ion Ceban was quoted/mentioned 10 times: 6 times in neutral contexts, and 4 times in negative contexts. Andrei Năstase enjoyed four appearances/mentions in positive contexts and six in neutral ones.

In the same context, other items can be mentioned that concerned subjects other than the two candidates for Chişinău mayor. On 21 May, the item about the general results of the first round of voting referring to independent candidate Silvia Radu noted that, “There were more journalists than supporters” at her campaign premises, and Silvia Radu’s declaration about ending her work at the mayor’s office was presented by TV 8 in an item entitled “Farewell, Silvia Radu!” Both cases displayed a slight bias when presenting the facts. Similarly, two items about the appeal lodged by PAS leader Maia Sandu regarding Marina Tauber’s election (“Şor Political Party”) as mayor in the village of Jora de Mijloc inserted elements of commentary/opinion: “They sang in court” (24 May); “They turned the protest into a poetry show,” “after tiring of shouting, the protesters started playing music,” “traditionally, poetry was not missing in the protest of the Şor Party supporters,” “this time, the poet dedicated a few stanzas to Maia Sandu,” and “the microphone was switched off each time they tried criticizing Maia Sandu” (28 May).

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

TV 8 secured a balance of sources in all nine controversial items broadcast by presenting the opinions of all parties concerned. It specified in one case that the two candidates for Chişinău mayor had not commented on the results of Promo-Lex’ report.

### **Language and videos**

Between 21 May and 2 June, TV 8 did not use labels, discriminatory expressions or other linguistic elements that did not comply with professional standards in its election items. Nonetheless, in two items about the elections in Jora de Mijloc, a party concerned used offensive expressions and terms of a private/intimate character about PAS leader Maia Sandu (“the expensive, ungrateful and unscrupulous Maia!,” “You have not been able to build a private life,” “..not making at least one person happy, how do you suggest making people happy?” [22 May], and “a laggard who has done nothing in this life,” [28 May]). The videos used in the election items complied with professional standards. The station did not use collages, archive

images or other elements to distort reality and mislead the viewer or disfavor/favor one candidate or another.

## **Pro TV Chişinău**

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

From 21 May to 2 June, private TV station with regional coverage Pro TV Chişinău covered the second round in 46 direct or indirect election items aired in 12 newscasts at 20.00. The items were inserted both under the rubric “2018 New Local Elections” (27) and outside it (19). They referred to the results of the first round; the campaigns of the candidates left for Chişinău mayor; and the election process. Other items concerned the independent candidate from the first round Silvia Radu; the statements made by PDM representatives about the second round and the telephone tapping of the discussion between Andrei Năstase and his mother; the candidate PAS might have had for the new local elections, and Andrei Năstase’s participation in the march organized by many parents demanding better conditions in school bathrooms. In addition, Pro TV Chişinău broadcast an item in which children spoke about Chişinău’s problems and what they expected from the new mayor, and another one about the opinions of Moldovan MPs about the future mayor’s profile. In three times (on 22 May, 31 May and 2 June), the election news bloc was not delineated from the other news items during the main newscast.

The two candidates for Chişinău mayor appeared directly or indirectly in the election news on Pro TV Chişinău as follows: Ion Ceban (PSRM) in 16 items and Andrei Năstase (PPPDA/PAS/PLDM) in 15 items.

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

On the whole, Pro TV Chişinău followed the principle of impartiality and objectivity in its election coverage; no obvious favoring of a candidate was noticed. However, in several items, the station did not secure the highest level of accuracy inserting elements of commentary/opinions in its news items. In an item about the billboards in which Ion Ceban invited Andrei Năstase to public debates aired on 24 May, the reporter said: “Since yesterday, Ceban has been inviting (Năstase) not only shouting from the rostrum...,” and in another one on the same subject aired on 25 May, the journalist commented on the manner of organizing the debate held by the Socialist candidate as follows: (Ion Ceban) “...delivered his speech in the shade while his supporters and the journalists stood in the sun.” On the same day, 25 May, in an item about Ion Ceban’s presence at a campaign meeting of Andrei Năstase’s, the reporter said, “After a long speech in which he threw insults at his opponent, Năstase bid goodbye and left,” without mentioning either the length of the speech or the insults. At the same time, Năstase appeared in an item about a protest organized by a number of parents and children in which they demanded better conditions in school bathrooms aired by Pro TV Chişinău on 1 June outside the rubric dedicated to election news. Although the item mentioned that both candidates were invited to join the protesters and presented Ion Ceban’s post on social media on the occasion of the International Child’s Rights Protection Day, Năstase was favored not only by appearing directly in the item during an interview and expressing his opinions about the protest and other things but also by Ion Ceban’s absence from the event. In addition, Ion Ceban’s Facebook reaction did not refer to the event tackled by the TV station in the item mentioned and so created the impression that the Socialist did not care about the conditions in school bathrooms.

Andrei Năstase appeared in a neutral context 13 times and once each in a positive and negative light. Ion Ceban was quoted/mentioned 14 times in neutral contexts and twice in a negative context.

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

Pro TV Chişinău secured a balance of sources in all 11 controversial items aired. In one case it specified that the two candidates for Chişinău mayor had not reacted to the results of the Promo-Lex’ report on the irregularities found by the observers in the campaigns of the two

candidates for mayor. In addition, an item broadcast on 21 May entitled “Surveys vs results,” referred to four opinion polls that had inaccurately predicted the results of the first round but presented the reaction and explanation of the data by only one of the companies that had conducted the polls. The TV station would have secured a higher level of pluralism if it had presented the opinions and reactions of all four institutions concerned.

### **Language and videos**

Between 21 May and 2 June, Pro TV Chişinău used proper language that complied with professional standards in its election items. The journalists did not use labels, insults, offensive or discriminatory words, expressions or phrases about the candidates for Chişinău mayor. In an item about the elections in Jora de Mijloc in the newscast outside the special election rubric, a party concerned used labels and offensive words about PAS leader Maia Sandu (“a laggard who has done nothing in this life” 28 May). The videos used in election items were in compliance with professional standards. The station did not use collages, archive videos or other elements to distort reality, mislead the viewer, or disfavor/favor one candidate or another.

### **General conclusions**

The monitoring of 10 TV stations between 21 May and 2 June showed that some broadcasters covered the candidates relatively neutrally while others demonstrated political partisanship, favoring or disfavoring one candidate or another.

- Public station Moldova 1 and private stations RTR Moldova and Pro TV were relatively balanced offering access to both candidates in their news items without obviously favoring or disfavoring either of them.
- TV 8 covered both candidates neutrally but was slightly in favor of PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase who was repeatedly covered positively at the expense of PSRM candidate Ion Ceban who was covered in a negative context.
- National broadcasters Prime TV, Canal 2 and Publika TV that had announced that they would not cover the campaign broadcast a number of items with electoral content favoring PSRM candidate Ion Ceban and disfavoring the PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase.
- Jurnal TV gave access to both candidates in its news items and presented them in different contexts. PPDA/PAS/PLDM candidate Andrei Năstase was heavily favored through exclusively positive coverage while PSRM candidate Ion Ceban was presented negatively but also neutrally and positively.
- NTV Moldova and Accent TV heavily promoted Ion Ceban for Chişinău mayor and disfavored Andrei Năstase who was presented in an exclusively negative light.

### **Recommendations**

- Broadcasters must use monitoring reports as self-regulation tools and remove any obstacles that prevent their work from complying with legal norms and the Journalist’s Code of Ethics. They also must:
  - inform the electorate in a correct, impartial and unbiased manner;
  - renounce assessing/commenting on election events of political parties or their representatives in their news items;
  - remove discrimination when applying the principle of pluralism and diversity of opinion and when granting the right to reply;
  - cover events truthfully without distorting reality by editing or commentary, following the principle of multiple sources.

- The BCC should take action and use the monitoring reports to assess whether the TV stations monitored have observed Moldovan citizens' rights to full, objective and truthful information.
- The BCC should develop intervention tools and apply them promptly and efficiently when broadcasters deviate from legal norms in covering election campaigns in order to secure adequate information for the electorate through broadcasts.