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Monitoring of Media Coverage of the Presidential Election Campaign in Ukraine:

RECOMMENDATIONS

**The media monitoring period
January 14 – April 21, 2019**

Kyiv, Ukraine

➤ FOR THE STATE AUTHORITIES

- Politicians, media owners and authorities should refrain from attempts to influence media content or interfere in any other way in activities of the media and journalists as it undermines their independence. Interference with the activities of journalists and media personnel should not be tolerated and any allegations of such should be promptly and efficiently investigated.
- Authorities should ensure the presence of strong, independent and adequately resourced public service media, which operate(s) under a clear mandate to serve the overall public interest and to set and maintain high standards of journalism.

➤ FOR THE VERKHOVNA RADA OF UKRAINE

- Identify an effective state regulator(s) to oversee how mass media comply and ensure their compliance with electoral law. Also, assess the need for a regulator in the sphere of Internet and establishment of this institution in a strict accordance with international principles and standards of regulation of the global network. The regulator(s) should:
 - ✓ have a balanced composition,
 - ✓ act impartially, independently and transparently,
 - ✓ investigate violations,
 - ✓ make decisions quickly,
 - ✓ be able to impose reasonable, adequate and effective sanctions, and
 - ✓ act with the purpose of ensuring pluralism and freedom of speech, monitoring of the main mass media (subject matters and time of speeches for candidates and their supporters, terms and conditions for accessing the media - absolute or proportional equality), searching for new ways to cover the electoral process with due regard for the evolution of the media
- Foresee a system of adequate sanctions for violating the electoral legislation by the mass media in the field of election campaigning, informing voters and covering the election process
- Improve current legislation with the aim to clearly differentiate election campaigning from the voters' informing, and introduce effective mechanisms for dealing with hidden advertising and advertorial/paid materials ("dzhynsa")
- Introduce restrictions or prohibitions on the placement of campaign materials on television and radio, prohibition on placement of campaign materials via outdoor advertising during the election process

- Consider introducing a special regime for placing campaign materials prior to the start of the election process
- Update the electoral legislation and introduce regulation of activities in the Internet during the elections, both in terms of campaigning and informing, as well as in terms of monitoring the spending of the election campaign funds on similar activities, and, more specifically, funds from other sources and other countries
- Take measures to minimize misuse of personal data by candidates for election purposes (BigData), incl. through voter targeting.
- Take all measures to prevent the possible absence of a quorum in the National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine in the beginning of the election process in August 2019 due to the untimely appointment by the Parliament of the members of the National Council.

➤ **FOR THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TELEVISION AND RADIO BROADCASTING OF UKRAINE**

- Create precedents and introduce the practice of responding to violations in the manner prescribed by the Law of Ukraine "On Television and Radio Broadcasting" in order to bring to liability television channels that violate the requirements of the electoral law in so far as informing and campaigning;
- Adopt all necessary amendments to National Council's normative legal acts in order to ensure that protocols are drawn up on administrative violations in the cases provided for by the Code of Ukraine on Administrative Violations;
- Create precedents and introduce the practice of drawing up protocols on administrative violations in cases provided for by the Code of Ukraine on Administrative Offenses;
- Create precedents with final findings and assessments for differentiating the nature of the materials - campaign/informational.
- Introduce Council's own practice of responding to cases of hidden campaign materials' distribution by TV channels, including instances when campaign materials are included in the information programs, as well as introduce interaction with other state authorities on verification of funding and the role of the subjects of the election process in cases of such violations.

- Encourage media companies to adopt their own policies on gender equality, in particular in terms of pay, career growth, work-life balance, access to managerial positions and media content.

➤ FOR THE ELECTORAL SUBJECTS

- During the campaign, focus on their own position and program clauses related to important aspects of the country's life. Put forth efforts for raising awareness of the audience about how the state mechanism works whilst not ignoring the problems. This would increase the level of electoral debate in the country and would increase the level of trust in society, the transparency of the election and the process of country's governance, and the strengthening of democracy.
- When criticizing, remember about the meaningful side of criticism: it must be argumentative, and not purely emotional, and should not contain aggressive language that sparks hostility. The latter increases the polarization and radicalization of society, promotes tension and does not contribute to the development of democracy.
- Initiate meaningful and detailed discussions, including those in social networks, on key issues of state development with the involvement of the broader public and opinion leaders, thus creating a culture of political debate in Ukraine.
- Increase the transparency of the campaigning in social networks. In particular, to create public pages instead of private profiles. This concerns also an open advertising policy for candidates and political forces, since it should not be carried out from third-party accounts.

➤ FOR THE OPINION LEADERS

- Understanding their responsibility, it is better to raise the literacy of voters instead of promoting separate messages; it is better to discuss ideas and meanings, rather than candidates' personalities. Opinion leaders can influence the improvement of quality of the public discussion.
- In case of active promotion of a particular point of view, to clearly state their connections or affiliation with the candidate or media team that supports the candidate (if any). For example, to mention them in a profile.
- Avoid distorting or silencing facts in favour of one of the parties. Refrain from comments without knowing the situation or having accurate information. Instead, to clarify the issues which fall within the scope of their expertise. This

is especially true for journalists, who should communicate difficult things to the audience without violation of the professional ethics.

- Understand that by promoting one of the candidates, a public opinion leader risks his/her reputation. Especially if he/she is at the same time an expert and expresses an expert opinion. A strong concept of reputation is one of the foundations of public trust, on which, in turn, democracy is based.

➤ **FOR THE PUBLIC BROADCASTER**

- Enhance the information & political broadcasting and more actively provide coverage of complex political processes in the news, including elections.
- Demonstrate to the media market a standard of quality work in elections coverage, as opposed to biased editorial policies of private TV channels.
- Create a competitive political content for TV and radio. In particular, ensure the launch of a political talk show (not only the debates) from the first days of the election campaign, which could provide a quality discussion on the issues of the election process.
- Fill and manage the Facebook page more actively whilst promoting educational content (due to the effectiveness of the campaign of short video with the involvement of celebrities calling to vote during the first round of elections). Also, draw attention of the social networks' audience to the channel's high-quality products using modern formats: quotes, short videos, etc.
- Elaborate and adopt a gender equality policy and serve as an example for commercial media on this matter.
- UA:Persnyi could put more emphasis on reporting the reality as it is, not to be afraid of showing people's emotions, positive or critical/negative viewpoints. Neutrality should not be seen as an ultimate goal as the news then becomes superficial and sterile. At the same time, UA:Persnyi should present all sides of the story with a comparable time and manner of presentation to avoid any preference or bias. It is important to ensure that Persnyi's news is newsworthy, enriching the public discourse. It is thus important that their journalists actively seek for information and do not just wait what other media outlets report in order to recycle their reports.

➤ FOR THE EDITORIAL TEAMS OF MASS MEDIA

- It is vital for TV channels' credibility to assure that all personnel (editors, producers, journalists, news program & talk-show anchors and hosts) are perceived as professional and impartial while carrying out their journalistic duties. Adherence to this requirement is extremely important when preparing the news (news structure, composition, topics, editing, visual, audio aspects of concrete news items; selection of guests & topics & questions in talk-shows) and also in the way news is presented (communication with respondents, guests, how questions are formulated, toned, how deep journalist goes with additional inquiries, whether a viewer can perceive, feel, hear and see that journalist is really involved, issue-driven or whether journalist is biased in some way and leaning towards or distancing against certain views.

➤ FOR THE EDITORIAL TEAMS OF MASS MEDIA

❖ regarding training of journalists and other editorial staff

- Improve journalists' knowledge on matters from the elections sphere.
- Increase the level of journalists' knowledge on how social media work, including in election campaigns. This will allow journalists to treat social networks more carefully and as sources of information and not be easily manipulated, which ultimately would lead them to providing better coverage the election process. This need exists not only at the central level, but also in the regions where it is necessary to provide coverage and quality analysis of politicians' online campaigns during the future parliamentary and local elections.
- Enhance journalists' knowledge on how propaganda and external information influences work. Get them acquainted with the main narratives of Russian propaganda and manipulative techniques for the rapid identification of such possible influences.
- Organise trainings that raise the level of critical thinking, and encourage journalists to participate in them.
- Increase the level of journalists' knowledge on fact checking.

➤ FOR THE EDITORIAL TEAMS OF MASS MEDIA

❖ regarding presentation of sociological data during election campaigns

- When presenting the results of sociological surveys, it is necessary to provide information on: full name of the organization that has carried out the survey; customers who ordered the survey; time when survey was carried out;

territory covered by the survey; size and method of forming a sociological sample; survey method; precise wording of questions; possible statistical error.

- When the results of an interactive audience poll are publicly presented, they should be accompanied by a text message "This poll reflects the opinion only of this particular audience". The message should be displayed on the screen (for television programs) in a form suitable for a viewer to perceive it, or it can be announced (for radio programs) in a clear manner by the speaker or program host immediately before and after the indicated results are presented.

➤ **FOR THE EDITORIAL TEAMS OF MASS MEDIA**

❖ regarding the decrease of the conflict level in the media environment

- Editorial teams of online publications are recommended to find a balance between clickable headlines and those that do not mislead the reader and do not provoke aggression or negative emotions.
- Talk show TV-hosts should avoid having a biased attitude towards the guests present in the studio or political processes; they should stay neutral and make sure that discussion in the studio remains sufficiently ethical, and prevent offensive, xenophobic, racist, or other expressions that incite hostility.
- On social media pages, refrain from supporting and even block discussions that incite hostility and hatred.

➤ **FOR THE EDITORIAL TEAMS OF MASS MEDIA**

❖ regarding completeness of information

- In their news coverage of the campaign, broadcasters should enhance their reporting by providing the relevant context, background information, using experts and alternative viewpoints in the framework of their news items. By offering such views, they could help their viewers to better understand what the given information means for them, what the consequences of bad governing are, its alternatives and other perspectives. The stories should be presented from various angles, presenting different viewpoints – all sides involved in an issue – experts, civil society representatives (but not always the same ones).
- When covering any controversial issue, especially of a political nature, it is important to present all sides involved, including when a side refuses to comment. In such scenario, such a refusal shall be presented so that the public is not misled. In addition, it is evenly important to provide impartial

background information (intro into the story) if the issue is long-term and complicated. It is usually not satisfactory to limit coverage of such controversial topics by purely presenting opinions of sides involved without proper contextual information. At the same time, it is important to consider balance of expert/analytical views.

➤ **FOR THE EDITORIAL TEAMS OF MASS MEDIA**

❖ regarding the sources of information

- Do not use anonymous sources (exception - you disregard the recommendation to indicate a source if it would impose a threat to safety/life of the source).
- When using information from social networks, check the source of this information, and clearly indicate it; even links to verified accounts are not a guarantee that your source distributes credible information, as the source may have its own mercenary motive.
- Treat critically references to mass media that use social networks as the main source of information.
- When covering events in Ukraine, it is better to use Ukrainian sources of information; when covering events in other countries, use the media of the respective country, and it is better to refer only to those media that have a long history and known experience.
- Regarding Russian sources of information - see section "Regarding the possible Russian influence".

➤ **FOR THE EDITORIAL TEAMS OF MASS MEDIA**

❖ regarding work with social networks

- Focus on educating voters in social networks by using formats attractive for readers, such as short videos and motivational photos. Actively promote analytical information by "packing" it into visualized formats - "teach while entertaining". At the same time, keep in mind which format is most in demand by the target audience of the media.
- Devote part of media content to expert explanations of the role of social networks in the electoral process and the mechanism of their work. For example, tell about the dangers of distributing disinformation and manipulative content through closed groups in social networks and messengers. Such education will allow voters to better identify possible manipulations in social networks and resist them more effectively.

- Explain to audience the damage and threats of disinformation, fake news and information noise, as well as the consequences of these phenomena for the society. Do it in a form that is interesting and easy to understand.
- Use social networks to initiate a real public debate on important issues of the country's development, requiring the involvement of top candidates. Collaborate with other media on this matter to create joint initiatives that can contribute to quality changes in the information space.
- Elaborate editorial policies for days of "election silence" in social networks, since during these days the "silence" is being actively violated by both the election headquarters of candidates, and the media themselves.

➤ **FOR THE EDITORIAL TEAMS OF MASS MEDIA**

❖ regarding the possible Russian influence:

- Do not use Russian sources of information about international and Ukrainian news, except when they are the primary sources of information - for example, when the news concerns important statements or actions of Russian officials.
- Do not use sources of information access to which is officially restricted in Ukraine.
- Do not give too much attention to domestic events in Russia, as this immerses Ukrainian audience into the media discourse of the aggressor country.
- Provide balanced coverage of politicians' or candidates' statements that re-echo narratives of Russian propaganda. Present them critically, alongside with the context and background that are necessary for understanding, and, if needed – with the opposite point of view.
- Use responsible approach to terminology when covering topics related to the Russian aggression in the Donbas region. Clearly articulate who is the opponent of the Ukrainian army, indicating the country-aggressor.

➤ **FOR THE EDITORIAL TEAMS OF MASS MEDIA**

❖ on avoiding materials with signs of being advertorial/paid ("dzhynsa") during content planning

- If any "customer" offers a material to your media outlet (TV or radio channel), then the choice should be between agreeing to publish it as an advertising

material (with the obligatory plate "advertisement"), or making your own editorial material based on the interests of your target audience.

- The editorial materials should be balanced, truthful and reliable, without any PR theses about a presidential candidate/member of the parliament, a party. The material should not contain any unverified statistics, incorrect dates, allegations that do not correspond to reality, or unreliable facts. Only in this case, the text can be regarded as a quality one and useful for your audience.
- No privileged treatment should be given to public authorities by the media during election campaigns. Media should be able to criticize activities or inaction by the authorities and other official bodies whose activities are financed from the public money, to investigate corruption and other wrongdoings and they should not face any pressure in the form of retaliation
- It is advisable to reasonably limit presentation of officials during the period prior the elections, especially if officials are taking part in the elections. The coverage of officials activities shall be based on the newsworthiness of topic in which a politician is involved, not on a pure fact that a top official is involved. The news program shall try to avoid automatic coverage of top officials. If it is decided that the coverage of an official is newsworthy, then a broadcaster should do its best to provide the necessary background to all such stories, including independent and/or opposing views to those of the government.
- When planning the materials, take into account the significance of the topic for the public
- Check the information to see if it can be an "information leak" made on purpose and look into who might benefit from it. Only then decide whether to work on the topic.
- Plan meaningful content for publishing; do not load the audience with cliches and empty words. It is often a sign of an advertorial/paid material when, instead of answers to important questions, the campaign headquarters offer cliches and excessively broad PR messages.
- Take care of the balance of opinions, and in a situation where it cannot be observed, clearly explain to the audience why this happened. For example, there was no time to ask the opinion of the other party, or the party itself was unavailable, or refused to provide comments. And do not stop there - try to get answers from the opponent as soon as possible. Even if it seems that one party's guilt has already been proved, the party still has to be given an opportunity to provide comments.

- When preparing to cover the event, ask if it is genuine, and not organized exclusively for someone's PR. If you see that the event is organized in someone's interest – it is best to simply ignore it. Materials like "presidential candidate took part in honouring veterans" should not be published as a matter of principle. On the occasion of the Veterans' Day, for example, the floor should be given to the veterans themselves and not to a presidential candidate for his/her PR.
- Check the declarations and statements of politicians, and add the opinions of experts, instead of simply repeating the politicians' messages. If someone lies, and you can prove it - prove it! If the person is doing it simply for PR – it is not news then.

➤ **FOR THE EDITORIAL TEAMS OF MASS MEDIA**

❖ regarding gender-related issues

- Cover the activities and programs of the candidates to the fullest extent possible regardless of their sex and ensure equal and unbiased attitude towards them. Media coverage of male and female politicians, in particular, during the elections, influences their public perception, and therefore, the voting (results).
- Keep in mind that gender equality in media sphere has two levels: equality inside a mass media (equal opportunities and attitude, equal access to decision-making positions) and equality in media content, with a special focus on combating sexist stereotypes. Ensure equal access to managerial positions in media both for men and women.
- Ensure gender equality in media content with a special focus on combating sexist stereotypes.
- Develop editorial policies and standards of responding to sexism and respecting gender parity in media.
- Conduct trainings for journalists and editors on gender-sensitive media literacy. Develop training modules for media professionals, heads of media organisations and self-regulatory organizations.
- Make efforts in finding female experts, commentators and speakers.
- Respect gender balance while selecting guests for the talk-shows.

- Change the trend of speaking about women indirectly instead of giving them an opportunity to have a say.
- Indicate the authorship of published materials for the readers to understand from which perspective the materials are written and whether gender parity among journalist in media is respected.

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Opinions expressed by the authors of the publication do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Council of Europe

Monitoring* of Media Coverage of the Presidential Election Campaign in Ukraine: RECOMMENDATIONS / O. Burmahin, D. Dutsyk, R. Kuzel, Ye. Kuzmenko, O. Yurkova. - K., 2019. – 12 p.

The monitoring was held by a coalition of the civil society organisations consisting of “The Commission on Journalism Ethics”, “Human Rights Platform”, “Ukrainian Media and Communications Institute” and “StopFake” with the support of the Council of Europe projects “Supporting the transparency, inclusiveness and integrity of electoral practice in Ukraine” and “Strengthening freedom of media, access to information and reinforcing the public broadcasting system in Ukraine”, which are implemented within the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021. Monitoring was held during January - April 2019. Reports in Ukrainian and English, as well as monitoring methodology can be found at the web-site of the Commission on Journalism Ethics <http://www.cje.org.ua/>.