



Recommendations for the First National Channel

Specific News Programs Recommendations

- It is clear that government is the main policymaker and coverage of its activities is necessary to keep the public informed, including official events, meetings and implementation of policies. However, events can be genuine and relevant (such as national celebrations, anniversaries, the signature of international treaties, etc.), genuine but marginal (such as the opening of public buildings), and pseudo-events (occasions created or managed by the government with the aim of gathering more extensive positive media coverage. While incumbents generally receive more media exposure than challengers, the media should cover the activities of authorities in a balanced and critical fashion by focusing on results, successes and failures. The media should provide a platform for independent and critical opinions, offering the public informed views on the authorities' performance in office.¹
- It is very advisable to reasonably limit presentation of officials during the period prior the elections, especially if state officials are taking part in the elections. The coverage of state 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, as the television is a PUBLIC, not a state broadcaster. If it is decided that the coverage of an official is newsworthy, then First National Channel should use its own materials.
- First National Channel's journalists could be more probing in their approach when asking questions, not to let politicians come up with weak responses, excuses or general answers. They should see public money interest behind each story and confront the responses with reality.
- It is important to ensure that First National Channel's news is newsworthy, enriching the public discourse. It is thus important that channel's journalists actively seek for information and do not just wait what other media outlets report in order to recycle their reports.

¹ See the OSCE/ODIHR Handbook on Media Monitoring for Election Observation Missions at <http://www.osce.org/odihr/92057?download=true>.

- First National Channel 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, the channel should present all sides of the story with a comparable time and manner of presentation to avoid any preference or bias;
- First National Channel could still further enhance its reporting by providing the relevant context, background information, using experts and alternative viewpoints in the framework of its news items. By offering such views, the channel could help its 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).
- First National Channel news programs shall really reflect what is happening in the country - from either social or political perspective. As such, if there is something important happening, it should be always shown. However, it is always crucial to provide background, context and to try to confront actors (especially when holding public offices) with such contextual questions.
- When covering any controversial issue, especially of a political nature, it is highly 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, try always to consider also general balance of expert/analytical views – if possible.
- It is vital for First National Channel's 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.

Proposed action vis-a-vis the upcoming parliamentary elections

1. Description

1.1. Title of the Action: Consultancy of Internal Monitoring of News Coverage at First National Channel

1.2. Start date and end date:

November – December 2014

2. Implementation activities

2.1. Executive Summary

The overall objective of the consultancy will be to support the First National Channel in trying to provide impartial, balanced and fair coverage of electoral contestants during and after the upcoming parliamentary elections as well as helping the channel in enhancing its internal media monitoring capacities with a special focus on political and electoral coverage. During the initial phase, two MEMO 98 experts will become familiar with First National Channel's plans for the coverage of the upcoming parliamentary elections and will tailor working mechanism of their cooperation with the First National Channel management as well as journalists. In November, MEMO 98 experts will start with practical implementation of their advisory roles by actively participating in the channel's daily agenda/topics-related discussions, offering their advice on the process of news, talk-show, debates and other programs creation and advising on the performance of news presenters and other journalists. Both experts will prepare an assessment of channel's news and current affairs programmes which will include a set of recommendations.

Activities

Activity n.1 – Drawing attention and reviewing basic principles of international standards for media election coverage, including documents adopted within OSCE, Council of Europe and other international organizations as well as the First National Channel's Code of Conduct and the Ukrainian legal framework for media election coverage, inter alia, Election law, Broadcasting law etc.

Activity n.2 – Practical implementation of the experts' advisory role

MEMO 98 experts will start with practical implementation of their advisory roles by actively participating in the channel's daily agenda/topics-related discussions, offering their advice on the process of news and talk-show programs creation and advising on the performance of news presenters and other journalists. Both experts will participate at the morning staff meeting and will offer their advice on the topics of the day. Consequently, they will join journalists helping them to cover their respective election and campaign related topics, offering their advice and on-the-job mentoring. The experts will also help with editing of stories and will review the main news programme jointly with the chief editor and other news journalists daily to offer their point of view on the quality of the output. MEMO 98 experts will hold regular meetings with the First National Channel's director general and the deputy director helping them to make important decisions throughout the difficult period to guarantee the channel's independence and impartiality. The experts will participate in various other topics-related discussions; accompanying TV crews to the field to offer advice and feedback during interviews and in preparing footages; taking part at editing process, including related discussions; offering advice on the process of news and talk-show programs creation, as well as a concrete news item structure, format and preparation; advising on the performance of studio anchors and on-the-spot journalists; and providing recommendations to the mid-level managers as well as to the top management and the board of trustees.

Activity n.3 – Communicating with international observation missions, diplomatic community and domestic media monitoring groups on the results of media monitoring and explaining the coverage of First National Channel in the campaign;

Both experts will be having regular meetings with international observation missions (mainly OSCE/ODIHR and NDI), other international organizations and local organizations which will media monitoring or will focus on media & elections to explain and promote the role of the First National Channel in the campaign, helping the broadcaster to improve its image as public-service provider.

2.2. Pre and post consultancy assessments

The main goals of the consultancy will be to improve professionalism of the First National Channel aiming to adopt an unbiased, diverse and analytical editorial line within the news and current affairs programmes, including prior, during and after the parliamentary elections campaign.