



MEDIA MONITORING DURING THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN **for the general local elections of November 5, 2023**

Report No 3
October 24 – November 4, 2023



This report is part of the “Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion and Accountability in Moldova” (MEDIA-M) project funded by USAID, the British Embassy in Chisinau, and implemented by Internews in Moldova, which aims to promote the development of independent and professional media and to create a media sector more resistant to political and economic pressures. The opinions expressed belong to the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the funders.

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

Monitoring period: October 1 – November 5, 2023.

Criteria for selecting media outlets for monitoring

- Audience/impact: national, regional.
- Type of media: audiovisual.
- Form of ownership: public, private.
- Language of broadcasting: Romanian, Russian.

List of monitored media outlets

Moldova 1 (21:00) – public television, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;
TVR Moldova (18:00) – television with national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian;
Jurnal TV (19:00) – private television, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;
Pro TV (20:00) – private television, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian;
TV 8 (19:00) – private television, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;
Cinema 1 (19:00) – private television, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;
ITV (20:00) – private television, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;
Orizont TV (19:00) – private television, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian;
Vocea Basarabiei TV (18:30) – private television, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian;
Exclusiv TV (20:00) – private television, national coverage, broadcasts in Romanian and Russian.

2. Methodology

We monitored the entire content of the main daily newscasts from each television station, analyzing materials of direct and indirect electoral nature. The materials were subjected to a content and context assessment to determine whether they were favorable or unfavorable to any electoral competitor.

The materials were analyzed according to the following criteria of objective media coverage.

Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship

According to professional standards, the Journalist's Code of Conduct and the Code of Audiovisual Media Services, news should be impartial and objective and should not favor any particular parties/groups/persons to the detriment of others. The presence of discriminatory elements in reports and news is a first criterion showing that reality is presented through the journalist's opinions. Filtering news and minimal analysis of the story and context also suggest that the interests of certain actors are being protected instead of the interests of the general public.

Fairness and balance of sources/pluralism of opinions

In order to be fair and balanced, materials must present all the sides concerned, especially when it comes to controversial topics, and must treat opponents equally. The media must also

ensure access to a multitude of diverse views that would help the audience create their own opinion on whatever happened.

Language and images used

Exaggerations and deliberately used indecent language, such as derogatory language or labels attributed to certain individuals or organizations, 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 questioned most of the time when images present aspects that do not correspond to reality, when they are rigged, but also when news stories are illustrated with images that are not related to the text.

Acronyms used in the report

CEC – Central Electoral Commission

CPA – central public administration

LPA – local public administration

CC – Constitutional Court

EU – European Union

CES – Commission for Emergency Situations

ESDP – Political Party, European Social Democratic Party

PCRM – Political Party, Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova

LP – Political Party, Liberal Party

PSRM – Political Party, Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova

EGP – Political Party, Ecologist Green Party

NOI – Political Party, *Noua Opțiune Istorică (New Historical Option)*

PN – Political Party, *Partidul Nostru (Our Party)*

RPM – Political Party, Republican Party of Moldova

CUOM – Political Party, Centrist Union of Moldova

EPP – Political Party, European Party

PDPM – Political Party, Popular Democratic Party of Moldova

CP – Political Party, Conservative Party

NLP – Political Party, National Liberal Party

LDPM – Political Party, Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova

DA – Political Party, *Democrația Acasă (Democracy at Home)*

PRM – Political Party, Party of Regions of Moldova

PSPM – Political Party, Popular Socialist Party of Moldova

PPDA – Political Party, *Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr (Dignity and Truth Platform Party)*

AUR – Political Party, *Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor (Alliance for the Union of Romanians)*

NUP – Political Party, National Unity Party

PAS – Political Party, *Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate (Action and Solidarity Party)*

PACE – Political Party, *Partidul Acasă Construim Europa (Building Europe at Home Party)*

PC – Political Party, Party of Change

PDCM – Political Party, Party of Development and Consolidation of Moldova

PNP – Political Party, Party of National Progress

CUB – Political Party, *Coaliția pentru Unitate și Bunăstare (Coalition for Unity and Prosperity)*

MAN – Political Party, *Mișcarea Alternativa Națională (National Alternative Movement)*

NMP – Political Party, National Moldovan Party

ALDE – Political Party, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

3. Monitoring data

Moldova 1

Involvement in the electoral campaign

During the reporting period, the public TV channel broadcast 77 news items of direct and indirect electoral nature. The direct electoral news items (64) referred to the priorities listed in the electoral programs of the candidates for the post of mayor of Chisinau Municipality, detention of the Chance Party representatives for illegal financing, accreditation of observers for the local elections, news items with and regarding the candidates taking part in the electoral debates organized by Moldova 1 and Radio Moldova, suspension of broadcasting licenses of the six TV channels based on the CES's decision, the events involving members of the Chance Party before they were suspended from the elections, the promises made by Evghenia Gutul, the head of the autonomy, to the residents of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia and Orhei Districts, conclusions and findings regarding the electoral process made by Promo-LEX and ENEMO, etc. All the direct electoral news items were included in the "Elections 2023" section. The news of indirect electoral nature (13) referred to the assistance provided by the Government for the cold season, possibilities of reducing the tariff for electricity for household consumers in the north of the country, possibilities of increasing teachers' salaries, funds allocated for modernization of the sphere of education, subsidies for farmers, the progress made by the Republic of Moldova on its way to European integration, etc.

Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship

The news and reports broadcast by Moldova 1 during the reporting term mostly complied with the principles of neutrality, fairness, and impartiality. During the monitoring term, the public TV channel focused on the topics referring to the priorities of the electoral competitors who were offered more or less equal access. However, as to the manner of presentation, Moldova 1 slightly disfavored the candidates from the Chance Party and Diana Caraman, the PCR candidate, the candidate for the post of mayor of Chisinau Municipality. For instance, in the case of Diana Caraman, Moldova 1 insisted on the incident during the electoral debates, when she had been excluded for not complying with the rules of speaking in Romanian. In the headlines to the news items, Moldova 1 reporters emphasized certain aspects which were on the verge of facts mixed with opinions, presenting the candidate in a negative way, e.g. "*New Communists, Old Habits*" or "*Caraman Sees Nazis Everywhere*."

Moldova 1 quoted and mentioned 16 candidates in the news items of direct electoral nature. Ion Ceban, the MAN candidate, who was the protagonist of nine materials, had the widest coverage, being mildly favored by the greater number of news items compared to the other candidates. He is followed by Lilian Carp (PAS) and Vasile Bolea (Revival Party) who appeared in four materials each. The ESDP candidate, Vadim Brinzaniuc, was the protagonist of three news items, while Cristina Vulpe (Chance Party), Adrian Albu (PSRM), Diana Caraman (PCR), Andrei Donica ("Speranta – Nadezhda" Movement of Professionals), and Alexei Lungu (Chance Party) were mentioned in two news items each. Six other candidates were the protagonists of one news item each.

Fairness and balance of sources. Pluralism of opinions

In the materials of directly electoral nature broadcast from October 24 to November 4, Moldova 1 included, as a rule, opinions from a single source and did not provide any background information. Pluralism of opinions was provided in only 14 of the 77 materials monitored.

During the reporting period, Moldova 1 had 14 controversial materials; in most of them (11), the balance of sources and/or the right to reply/opinion were provided. In three materials, the public TV channel did not ensure the right to reply to those concerned. In the first one broadcast on November 1 (*"8 Localities without the Chance"*), concerning the CEC's decision to cancel the registration of eight candidates for the post of mayor and councilor from the Chance Party, Moldova 1 did not include the party's representatives' opinion. In another news aired on November 1 (*"Nesterovschi Is Arrested"*), about the fact that Alexandr Nesterovschi who was accused of passive corruption remained in preventive detention, Moldova 1 mentions that *"Nesterovschi is supported by the Revival Party affiliated with Ilan Sor who was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment for the bank fraud,"* without including the opinion/reply by the Revival Party representatives. The third case of failure to offer the right to reply was stated in a news item dated November 3 (*"Russia Is Craving for Destabilization"*) where Alexandru Mustata, the ISS director, is quoted, according to whom, Russia initiated a scenario intended for eliminating the governance in Chisinau, mentioning the Chance Party in this context. In this case, Moldova 1 did not offer those concerned the right to reply.

As to ensuring gender equality, the public TV channel ensured a relative balance of sources; men were cited 63 times, and women 37 times.

Language and video images used

In the news items of direct or indirect electoral nature, Moldova 1 used neutral language in relation to most of the candidates, except those from the Chance Party. In some news items, Moldova 1 admitted labeling: *"...through the intermediary of the criminal groups headed by Ilan Sor who has criminal conviction," "The Minister of Energy spoke about the so-called agreement published by Evghenia Gutul, the head of the autonomy, who has connections with the fugitive oligarch Ilan Sor..."*, *"The head of the autonomy from Comrat and the fugitive oligarch Ilan Sor promised pensioners from the Gagauz autonomy and from Orhei and Taraclia Districts a financial assistance of 1000 lei on the eve of the general local elections,"* and in the other materials, irony was used, especially in the news items' headlines: *"No 'Chance' at the Elections," "8 Localities without the Chance," "Russia's Chance."*

The images broadcast complied with deontological standards.

TVR Moldova

Involvement in the electoral campaign

From October 24 to November 4, 2023, TVR Moldova aired 71 news items of direct and indirect electoral nature. Most of them (56) were included in the section titled "Elect the Mayor. Electoral Bulletin" and referred to the candidates' promises and their campaign activities, some electoral competitors' accusations against the others, searches the Chance Party members were subjected to and exclusion of this party from the elections, the Central Electoral Commission's activity in the context of the general local elections to be held on November 5, and presentation of the conclusions from the Interim Report of the ENEMO International Election Observation Mission, as well as the fourth election campaign monitoring report by the Promo-LEX Association.

Apart from the electoral section, 15 other topics were presented; they referred to the development of the case of deputies Alexandr Nesterovschi and Irina Lozovan (Revival Party),

promises related to lower gas prices in the Gagauz autonomy, creating an institute to support the integration of the Republic of Moldova in the EU, increases in social assistance for the cold season, the European officials' promises of granting macro-financial assistance to the Republic of Moldova, as well as the *"powerful message of support for the European path of the Republic of Moldova from over 80 European officials"* on the eve of the local elections, etc.

Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship

The topics of direct electoral nature broadcast by TVR Moldova were objective and impartial, without favoring or disfavoring any electoral contestants. In total, the channel covered the campaign events related to 16 candidates for the post of mayor of Chisinau Municipality. Two other candidates running for local mayor's offices were also mentioned in the news.

Ion Ceban, the MAN candidate, appeared in the largest number of news items (nine), five of which were about his campaign activities, and in four other cases, he was quoted/accused/invited to public debates by his opponent Victor Chironda from PPDA. Ion Ceban is followed by Victor Chironda (PPDA) and Alexei Lungu (Chance Party) who had seven appearances each, and the latter was especially mentioned in the case related to the party's exclusion from the elections or attempts to bribe voters. Lilian Carp from the PAS and Vadim Brinzaniuc from the ESDP had four appearances each, and Ion Purice from the LP had three appearances. Cristina Vulpe from the Chance Party, Adrian Albu from the PSRM, Vasile Bolea from the Revival Party, Ruslan Codreanu from the "Ruslan Codreanu" Electoral Bloc, Stefan Gligor from the Party of Change, Andrei Donica from the "Speranta – Nadezhda" Movement of Professionals, and Roman Mihaes from the NLP were the protagonists of two news items each. Three other candidates were mentioned once.

In some materials broadcast outside the electoral section, the central public administration and, respectively, the candidates from the governing party were presented in a positive light. For instance, in the newscast of October 24, the channel informed about the initiative to create an institute for supporting the integration of the RM in the EU upon the initiative of the Senate of Romania, about the inauguration of the Center of Excellence in Agriculture at the Technical University of Moldova and the National Institute for Education and Leadership, and the Minister of Education and Research taking part in both events. At the same time, the channel informed about Prime Minister Dorin Recean's visit to Brussels (October 26) and the macro-financial assistance of 72.5 million Euros to be granted by the EU, which *"will be transferred by the end of this month and will be used for ensuring macro-financial stability and the reforms required for the process of European integration."*

On the eve of the local elections, on November 4, TVR Moldova informed that *"over 80 European officials sent a powerful message of support for the European path of the Republic of Moldova."* These statements sounded at the meeting of the heads of the committees for Foreign Affairs from the EU countries organized in Chisinau for the first time. During the event, Igor Grosu, President of the Parliament, said that *"the EU countries have always been with us, and for the last two years, we've had electricity, heat, and safe future without being intimidated."*

Fairness and balance of sources. Pluralism of opinions

As to pluralism of opinions, out of the 71 monitored materials, it was ensured in 15 cases, while the other news items included references to only one source.

Of the 23 news items of controversial nature, TVR Moldova offered the right to reply in 20 cases to ensure the balance of sources. Three other news items were unbalanced: a material about the CEC's meeting regarding the ISS's request to suspend two candidates from the Chance Party from the elections (October 30), the news item about a new case of illegal

party financing and money laundering (October 31), and the amounts of money received from the representatives of a political party and voluntarily surrendered to the police (November 2).

As to ensuring gender equality, the channel gave priority to male sources. Therefore, men were cited/mentioned 80 times, and women 23 times.

Language and video images used

The language used by TVR Moldova mostly complied with the deontological provisions, except in two cases (November 3) in which such labels as *“an organized criminal group headed by the fugitive oligarch Ilan Sor”* and *“criminal groups headed by Ilan Sor who has criminal conviction”* were used. As to video images, no deviations from legal provisions were stated.

Jurnal TV

Involvement in the electoral campaign

From October 24 to November 4, 2023, the Jurnal TV channel presented 40 news items of direct and indirect electoral nature in the main newscast of the day. 25 of them were included in the “Local Elections 2023” section and mostly referred to the electoral promises of the candidates registered for the elections for the post of general mayor of Chisinau Municipality and the suburbs of the capital, the Central Electoral Commission’s activity in the context of the elections, several cases of bribing voters, accusations of *“accepting the financing of the Revival Party from the criminal group headed by Ilan Sor”*, searches at the headquarters of the Chance Party, and excluding it from the elections on the last day of the campaign.

During the monitored term, Jurnal TV also broadcast 15 materials of indirect electoral nature which referred to suspended broadcasting licenses of the six TV channels, the case of deputies Irina Lozovan and Alexandr Nesterovschi, discussions in the context of the statements made by the head of the Gagauz autonomy on signing the gas purchase agreement with a company from Turkey which would presumably allow the residents of the autonomy to use the gas at a price of 10 lei/m³, increasing the salaries of the staff working in the sphere of education planned for the next year, launching the “Ajutor la contor” program, increasing financial support for the cold season, reconfirming the North Atlantic Alliance’s support for the Republic of Moldova, and consolidating the relations with the authorities in Chisinau in these “complicated times.”

Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship

During the monitoring term, the news items and reports of direct electoral nature broadcast by Jurnal TV complied with the principles of neutrality, objectivity, and impartiality, and the election campaign was covered impartially, without favoring any competitors. Most candidates for the post of mayor of the capital were offered equal chances to present their electoral priorities according to the electoral events organized.

In its electoral materials, Jurnal TV presented the promises made by 16 electoral competitors for the post of mayor of the capital and one candidate for the post of municipal councilor, as well as four electoral candidates for the post of mayor of Durlesti Town, the capital’s suburb. Jurnal TV used the same format for presenting the candidates’ electoral priorities, announcing the promises made by four to five candidates in one news item. The news items had the same headline: *“The Candidates Compete in Making Election Promises.”*

Vasile Bolea from the Revival Party (five times) and Ion Ceban from the MAN party (five times, three of which concerned his electoral promises, and two included direct or indirect accusations against him) had the greatest number of appearances in the news items; they were followed by Lilian Carp from the PAS (four times). Adrian Albu from the PSRM, Ion Bulgac from the CUB, Vadim Brinzaniuc from the ESDP, and Victor Chironda from the PPDA had three appearances each. Roman Mihaes from the NLP, Constantin Butucel from the PACE, and Andrei Donica from the “Speranta – Nadezhda” Movement of Professionals had two appearances each. Seven other electoral candidates had a single appearance each.

In the news items of direct electoral nature, no cases of favoring any electoral competitor were noticed. The Chance Party was mentioned in five news items, all of them had a negative connotation, and they referred to the searches at the party's headquarters (October 26), illegal funding from the Russian Federation (October 27), the possibility of being excluded and exclusion of the Chance Party candidates from the elections for being suspected of bribing voters (October 31 and November 2), and the party's exclusion from the elections (November 3).

As to the topics of indirect electoral nature, the central authorities were presented in a positive light in six news items: the ones about the launched "Ajutor la contor" program, promises of salary increases in the sphere of education and financial support for the cold season, the statements of support for the country's European path, etc. Therefore, the governing party and its candidates at the general local elections indirectly benefited from the positive context.

The MAN representatives were disfavored by a news item based on an investigation by Jurnal.md in which it affirms that the protagonist *"lives an opulent life and owns expensive cars and clothes, as well as several property objects allegedly purchased for the state money. The above statements refer to the vice mayor of the capital, Irina Gutnic, who is also a candidate from the National Alternative Movement party for the post of Chisinau municipal councilor. Her colleagues refer to her jokingly as 'Malvina.'* An investigation conducted by the Jurnal.md portal reveals that Irina Gutnic was directly involved in the last year's Apa-Canal Chisinau crisis related to water supply and sewage services in the capital."

Fairness and balance of sources. Pluralism of opinions

In the news items broadcast during the reporting term, Jurnal TV ensured a relative diversity of sources. 17 materials included several opinions on the topics discussed. The other materials were based on a single source of information.

Out of the 22 controversial news items broadcast during the reporting term, Jurnal TV respected the balance of sources in 15 cases by requesting the opinion of those concerned. In seven other cases, the channel either requested a reply but those concerned did not respond, or merely presented the authorities' point of view (the news item dated November 1 about granting the money to bribe voters; the news dated November 2 about the candidates from the Chance Party for the posts of mayor and councilor who were excluded from the elections in eight localities; the news dated November 3 about the video images published by the NAC from the dossier in which deputy Irina Lozovan is accused of acting as an intermediary for financing the Revival Party by the criminal group headed by Ilan Sor), or mentions that "the persons concerned have not provided any reply yet," without any obvious journalists' efforts to obtain more sources of information (the news item dated November 3 about excluding the Chance Party from the elections).

As to the gender perspective, the topics broadcast by Jurnal TV were unbalanced: male sources prevailed in the news items (75) compared to female sources (12).

Language and video images used

Jurnal TV used neutral language in the election news items, except using such a label as *"the fugitive oligarch Ilan Sor"* several times. As to the images accompanying the electoral topics, they mostly complied with the deontological standards, except in one case (November 1), when during a telephone interview by Vadim Ceban, President of Moldovagaz, about the *"political gas from the head of the autonomy,"* an inscription saying *"Igor Dodon, President of Moldovagaz"* appeared on the screen.

TV8

Involvement in the electoral campaign

From October 24 to November 4, 2023, the TV8 channel broadcast 44 materials relevant to this monitoring in its prime-time newscasts. 38 of them were included in the “Elections 2023” column. They informed the audience about the solutions suggested by the candidates for certain issues in the communities, the priorities in the candidates’ electoral programs, printing ballots by the CEC and details about the election process, video evidence about the persons who were detained following the searches at the headquarters of the Chance Party, the news based on the electoral candidates’ participation in the debates organized by TV8, electoral advertising and its efficiency, suspended broadcasting licenses of the six TV channels, the CEC’s demand to exclude the candidates from the Chance Party from the elections, implicitly excluding them pursuant to the CES’s decision on the last day of the campaign (November 3, 2023), the statements by the head of the autonomy Evghenia Gutul according to whom the citizens of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia and Orhei Districts would receive the gas at a price of 10 lei/m³, findings regarding the electoral process from the new report by the Promo-LEX organization, completing the electoral campaign by some candidates for the post of mayor of the capital, etc.

In addition, six news items broadcast outside the electoral section were registered and analyzed. They referred to the “*larger heating compensations*” provided by the Government for families with low incomes (two news items), renovation of the bridge on Mihai Viteazul Street which will last longer than initially scheduled, as the term was prolonged due to unforeseen works, release of the three persons detained after the searches at the headquarters of the Chance Party for illegal party financing from judicial control, Prime Minister Dorin Recean’s visit to Brussels where he met with the Secretary General of NATO, and inauguration of the Agrotek Arena Center of Excellence at the Technical University of Moldova which was attended by Dan Perciun, Minister of Education and Research.

Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship

The electoral news items broadcast by TV8 were mostly objective and impartial. TV8 did not favor or disfavor any electoral contestants, presenting all of them in a neutral manner and covering the events and statements by various candidates who organized their activities relevant to the electoral process.

During the reporting term, TV8 covered the statements by and events related to 22 candidates. The largest number of appearances belonged to Alexei Lungu, the candidate for the post of mayor of Orhei and the leader of the Chance Party, who appeared in five news items, in the context of number of events with negative connotations related to that party (arrests of their sympathizers, requests to exclude the party from the elections, fragments from the party’s dossier concerning illegal financing, etc.). He was followed by Adrian Albu, the PSRM candidate for the post at the capital’s mayor’s office, who had three appearances. Ion Ceban (MAN), Vadim Brinzaniuc (ESDP), Lilian Carp (PAS), Vasile Bolea (Revival Party), and Andrei Donica (“Speranta – Nadezhda” Movement of Professionals) had two appearances each, and 15 other candidates had one each appearance each.

Fairness and balance of sources. Pluralism of opinions

Out of the 38 electoral news items, over half, i.e. 21, were conflict-based; in these items, certain electoral actors were either blamed or accused of some illegalities. In all the materials, except for two, TV8 ensured the right to reply to those concerned by direct or indirect quoted or by mentioning: “*We tried to obtain a reaction from the former Sor Party representatives, but they did not answer our calls or messages.*” When it was impossible to include the reaction in the news item, in the same newsletter, the presenter returned to the topic and mentioned: “*A few minutes ago, Alexei Lungu, the Chance party leader, has provided the first reply after the party was suspended from the elections. He has written on the social networks that...*”

In two materials, TV8 did not include any reactions of the persons concerned and merely stated the following: “*Until now, neither the Revival Party leaders nor Ilan Sor commented on the*

images published by the NAC” (November 3), or “...*the Chance Party representatives have not provided any comments yet*” (November 4). These remarks cannot be regarded as ensuring the right to reply to those concerned.

As to ensuring gender equality, TV8 provided access to the news to 86 men and 26 women, thus shifting the ratio in favor of male sources. This gender imbalance can be explained by the fact that election candidates, who are mostly men, were included in the election materials.

Language and video images used

The language used by TV8 was generally neutral, and the video images accompanying the materials complied with the deontological provisions. In one of the news items, TV8 resorts to labeling – “*the money was obtained from the fugitive Ilan Sor*” (November 3).

Pro TV Chisinau

Involvement in the electoral campaign

From October 24 to November 4, 2023, Pro TV Chisinau covered 51 direct and indirect electoral topics. 27 materials were included in the “Elections 2023” section. They covered the electoral contestants’ participation in the debates broadcast by Pro TV Chisinau, the candidates’ promises during the campaign and the statements/accusations made by them, the electoral processes, searches based on a criminal charge against the Chance Party, the criminal files based on bribing voters, the criminal case of deputies Alexandr Nesterovschi and Irina Lozovan (Revival Party), exclusion of the Chance Party from the electoral campaign, quotes from the speech by President Maia Sandu before the local elections, the findings by the Promo-LEX Association and the ENEMO’s International Election Observation Mission, the election campaign retrospective, opinions expressed by citizens from Balti, etc.

The news broadcast outside the electoral section covered the decision of the Chisinau Court of Appeal in the case of deputies Alexandr Nesterovschi and Irina Lozovan, compensations for the cold season provided by the Government, the press conference with the participation of Prime Minister Dorin Recean and Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General of NATO, salary arrears to some mayors’ offices’ staff, financial assistance offered to 100 schools for renovating or constructing sanitary conveniences, blocking 31 websites and suspending the broadcasting licenses of the six TV channels, as well as civil society’s reaction, etc.

On Saturday, November 4, the day preceding the elections, Pro TV Chisinau no longer had an electoral section, broadcasting eight news items about the electoral processes, citizens’ opinions and expectations related to the mayor of the capital, and problems of Chisinau Municipality and Delacau Village, Anenii Noi District.

Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship

During the monitoring term, 25 electoral contestants were offered access to Pro TV Chisinau news. The greatest number of appearances belonged to Victor Chironda (PPDA) who had four appearances, followed by Ion Ceban (MAN), Adrian Albu (PSRM), Vasile Bolea (Revival Party), Roman Mihaes (NLP), Lilian Carp (PAS), Vadim Brinzaniuc (ESDP), and Andrei Donica (“Speranta – Nadezhda” Movement of Professionals) with three appearances each. The other contestants had one or two appearances each. The Chance Political Party representatives were mentioned/quoted in eight news items, seven of which had negative connotation and concerned the events related to this party. The TV channel did not broadcast any separate news items about the events/statements of the candidates, but offered joint materials covering several candidates’ involvement in the campaign.

Pro TV Chisinau did not obviously favor or disfavor any electoral competitors. On the last day of the campaign (November 3), the channel broadcast a retrospective which included some elements from the materials aired during the campaign. The authors emphasized: “*Every contestant presented their own list of promises and electoral ads. Trying to gain more votes,*

some candidates for the post of mayor of the capital demonstrated their talents, while the others relied on technology and artificial intelligence.” In this material, Pro TV Chisinau highlighted the incidents and included a fragment from the PCRМ election event with a tricolor falling in the middle of a speech, continuing with the phrase: “As the list of promises was long, certain candidates sometimes forgot what they were supposed to say,” a statement followed by a quote from a speech by Adrian Albu (PSRM). In the same material, the authors remark: “The other parties tried to organize grandiose events while launching the campaign, but in the last moments, the entire script was turned upside down,” inserting the footage from the PAS electoral event. The journalists also pointed out that “certain candidates had bad luck,” showing Ion Ceban (MAN) who said: “Pay no attention to my left cheek and my left eye – I’ve had an incident this morning: an insect got into my eye when I was riding my scooter. The eye is watering, so please consider it just a technical issue.” In the same material, Pro TV Chisinau inserted some excerpts from the election ads and pointed out that some candidates’ promises exceeded the powers of a mayor, broadcasting a quote by Vadim Brinzaniuc (ESDP) who suggested establishing a municipal company, Air Chisinau, and a quote by Vasile Bolea (Revival Party) who promised bread at the price of one lei for elderly people.

A material broadcast on Saturday, November 4, on the “day of silence,” and accompanied by background sounds and generalizations from the authors, could discredit Ion Ceban. The material emphasizes the infrastructure problems in the capital. In the intro, the presenter affirms: “The future Chisinau mayor will inherit a city with deteriorated roads, traffic jams, and a lack of parking spaces. These are just a few issues the capital’s residents complain about. So whoever wins these elections will definitely have loads of work to do.” Further on, the journalist mentions: “Industrialia Street in the Ciocana Sector has not been repaired for decades and looks more like a countryside road,” “According to a research conducted by the Mayor’s Office back in 2019, the Ismail bridge needed to be renovated, and the works could not be postponed. Nevertheless, as we can see, they have been postponed, and the situation keeps getting worse day by day. Drivers and pedestrians complain they drive and walk there with caution.”

During the monitoring term, Pro TV Chisinau broadcast six more news items which could slightly favor the central public administration and contribute to the positive image transfer for the governing party candidates involved in the elections. The news items referred to the compensations provided by the state for the cold season (October 26 and November 1); the visit of the delegation headed by Prime Minister Dorin Recean to Brussels, “during which they had a number of meetings, including with Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The officials discussed consolidation of the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU, progress in implementing reforms, and cooperation in the sphere of energy” (October 26); about 100 schools which will obtain financial assistance from UNICEF and the Ministry of Education and Research for renovating or building sanitary facilities (October 28); about the visit of the President of Portugal to the Republic of Moldova and his meeting with Maia Sandu (October 30); the inauguration of a service for victims of violence in Orhei within a network of healthcare facilities to be opened in hospitals throughout the country, a network “created under the auspices of the Ministry of Health with the support of the UN Population Fund” (October 31).

A material broadcast on October 29 with the title “The Government Promised... and That Was All of It” about several “mayors’ offices in the country which have wage arrears after the Government provided a monthly increase of 1300 lei for their staff without allocating any amounts of money for this purpose” shows the executive authority in a negative light.

Fairness and balance of sources. Pluralism of opinions

With the exception of two news items, the rest of the materials monitored (49) cannot be regarded as pluralistic, because they offer a single point of view about the topic to be discussed.

The right to reply was not fully offered in the news items covering the electoral debates on Pro TV Chisinau (October 25 and November 3), and concerned the suspicions of illegal

financing during the electoral campaign (October 30), exclusion of the Chance Party from the elections (November 2), video evidence from Irina Lozovan's criminal case (November 3), findings by the Promo LEX Association (November 3), and citizens' opinions expressed in three materials regarding the situations in Chisinau, Balti, and Delacau Village (November 3 and 4).

It should be mentioned that, on October 30, the day when the CES decided to block 31 websites and to suspend broadcasting licenses of the six TV channels, Pro TV Chisinau aired five materials on this topic. If analyzed separately, three of them can be regarded as unbalanced from the point of view of ensuring the balance of sources. If analyzed as a whole, the five news items reflected the points of view of all the persons concerned.

In two other news items, Pro TV Chisinau announced about its attempt to get some replies.

The TV channel did not ensure gender balance of sources, giving access to the news to 104 men and 44 women.

Language and video images used

In the analyzed news items, Pro TV Chisinau used neutral language, except in seven news items in which such labels as "*the fugitive Ilan Sor*" or "*Sor's criminal group*" were used in the materials regarding the Chance Party and the Revival Party. The images broadcast by the channel complied with the deontological provisions.

Cinema 1

Involvement in the electoral campaign

From October 24 to November 4, 2023, Cinema 1 aired 62 materials relevant to this monitoring in the Russian-language evening newscasts, 39 of which were of direct electoral nature, most of them were included in the "Elections 2023" section, and 23 were of indirect electoral nature. Most topics informed about the activity of the Central Electoral Commission, the findings of an international electoral campaign monitoring missions, the results of an opinion poll concerning electoral preferences, printing ballots, some electoral competitors' priorities presented during the campaign events, TV debates, or in video ads, and about excluding the Chance Party candidates from the elections.

Materials of indirect electoral nature were mostly related to the activities of the central public administration representatives who could influence public opinion regarding certain issues. Most of them were about the steps taken by the authorities to simplify the bureaucratic procedure and to facilitate small entrepreneurs' activity, an increase in doctors' salaries and a possibility of a salary increase for teachers starting from the next year, subventions for farmers, loans for entrepreneurs, the European Union's support on the way to integration, etc.

Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship

The electoral materials aired by Cinema 1 during the reporting term complied with the principles of neutrality and impartiality, and the electoral competitors were given equal chances to present their priorities.

Cinema 1 provided access to the news to the total number of 21 candidates for the capital's Mayor's Office. The CUB representatives were quoted three times in the news, Lilian Carp, the PAS candidate for the post of mayor of the capital, Ion Ceban, the MAN candidate, Victor Chironda, the PPDA candidate, and the PDCM representatives were quoted in two news items each, and the Chance Political Party representatives were quoted and/or mentioned in the news, i.e. in the controversial materials regarding the suggestion to exclude them from the elections for political corruption and their exclusion from the elections on the last day of the campaign. The other 15 candidates had one appearance each and spoke about their electoral priorities.

During the reporting term, Cinema 1 broadcast 18 materials which presented the PAS governing party in a positive light, providing details about increasing doctors' salaries, explaining how single-time allowances of 200 thousand lei for newly founded enterprises and 600 thousand lei for developing already created businesses would be provided, speaking about the electronic commerce register and allowances of dozens of thousands lei for small entrepreneurs (a news item from the newscast dated October 27). On October 31, Dumitru Alaiba, Minister of Economy and Digitization, was quoted: he was saying that the economy of the Republic of Moldova was still unstable, but the authorities were implementing reforms to develop all its branches: *"To achieve some results here, we need three times more effort than in any other country in the region, and that is what we actually do."* In another news item dated October 31 and concerning Prime Minister Recean's meeting with the President of Portugal, the Prime Minister affirms that *"the visit of the President of Portugal to the Republic of Moldova is a powerful signal of high appreciation for the efforts of the Republic of Moldova on its path to European integration."* The other news items informed about the information presented by the Minister of Education and Research regarding the projects of millions of Euros for developing universities in the Republic of Moldova, about an event with the participation of the Minister of Health during which 1200 beds were donated to the hospitals of the republic, the Recean Government's priorities to facilitate business in the RM (November 1 and 2, respectively), the EU's support for business development (October 24), positive opinions from civil society about the European integration process (October 24), etc. Those materials were favorable to the PAS candidates for the post in the capital's Mayor's Office and in the other localities of the republic.

Fairness and balance of sources. Pluralism of opinions

Most of the materials analyzed during the monitoring term (55) were not pluralistic, as a rule, they quoted a single source without providing any context information. The channel had a total number of four controversial materials; in all the materials, the right to reply was respected.

Cinema 1 failed to ensure the gender balance of the sources, mostly citing male sources (56) to the detriment of female sources (10).

Language and video images used

The language and video images used in the relevant materials complied with ethical and deontological standards.

ITV Moldova

Involvement in the electoral campaign

On October 28, following the CES's decision, the ITV Moldova channel's license was suspended. Hence, only the monitoring data for October 24-27 is included in the report.

During the reference term, the ITV Moldova channel broadcast 33 topics of direct or indirect electoral nature, 27 of these materials were included in the "Elections" section, and six other news items were broadcast outside this section. The materials were about certain electoral competitors and their campaign activities, the priorities discussed by the candidates, and the information regarding the electoral process provided by the CEC. In addition, the channel covered the searches some representatives of the Chance Party were subjected to, prolonged arrest warrants for deputies Alexandr Nesterovschi and Irina Lozovan, the Revival Party members.

A large part of the topics illustrated multiple issues in the capital (*lack of parking lots, the deplorable states of some yards, streets where repair works have been conducted for years, and unsuccessful improvements*) either through the intermediary of the citizens or via the

opponents of the mayor Ion Ceban. It should be mentioned that they were included both in the electoral section and outside it.

The category of topics of indirect electoral nature included the news items about the *Gagauziyaland* park, the independent deputies' repeated appeal to the Constitutional Court and their demand to speed up examination of the amendments to the Electoral Code, the declaration of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on breaching the democratic provisions in the Republic of Moldova, and the dramatic situation in the sphere of agriculture.

Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship

In the four monitored newscasts, the ITV Moldova channel ensured access to the news to seven electoral competitors registered for the elections for Chisinau Mayor's Office. Therefore, Cristina Vulpe (Chance Party) and Lilian Carp (PAS) had two appearances each and explained their electoral priorities, and the three other candidates had one appearance each and presented the program for the development of the city. Two electoral candidates were shown in conflict materials (Ruslan Codreanu/"Ruslan Codreanu" Electoral Bloc and Victor Chironda/PPDA). Besides, the candidates from the Chance and the Revival Parties for the elections for Orhei, Balti, and Comrat Mayors' Offices appeared in five separate materials. Therefore, cumulatively, the candidates from these parties were favored by the frequent appearances on the screen.

Of the 33 materials monitored, 14 were biased and largely disfavored Ion Ceban, the electoral competitor from the MAN party (11 materials). Quoting the residents, they provide a detailed description of multiple problems of the city which have been unsolved for years and endanger citizens' lives day by day: pits and mud in the yards, especially in rainy weather, unsafe playgrounds for children, the lack of sidewalks, and roadworks delayed for indefinite terms: "... he has done it before, he only boasts about the sidewalks... at the Posta Veche Sector, a road has been constructed for 30 years and is not ready yet, but he promised he would do that... it all starts with the mayor, he gives the order, and this is how it's done... he boasts he has completed 90% of it, but I'm not sure if he has completed at least 10% of it..." "... just take a look at the roads and ask yourself, who is in charge of it? And suddenly it will all become clear, you'll see whether he can really handle it or not... we have addressed them several times, but to no avail...", "...I fell several times because of these high curbs and sidewalks, and I stumbled many times" (October 25); "...we have a mayor's office, let them do something else except taking photos and shooting videos..." (October 26).

Some solutions recently identified and implemented by the Mayor's Office were also criticized, such as arranging the track for cyclists on 31 August 1989 Street, which, according to the people interviewed, merely creates difficulties and increases the risk of accidents: "*vehicles used to be parked along the road, near the clinic, but where will they have to park now?... Many people take their children to the clinic, where should they park their cars?*", "...As I walk or drive along that street, I've never seen any cyclists there...", "...eventually, they will realize that it (making the track) was a mistake and eliminate it..." (October 27).

The CPA representatives also appear in a negative context in the three materials about the critical situation in agriculture (October 24), degradation of democratic standards, the "*failure of justice*" (October 26), and risks of election fraud: "*In our country, no one has any rights; we're a free country, but we actually have a dictatorship...*" (October 27).

On October 24, a topic about the "*Gagauzyaland Park which was supposed to be similar to the one in Orhei*" was broadcast. According to Dmitrii Constantinov, President of the People's Assembly in Comrat, *such a large-scale project is clear evidence that the head of the autonomy keeps her promises, and any other suspicions about her should be forgotten, especially since one could see what is being built: "This team keeps doing their job, and we should be proud of them."* During the elections of the governor of Gagauzia, Evghenia Gutul was supported by

Ilan Sor, and such materials presenting the rapid achievements can favor the candidates suspected of affiliation to/related to Ilan Sor.

Fairness and balance of sources. Pluralism of opinions

No pluralism of sources could be found in the analyzed journalistic content: only ten news items out of the 33 monitored were based on documentation obtained from several sources. Although some materials quoted several citizens' opinions, they cannot be regarded as pluralistic, because they typically expressed the same points of view and a unilateral perspective of the topics discussed.

During the monitored period, the ITV Moldova channel aired 18 controversial materials, in three of which, it failed to ensure the right to reply. These news items were about Ion Ceban, the MAN candidate accused of a lack of transparency by his opponent Ruslan Codreanu (October 25), as well as avoiding direct confrontations with the other candidates, and failing to fulfill his promises according to Victor Chironda, the PPDA candidate, who made these statements in two separate news items (October 26 and 27).

In five other news items also concerning Ion Ceban and presenting him in an unfavorable context, the reporters mentioned they had tried to get a reaction before airing the material, but to no avail, or tried to balance it with some other information irrelevant to the context.

As to gender equality, the balance of the sources was not ensured: men were cited 59 times, and women were cited 22 times. The significant number of sources cited during the four days of monitoring is greatly determined by interviewing citizens in controversial materials.

Language and video images used

In the monitored news items covering the topic of the elections, the ITV Moldova channel used neutral language. The images accompanying the materials were also neutral and complied with deontological provisions.

Orizont TV

Involvement in the electoral campaign

On October 28, pursuant to the CES's decision, the Orizont TV channel's license was suspended. Hence, the monitoring data for October 24-27 is included in this report.

During the reporting interval, the Orizont TV channel covered 29 topics of direct or indirect electoral nature. 24 of them were included in the "Elections 2023" section, and another five were aired outside the section. The Orizont TV journalists informed about some electoral competitors' campaign activities, covered their priorities in various spheres, and shared the details about the elections to be held on November 5 provided by the CEC.

The channel also covered the 65 searches which were related to the illegal financing case and referred to several representatives or supporters of the Chance Party, and prolonged arrest warrants for Alexandr Nesterovschi and Irina Lozovan, the Revival Party members. The Orizont TV journalists also prepared two reports about the difficult living conditions in Copanca and Plop-Stiubei Villages (Causeni District).

The materials of indirect electoral nature included the topics about the external assistance for farmers blocked by the CPA due to the crisis conditions, the initiated *Gagauziyaland* project, the repeated demand filed by some deputies from the former Sor Party who request to examine the amendments to the Electoral Code, etc.

Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship

The Orizont TV channel offered access time to the monitored newscasts to seven candidates registered for the elections for Chisinau Mayor's Office. Ion Ceban (MAN) had four appearances, three of which were in a negative context, and one was neutral, Lilian Carp (PAS) had three appearances, Adrian Albu (PSRM) had three appearances, two of which were dedicated to his electoral program, and one of them was in a conflict news item. The other candidates had one or two appearances each.

The Chance Party candidate for the post in Orhei Municipality Mayor's Office benefited from three appearances. Therefore, the representatives of this party had five appearances in the analyzed newscasts.

Then out of the 29 materials broadcast were biased. Three of them directly concerned Ion Ceban, the current mayor and the MAN candidate; the channel's tendency to present him in an unfavorable context was obvious, even if the topics themselves were balanced. The reports were about the lack of parking lots which had been previously promised (*"...four years ago, when Ion Ceban was running for the first term as mayor of the capital, he promised to create four thousand parking places, and currently, we should have had 16 thousand places... nowadays, the current mayor, the MAN candidate for the Mayor's Office, claims he has partially fulfilled his promise and that there are several thousand places for parking vehicles in the city. He did not provide an exact number of parking places..."* (October 24); the lack of drinking water and the centralized sewage system in a section of Muncesti Street, the fact Ion Ceban seems to be unaware of (*"...I don't know any details about it, but all the issues of this sort are being registered, and the teams will intervene as necessary..."*, October 26), as well as the case of houses with outdated and very dangerous elevators which *"have remained unchanged since the Soviet era"* and where people often get stuck for hours (October 27).

In the same manner, two reports were made in the villages of Copanca and Plop-Siubei, Causeni District, in which the mayors who are the PSRM representatives are blamed by the locals for not fulfilling their electoral promises: *"...the mayor promised that, in the next four years, we would have asphalt on the 100% of the roads, but now, as you see, it's far from that..."* (October 26). The locals from both villages have long lists of issues they are facing, and, according to them, they are unlikely to be solved soon enough.

The former Sor Party's contribution and Ilan Sor's direct involvement in solving citizens' problems was covered in four topics: *"...due to frequent shelling in many cities in Israel, a part of our fellow citizens decided to get back to Moldova, and had to address Ilan Sor's platform in order to do that. According to Sor, since the war broke out, more than 1000 people have been assisted in returning to Moldova, and he keeps receiving hundreds of requests every day..."* (October 24); the news about the Gagauzaland park which will be constructed with Ilan Sor's support and which serves as a proof that the team of the head of the autonomy keeps her promises. According to Evghenia Gutul, *"... the park will generate over 100 jobs, we're building the park for our children, for young families... You have trust in our program... creating the park was one of our team's promises"* (October 24); the topic about *"the financial assistance granted by Ilan Sor within his program for supporting the agricultural sector"* which was blocked by the authorities. The material covers all the steps included in Ilan Sor's program for saving the agricultural sector and supporting farmers (October 25). Another news item covers the march for fair elections and includes a remark that *"people... initiate street protests hoping they will be able to express their vote on November 5 without being pressured"; "We were struggling for justice, I mean, Ilan Sor's party, with the Chance, with Lungu and Cristina... they stand for the people. Who brought the people back from Israel, after all?"* (October 27). These news items are likely to favor the candidates from the parties related to Ilan Sor, considering that he is presented in the role of a savior.

The CPA representatives are presented in a negative context in two materials relevant to the monitoring: in the news item about the fatal accident of a PACE counselor, the topic was supplemented with background information on the large number of fatal accidents involving police officers (October 27), as well as in the news item about blocking the assistance provided by Ilan Sor to farmers in complicated situations (October 25): both materials could eventually disfavor the PAS candidates.

Fairness and balance of sources. Pluralism of opinions

In more than half of the news items monitored, pluralism of opinion was ensured, as they were based on documentation from several sources.

As to the conflict-based materials, which were 17, all of them were balanced, and the reporters' efforts to obtain alternative sources were obvious.

When documenting the news items relevant to this monitoring, the reporters cited 61 men and 25 women; the ratio obviously disfavors female sources.

Language and video images used

The Orizont TV channel did not use any discriminatory language while discussing the electoral candidates, and the images were broadcast without any deviations from deontological standards.

Vocea Basarabiei TV

Involvement in the electoral campaign

From October 24 to November 4, 2023, the Vocea Basarabiei TV channel broadcast 59 news items of electoral nature. 30 of them were included in the "Elections 2023" special section, and 23 were aired outside this section. The direct news items covered the electoral process in general, the candidates' programs and promises, as well as the breaches noticed by the national and international observers, such as those listed in the Promo-LEX and the ENEMO Mission election monitoring reports which highlighted the main serious breaches, such as bribing voters, using administrative resources in the electoral campaign, etc. The channel also informed about the police's actions related to the investigation of the phenomenon of bribing voters by some election participants, the decision of the Commission for Exceptional Situations to exclude the Chance Party from the elections, and suspended licenses of the six TV channels. The other materials of indirect electoral nature were about the ECHR's decision on the Stoianoglo case, compensations for the cold season and the "Ajutor la contor" program, the progress on the path of European integration and the support provided by the foreign partners, etc.

Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship

During the reporting period, the Vocea Basarabiei channel covered the electoral topics in an impartial manner, without favoring or disfavoring any candidates. In the four materials included in the electoral section, the channel covered the electoral programs of the candidates for the post of mayor of Chisinau Municipality from such parties as the PAS (Lilian Carp), the PSRM (Adrian Albu), the Revival Party (Vasile Bolea) and the MAN (Ion Ceban). All of them were impartial, they had equal airtime, and the message was neutral, without attacks against any candidates. In one news item, the electoral candidates from the Revival Party, Irina Lozovan registered in Ocnita and, partly, Alexandr Nesterovschi, registered in Balti, were mentioned. Both of them appear in a news item which reports that Irina Lozovan presumably agreed to

take the money from a criminal group in order to give it to some mayors. The news presents both candidates in a negative light.

The central public authorities were presented in both negative and positive light. Several materials from this period of time referred to the ECHR's decision in the Stoianoglo case; he, together with the guest in the studio, Alexandru Tanase, the CC ex-president, accused the governance which had dismissed the prosecutor general. At the same time, the news items included in the "European Moldova" section or the other materials (13) were dedicated to the governance's successes in the process of joining the European Union, the allowances granted to teachers in October, and compensations for heating, presented the governance in a positive light.

The candidates from the PSRM and the Revival Party were presented positively in one news item and negatively in two materials each. The Chance Party candidates were negatively presented in all the six news items where they were mentioned.

In most of the materials analyzed, the right to reply was respected. In one news item about the exclusion of the Chance Party from the elections, the opinion of those concerned was not included. In the newscast of November 3, only the arguments of the Commission for Emergency Situations to which Prime Minister Dorin Recean referred at the press conference were presented, but the party concerned, i.e. the Chance Party, was not offered to reply.

Fairness and balance of sources. Pluralism of opinions

Vocea Basarabiei had an impartial approach in the news broadcast during this term, and pluralism of opinion was ensured, especially by vox-pops which included a multitude of opinions. It is worth mentioning that, during the reporting term, the channel aired several vox-pops on electoral issues, citizens were asked what they thought about the importance of the elections to be held on November 5, about bribing voters during electoral campaigns, etc. The vox-pops were conducted not only in the capital, but also in other towns in the country, such as Comrat, Cahul, Balti, and Orhei.

Due to the significant number of vox-pop type news items, the relevant materials were less gender-unbalanced during this reporting term. Thus, in total, 103 male and 61 female sources were cited in the newscasts.

Language and video images used

The language used by the Vocea Basarabiei channel in the election news items was generally neutral. The images accompanying the electoral materials were broadcast in compliance with deontological standards.

Exclusiv TV

Involvement in the electoral campaign

During the reporting term, Exclusiv TV aired 53 news items of direct and indirect electoral nature. 32 of them were included in the "Elections" section and covered the electoral contestants' promises, the electoral processes, the searches related to the cases of illegal financing of certain political groups, the criminal case of the deputies Alexandr Nesterovschi and Irina Lozovan, the announcement made by the deputy Veaceslav Nigai about leaving the Bloc of Socialists and Communists, blocking 30 websites and suspended broadcasting licenses of the other six TV channels, exclusion of the Chance Party from the elections, the promises made by the head of the autonomy Evghenia Gutul to find and to provide natural gas at a price of ten lei per m³ and the denial of these statements by Victor Parlicov, Minister of Energy, citizens' opinions about the development of the city, results of a survey conducted by

the Idata company, and a news item about purchasing several ambulances with the support from the development partners of the Republic of Moldova.

The indirect election news items referred to the activity of several ministers and secretaries of state, the statements about the foreign events made by Igor Grosu, President of the Parliament, and Prime Minister Dorin Recean, and the visit of the President of Portugal to the Republic of Moldova.

Impartiality and objectivity. Political partisanship

During the reference term, within the electoral section, Exclusiv TV offered broadcasting space for more than half of the electoral contestants for the post of mayor of the capital (18 candidates). Ion Ceban (MAN) had the greatest number of appearances, he was shown nine times. Such a large number of appearances could be explained both by the electoral competitor's frequent electoral events and by the criticism from some of his opponents. The current mayor was followed by Victor Chironda (PPDA) with six appearances, Lilian Carp (PAS) and Vasile Bolea (Revival Party) with five appearances each, Vadim Brinzaniuc (ESDP), and Adrian Albu (PSRM) with four appearances each. The other candidates had one, two, or three appearances each. The Chance Party representatives were mentioned in six news items with a negative connotation informing about the searches the party's members were subjected to, exclusion from the elections, and the reasons for it.

It should be mentioned that, during the monitoring term, Exclusiv TV did not cover the candidates and their activities in separate news items. The TV channel broadcast a daily news item which included the activities/promises/statements by several competitors.

In the materials relevant to this monitoring and included in the electoral section, no obvious favoring or disfavoring of any electoral competitors was noticeable. A news item aired on October 30 which included several citizens' opinions could be considered slightly unfavorable for Ion Ceban. In addition to the expectations expressed by the sources, the material also included critical opinions, without referring directly to Ion Ceban: *"The underground passages – we have just one or two of them. Until now, we could hardly use them without the risk of fracturing both legs. (...) That's what has to be done first of all – we need to be able to walk safely"; "Transport issues in the center. This is what he promised earlier, saying it had to be done for those who come from all the sectors of Chisinau and have to drive across the city. Of course, there are millions of cars, and it's impossible to get to work, to school, or anywhere else on time"; "The streets and the houses are in a poor state. Parking lots are too few."*

Apart from the electoral section, Exclusiv TV aired 19 news items about the activity of the Government headed by Dorin Recean, covering the decisions and the events attended by the representatives of the Cabinet of Ministers. These news referred to the Agrotek Arena (e.g. *"The Minister (editor's note: Dan Perciun) assures that the institution he heads will keep investing in the development of universities, so that young people do not have to travel abroad searching for high-quality education"*), allowances for graduates of the faculty of pedagogy, compensations for the teaching staff, creating the National Institute of Education, salary increases in the sphere of healthcare, subventions in agriculture, creating support centers for victims of physical and sexual abuse, equipping pediatric hospital departments, rooms specially arranged for diagnosing cervical cancer, cancellation of bureaucratic procedures for business in the Republic of Moldova, the process of accession of the Republic of Moldova to the EU, Prime Minister Dorin Recean's meeting with Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General of NATO, and compensations for the cold season provided by the state. One of the materials regarding the compensations of 800 lei from the Government for the cold season includes the opinions of three citizens from the countryside. The material mentions low income and large expenses for heating homes in winter, but does not include any critical opinions about the governance. The authors of the material emphasize: *"Even though 800 lei promised by the Government is not a huge amount, a retired person will at least be able to buy some medicine"*

for this money.” One of the quoted sources affirms: *“They help us as much as they can. If there was more, it would be better. But let’s be grateful at least for what we have. Anyway, it’s (editor’s note: the amount of money) welcome. It’s enough for half a cube of firewood.”*

Two other news items cover the presence of Igor Grosu, President of the Parliament, at the second Parliamentary Summit of the Crimea International Platform in Prague and his statements about the security efforts made by the authorities, the visit of the President of Portugal to the Republic of Moldova and the official’s meeting with Maia Sandu, the head of state, during which the president emphasized: *“We will have discussions with the representatives of the Portuguese companies present in the region and consider the ways we could attract them to developing business in our country”* or *“Today, we have continued our discussions about the commitment of the Republic of Moldova to firmly follow the European path.”*

The materials which cover the activity of the executive authority, the President of the Parliament, and the Head of State present the central public administration in a positive light and could be considered favorable to the governing party representatives involved in the elections who benefited from the positive image transfer.

Fairness and balance of sources. Pluralism of opinions

During the reporting term, Exclusiv TV failed to ensure pluralism of opinions. Even though it aired the materials based on several sources, most of them expressed a single point of view. Most of the materials which included several voices cited the sources present at various events mostly attended by the central public authorities’ representatives. Hence, they could not be regarded as pluralistic.

20 analyzed news items out of 53 were controversial. Exclusiv TV ensured the balance of sources in 12 of them. The following news items can be considered unbalanced: the one in which the arrested deputy Alexandr Nesterovschi affirms: *“Печально, что мы живем в захваченном государстве”/“It’s sad that we live in a conquered state”* (October 25), the material based on citizens’ critical opinions regarding certain problems in the capital (October 30), a news item included in the electoral section in which Andrei Donica (“Speranta-Nadejda” Movement) claims that he is in a disadvantaged position because he was listed for the elections too late (November 1), the news item about completing the searches related to the criminal case involving deputy Irina Lozovan (November 2), and the material in which Dorin Recean explains the CES’s decision to exclude the Chance Party from the elections invoking voter corruption (November 3).

Another unbalanced material is the one in which Alexandru Musteata, the head of the ISS, is quoted as he speaks about blocking 31 websites and suspending the broadcasting licenses of the six TV channels (October 30). In the material, the authors limit themselves to mentioning that the channels in question do not agree with the accusations against them, and *“no comments could be received from Vladimir Plahotniuc and Ilan Sor regarding the announcement made by the head of the ISS.”*

As to ensuring gender equality, the channel gave priority to male sources, citing men 97 times, to the detriment of female sources who were cited 38 times.

Language and video images used

In most of the news items of direct or indirect electoral nature, Exclusiv TV used neutral language. In three materials, the channel labeled Ilan Sor referring to him as a *“fugitive politician”* (*“беглый политик”*). The images broadcast by the channel complied with deontological provision. In the Russian-language newscast of October 31, Exclusiv TV

included a news item about Andrei Donica in Romanian, providing only a few bottom lines in Russian.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

From October 24 to November 4, 2023, the following general trends were observed in the coverage of the electoral campaign by the ten monitored TV stations.

Moldova 1 public TV station provided access to the news to most of the electoral competitors, presenting them neutrally and impartially, with the exception of Ion Ceban (MAN) who benefited from several appearances and a favorable context. The central public authorities were mostly reflected in a positive context in the news items of indirect electoral nature, thus favoring the governing party representatives in the election campaign.

TVR Moldova covered the activity of a relatively large number of electoral competitors. The news items were balanced, without demonstrating any attitudes favoring or disfavoring any electoral competitors. The PAS representatives were slightly favored due to the positive image transfer from the central public administration whose activity was largely reflected in positive news items.

Jurnal TV covered the election campaign events in an objective and unbiased manner, presenting the activities of most of the electoral competitors without favoring or disfavoring them directly. The governing party representatives were favored due to the positive context of the news items focused on the central public administration. Ion Ceban, the MAN candidate, was equally mentioned in neutral and negative news items.

TV8 station provided access to the news to most of the electoral competitors, presenting them neutrally and impartially, without obviously favoring or disfavoring any of them.

Pro TV Chisinau provided a neutral and impartial coverage of the electoral campaign, offering equal access to most electoral competitors without directly favoring or disfavoring any of them. Ion Ceban, the MAN candidate, was slightly disfavored by a material about the capital's problems aired on the "day of silence." The PAS candidates were slightly favored due to the positive image transfer in the news items focused on the central public administration's activity.

Cinema 1 provided airtime for most of the electoral competitors without directly favoring or disfavoring any of them. The central public administration and, implicitly, the governing party were favored by a great number of materials with a positive connotation favorable to the PAS candidates for the elections.

The **ITV Moldova** station favored the candidates of the Chance and the Revival political parties who enjoyed the greatest number of appearances compared to the other candidates. The channel disfavored Ion Ceban, the MAN candidate, by the biased news items which presented him in a negative context. The central public authorities were mostly presented in a negative light, and the news items in question disfavored the PAS representatives at the elections.

Orizont TV favored the Chance Political Party by the large number of materials as well as by associating it with the leader of the former Sor Political Party who was presented as a *national savior*. Ion Ceban, the MAN candidate, was disfavored by the negative and biased news items.

Vocea Basarabiei TV provided access to the news to a limited number of electoral competitors, mostly covering the campaign from the perspective of the electoral process. The station slightly favored the central public authorities in several news items with positive connotation which could also be favorable to the governing party candidates.

Exclusiv TV offered broadcasting space to more than half of the electoral competitors covering them in a neutral manner. The central public administration's activity was extensively covered, favoring the PAS representatives involved in the elections by the positive image transfer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Broadcasters should use monitoring reports as tools for self-regulation and eliminate deficiencies, so that their activities could be in line with legal requirements and the Journalist's Code of Conduct:
 - to inform voters in a fair, impartial and unbiased manner;
 - to ensure pluralism and diversity of opinion by including in the news more perspectives on the covered topics;
 - to promote gender equality by citing more female sources.
- The Broadcasting Council should use monitoring reports in order to take note of the situation and to assess whether the monitored television stations respected the citizens' right to full, objective and truthful information and the electoral competitors' right to have equal access to the media.
- In case the Broadcasting Council finds deviations from legal provisions, it should apply sanctions proportional to the frequency and degree of those violations.