

Second preliminary report on media coverage of the 27 October presidential election

Released on 21 October 2013

Tbilisi, 21 October, 2013 – The Charter of Journalistic Ethics, an independent, non-profit professional journalist association that promotes the values of freedom and democracy, has been systematically monitoring the media coverage of the 27 October presidential election. This project is conducted in cooperation with the Slovak media-monitoring organization MEMO 98 and with the support of the Open Society Foundation Georgia (OSFG).

Following is the second preliminary report that includes the main monitoring findings covering three weeks of the official campaign period (16 September – 10 October):

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Monitored media continue to provide a generally balanced coverage of the campaign.**
- **Most media decreased their coverage of the government and increased coverage of political parties and candidates, focusing mainly on the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement.**
- **Davit Bakradze was the most presented candidate on GPB, Rustavi and Imedi whereas Giorgi Margvelashvili on Maestro and Adjara TV.**
- **News coverage of the campaign continues to focus on activities of candidates and parties rather than on issues. To date, monitored media have not provided analytical and in-depth coverage that could help voters to better analyze and assess the qualities and programmes of electoral contestants.**
- **Media continue to follow the principles outlined in the Code of Conduct for Elections, but there were a few instances where these principles were not fully respected.**

The preliminary media monitoring results for the period of 16 September – 10 October indicate that similar to the first monitoring period (2 – 15 September), most media continue to offer a generally balanced coverage of political parties and candidates in their political and election-related prime time news and current affairs programmes. The second monitoring period was characterized by an overall decrease in the amount of coverage devoted to the government and an increase in the coverage devoted to political parties and candidates (the biggest decrease of the government's share of coverage was noticed on Adjara TV – from 73 per cent to 30 per cent). This could be explained by the fact that the campaign has been slowly picking up in the last few weeks. However, news coverage of the campaign continues to focus on campaign events with little or no focus on issues and differences between the candidates. To date, monitored media have not provided analytical and in-depth coverage that could help voters to better analyze and assess the qualities and programmes of electoral contestants.

At the beginning of September, the Charter and MEMO 98 initiated a Media Code of Conduct that is a summary of generally applicable standards and principles to be observed by media during an election period. The code is drawn upon international documents and guidelines with special attention to recommendations of the Council of Europe, OSCE, and other international organizations of which Georgia is a member state. The main goal of the project is to help in improving professional standards during elections. To date, five TV channels (GPB, Rustavi 2, Imedi, Maestro and Adjara) signed the code and generally agreed to voluntarily abide by its provisions. It should be noted that similar to the first monitoring period, the media continue to follow the principles outlined in the code, with only a very few instances where these principles were not fully respected. This contributes to an overall improvement in the media coverage of elections (in comparison with the 2012 elections) which was also acknowledged by the OSCE/ODIHR report.[\[1\]](#)

Monitoring results

The **Georgian Public Broadcaster's** first channel (GPB1) devoted the bulk of its political and election-related coverage to the government – almost 34 per cent. However, it was less than during the first monitoring period (50 per cent). At the same time, the share of coverage dedicated to the political parties increased. Both the Georgian Dream (GD) and the United National Movement (UNM) received almost identical proportions of mostly neutral coverage (18,5 and 18,8 percent respectively). There was also a slight increase in the coverage of the president (from 7,4 to 9,4), which is due to his activities during the monitoring period (for example his speech in the UN and the UNM congress).

As for the coverage of presidential contestants, the two frontrunners – Giorgi Margvelashvili and Davit Bakradze – received comparable proportions (12,7 and 17 percent respectively) of mainly neutral or positive prime time news coverage.[\[2\]](#) The next most covered candidates were Giorgi Targamadze and Nino Burjanadze receiving respectively 14 and 15 percent of the coverage. The CDM and the UNM candidates had the biggest amount of direct time.[\[3\]](#)

Similar to *GPB1*, **Rustavi 2** also decreased the share of its prime time news coverage devoted to the activities of the cabinet ministers (29,4 against 38,5 percent during the first period). At the same time, however, the channel devoted two times more coverage to President Saakashvili (of which 27 percent was positive and 6 percent negative). As for the coverage of the two main parties, the channel gave more coverage to the UNM (23,3 percent) than to the GD (18,4 percent). While as much as 18 per cent of the UNM coverage was positive and 4 was negative, only 3 per cent of the GD coverage was positive and 7 per cent was negative.

In addition, while the two main candidates received almost identical share of the coverage on Rustavi 2 (29 percent respectively), Davit Bakradze received more positive coverage than his main rival. The UNM candidate also received the biggest amount of direct time. The next most covered candidates were Giorgi Targamadze (12 percent) and Nino Burjanadze (11,2 percent).

Another private channel **Imedi** also allotted the largest portion of its coverage to the government (33,3 percent) but it was a significant decrease in comparison with the first period – 62,3 percent). The tone of the coverage was mainly neutral. Similar to other channels, Imedi also devoted more coverage to political parties and candidates. The two main parties – UNM and GD – received similar proportions of mostly neutral coverage (23,1 per cent and 19,6 per cent respectively). The activities of the president were devoted 10 percent of mainly neutral coverage (which is an increase in comparison with the first period when he received 5,9 percent).

As for the coverage of candidates, Imedi devoted more time to Davit Bakradze (30 percent) than to Giorgi Margvelashvili (18,9 percent). The tone of their coverage was mainly neutral or positive. Nino Burjanadze (14,3 percent) and Giorgi Targamadze (13 percent) were the next most covered candidates. The UNM candidate was devoted the biggest amount of direct time.

Of the monitored TV channels, **Maestro TV** devoted the biggest share of its prime time news coverage to the activities of the government (46,1 per cent – only a small decrease in comparison with the first period – 49,1 per cent). At the same time, the channel was more critical towards Ivanishvili's cabinet than in the first monitoring period (26 percent of the government's coverage was negative and 9 per cent was positive). This was mainly in connection with the government's response to the 'borderisation' in Dvani and in relation to the prime minister's lengthy briefings (on September 25 and October 2, Mr. Ivanishvili held four-hour long briefings for experts and journalists). As for the coverage of political parties, there was a small increase in the amount of their coverage but not as significant as on other monitored channels. The channel gave a similar coverage to the UNM and the GD (19,2 and 16,6 per cent respectively). President Saakashvili received 10,9 percent of the coverage that was mainly neutral in tone.

Giorgi Margvelashvili and Davit Bakradze received the biggest proportions of the candidates' related coverage on Maestro – it was 30,5 and 26 percent respectively. The next most covered candidates were Nino Burjanadze and Giorgi Targamadze who both received respectively 10 percent of the coverage. The UNM candidate received the biggest amount of direct time.

Similar to other monitored channels, also Kavkazia decreased the share of its coverage devoted to the government (from 46,7 percent in the first period to 39,4 percent in the second period). It should be noted that the actual share of positive coverage for the government also decreased – while during the first period, as much as 46 percent of the government's coverage was positive and only 14 per cent negative, during the second period, only 24 per cent was positive and 19 percent was negative. As for the presentation of the two main parties, GD and UNM received almost identical amount of coverage – 19,1 and 19,5 percent respectively. The tone of the coverage was mainly neutral. The president received some 11,1 percent of the coverage that was mainly neutral (more than in the first period when he had only 3 per cent).

Unlike other monitored channels that devoted most of their candidates' related coverage to the two frontrunners, Kavkazia gave the bulk of its candidates' coverage to Nino Burjanadze (34,8 percent). This coverage was almost exclusively positive or neutral. The GD and the UNM candidates followed with 21,2 and 19 percent of mainly neutral or positive coverage. Nino Burjanadze also received the biggest amount of direct time.

TV Adjara significantly decreased its coverage of the government and devoted it 30 per cent of its coverage (against 73,1 percent devoted to the government in the first period). As for the tone of this coverage, it was overwhelmingly neutral. At the same time, the channel increased its coverage of the main parties – the GD received 19,3 percent and UNM 14,2 percent respectively. This coverage was also mainly neutral. There was also an increase in the coverage of independent candidates (10,2 per cent). The government of Adjara received some 9,1 percent of mainly neutral coverage.

As for the coverage of candidates, Adjara TV allocated two times more time to the GD candidate Giorgi Margvelashvili (21 per cent) than to his main opponent Davit Bakradze (9 per cent). The television provided substantial coverage to some independent candidates, including Chanishvili (11 percent), Gharibashvili (8 percent) and Saluashvili (7 percent).

Qualitative analysis

GPB

During the monitoring period, we monitored the main news bulletin at 19.00; the main news “Moambe” at 20.00; and political talk show “The First Studio,” launched on 1 October.

All significant topics were covered by GPB 1 news. The majority of stories were balanced, with no bias shown, but there were some problems.

Most important news in this period was related to events concerning Dvani village in the zone of conflict. Special attention was paid to three families left on the other side of the barbed wires. The channel dedicated several stories, live syncs and live stand-ups to it. According to these materials, three families were forced to leave their houses and dwellings, without any place to live. It was not mentioned that these families have already received financial compensation and cottages to live in from the previous government. Other TV channels presented the above mentioned facts about these families in their stories but the audience of Channel 1 learned about it only on October 7 from the Minister of Reintegration Paata Zakhareishvili, who was a guest of the talk-show “The First Studio”.

In October 10, “Moambe” had a story (at 20.28) covering the death of a teenager inmate. By that time public already knew that the inmate was found hanged in his solitary cell. “Moambe” story began by showing a close-up photo of deceased that showed a long wound across the whole chest, presumably made during the autopsy. It should be mentioned here that according to the Article 56 of the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters, showing similar close up shots “should be avoided in all cases except when there exists an overriding public interest.” The story really represented big public interest, but based on the content of the story, it was not clear why the photo was shown in close-up because it did not contain any additional information. It was impossible to understand, by means of this photo, whether the inmate committed a suicide or whether he was hanged. A criminal expert from the same story never said anything about the importance of the mentioned photo. It is thus not clear what was the reason behind showing it to the audience in a close-up. It should also be mentioned that according to the Article 47 of the same Code, when showing material that may cause negative emotions, broadcaster should warn the audience beforehand. The Public broadcaster did not do so and there was no warning either by the presenter or the reporter.

During the second stage of the monitoring period, from October 1, Channel 1 launched a new programme “The First Studio.” This talk show is broadcast every day except Saturdays and Sundays. The talk show discusses current important events together with government representatives, experts and opposition. The talk show consists of several blocks. The last block is devoted to presidential candidates, each of them given about 15-20 minutes.

This programme is balanced, the anchor is not biased, and there were no cases of using hate speech or other terms inappropriate for broadcasting.

Rustavi 2

Most of the stories from 18.00 and 21.00 Courier of Rustavi 2 were balanced and unbiased during the monitoring period.

There were only a few stories where balance was not observed, namely:

On October 5, at the beginning of “Courier” at 21.00, there was a headline concerning arsenic storage in Lentekhi region. According to the headline, ecological disaster was threatening several regions of the western Georgia. The story was 4 min and 21 sec. long. We learned from the story that there were several sources of arsenic pollution in Lentekhi region that were polluting soil, plants and poisoning cattle, while the government was doing nothing to solve this problem. In spite of the fact that the topic itself, as well as the allegations towards the government, was grave, there was no comment from any representatives of local or central governments. It was not clear from the story whether the journalist attempted to find out what their position was. There were neither experts nor representatives of NGOs working on the ecological issues.

The problem was dramatized, and presented as a tragedy, based only on three local residents, thus the story itself was incomplete, one-sided, the facts not checked and balance was not maintained. We assume that it was necessary to have a comment from the Ministry of Environment whose direct responsibility is to protect and monitor the environment in the country.

On September 25, there was a story of 6 min.15 sec about the events related the trial of Vano Merabishvili. Merabishvili made a political statements for 2 minutes in live sync in which he was criticizing the incumbent government saying: “there is a huge gap/deficit in the budget of Georgia for 750 million laris, from which 650 million laris is the gap in the revenue section only. The budget cannot collect even 500 million laris and any expert economist can prove that.” He further said: “the incumbent government faces serious challenges. Not only it becomes impossible to fulfill their promises, but from the beginning of January, there will be serious problems in distributing salaries and pensions, so that the only thing left for the government is to continue repressions against mass media and opposition.” In spite of the fact that in the story dedicated to Merabishvili trial, the author devoted 2 minutes, there was neither a response of the government representatives to Merabishvili’s allegations. We think that since Rustavi 2 put out live the political statement of Merabishvili, they should have given the opportunity to the other party to respond.

There was one more case where balance was breached. On September 17 (“Kurier” at 18.0), the Secretary of Security Council Giga Bokeria strongly criticized the ruling party concerning the constitutional amendments and blamed it for putting pressure and persecuting opposition MPs. Rustavi 2 did not give any chance to the ruling party to respond on Bokeria’s accusations, neither in the same nor in the following news bulletins.

During the monitoring period, Rustavi 2 had two political talk shows: “Archevani/The Choice” and “The Position.” The talk shows covered important current events, with invited guests representing all parties. The anchors were unbiased and there were no cases of using hate speech or other breaches of the code.

Imedi TV

During the monitoring period, we monitored the main news bulletin of Imedi TV “Qronika.” The news covered the main events and were balanced and unbiased. There were no cases of violating balance in the main news. The stories comply with the journalist standards outlined in the code.

One detail was highlighted in this period that is based on the results of the quantitative analysis. It indicates that compared with the other broadcasters, Imedi TV's main bulletin had more materials showing successful work of the government which Imedi is presenting it in a positive way. For example, one can mention "the ceremony of oath-taking in the Ministry of Defense." During this ceremony, government members spoke about the positive changes in the Ministry of Defense. In the main news, there was a story of "Mountain trainings" that told the audience how successful Georgian military is in the process of training together with Hungarian and Czech soldiers.

During the monitoring period, Imedi TV broadcast two political talk shows. One was Thea Sichinava's "Time for Politics" and the other was Vakho Sanaia's "Live."

The guests in the shows were from various parties; topics were interesting and comprehensive; the anchors were not biased towards political subjects; and there were no cases of using hate speech or other inappropriate language.

Maestro TV

During the monitoring period, Maestro TV had two news bulletins: "News at 18.00" and "News at 21.00". Most of the stories were balanced and unbiased although in three occasions, the GD candidate was given preferential treatment over other candidates. On September 20 in "News at 18.00," there was a story about "the situation in the conflict zone" with a subtitle saying, "the candidate for presidency Giorgi Margvelashvili evaluates Karasin-Abashidze meeting." The channel had a comment of Margvelashvili under the banner marked 41. Not showing any other candidates in the same story puts Margvelashvili in the preferential position.

Similar facts were observed in the news of September 18 and 21 when the channel only had Margvelashvili's comments about the events happening in GPB.

During the monitoring period, Maestro TV had the following talk shows: "Subjective Opinion" 5 times a week, "Arguments" Twice a week and "Politmeter" twice a week.

Most talk shows were balanced concerning the invited guests – there were representatives of the government as well as of the opposition. There were no cases of using hate speech or other inappropriate language. However, on September 24, when the guest of the talk show "Arguments" was the Minister of Probation Sozar Subari, there was a special report on the situation in the Kutaisi N2 prison which positively featured government's achievements in improving the overall conditions of inmates. In the report, a number of inmates said that they had exceptionally good conditions in this prison and unlike under the previous government, they had been treated well. Neither in this story, nor after it did Maestro TV offer its audience any comment by human rights activists, ombudsman or of any competent person concerning the problems existing in the penitentiary institutions. The anchor herself had no concrete cases concerning prison problems. After the report, Subari again spoke on conditions in prisons in general stating that there were improvements in other prisons as well.

Adjara TV

There were no cases of breaching journalistic standards during the monitoring period in the news programmes of “Adjara TV.” The stories were balanced with no cases of being biased towards any political subject.

In this period, a special section “Dros Obieqtivi” was added to the news bulletin “Dro” which dealt with portraits/personal stories of different presidential candidates who were mostly shown in a positive way.

The channel often suffers from technical defects in not having relevant subtitles for respondents. For example, in the news of September 18, an interviewee responding to the allegations towards the Government had no subtitle so that we can only assume that the respondent was a representative of either local or of the central government.

During the monitoring period, presidential candidates were invited twice in the talk shows of “Adjara TV” but in both cases, they were invited alone without any opponents. There were no important violations of journalistic standards in talk shows; the anchor had neither positive nor negative attitudes towards the guests. There were no cases of using hate speech or other terms inappropriate for broadcasting.

Kavkasia TV

During the monitoring period, we analyzed news bulletin of Kavkasia TV “Today” that is aired three times a day – but in spite of this fact, it is short of events from the point of view of information and news are mainly broadcast in live sync. The news is often repeated in all three bulletins and the audience has little opportunity to get something new.

News programmes in Kavkasia TV are balanced. There were only some cases when balance was not observed or when the other party was not given the opportunity to present its position. For example, on September 24, there was a story in news concerning the report of GYLA (Georgian Young lawyers Association) on the rehabilitation of Batumi city. The story was based on the comments of three GYLA representatives as they were blaming Batumi municipality in breaching the law and using budget expenditures inappropriately. In the whole story (lasting three minutes), there was not a single a comment from a representative of the Batumi municipality.

Another case of breaching the balance was in the news bulletin of October 5, where Koba Davitashvili accused the leader of parliamentary majority David Saganelidze of making secret deals with the former government. He also spoke of Saganelidze’s financial interests and said that he was one of the important heads of Georgian mafia. In spite of these heavy accusations, Kavkasia TV gave no opportunity to Saganelidze to respond; there was no indication that there has been even an attempt on the journalist’s part to obtain his comment on the story.

During the period of monitoring Kavkasia TV had the following talk shows: “Spectrum”, “Hot Line” and “Barrier” as well as “Elections 2013”.

We would like to single out daily talk show “Spectrum” and his anchor David Akubardia. It should be noted that the incumbent government is presented in an exceptionally positive way, while the former government is presented in a negative way. In addition, during the monitoring period, there were no guests from the UNM or from the former government in the studio. The anchor nevertheless repeatedly criticized them very sharply. For example, on October 1, the anchor said “congratulations

on the anniversary of the revolution. I'd like to stress one more time that bad guys are gone"; "at weddings and at funerals, criminals from the UNM would sit next to you as if nothing had happened... the former government was a bloody government, they don't even feel the huge sin they committed against the nation and still, they have claims to come to the power, those rats..." At the same time, the anchor doesn't try to hide his friendliness towards the incumbent government. Addressing the government's presidential candidate, Giorgi Margvelashvili, in his programme of September 19 the anchor said: "generally you're a good guy and Bidzo (diminutive for Bidzina PM) has selected you. Many are critical; and there are many things that I don't like about you – but in general, you are better than all the others. You know what, Gio? (diminutive for the presidential candidate) You have too many commitments. You have to fulfill them, Gio, or public will eat you alive."

The anchor often uses phrases inappropriate for presenters, thus, insulting the audience as well as the concrete group of people. For example, "Your administration (the admin of Tbilisi State University) resembles the admin of the Zoo, they have the similar mentality -both of them are idiots" – September 16, "Spectrum." "I'm expressing my surprise once more. Everything that was published in the newspapers about this "office" (The Institute of Theatre and Cinema) shows that they were the gang of "Nationals" (UNM)... It really has some criminal edge to it" September 17, "Spectrum."

Anti-Turkish rhetoric was also observed on David Akubardia's part: "they are eating you alive 'cause you are a Georgian businessman, don't allow you to do anything and at the same time, they give cart blanche to some Turks to build shops and similar things" September 20, "Spectrum". The anchor had quite a negative attitude towards the ethnic Indians. "We should get rid of all these Indians..." October 4, "Spectrum."

The anchor of "The Hot Line" Alexandre Elisashvili stands out for his emotional evaluations of different issues. He never hides his position and sometimes uses phraseology inappropriate to the anchor: "Just tell me what is all the clowning about at Akhalaia's trial? That's some kind of a circus, but it sucks" October 10.

One of his guests expressed his opinions on David Paichadze and Eka Kvesitadze:

"One was obviously well-trained bullterrier, the other addressed the guests in such a dull, stupid voice..." September 18.

The anchor didn't urge his guest to refrain from such expressions, on the contrary, Elisashvili stated that he had absolutely no feeling of solidarity towards those journalists.

As to the programme "Elections 2013, no ethical violations were observed there.

Conclusion

Data from the second monitoring period reveals that most monitored media continue to provide a generally balanced coverage. However, unlike during the first period, the focus of monitored media has generally shifted from the government to political parties and candidates. To date, monitored media have not provided analytical and in-depth coverage that could help voters to better analyze and assess the qualities and programmes of electoral contestants. The Charter and MEMO 98 will continue to monitor the media coverage until the election day. The next report will evaluate the

entire monitoring period and it will provide an overall assessment of the media coverage of the 2013 elections.

Methodology

The Charter & MEMO 98 have sought to evaluate the mass media's performance in providing objective and balanced coverage of contestants and their platforms so the citizens of Georgia can make well-informed choices at the ballot box. The project's findings have been determined through a well-defined and rigorous methodology and are not intended to support any one candidate or political party, but the integrity of the media environment as a whole during the campaign season. On 2 September, the Charter commenced the monitoring of six TV channels (GPB, Rustavi 2, Imedi TV, Maestro TV, Kavkazia and Adjara TV).^[4]

The Charter uses methodology that has been developed by MEMO 98 which has carried out similar projects in 47 countries in the last 15 years. Given its comprehensive content-oriented approach, it is specially designed to provide in-depth feedback on pluralism and diversity in media reporting, including coverage of chosen subjects/themes. As such, the outcome of the monitoring is not a set of empty and superficial data, but a detailed analysis and evaluation of the current level of political diversity in media reporting, examined in the proper context, including concrete comparisons and analysis.^[5] The Charter & MEMO 98 will issue one more preliminary reports and a comprehensive final report, including recommendations for potential improvements, in four weeks.

^[1] For more information, see the OSCE/ODIHR report at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/107052>.

^[2] The proportion of the coverage for presidential candidates is calculated out of the total time devoted to all of them.

^[3] Direct time is when a candidate or other monitored subjects has an opportunity to speak directly.

^[4] The monitoring of TV channels focused on prime time (18.00 – 24.00).

^[5] The media monitoring included quantitative analysis of the coverage focusing on the amount of time allocated to each “subject” and the tone of the coverage in which the relevant political subjects were portrayed – positive, neutral or negative. Qualitative analysis assesses the performance of media against specific principles/benchmarks, such as ethical or professional standards, that cannot be easily quantified. Monitors report about lies, distortions, unbalanced coverage, unfairness, inaccuracy, bias and anything else that is important to presenting the quality of reporting. These data are reported separately and integrated in the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.