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

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1. 1. General Data

1.1 Project goal: To monitor the performance of mass media during the election campaign and to inform the public including about the access of candidates to media outlets and whether the outlets guarantee pluralism of opinions. The aim is to analyze reporting trends that can affect media outlet performance and compromise their ability to provide truthful, balanced, and comprehensive information to the public.

1.2 Monitoring period: 1 May - 14 June 2015

1.3 Criteria used to select the media outlets to be monitored:

- Audience-impact (national, quasi-national);
- Type of media: broadcast, online;
- Type of ownership: public, private;
- Language (Romanian and Russian).

1.4 Media outlets monitored:

Broadcast media

Moldova 1 (Mesager at 21:00) : public broadcaster, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;

Prime TV (Primele Știri at 21:00): private broadcaster, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;

Canal 2 (Reporter at 19:00): private broadcaster, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian;

TV 7 (Știri at 20:30): private broadcaster, regional coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;

Accent TV (Accent info at 20:00): private broadcaster, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian.

Online print press:

www.unimedia.info (online portal, Romanian);

www.omg.md (online portal, Russian);

www.publika.md (online portal, Romanian);

www.pan.md (online version of *Panorama*, Russian);

www.timpul.md (online version of national newspaper *Țimpul de dimineață*, Romanian).

2. Methodological framework

The full content of the online postings and of one daily newscast on each TV station were monitored for direct or indirect news about the election. Each news item was subjected to an assessment of content and context to establish whether it was favorable or unfavorable to a party or to a candidate. The news items were also analyzed according to the following criteria.

Objectivity/impartiality: According to the journalistic code of ethics, the news must be impartial and objective; it should not favor certain parties/groups/individuals to the

detriment of others. Discriminatory elements in reports and news items are prime indications that the story is presented from the journalist's point of view. Screening the news and a minimal analysis of background and context also imply that the interests of certain persons and not those of the general public are being protected.¹

Fairness and balance of sources/diversity of opinions: To be correct and balanced, articles should present the views of all the parties involved, especially on controversial subjects, and should treat all sides equally.² In addition, mass media outlets must ensure the public has access to a wide variety of opinions in order to help them draw their own conclusions.

Language and images used: Deliberate exaggeration and licentious language such as pejorative expressions or labels for individuals or organizations and images manipulated to show certain parties in a negative light can raise serious questions about the observance of ethical and professional standards. The ethical conduct of journalists is especially in question when videos show things that are not true or that have been fabricated as well as when news items are illustrated with images that have no connection to the accompanying text.

3. Monitoring data



Involvement in the campaign

From 15 to 30 May 2015, public TV station Moldova 1 broadcast 54 items that directly or indirectly covered the elections. Most covered events organized by the candidates but also included the activities of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) and non-government organizations (NGOs). Among the news items that indirectly covered the elections were the ones about the renovation of Soroca Fortress with the participation of Speaker of Parliament Andrian Candu, the investigation into the lawsuit against Banca de Economii, the inspection of national roads under repair carried out by the Minister of Transport, and the negotiations with farmers and solutions offered by Parliament, among others.

Objectivity and impartiality/political partisanship

The vast majority of relevant news stories broadcast by Moldova 1 were objective and unbiased; no deviations from journalistic norms were recorded. The only ones that displayed problems of bias and of separating facts from opinions were the following: (i) the story on 15 May about, "...a new scandal involving socialist MPs who chose to make the law with their fists" ("...un nou scandal cu implicarea deputaților socialiști care au ales să facă legea cu pumnul"); (ii) the item on the celebration of Sports Day in Hâncești on 18 May that highlighted the municipality's future plans instead of focusing on the day's activities and contestants' opinions; and (iii) the item on 26 May about the intention of Bălți municipal councilors to hold a referendum in order to gain greater financial autonomy.

¹ Simona Ștefănescu, Riscurile comunicării mediatice în timpul conflictelor

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

Moldova 1 featured 11 candidates in its news pieces. The Democratic Party (PDM) benefited most as representatives of this party were featured in 11 news stories and were mentioned in 3 more in positive (10) and in neutral (4) contexts. The PDM got more coverage than other parties due to stories of an indirect nature that featured their members, i.e., the Minister of Transport and Road Infrastructure and the Speaker of Parliament. Other candidates got less coverage in different contexts. The Liberal Democratic Party (PLDM) was featured in 4 stories and was mentioned in 3 more in both positive and neutral lights, the Liberal Party (PL) was featured in 2 and was mentioned in 5 in positive, neutral, and negative contexts, the Socialist Party (PSRM) appeared in 4 news stories and was referred to in 4 others in neutral, negative, and positive contexts, the Electoral Bloc European Popular European Party – Iurie Leancă (PPEM) was featured in 3 stories and was mentioned once mainly in a neutral light, the Communist Party (PCRM) was featured once and was referred to 3 times mainly negatively, and Our Party (PN) was featured twice and was mentioned once in neutral and positive contexts.

Diversity of opinions/fairness and balance of sources

During the reporting period, the public broadcaster provided pluralism and diversity of opinions in relevant stories to a certain degree. Most frequently, Moldova 1 featured politicians as sources as they were directly or indirectly quoted 35 times. Civil servants were quoted 18 times, experts 9 times, and citizens 13 times. In 16 cases, Moldova 1 used other sources. It is to be noted that of the total number of 91 sources, only 10 were female representing 9%. This indicator reveals an obvious lack of gender balance and was worse than in the previous reporting period when it was 20%.

During the reporting period, Moldova 1 broadcast 6 reports that covered conflicts, 3 of which failed to present the sides of both parties involved. Examples of unbalanced reports were the following: (i) the news item on 15 May about the quarrel between the PSRM MPs and employees of a construction company; (ii) the story on 20 May about the statements of Prime Minister Gaburici about signing the concession contract for the International Airport at Chişinău under unfair conditions; and (iii) the news story on 26 May about the intention of the PCRM councilors of Bălţi municipality to hold a referendum in order to gain greater financial autonomy. _

Language and videos

The language and videos used by the public broadcaster from 15 to 30 May were in line with journalistic norms.

In conclusion, the performance of public broadcaster Moldova I was relatively balanced providing some pluralism of opinions, diversity, and balance of sources. The TV station also slightly favored the PDM which benefited from most features in a positive context.



Involvement in the campaign

Prime TV with national coverage actively covered the election campaigns of mayoral candidates for Chişinău and for other town halls in places across the country. Overall during the reporting period, 53 news stories were broadcast most of which directly covered the elections. Fewer items covered election issues indirectly but still carried an information load that could influence the electorate's perception of certain candidates such as the news item about the construction of European roads featuring the Minister of Transport and Road Infrastructure (member of the PDM), items about solutions for farmers quoting the Speaker of Parliament (member of the PDM), but also reports about various charity activities carried out by the Edelweiss Foundation. The vast majority of new reports that covered the elections across the country as a rule portrayed various difficulties faced by certain communities followed by information about persons who provided solutions for these problems, mostly members of the PDM. Prime TV always mentioned the political affiliation of mayoral candidates. This TV station chose, however, not to report the results of the opinion poll conducted by CBS AXA according to which the PDM, PLDM, and PCRM would gain fewer votes together than the PSRM alone.

Objectivity and impartiality/political partisanship

Compared with the first reporting period, Prime TV aired more stories (8 compared with 4) that obviously displayed the attitude of the reporter toward the subjects. In most cases, they were about the launches of the campaigns of various candidates for town halls across the country, and the headlines, the crawling titles, and the leads were full of adjectives meant to present their actions in a rosy manner such as the lead: “A community center, modern educational institutions and places for leisure time. This might sound like a description of place in a European country, but we are talking about Fundurii Vechi Village in Glodeni District. Local people say that you can make a decent living here, you can find a proper job, and you have places to rest.” (22 May). Certain news items showed candidates in a somewhat whimsical manner such as the report on Vasili Chirtoca, PCRM candidate for Chisinau mayor releasing a musical composition on 21 May. An example of not separating facts from opinions is the news story about the launch of the PN team into the campaign on 26 May in which the author made conclusions about the party's candidates and added personal counter arguments on the lack of integrity of certain candidates on the list. There are more details in Case Study No. 4 in the Annex.

Relevant stories featured the activities of 8 candidates. In terms of coverage, the PDM was the most favored party as its representatives were featured in 28 news stories and were mentioned in 3 more. In all, 27 stories were positive and 4 were neutral. The PLDM was quoted in five cases and was referred to once, and the PCRM was quoted in four and was referred to twice. The context was mainly positive and neutral for the PLDM and mainly negative and neutral for the PCRM. The PSRM was mentioned twice, and the Movement Ravnopravie (MR) was mentioned five times; each was featured once mainly in a negative light. Prime TV also covered candidates from PPEM, PN, and PL, mainly in a neutral light.

Diversity of opinions/fairness and balance of sources.

Most of the relevant stories broadcast by Prime TV during the reporting period presented information from a single perspective without background details and lacking experts' opinions that could have provided comprehensive information about the election. Politicians were the most quoted sources at 50, most of them members of the PDM. The principle of diversity of sources was thus not observed. Civil servants were quoted 21 times, citizens 32 times, and experts 5 times. Other sources were cited 9 times. It is to be noted that the number of citizen sources increased fourfold from the first reporting period. They were quoted in support of actions of candidates outside the capital. Concerning gender balance, there was a small increase in female sources from the first period at 25%, compared with 21%. The percentage increased as citizens were quoted more often.

During the reporting period, Prime TV broadcast 5 stories about controversies; all failed to provide the right to reply to all parties involved. The unbalanced news item on 15 May featured the quarrel at a construction site involving several socialist MPs, and the unbalanced item on 19 May was about the request of the communist councilors of Chişinău to revoke the parliamentary immunity of five socialist MPs for their altercations at the Chişinău Municipal Council and at a construction site in the capital. In the news item on 19 May, the end of the story mentioned that, "Socialists haven't so far commented on the accusations," without clarifying if the reporter had made any attempt to contact them. On 22 May, the PPEM candidate for Chisinau mayor, Oazu Nantoi, criticized the initiative of communist councilors in Bălţi for demanding more autonomy for the municipality. He declared that due to their actions and initiatives, the PCRM and the PSRM endangered the country's statehood; these two political parties were not provided the right to reply.

Language and videos used

Throughout the monitoring period, Prime TV did not exaggerate or use inappropriate language in the news pieces aired.

In conclusion, Prime TV departed from professional standards and performed like a party outlet and the mouthpiece of the PDM. The number of biased stories increased and pluralism of opinions, diversity, and balance of sources decreased compared with the first reporting period.



From 15 to 30 May 2015, Canal 2 broadcast 35 stories with direct or indirect electoral content. Most were either about press events organized by candidates or about their reactions to statements or accusations launched by their opponents. There were no items about the activities of the CEC or educational items. In fact, with few exceptions the news stories were produced in a similar way as those on Prime TV employing the same angles and the same sources. Even the same formula was applied: first present problems faced by communities and then feature candidates who could solve those problems. Canal 2 chose

not to report the results of the opinion poll conducted by CBS AXA according to which, the PDM, PLDM, and PCRM together would gain fewer votes than PSRM alone.

Objectivity and impartiality/political partisanship

Of the total of 35 relevant news items, 10 had problems with objectivity and impartiality. Among those were items about the proposals of candidates supported by the PDM such as the news report about the mayoral candidate for Sofrincani Village, Edineț District (17 May); the item with the headline “Successful projects in Ialoveni,” about the achievements of the mayoral candidate for Ialoveni and the priorities of the retiring mayor of Costești Village; and the item about the achievements of the mayor of Rublenița Village, Soroca District (19 May) during 16 years in office. On 16 May, Canal 2 aired 3 relevant news items, all of which exclusively promoted 6 candidates of the PDM!

There were several cases when reporters did not separate facts from opinions: (i) the news story about the declared income of Ilan Shor, MR mayoral candidate for Orhei on 26 May that commenced with the phrase “A millionaire but not really... (“Milionar si nu prea...””) and ended with the fact that he is involved in the Banco de Economii lawsuit; the news story on the PN joining the campaign under the headline “Candidates with integrity but not really” (“Candidați integri si nu prea”) on 26 May; the news item featuring the quarrel on a construction site in which several socialist MPs were involved on 15 May; and the news story about the launch of a PL candidate’s campaign on 17 May. On 17 May, Canal 2 also broadcast a news item about the Family Festival held in Călărași. Neither the candidates nor the party that organized the festival was mentioned; however, in the images one could see the PDM logo on the stage backdrop and the note: Trustworthy Mayors! There are more examples in Case study No. 4 in the Appendix.

The relevant stories covered 8 candidates; the PDM was at the forefront as it was featured in 25 items, 16 in a positive context and the rest in a neutral one. Other candidates were not featured as often. The PCRM was featured in 3 news items and was mentioned in 2 others in negative and neutral contexts, the PL was in two features in positive and neutral contexts, PLDM was featured and mentioned once in a neutral and once in a positive context, the PPEM was featured in 3 news stories in a neutral context, and the PN was featured in 2 news items and mentioned in one, all in a neutral context. Both the PSRM and the MR were featured once and were mentioned in 2 and in 4 news stories, respectively, mainly in a negative context.

Fairness and balance of sources/diversity of opinions

The relevant news items broadcast by Canal 2 during the reporting period had problems with diversity and pluralism of opinions. In most cases journalists quoted politicians; 39 were from the PDM. Other sources quoted included civil servants 12 times, citizens 55 times, and other sources 11 times. Female sources amounted to 37%; most of them were ordinary citizens. Note that the number of citizens quoted increased sevenfold from the first reporting period; however, experts were quoted very seldom although their opinions were required in several cases when the news item should have been balanced by details provided by experts, commentators, or political analysts to help viewers better understand the topics discussed.

During the reporting period, Canal 2 broadcast 6 stories about controversies. Three of them were balanced, but in the other 3 the right to reply was not provided. These included the news item of 15 May about the involvement of socialist MPs in the altercations at a construction site and at the Chişinău Municipal Council, the news story of 19 May about the PCRM request to withdraw parliamentary immunity of the socialist MPs who were allegedly involved in those quarrels, and the news item about the accusations launched by the PPEM candidate Oazu Nanatoli against the PCRM and the PSRM concerning the intention of Bălţi municipal councilors to hold a referendum (22 May).

Language and videos used

Throughout the monitoring period, Canal 2 didn't air any images that departed from ethical and professional standards. The language used was acceptable; the reporters did not assign labels to candidates.

In conclusion, Canal 2 breached professional standards and openly campaigned in favor of the PDM. The TV station performed in a rather biased way and did not ensure pluralism of opinions, diversity, and to some extent balance of sources.



TV 7

Involvement in the campaign

During the reporting period, this TV station with regional coverage broadcast 45 stories that covered various political figures. Most of the items directly featured the election: the launches of the campaigns of Chişinău mayoral candidates from several parties (the PLDM, PL, PPEM, among others), campaign activities, statements and accusations launched by certain candidates against the competition, CEC activities, and opinion polls about the mood of the electorate in the last month of campaigning. Other stories in the TV 7 newscasts had an indirect electoral connotation tackling, for example, the activities of MPs in the context of farmers' strikes and developments in the Banca de Economii lawsuit .

Objectivity and impartiality/political partisanship

Of the 45 news pieces broadcast that directly or indirectly covered the elections, only 5 had problems with regard to objectivity. An item on 18 May covered the court hearing in the Banca de Economii lawsuit in which MR leader Ilan Shor was involved. Two groups protested in front of the law courts, one in favor of Shor and the other demanding his detention. The first group was granted more time (19 seconds), and one of the participants was featured. The second group was provided only 4 seconds to respond with a brief mention that, "others are demanding that Shor be placed in detention," accompanied by an image of protestors chanting "Thieves to prison." In the newscast on 18 May there was a story that presented the opinion of Igor Dodon of the PSRM about the union platform. The voice off screen that quoted Dodon in Russian skipped the part when he directly attacked the "the little mayor" ("primăraş" in the original version in Romanian). Another news story in which the author's attitude toward the subject was obvious was about the initiative of the

communist councilors in Bălți to hold a referendum (26 May) to gain more rights. The news item contained the author's comment whereas the *vox* included the opinions of the citizens who did not support the idea of holding a referendum.

In this reporting period, TV 7 covered 11 candidates who were either featured or mentioned in various contexts. The PLDM benefited from most features (8) and mentions (6), their campaign activities were featured neutrally (7 times) or positively (6 times). For instance, on 20 May alone the station broadcast 3 news items featuring the PLDM in a positive light. Even though one of the items did not mention the PLDM directly or the Mayor of Cricova where an avenue with the busts of Moldovan rulers was inaugurated, it nonetheless favored the incumbent mayor, a member of the PLDM, by mentioning that the Mayor of Cricova would cover the costs. The PCRМ was featured and mentioned in 5 news stories, and the PSRM was featured in 5 and mentioned in 6 reports. These two parties were featured in a neutral context (6 and 5, respectively), but also in a negative one (each 3 times), and in a positive light (once and 3 times, respectively). Next came the PN with its representatives featured in 4 news stories and mentioned in 3 others (mainly in neutral and positive contexts), the PPEM which was featured and mentioned in 3 news items (mainly in a neutral context), the PDM which was featured in 2 news stories and was mentioned in 1 (mainly in a neutral light), and the PL which was featured in 2 news stories and mentioned in 6 (mainly in a positive light).

Diversity of opinions/fairness and balance of sources

The sources quoted by TV 7 reporters in the relevant news items to a certain degree lacked diversity. Most were politicians who were quoted 45 times, followed by civil servants 10 times and experts 5 times. There was an increase in the number of citizens interviewed to 18 from 4 during the previous reporting period; other sources were quoted 10 times. The number of female sources was 18 (8%), whereas male sources numbered 84, an obvious lack of gender balance.

Broadly speaking, the journalists from TV7 observed the principle of pluralism of opinion and balance of sources as only 3 of 14 news items on controversies lacked balance. On 21 May the news story with the headline “*SP* made public the names of the 22 suspects involved in the theft of a billion” (“*SP* a făcut publice numele a 22 de persoane suspectate de implicare în furtul miliardului”) presented only the accusations launched by the leader of the PSP. Other pieces lacking balance were about the extension of the home arrest warrant for Ilan Shor on 18 May and the accusations launched by Igor Dodon of the PSRM according to which the PLDM and the PDM attempted to expel him from the elections via the CEC on 27 May.

Language and videos used

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

In conclusion, TV 7 performed in a relatively balanced, objective, and unbiased way though not all broadcasts managed to provide a diversity of opinions, and sources and gender representation were unbalanced. Compared to other parties, PLDM was slightly favored due to the greater number of features aired about it, mainly in a positive context.



Involvement in the campaign

The monitoring data show that the broadcaster Accent TV continued to be actively involved in the campaign tackling several political issues and election events. During this reporting period, Accent TV broadcast 70 stories with a direct or indirect electoral content mainly about (i) various events organized by the PSRM both in Chişinău and outside the capital, (ii) various activities carried out by the PN, (iii) the accusations made by the representatives of the Casa Noastră of Moldova (PCNM) party, and (v) the campaign launches and the visions of certain candidates on solving specific problems of Chişinău municipality including PL candidate Dorin Chirtoacă, PPEM candidate Oazu Nantoi, PLDM hopeful Serafim Urechean, Party Democracy at Home (PDA) contestant Oleg Brega, Party Law and Justice (PLD) candidate Marcel Darie, and PCRM hopeful Vasili Chirtoca. Other stories concerned the controversies around the Chisinau Municipal Council's enactment of a package of laws, the attempts of the PSRM to hinder their enactment, the involvement of socialist MPs in the disputes over the construction of an apartment building, and developments in the Banco de Economii lawsuit.

Objectivity and impartiality/political partisanship

Of the 70 relevant news items, 18 were biased (nearly 25%). In most cases, the information was presented from one perspective only. On 18 May, Accent TV covered the launch of Dorin Chirtoacă's campaign, and the item contained the direct address of the candidate who referred to the positive things he had accomplished since becoming Mayor of Chişinău. In the second part, however, the reporter referred to a "scandal" in 2011 concerning the procurement of trolleybuses with the involvement of a Romanian company. The reporter did not quote the source that provided this information, and the fact that he chose to include negative information revealed his bias. Concerning the campaign launches or other actions of the other candidates, the reporter expressed doubts about their statements.

Other news items that included the reporter's attitude were about the campaign launch of PCRM candidate Vasili Chirtoca on 15 May, the statements of PN hopeful Ilan Caşu about his competitor Dorin Chirtoacă in which the reporter referred to anonymous experts to present Chirtoacă in a negative light (22 May), and the protests of PCNM members and its leader Grigore Petrenco in front of the Nobil Hotel (28 May). The item included vivid images showing Petrenco's attempts to enter the hotel and his fight with the security guard. He was portrayed as a hero fighting against oligarchs (28 May). Another biased news item was about the accusations launched by the independent candidate for Chisinau mayor Oleg Cernei on 27 May who blamed Dorin Chirtoacă for chaos in public transportation. In the background information, the reporter reminded the audience about the decisions of Mayor Chirtoacă to change the routes of public minibuses and mentioned that, "The mayor was not satisfied, so he changed the routes of minibuses a few more times, overnight, without notification, thus inconveniencing capital residents even more." Another news item displaying an obvious lack of separation of facts from opinions was about the accusations against PLDM candidate Serafim Urecheanu that he had not resigned from the Court of Accounts when his campaign commenced (28 May).

Bias is obvious also from the way the reporter selectively quoted the candidates leaving out basic information on their party platforms and including statements/accusations of corruption instead (see for instance the statements of Oazu Nantoi, the PPEM candidate, during a TV show on 22 May and the accusations against Mayor Chirtoacă launched by Mihai Cîrlig, the PPRM candidate on 26 May).

In some cases, the news items presented information based on candidates' statements on TV shows (on Accent TV or other broadcasters) that were refuted in the same news story by indirectly quoting anonymous experts. For instance, in the news story that presented the opinion of Marcel Darie, the PLD candidate for Chisinau mayor, on 26 May with respect to the issue of mansards, at the end the reporter referred to anonymous experts who were against mansard roofs. These examples clearly reveal the bias of the TV station toward various candidates. See more examples in Case Study No. 3 in the Annex.

In terms of coverage of parties, Accent TV frequently featured them in newscasts. During the reporting period, the TV station targeted 15 including those in races for municipal offices. The news items mainly focused on the campaign for Chişinău mayor; the most favored party based on the number of features and the context was the PSRM as its representatives were featured in 18 news stories and were mentioned in 2 others in the vast majority of cases in positive (14) or in neutral contexts (6). An example of an item favoring the PSRM was the one about the participation of Igor Dodon in Slavone Culture Days in Tvardiţa (25 May) where the PSRM leader spoke about his party to the parishioners in a church accompanied by several priests. Another news item aired on the same day referred to a march to promote Christian values organized by the representatives of the Metropolitan of Moldova. Igor Dodon spoke about family values and his intention to cancel the Law on Equal Opportunities when the PSRM gained a legislative majority. On 26 May, Accent TV covered the opinion poll conducted by CBS AXA to highlight repeatedly that the PSRM would gain more votes than all the other governing parties together.

The PCNM with Grigore Petrenco at the forefront had relatively few features (7) and mentions (1), in neutral and positive contexts 6 and 2 times, respectively. The news items about this candidate were produced based on statements made at press conferences about holding two candidates on the PCNM list for municipal councilors in detention (18, 22 and 29 May), about exposing election banners and the court decision allowing the display of those banners (25 May), and about the protest organized in the front of the office of Vlad Plahotniuc and the court decision to ban the demonstration in front of the Nobil Hotel (28 May).

The PN was featured 5 times and was mentioned once in positive and neutral contexts 4 and 2, times respectively.

Other candidates were featured either in neutral or negative lights and seldom in a positive context. PL candidate for Chisinau mayor Dorin Chirtoacă was the most criticized candidate as he was mentioned either in a negative context 16 times or in a neutral context (5 of 6). The PLDM was featured in 5 news items and was mentioned 7 times in a negative context 6 times but also in positive (4) and neutral (2) lights. The PDM was mentioned 6 times in a

negative context, and the PCRM was featured in 8 news items and was mentioned 2 times in positive (3), negative (3) and neutral (4) contexts.

Fairness and balance of sources/diversity of opinions

During the reporting period, Accent TV failed to diversify sources. Relevant news items quoted politicians 87 times, civil servants 7 times, expert 6 times, citizens 12 times, and other sources 10 times. In the vast majority of cases the sources were male (77 %); nevertheless female sources showed a twofold increase compared with the previous reporting period.

In covering controversial issues, the principle of providing information from all sources was not observed. Of the 34 stories that contained accusations and that required a second opinion, only 9 were balanced; the rest presented only one side, as a rule that of the PSRM and the PCNM. For instance, among the stories lacking balance were the news items about PSRM actions against unauthorized construction (15 May), about the corruption allegations launched by the PSRM against Chisinau city hall (19 May), the Chisinau Municipal Council session on 19 May, the accusations of Mihai Cîrlig of the People's Party of the Republic of Moldova (PPRM) against Dorin Chirtoacă (20 May), the opinion of Ilan Cașu of the PN about Mr. Chirtoacă (22 May), the story about keeping the PCNM candidates in detention (18, 19, 29 May), the news item about Mr. Chirtoacă causing chaos in public transportation (27 May) the story about the demonstration organized by Grigore Petrenco in front of the Nobil Hotel (28 May) that ended with the words, "as of now, Vladimir Plahotniuc has not commented in any way on what happened."

In some cases, the reporter mentions at the end of news items that Accent TV did not succeed in finding the persons concerned to request their comments and to provide them with the right to reply. This is a vague statement as it does not clarify whether the journalist made any attempts to ensure a balance of sources.

Language and videos used

The pieces with direct or indirect electoral content broadcast by Accent TV did not deviate from professional norms in the use of images or sounds to the extent that the message was compromised.

In conclusion, Accent TV broadcasts deteriorated during this reporting period as the number of biased and unbalanced items and those lacking pluralism increased. The TV station extensively campaigned in favor of the PSRM at the expense of the PL.

ONLINE PRESS

www.omg.md

Involvement in the campaign

During the reporting period, Omg.md posted 121 articles directly or indirectly referring to the elections and the campaign and thus continued to be the most active in this regard. The most productive day was 22 May when the site posted 15 news items about the elections. The articles on Omg.md were generally short or long (65) items that covered controversial

subjects or were critical of certain candidates (55). One posting about the launch of a CEC hotline for questions about elections was educational. The topics selected for publication mainly focused on criticizing the actions of the governing parties, the campaigning of the PN of Renato Usatîi and Ilian Caşu, the proceedings in the lawsuit against citizens Amerberg and Grigorciuk labeled by the site as “political detainees,” the protest in front of the Nobil Hotel, and the campaign “Not a single vote to the governing parties!” launched by the opponents of the current government.

Objectivity and impartiality

Similar to the previous monitoring period, 33% of the news items posted on Omg.md were biased, and most of the information pieces did not observe the principles of impartiality and objectivity. Often, the news items contained the authors' value judgments and used adjectives and labels that conveyed their personal attitudes toward the candidates.

The articles posted covered a small number of political parties and candidates. The PDM was the party most covered on the site appearing in 69 items including 59 in negative and 13 in neutral contexts. The PLDM ranked second (35 items, 32 in a negative context) followed by the PL (32 items, 28 in a negative context). In the absolute majority of cases (22 of 26), the PCRM was portrayed in an unfavorable light as was MR (20 of 27). In contrast, PN and its leaders Renato Usatîi and Ilian Caşu were featured in a positive context in 19 of 24 articles that concerned them; in other cases the context was neutral.

Fairness and balance of sources/diversity of opinions

Similar to the previous monitoring period, many of the stories on Omg.md were based on only one source thus lacking balance and not observing the principle of diversity of opinions.

The 121 relevant articles were based on the statements of 101 sources, including 49 politicians, 37 experts, 13 civil servants, and 2 ordinary citizens. Gender balance was ignored: of the 101 sources only 9% were women. All politicians quoted by Omg.md during this period were men.

The portal did not provide a real diversity of opinions in any of the stories on controversial topics. Thus, 45 of the 55 items that covered accusations or conflicts (81.8% of the total) presented just one opinion/position, and in the remaining 10 the opposing sources were not provided equal space. For example, on 15 May the site published the news story “PCRM: We Will Put Anyone Who Sides With Russian Speakers Out of the Way” (“ПКРМ: Мы будем «мочить» всех, кому симпатизируют русскоязычные избиратели”). The next statement in the lead which was not attributed to any source or confirmed in the text, was, “The Communist Party announced its new strategy in the municipal election campaigns: segregation of the electorate based on the ethnicity.” The text was based on statements by PCRM municipal councilor Victor Gurău about the party’s electoral tactics but included interpretations and speculation by the author. On the same day, the site published the news story “Caşu: The Difficulties Faced by Chişinău are the Consequences of the Total Corruption of the Municipal Government” (“Кашу: Проблемы Кишинева являются следствием прогнившей от коррупции муниципальной власти”) which essentially was

campaign advertising harshly criticizing the present municipal government. The portal failed to provide the right to reply to the accused.

Language and images used

The language on Omg.md was full of insinuating and pejorative expressions aimed at portraying the opponents of the political forces favored by the site in an awkward context. As in the previous monitoring period, the articles contained labeling and generalized accusations and sometimes personal attacks. For instance, the news item posted on 27 May “Plahotniuc’s Organizations Consider that Bulgarians Are a Minority in the Taraclia District” (“Структуры Плахотнюка считают, что болгары составляют меньшинство в Тараклийском районе”) was accompanied by a collage without a caption but with the logo of station Publika TV and the inscription “There is a profession that tells lies every evening.” It contained labels and generalizations about the guests on a talk show on the TV station such as, “...the main expert of the TV station who has been arraigned in a criminal proceeding in Romania on pedophilia,” and “...the editors of the TV station that daily transmits the lying propaganda of Plahotniuc.”

www.pan.md

Involvement in the campaign

During this reporting period, Pan.md published 66 items that directly or indirectly covered the elections including 45 news items, 20 stories on controversial issues, and one text that could be regarded as educational (the launch of CEC hotline). The main issues selected for coverage by the site administrators were (i) opinion polls about the elections, (ii) introducing the candidates for mayor of the capital, (iii) reactions toward the RISE investigation about the media empire of Plahotniuc and the involvement of Andrian Candu, (iv) the activities and statements of the PSRM and the PN, and (v) protests by the opponents of the current government.

Objectivity and impartiality

Pan.md covered a limited number of candidates and political parties and featured them in a selective manner in various contexts, often without observing the principles of impartiality and objectivity. The PSRM and the PN were favored by the site and were featured mainly in positive and neutral contexts: the PSRM was mentioned 15 times in a positive and 8 times in a neutral context; PN was featured 10 times in positive and 9 times in neutral contexts. In contrast, the PDM had the most features (30), but they were generally either neutral (17 cases) or negative (12). The PLDM, PL, and PCRM were also frequently mentioned mainly in a neutral context. PLDM appeared in items that were neutral 13 times, negative 6 times, and positive once; the PCRM was mentioned in 12 neutral, 4 negative, and 5 positive items; and the PL was in 12 neutral, 5 negative, and 2 positive postings. During the monitoring period, the PPEM was featured in a neutral context only.

Most articles posted on Pan.md (52 or 78.8% of the 66 relevant items) were unbiased, whereas in 14 cases (21.2%) the articles were biased and the author’s opinion could easily be perceived by readers as value judgments were inserted and headlines contained adjectives that favored or criticized the candidates. An example of a biased feature was the news item on 28 May “Moldovan Tined Foods Will Return to the Russian Market”

(“Молдавские консервы вернутся на российский рынок”). The headline is erroneous because it implies that the decision had already been made in spite of the fact that the text referred to a press release of the Russian news service Rospotrebnadzor that said that currently the documentation submitted by the Moldovan companies was being examined. The story's lead revealed the aim of posting this item, namely promoting the PSRM: “With the active participation of Igor Dodon on the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic Cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation, joint work was established on the resumption of tined foods deliveries from Moldova to Russia.”

Fairness and balance of sources/diversity of opinions

Politicians were the most quoted sources at 38 of 67 or 56.7% of the total. The other sources were 16 experts, 10 civil servants at different levels, and 3 ordinary citizens. Gender balance was not observed as only 6 women were quoted representing 9% of the total number of sources.

In 13 of the 20 articles about various controversial subjects or accusations against candidates the opinions of all parties concerned were not provided; thus they were unbalanced. Some news items were exclusively based on statements that criticized certain candidates, but their opinions/reactions were not presented. On 19 May Pan.md posted the news story “Socialists Will Cancel the Chisinau Municipal Council Decisions on Real Estate: Ceban” (“Социалисты отменяют решения КМС по недвижимости: Чебан”) based on the statement of socialist MP Ion Ceban who said that all decisions taken on 19 May 2015 by the council on the sale and rental of land would be appealed in court, also mentioning the statement of PSRM mayoral candidate Zinaida Greceanii who had previously claimed that three months after the elections all unauthorized construction would be stopped. Ceban directly accused the municipal council of theft stating that each of the councilors who voted for these decisions was truly a thief. The opinions of those who had voted for the decision were not presented. The news story “On 10 June the PN will have a March For Fair Elections” (“Наша партия проведет 10 июня марш За честные выборы”), posted on 27 May reported on the press conference held by Renato Usatîi in which he announced that a national event “For Fair Elections” would be organized. The article also contained accusations by Usatîi against the PLDM that had tried to discredit the PN and further accused them of using foreign funds. The PLDM position on these grave accusations was not presented.

Language and images used

In most cases, the language used on Pan.md was in line with journalistic norms, and images were not used for political partisanship. In some texts (as a rule, editorials and opinion articles), pejorative expressions and labeling were used; however, they did not exceed the limits allowable in a political pamphlet.

www.publika.md

Involvement in the campaign

During the monitoring period, Publika.md posted 76 articles with a direct or indirect electoral content including 69 news reports, 5 stories about controversial subjects, and 2 texts that could be considered educational (the launch of CEC hotline and the CEC press

release about checking the electoral rolls). The overriding theme on Publika.md was the activities of the PDM and its candidates across the country; in fact, the content of the site was a virtual journal of the PDM election campaign.

Objectivity and impartiality

Publika.md observed the principle of impartiality in only half of the relevant articles as of the 76 items, only 39 were unbiased (51.3%). The absolute majority exclusively promoted PDM candidates for mayors and/or councilors presenting their solutions for community problems and their plans for improving peoples' lives. These articles revealed the political partisanship of the portal. The PDM and its representatives were covered by Publika.md 52 times, including 37 times in positive and 15 times in neutral contexts. Next was MR and its candidate for mayor of Orhei Ilan Shor with 12 mentions although they were mainly in a negative light. Other candidates were featured far less often. The PL appeared in 5 neutral, 2 positive, and 2 negative items; the PCRM was in 5 neutral and 3 negative postings; the PN was in 4 neutral and 2 negative items; the PSRM appeared 4 times negatively and once neutrally; the PPEM was in 3 neutral and 2 positive texts; and the PLDM appeared in 3 neutral items and 1 positive item.

Publika.md posted items about PDM candidates daily, but candidates of other parties were not the main subjects in other postings. Essentially, these items were nothing but veiled election advertising for the PDM and its candidates, all following the same script: the most troublesome issues of a community are presented followed by the solutions proposed by a single mayoral candidate, usually without mentioning that this candidate is supported by the PDM.

Here are a few examples from the extensive list of such postings:

15 May: the news item "They Pin Their Future on The Future Mayor. The Residents of a Village in the North of the Country, Without Water and Natural Gas" about the solutions offered by the candidate for mayor of Balasinești, Oleg Garabajiu, for supplying the community with water and natural gas.

16 May: the news item "Kindergartens and Infrastructure Remain the MAIN Problems of Ocnîța: Here are the Solutions" about the troubles faced by the residents of Ocnîța but also about the "efficient solutions" proposed by candidate for mayor Igor Voleac.

16 May: the news item "The Team of the Democratic Party from Nisporeni Joined the Local Election Race. What Priorities They Highlight" that mentions that, "They had invested millions of euros in infrastructure in the communities in Nisporeni District and wished to continue the project they had started."

17 May: the news story headlined "IT IS A DISASTER" that went on to say that residents of Sofrincani Village in Edineț District do not have access to basic services and hear only about the difficulties of water supply. PDM mayoral candidate Valeriu Șipitca offers solutions in the item and the author said that, "For 10 years he has run a successful agricultural business and he wishes that the troubles faced by his native village could be solved just as quickly and efficiently as those in the business he manages."

17 May: “SOLUTIONS before Elections. People from Cimișlia Still Hope to Get Rid of a Landfill” about the solutions provided by candidate Olga Coptu who, “...intends to establish a partnership with NGOs.”

Similar examples of direct campaigning by PDM candidates were recorded nearly every day on Publika.md

Fairness and balance of sources/diversity of opinions

Compared with all the other sites monitored, Publika.md quoted the most sources. In the 76 relevant items, 243 sources were cited; however, this large number did not ensure a diversity of opinions in all cases because several voices delivered the same message. Nearly half of the sources (114 or 46.9% of the total) were ordinary citizens, another 59 were politicians, 23 were civil servants, 20 were experts, and 27 were others. Overall, gender equality was observed as of the 243 sources, 93 were women, representing 38.3 % of the total; this is the best score for this indicator among the sites monitored.

During the reporting period, Publika.md avoided covering controversial subjects related to the elections posting only 5 such items. In 3 cases the rule of balancing sources was followed, but the other two stories were unbalanced as only one opinion/position was presented.

Language and images used

The language on Publika.md during the monitoring period was appropriate without exaggerations, labeling, or offensive expressions about the subjects and or parties.

www.timpul.md

Involvement in the campaign

During the monitoring period, Timpul.md posted 47 relevant articles: 33 were short news reports, 12 were stories that covered controversial issues or included accusations against candidates or parties, and 2 were educational items (the CEC press release about checking the electoral rolls and the video spot aimed at encouraging voter turnout produced by the NGO Promo-LEX). From the point of view of themes, the articles tackled campaign activities, the results of opinion polls, and the opinions of various persons about the candidates.

Objectivity and impartiality

Most of the stories posted on Timpul.md (38 of 47 or 80.9% of the total) observed the criteria of unbiased coverage of the issues, however 9 articles were biased as the headlines and the texts contained authors' value judgments. The PSRM was the party most often criticized as of 15 features posted about it, 10 were negative. The PL and the PDM were covered in mainly neutral and positive contexts (each had 7 features in neutral, 5 in positive and 1 in negative contexts), the PLDM was mainly featured in a neutral context (9 of 14 mentions) but also in a negative light (4 cases), the PN had 7 neutral features and 2 negative ones while the PPEM was not covered very often but appeared mainly in a neutral context.

Fairness and balance of sources/diversity of opinions

The sources quoted by the site were, as a rule, politicians (21 or 61.8% of the total), but they also quoted 7 experts, 5 civil servants, and 1 ordinary citizen. Timpul.md completely ignored gender balance as only 2 sources were female which represented 5.9 % of the total; this is one of the lowest ratings for this indicator among the sites monitored.

Regarding diversity of opinion and balance of sources, all postings on controversial topics except one (11 of 12) were unbalanced as they presented only one side of the conflict.

On 17 May Timpul.md posted the article “The Archives Do Not Burn. Zina Karabina Wishes to Become Mayor of Chişinău” in which several accusations were made against PSRM candidate for Chişinău mayor Zinaidei Greceanîi, including allegations that she illegally acquired the Cojuşna winery that had received millions of lei from Banca de Economii that were not paid back and reminding readers that, “After 7 April 2009, forced by the Communists, she promised mothers via TV that police would fire point blank at their children if they went out on the streets. As a consequence, she is known as Zina Karabina....” This article looks like an opinion piece; however, it was posted under the Politics section without providing the right of reply or mentioning the previous statements of the PSRM candidate concerning these accusations.

Language and images used

The language was appropriate; however, there were several cases of using pejorative expressions that could have been avoided.

www.unimedia.info

Involvement in the campaign

Unimedia.info indirectly or directly covered the local general elections in 78 articles, including 65 short or long news stories, 9 items about conflicts, and 4 educational items (the launch of CEC hotline and press release about checking the electoral rolls and the launch of an interactive map about the elections by Unimedia). The site published articles on various themes including about the campaign activities of several candidates; however, PLDM candidates were featured the most.

Objectivity and impartiality

In most items published by Unimedia.info (69 of 78 or 88.5 % of the total), the author's position/opinion was not obvious; these articles on the whole were unbiased. Nevertheless, 9 articles did pass on the authors' value judgments. In addition, the frequency and the context in which PLDM candidates, leaders, and representatives were featured showed a clear bias in favor of this party. Of the 30 features, the PLDM was presented in a positive context 18 times, 11 times in a neutral context, and once in a negative context. The PSRM was covered more often in a neutral (9) or negative (6) context, MR and its candidate Ilan Shor, the PL, the PCRM, the PDM, and the PN were covered in various contexts but mainly in a neutral one. PPEM was featured 3 times, always in a neutral light.

Fairness and balance of sources/diversity of opinions

The overwhelming majority of sources quoted (51 or 83.6% of the total) were politicians, followed by civil servants (7) and experts (3). Unimedia.info ignored gender balance during the reporting period as only 1 female source was quoted.

Two thirds of the texts regarding conflicts (6 of 9) lacked editorial balance because they presented only one perspective/opinion. For example, the news piece “The reaction of the PSRM to the accusations launched by the communists: the PCRМ is an accomplice in the theft of the century that took place in city hall” (“Reacția PSRM la acuzațiile aduse de comuniști: PCRМ este părtaș la furtul secolului din primărie”) posted on 19 May contained accusations by PSRM MP Ion Ceban against the PCRМ municipal councilors calling them accomplices in the theft. The lead of the news report mentioned that these statements were the reaction of the PSRM to accusations made by PCRМ representatives on the Chișinău Municipal Council; however, the item did not specify what kind of accusations (by the PCRМ against the PSRM). Also, the article lacked the replies of councilors accused of complicity in theft and the comments of city hall representatives.

Language and images used

The language and images in election-related news items posted on Unimedia.info during the monitoring period were appropriate without linguistic exaggerations or faked images.

4. General Conclusions

- Monitoring results from 15 to 30 May 2015 revealed a deterioration in the performance of most media outlets as they were more biased, did not comprehensively cover the election campaign, and did not ensure diversity of opinions to the proper extent focusing instead on intensive campaigning in favor of certain parties and candidates and in some cases on criticizing/discrediting the political opponents of the favored candidates.
 - TV stations Moldova 1 and TV 7 performed in a relatively balanced and unbiased way providing a pluralism of opinions and a diversity of sources. From the point of view of the frequency and the context in which electoral competitors appeared in newscasts, Moldova 1 slightly favored the PDM whereas TV7 slightly favored the PLDM.
 - Prime TV and Canal 2 both with national coverage massively favored the PDM, as its candidates and representatives were featured in most items, mainly in a positive context. In many cases broadcasts could be categorized as open campaigning in favor of a certain candidate.
 - Accent TV massively favored the PSRM through positive news reports on election-related events. At the same time, Accent TV clearly criticized the PL as in most cases its representatives appeared in a negative light.
 - The portal Omg.md campaigned for PN and its candidates Renato Usatfi and Ilian Cașu and vehemently criticized the governing parties, especially the PDM but also the current government of Chișinău.
 - The site Pan.md openly favored the PSRM and PN presenting them mainly in a positive context.

- Publika.md intensively promoted the PDM candidates for mayors and councilors including using veiled election advertisements.
 - Timpul.md often criticized the PSRM and the candidates of this party; some PCRМ candidates were also criticized.
 - Unimedia.info clearly preferred the PLDM through the frequency and the context in which its candidates, leaders, and representatives were portrayed.
- Pluralism of opinion was sacrificed to editorial partisanship and the unilateral coverage of issues.
- Most items about controversial subjects failed to balance sources and did not grant the right to reply to the parties accused.
- There were very few educational items for citizens.
- Gender balance improved somewhat; however, the tendency to mainly quote male sources persisted.

ANNEX

Case Study No. 3: Accent TV prepares a special section “Electoral 2015” that seriously violates legal and journalistic norms

This study is based on the existing regulatory framework for media coverage of the general local elections on 14 June 2015 and on the quantitative and qualitative content analyses of the main daily newscast on Accent TV from 15 to 30 May 2015.

Regulatory framework

Electoral Code Article 64 (1) Public broadcasters, within all program services, and written media founded by public authorities are obliged to observe the principles of fairness, balance and impartiality while covering elections.

Regulations on the Coverage of the Election Campaign during general local elections on 14 June 2015 by media outlets in the Republic of Moldova, paragraph 10: Electoral competitors shall participate in the election campaign under equal conditions and shall enjoy non-discriminatory treatment when allotting air time and using the space in mass media outlets.

Paragraph 19. In the informative and news programs of the audiovisual institutions, events about the election campaign will be reflected respecting the provisions of articles 47, 64 and 64 (1) of the Election Code and Article 7 of the Broadcasting Code.

Paragraph 21. In the newscasts and articles of print media, election-related events will be covered without commentaries and in such a way as to avoid distorting the message of the electoral contestants and of the Central Electoral Commission.

From the **Declaration regarding editorial policy for the election campaign** approved by BCC:

Accent TV: 21. Election campaign events may be covered in the news edition (newscasts), only in line with the legal provisions and in such a way as to avoid distorting the message of the electoral contestants.

Findings from the content analysis:

During the reporting period in the main news program “Accent info,” Accent TV broadcast a wide variety of items and stories under the special headline “Electoral 2015” that with few exceptions featured the candidates for the position of Chişinău mayor. Analyzing this segment and the news program as a whole highlighted the following points:

- Accent TV has opinions about candidates that are displayed in the headlines and the length of items, by comments on the statements of certain persons, by the lack of relevant sources for controversial topics, and by using techniques better suited for disinformation and propaganda than for journalism.

Here are a few examples.

- a) In the newscast of 18 May, Accent TV broadcast the subject “The PSRM launched the campaign: Moldova without oligarchs, Moldova without unions” (“PSRM lansează campania: Moldova fără oligarhi, Moldova fără unioniști”) with a total length of 2 min 7 seconds, but not as part of Electorala 2015 in spite of the fact that PSRM is participating in the election.
- b) In the same edition, during the Electorala 2015 segment the item “Urecheanu promised to fire all employees of Mayor's Office” (“Urechean promite concedierea tuturor colaboratorilor din primărie”) appeared with a length of 1 min 18 seconds. In the story, however, we found out that Urecheanu intended to fire only incompetent officials, not all of them. The question is, did the author of the report wish to inform or misinform the audience? Misleading headlines are a propaganda technique; those who use it know very well that people in a hurry very often read only the headlines.
- c) Among the 5 subjects in the special segment was the item with the headline “Chirtoacă is proud of the roads in the capital” (“Chirtoacă este mândru de drumurile din capitală”) with a length of 2 min 18 seconds. At the end of the item, the reporter reminded viewers about the “big” scandal about the purchase of the new trolleybuses making reference, maybe for greater balance and credibility, to anonymous experts who believed that a fraud was committed. The reporter did not consult competent authorities to confirm or to rule out the alleged fraud. It is obvious that the reporter had the right to enrich the subject with additional information, but it should have been done according to professional ethics. On 18 May, candidates Gr. Petrenco, Z. Greceanii, V. Chirtoacă, were also featured, all of whom at certain times had been involved in scandals.
- d) On 20 May Electorala 2015 contained 5 items, 2 of which used images from the talk show "Glavnoe" on TV 21. This is a common practice for Accent TV. We don't know under what conditions these images are “borrowed,” but it seems like the TV station does its best to pack as many subjects as possible into the special segment. Often this looks awkward. For instance, one headline was “Cernei: city hall needs Oleg Cernei” (“Cernei: primăria are nevoie de unul ca Oleg Cernei”) in which the subject actually is a candidate for the municipal council. Or the item “The budget depends on the level of happiness of Chișinău residents: Chirtocă” (“Bugetul depinde de nivelul de fericire a chișinăuienilor: Chirtocă”) in which at the end the reporter found it necessary to repeat the candidate's “ambitious” (cited) engagements.
- e) On 21 May, the first item under Electorala 2015 had the headline “Urecheanu promises new schools and kindergartens” (“Urechean promite noi școli și grădinițe”), and at the end the reporter reminded viewers about his promises in 2009 to increase wages and pensions. It would not be incorrect to apply the same technique to all candidates, especially in cases when campaign promises are not fulfilled.
- f) The edition of 22 May contained 9 more stories with electoral content that are relevant to this case study for multiple reasons. Let us quote a few headlines: “Who will be the first to be released from detention, Shor or Amerberg and Grigorciuc” (“Cine va ieși primul din arest: Shor sau Amerberg și Grigorciuc?”); “Greceanii: Our pride is our professional team” (“Greceanii: mândria noastră este o echipă profesionistă”); and “The PL infringed the provisions of the Electoral Code” (“PL a

încălcă prevederile Codului electoral”). The authors of these items definitely enriched the written Romanian language: "Victor Cebotari, candidat la *f-ția* (?), *al cărui echipă* este una demnă..” , ”necesită lucrări ample de solubrizare (?), ”ca candidatul”, ”s-a majorat *simțibil*”, ”blocurile au fost ridicate pe *trenurile* de joacă pentru copii *și parcuri*.., iar *ridicare* (?) lor...”. Additionally, in a report we learned that the editorial office contacted Iurie Ciocan, the head of the *District* (instead of Central) Election Commission. In another edition we learned that we have a "National Anti-corruption *Council* (instead of Center). The final straw in this edition was the subject “Nantoi urges the population not to vote for the parties in power” (“Nantoi îndeamnă populația să nu voteze pentru partidele de la putere”) produced by using images from the talk show on TV station “1+1” in which the participants talked in Russian with no subtitles in Romanian. A similar situation was the news item about the concerns of PCNM leader Gr. Petrenco about the destiny of Amerberg and Grigorciuc who were not released from detention to run for municipal councilor.

- g) Of the 7 subjects in Electorala 2015 on 27 May, some are noteworthy. For instance, the first item began with the reporter's statement, “In the middle of the election campaign, the PSRM was overwhelmed by a wave of frustrations” (“În toila campaniei electorale la adresa PSRM a început lansarea unui val amplu de provocări”); you start doubting that these words were from the party’s lawyer. In another item, the reported says at the end, “Even if Urecheanu's plans seem to bring freshness to the capital, there is no doubt that the politician avoided revealing from where he would collect the necessary funds for implementing the projects” (“Chiar dacă planurile de viitor ale lui Urechean par a readuce prosperitatea capitalei, cert este că politicianul a evitat să declare de unde va lua sursele financiare suficiente pentru a demara proiectele vizate anterior.”) We would like to point out that in the same edition in an election-related report based on the “1+1” talk show, another mayoral candidate (M. Darie) also spoke about future plans, however the question of where he would find the funding for bus stations; for bigger, faster, and more comfortable transport; and for compensation for poor people and when the taxes would increase was not raised, although it would have been appropriate to do so. In a different item about elections featuring candidate for municipal council O. Cernei, three persons are criticized: an employee of the mayor’s office (V. Butucel), a councilor (Iu. Topal) and the incumbent mayor (D. Chirtoacă). The reporter said, however, “Accent TV did not manage to contact D. Chirtoacă (only?) to comment on the accusations.” (“Postul Accent TV nu a reușit să ia legătura cu D. Chirtoacă (numai?) pentru a comenta acuzațiile.”) Instead, the reporter reminded viewers one more time that without notice, the mayor had changed several minibuses routes causing a lot of inconvenience to the residents of the capital; this was also mentioned by Cernei in the same news item. The final gem in that edition was “Free public transportation will solve the traffic jam problem: Brega” (“Transportul public gratuit va rezolva problema ambuteiajelor: Brega”). The report presented a segment from the talk show "Glavnoe" on TV 21. In a speech, Brega talked about transport and the reporter filled the space in between with information that the municipal mayor should be a member of the government movement. O. Brega spoke about transport whereas the reporter spoke about the current members of the Government (Bashkan and head of AȘ). Was this a mistake or was it done on purpose?

Nearly every edition of Accent info that included Electorala 2015 was full of examples of inappropriate coverage of the elections, but we will highlight one case we believe is an unusual one and which we consider to be far outside any journalistic rules. The case is about two subjects broadcast on 29 May.

The first item had the headline “Turned upside down, the Final Bell at Sadova Gymnasium” (“A răsunat ultimul clopoțel în gimnaziul Sadova”), lasted 5 min 16 seconds (the longest one so far), and covered to a great extent the participation of PSRM leader I. Dodon at the celebration of the final bell (graduation) in his native village. In the news report, the length of speaking time for the gymnasium principle, Ludmila Dodon, was 1 minute while that of I. Dodon was 1 minute 30 seconds. The PSRM leader not only congratulated students on finishing the school year but also handed out “Igor Dodon” diplomas to the best ones. What is troublesome? Television should cover such events, however it is not proper to trail after political candidates, especially to show them on the screen for long stretches during an election campaign. The right approach is either the presence or the absence of all party leaders in the race, otherwise Accent TV is guilty of political partisanship and thus is not performing in line with legal provisions or its own editorial policy adopted for this period.

Another item had the headline “Political campaign now even at the Final Bell?” (“Agitație electorală chiar și la ultimul sunet?”) and a length of 2 minutes 30 seconds. The report apparently was about the final bell at the Gh Asachi Lyceum in Chișinău. Its authors, however, in a strange and awkward way embellished it with images of Principal B. Volosatîi, who was featured a week ago and introduced as an avid supporter of the PLDM and who gave a speech at the launch of the election campaign of Urecheanu. That speech was also incorporated. Later, the authors of the item got back to the lyceum and told us that the same principal during a school gathering, “...made a more or less political speech.” Actually, the principal had read an innocuous quatrain. The graduation was actually attended by Mayor D. Chirtoacă who gave a nonpolitical speech.

The way this subject was covered raises a lot of questions that have only one answer: the authors misled and misinformed the audience. The subject is political and is presented in an awkward way that had nothing to do with journalism. The headlines flipped two situations as campaigning was extensive at the Sadova Gymnasium but not at the Gh. Asachi Lyceum. We thus see reality in a false mirror.

Conclusions:

- In the way it produced most of the items broadcast in the Electorala 2015 segment, Accent TV gave the impression that contrary to its journalistic vocation it is politically affiliated and favors some candidates and is critical of others thus denying appropriate information to voters, again contrary to journalistic principles and contrary to professional norms and legal provisions.
- Accent TV featured some electoral subjects during the reporting period by awkwardly using disinformation techniques that might have brought dividends to certain candidates but did not help voters to get a better understanding of their electoral options.
- The way Accent TV performed demonstrates its inability to stand by the commitments made in its declaration to the CCA and the CEC and to its audience

during the election campaign. These commitments, which are very good in and of themselves, are thus discredited.

Recommendations: Accent TV should honor its commitments in the declaration on editorial policy for the 2015 general elections and should faithfully follow them in order to demonstrate their respect for the law, for their profession, and for their audience.

Case Study No. 4: During the election campaign, Prime TV and Canal 2 continue to be the mouthpieces of the PDM

This study is based on the existing regulatory framework for media coverage of the election campaign for local general elections on 14 June 2015 and on the quantitative and qualitative content analyses of the main newscasts of the day from 15 to 30 May 2015 on two TV stations: Prime TV and Canal 2 .

Regulatory framework

Electoral Code Article 64 (4): Media outlets will not adopt privileged treatment toward electoral competitors due to their social status and/or the positions held by its candidates.

(5) During the electoral period, public broadcasters and written media founded by public authorities will make a clear distinction in their products between fulfilling official duties and the electoral activities carried out by persons who do not fall under the incidence of Article 13, paragraph (3).

Regulations on the Coverage of the Election Campaign during local elections on 14 June 2015 by media outlets in the Republic of Moldova, paragraph 20: The activity of the central public administration, including the activity of the mayoralty, village/town/city councils and of the district (*rayon*)/municipal councils shall be presented separately from debates and electoral advertising, according to the provisions of the Election Code, Broadcasting Code and this Regulation. No candidate in the elections will have priorities despite his function.

Paragraph 21. In the newscasts and articles of print media, election-related events will be covered without commentaries and in such a way as to avoid distorting the message of the electoral contestants and of the Central Electoral Commission.

From the **Declaration regarding editorial policy for the election campaign** approved by CCA:

Prime TV. 4. The TV station Prime will cover the election campaign during the local general elections on 14 June 2015 in a fair, balanced, and impartial way, will strictly observe the Regulation on the Coverage of the Election Campaign during the local general elections on 14 June 2015 by media outlets approved by the decision of the Central Electoral Commission No. 32266 as of 17 April 2015 and the Concept on the Coverage of the Election Campaign during the local general elections on 14 June 2015 by the audiovisual institutions in the Republic of Moldova approved through the Decision of CCA.

TV Canal 2 4. The TV station Canal 2 will cover the election campaign during the local general elections on 14 June 2015 in a fair, balanced, and impartial way, will strictly observe the Regulation on the Coverage of the Election Campaign during the local general

elections on 14 June 2015 by media outlets approved by the decision of the Central Electoral Commission No. 32266 as of 17 April 2015 and the Concept on the Coverage of the Election Campaign during the local general elections on 14 June 2015 by the audiovisual institutions in the Republic of Moldova approved through the Decision of CCA.

Findings as a result of content analysis:

Prime TV 22 May Primele știri (First News) at 21:00.

The segment “Alegeri Locale 2015” (Local Elections) contained:

- An item about the PCRM mayoral candidate for Chișinău V. Chirtoca with the headline “Hit the deck DJ Vasili” (“Hai dă-i bătaie DJ Vasili”) with a length of 1 minute 56 seconds in which the subject is portrayed as somebody who loves and sings songs.
- A report about the PPEM candidate for Chișinău mayor with the headline “Nantoi will deal with communist councilors in Bălți” (“Nantoi se ia de consilierii comuniști din Bălți”) with a length of 54 seconds in which the subject attacks the initiative to gain autonomy for Bălți municipality through a referendum.
- An item about the initiative of PDM women to hold a fair with the headline “Charity Fair in Chișinău” (“Târg de caritate la Chișinău”) with a total length of 2 minutes 5 seconds. The first subject is a young beneficiary of the charitable event, but her name is mentioned only in the subtitle. The PDM candidate for Chișinău mayor, M. Babuc, is featured twice in the same image, gently patting her. The story continues with M. Babuc and then PDM leader Marian Lupu speaking.
- An item with the headline “European conditions in a village in Moldova” (“Condiții europene într-un sat din Moldova”) referred to Fundurii Vechi Village in Glodeni District. The length of the item was 1 minute 38 seconds. The intro of the story read “A community center, modern educational institutions and places for leisure time. This might sound like a description of place in a European country, but we are talking about Fundurii Vechi village in Glodeni District. Local people say that you can make a decent living here, you can find a proper job, and you have places to spend your free time.” (“Un Centru comunitar, instituții de învățământ moderne și locuri de agrement. Pare o descriere a unei localități dintr-o țară europeană. Însă este vorba despre Fundurii Vechi din raionul Glodeni. Localnicii spun, că aici poți trăi decent, îți poți găsi un loc de muncă și ai unde-ți petrece timpul liber.”) The story continued with three persons speaking—one from the recreation center, one from the kindergarten, and one from the community center—without being introduced either verbally or in subtitles. Only the final speaker is introduced, i.e., Emilia Vieru who has been mayor of the village for 8 years during which over 20 infrastructure projects were completed with a total budget of 16 million lei. Nothing is mentioned

about the PDM mayoral candidate running for a third term; the icon on her shirt is the only indication of her affiliation.

Of the 2 items that featured PDM candidates, 1 can be categorized as veiled political campaigning. The way in which the headlines were formulated set certain tones for the content.

Canal 2 22 May Reporter at 19:00.

The segment *Alegeri locale 2015* contained:

Item 1: “Nnanto criticizes communist councilors in Bălți” (“Nantoi îi critică pe consilierii comuniști din Bălți”), length 52 seconds.

Item 2: “Musical talent of Vasile Chirtoca” (“Talentul muzical al lui Vasile Chirtoca”), length 2 minutes 3 seconds.

Item 3: “Charity Fair by PDM women” (“Târg de caritate de la femeile democrat”), length 2 minutes 41 seconds.

These items are nearly identical to those on Prime TV, only they are presented in a different order with somewhat different headlines and sometimes with changes in the content. For instance, the third item in addition to PDM candidate M. Babuc and PDM leader M. Lupu also featured Dm. Parfentiev, Deputy Minister of Information Technology and Communication.

Item 4: “Projects for Talmaza, Ștefan-Vodă District” (“Proiecte pentru Talmaza”), length 2 minutes 31 seconds.

Even though the fourth item was placed under the *Alegeri Local 2015* rubric, it did not mention that Vl. Pleșca, mayor of the village for 6 years, was running again on the PL list. Instead, on the same day in an item aired on Publika.TV “A village in Ștefan Voda is full of problems. Children freeze in schools, roads are very bad” (“Un sat din Ștefan Vodă, plin de probleme. Copiii îngheață în școli, iar drumurile sunt foarte proaste”), we learn that “Renovating the lyceum is among the priorities of mayoral candidate Vladimir Pleșca” (“Reparația liceului este una dintre prioritățile candidatului pentru funcția de primar Vladimir Pleșca”); however, not a single word is mentioned about the party supporting him. The lyceum was built 30 years ago, the windows had not been replaced, and the roads are bad, but the candidate in 6 years had managed to repair 2 kindergartens. If we unravel the message we find that in Fundurii Vechi where the mayor is a PDM member there are European living conditions whereas in Talmaza, where the mayor is a PL member there are tons of troubles. Because the items were broadcast on national channels, they have a great deal of relevance for the communities involved; however, we have reason to believe the aim was to persuade the residents of the two communities to vote “in the right way.”

Prime TV 25 May *Primele știri* the *Alegeri locale 2015* segment:

The first and only item “Education: the priority of democrats” (“Educația: o prioritate a democraților”), length 1 minute 55 seconds is about the PDM mayoral candidate for

Chișinău, Monica Babuc at a meeting with the teachers of the Education and Science Institute.

Canal 2 25 May Reporter at 19:00

Item 1: “Check-ups before the elections” (“Verificări înaintea alegerilor”), length 35 seconds was a news report from CEC.

Item 2: “They will rest in a modern summer camp” (“Se vor odihni într-o tabără modern”) length 2 minutes 8 seconds was a boastful item, just like the headline, about Bobeica Village, Hâncești District where PDM member Lilian Musteață is mayor.

We note that, on 1 June 2014, TV Publika informed viewers that, “Residents of Bobeica community, Hâncești District will have tap water by the end of the year. A construction project on water supply and sewage for this community was launched today,” and also that, “The work was made possible due to the support of MPs of the PDM.” Also here, PDM MP Mihail Socan is quoted: “From the national budget, thanks to the support of MPs of the DPM, 2,700,000 lei were allocated for this project. We also received funding from the Environmental Fund. We help many mayors, not only the ones from our party.” (http://www.publika.md/motiv-de-bucurie-pentru-locuitorii-comunei-bobeica--raionul-hancesti-in-curand--oamenii-vor-avea-apa-potabila-la-robinet_1952651.html)

We also note that on 17 January 2015, the publication *Ziarul Național* mentioned in one article among others that, “The biggest profits from contracts signed with state institutions in 2014 were gained by PDM MP Mihail Solcan,” and that “The most profitable contract was signed in April 2014 with the town hall of Bobeica Village, Hâncești District” to implement a project on water supply and the removal and discharge of waste water. The publication concluded that despite the fact that the construction work should have ended in autumn, “The residents of Bobeica community still had neither water, nor sewage facilities.” (<http://ziarulnational.md/interese-licitatii-de-125-de-milioane-de-lei-castigate-de-deputati-si-ministri/>)

On 3 April 2015, the head of an NGO in the village made a post on the platform anticorupție.md: “Fraudulent schemes with land at Bobeica Town Hall, Hâncești District” with the involvement of “SRL Mirconcord from Bobeica (who is very close to Bobeica Mayor Lilian Musteață).” (<http://anticoruptie.md/sesizare/scheme-dubioase-cu-terenuri-la-primaria-bobeica-hancesti/>)

After learning these details, we rhetorically ask the questions, How do we choose addresses and subjects? How do we do the research? and Is this media product the result of a journalistic effort or of a party order?

Prime TV 26 May Primele știri the Alegeri locale 2015 segment:

Item 1: “Essential solutions for problems in Bălți” (“Soluții *esențiale* pentru problemele din Bălți”) length 1 minute 15 seconds about the PDM candidate for Bălți mayor Serghei Chiseliov. The adjective in the headline suggests that he has the best solutions for all the problems faced by the city. To avoid extensive presence on the screen, the moderator sums up the list of grandiose proposals by the candidate.

Item 2: “PN launches its campaign” (“Partidul Nostru's-a lansat în campanie”), length 1 minute 6 seconds. The item ends with candidate for Chişinău mayor I. Caşu telling viewers about his team which is committed to personal integrity. The moderator doubts the candidate's words and reminds viewers that one member of the team, Al. Petcov, was fined for offending a prosecutor and for aggression against policemen.

Canal 2 26 May Reporter at 19:00 the Alegeri locale 2015 segment:

Item 1: “Millionaire Shor with an annual income of 25 thousand lei” (“Milionarul Shor cu venit anual de 25 de mii de lei”), length 1 minute 8 seconds.

Item 2 “Candidates with personal integrity but not really” (“Candidaţi integri şi nu prea”), length 1 minute 12 seconds was an item aired by Prime TV with the headline “The PN launches its campaign.”

Item 3: “Solutions for problems in Bălţi” (“Soluţii pentru problemele oraşului Bălţi”), length 1 minute 18 seconds was aired by Prime TV with the headline “Essential solutions for problems in Bălţi.”

Item 4: “Successful Projects in Ialoveni” (“Proiecte de succes în Ialoveni”), length 2 minutes 47 seconds is a flattering story about mayor Gh. Caracuian who managed to spend 8–10 million lei each year for the needs of the community, and “the results are visible.” It is not noted that in 2011 Gh Caracuian stood as an independent candidate. Judging from the headlines we find that in the case of the PN, their candidates “have personal integrity but not really” whereas in the case of Ialoveni, the projects are “successful.”

Let us do the job of the television station and remind ourselves that last year the platform moldovacurata.md published the article “Bread from the company of the son-in-law” (“[Pâine de la firma ginereului](#)”) that states that “at the end of 2013, Ialoveni town hall organized only one public tender and on that basis selected the company that would supply food to three kindergartens in the town for half a year. Only one company submitted a bid; it was Ialpanis Ltd. run by mayor's son-in-law. Moreover, with respect to this case, CNI conducted an internal investigation and found that the mayor ‘created a conflict of interest by signing the acquisition contract.’” (<http://www.moldovacurata.md/interese-avere-la-vedere/integritatea-persoanelor/contractele-de-achizitionare-a-painii-semnate-de-primarul-orasului-ialoveni-cu-ginerele-sau-ar-putea-fi-anulate>)

It appears the TV station was not interested in learning all the information but instead had another goal. So, from Ialoveni we move to nearby Costeşti where investments in the past 4 years amounted to 37 million lei, and mayor V. Bortă is standing for re-election though this time it is not clear on behalf of which party. Of course “he will not stop here.” The mayor of Costeşti was elected from the list of the PL. In 2013, the Court of Accounts accused him of purchasing an official car costing 250,000 lei from the funds intended for the day care center for children with special needs. Why is there so much reverence for a PL mayor? Maybe because the procurement of the Skoda car was decided by the PL and PDM councilors? (<http://www.jc.md/s-a-pricopsit-cu-skoda-din-banii-destinati-copiiilor/comment-page-1/>)

Conclusions:

- Prime TV and Canal 2, contrary to legal and journalistic norms, cover election subjects in a selective way.

In their Alegeri Locale 2015 segments, both stations continued to feature electoral contestants favoring PDM candidates in a disproportionate manner.

When preparing the Alegeri locale 2015 segments, Prime TV and TV Canal 2 often and consciously told half the truth which is the equivalent of lying on a national level, thus enormously compromising the information appropriate for voters.

Repeated recommendation: Prime TV and TV Canal 2 should use the terrestrial frequencies through which they broadcast and which are national patrimonies for the benefit of the voters and not the parties.