

**Republic of Moldova:**

**Pre-electoral assistance programme for parliamentary elections in 2014**

**MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE 30 NOVEMBER 2014  
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC  
OF MOLDOVA**

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*The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect  
the official policy of the Council of Europe*

## **Introduction**

In Moldova, television remains the key source of political information and most importantly media, especially in rural areas.

The media conduct, including coverage of election campaigns, is governed by the Election law and Audio-visual code, and further regulated by the 30 September regulations adopted by the Central Election Commission (CEC) on recommendations of the Audio-visual Co-ordination Council (CCA). The legal framework requires the media, during the campaign period, to provide balanced and impartial coverage of all political contestants running in the election race.

The Election code also requires the CCA to provide the CEC, on bi-weekly periods, the results of the media monitoring of national broadcasters and to produce two days before the election day, the final report on the activities of the broadcasters during the campaign.

During the election campaign period preceding the 30 November 2014 Parliamentary elections, the CCA monitored five national broadcast television channels and eight additional television channels in their coverage of political pluralism (coverage of campaigns and relevant political actors).

The 13 TV channels that were monitored by the CCA were as follows: national public television Moldova 1 and national private TV channels - Prime, Publika TV, Canal 3, Canal 2, as well as other key private channels N 4, TV 7, PRO TV CHIȘINĂU, Jurnal TV, Accent TV, Ren Moldova, RTR Moldova and Euro TV.

The CCA, following their experience from the previous election campaigns, has again for these elections decided to analyse the news programs of the most influential TV channels. Conducting assessment of the 40-day monitoring period (20 October – 30 November), the CCA issued five media monitoring reports and the final report covering or which covered the entire period of monitoring.

## **The campaign in the media**

In general, voters were able to access media information regarding candidates and campaign developments, allowing them to make informed choices. In addition to the extensive news coverage of the campaigns, voters had access to regular election programmes including debates<sup>1</sup>. However, leaders of the political entities running in the

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<sup>1</sup> National broadcasters were during this election campaign obliged to organise debates in which the contesting subjects were able to participate free of charge. This obligation was challenged

elections often failed to participate in these debates, thus preventing voters from comparing these key candidates and leaders of the political entities running in the election contest. The campaign was calm and to some extent lacking genuine debate, for instance about the differences between election platforms of contesting parties represented in the current Government.

*Overview of the main trends identified during the entire monitoring period (20 October – 28 November)<sup>2</sup>:*

Overall, monitored media provided a variety of views in their news programmes, although of all 13 media monitored, only a small number maintained balanced and unbiased coverage of political parties running in the elections and other relevant political actors.

Public TV "Moldova 1" managed to cover the large spectrum of political parties running in the elections ensuring diversity of views and providing the parties with balanced coverage. The portrayal of the Government (that received the largest single share of coverage of 20,5 per cent) and the coalition parties was slightly positive. On the other hand Political Party Patria (PPP) was portrayed rather negatively, especially in the last week of the campaign when the party was removed from the election race.

Election coverage in the main news programmes of the TV channel "PRO TV Chisinau" were even more diverse compared to Moldova 1. PRO TV Chisinau managed to maintain impartial and balanced coverage of a large spectrum of political contestants and other political actors throughout the entire monitored period. The largest single share of coverage of some 14 per cent was allocated to Government that was portrayed in overall neutral light, along with other political subjects and election contestants.

In contrast with Moldova 1 and PRO TV Chisinau, four TV channels (all with national coverage!) - Canal 2, Canal 3, Prime and Publica, owned by the General Media Group, reportedly controlled by PDM Deputy Chairman V. Plahotniuc, demonstrated practically throughout the entire campaign period a clear bias in favour of PDM. All four channels have maintained rather extensive level of coverage of PDM activities (ranging from 43 per cent of news coverage of political actors and election protagonists on Canal 2, to 31 per cent of such coverage dedicated to PDM in news programmes of Publica), presenting this party, in particular its leader M. Lupu in a very positive light throughout the entire campaign period monitored by the CCA. Obvious bias of four

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(including by Ombudsman) at court, but the final court decision was pending during the campaign period.

<sup>2</sup> Below (pages 7 – 45) is an overview of the media monitoring results combined for the entire 38-day monitoring period.

major TV channels owned by one media house, in favour of one political party, demonstrates a systemic problem. In particular in connection with this issue, but also in general, regulation of media ownership is perceived in media community stakeholders as largely inadequate, and requiring legislative changes aiming at prevention of its high concentration and improved transparency of media ownership structures.

In the first 10 days of the monitored period TV channels "N4", "TV 7" and "Euro TV" also demonstrated bias coverage, favouring another governing party - Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM). These TV channels maintained such rather favourable coverage of PLDM during the entire campaign period monitored. During this 38 day period, N4 allocated the single largest share of coverage of political actors and election protagonists to the Government (19,5 per cent of news coverage), while PLDM received the largest single share of coverage allocated to election contestants (17,5 per cent of news coverage). Portrayal of PLDM was rather positive. Similarly, also TV 7 allocated two largest shares of coverage to the Government (22 per cent) and PLDM (15 per cent), portraying this political party in a rather positive light. The tone of the coverage of political actors and election protagonists by Euro TV was more neutral compared to other two TV channels, but this TV has also demonstrated tendency to favour PLDM in the amount of coverage provided to the Government (that received 28 per cent of coverage) and PLDM, that was given 18 per cent of the coverage - the single largest share of coverage allocated to political parties contesting in the elections. PLDM leader V. Filat received 19 per cent of coverage allocated to political actors (persons), more than any other political representative, and his portrayal was rather positive.

News casts of "Jurnal TV", while allocating the largest shares of coverage to PDM (30 per cent), and Government (15 per cent), presented these subjects in a critical way (especially PDM deputy chair V. Plahotniuc was presented in a very negative light). Other political subject presented in news cast of this channel were portrayed in a neutral or negative light also. The channel refrained from favouring any political actor of contesting subject, but the approach of negative coverage it was demonstrating during the campaign period was a result of often one-sided news items lacking views of criticized or accused political actors.

TV station "Accent TV" clearly favoured PPP and its leader R. Usatâi who received during the 40 days monitoring period, over 26 per cent of the coverage allocated to political actors (leaders and other representatives of political parties). At the same time, the Government was portrayed in a negative light.

While TV station "Ren Moldova" showed a preference for Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova, allocating this party a major share of rather positive coverage in the first media monitoring period, when assessing the entire monitored period, the TV offered rather neutral coverage of political actors, of which the Government received

the largest single share of coverage, some 19 per cent. RTR Moldova allocated the largest single share of coverage (some 15 per cent) to the Party of Socialists that was portrayed in overall neutral light, and to the Government, that was presented in a slightly negative way.

#### *CCA regulation of the media coverage during the campaign period*

During the campaign period the CCA held four public sessions that were analysing the campaign coverage based on the media monitoring reports prepared by the CCA media monitoring department. The monitoring periods discussed during these four sessions were: 20 - 29 October, 30 October - 8 November, 9 - 15 November and 16 - 21 November. The fifth monitored report covering the period 22 - 28 November was planned to be reviewed after the elections.

Throughout the four sessions of the CCA that took place in the campaign period, the regulatory body sanctioned the majority of monitored media for bias coverage. The law prescribes that sanctions are imposed gradually starting from warning, through fine (max. 5500 lei) to ban on airing the advertising for 72 hours, until temporary revocation of the broadcasting license. The CCA has during the first and second session imposed sanctions ranging from warning to the max. fine, but no more penalties were imposed until the end of campaign on 28 November. In the third monitoring period, based on the media monitoring report, the CCA did not find any major media misconduct, so it did not impose any penalty. Furthermore, during the fourth session that took place on 28 November, despite the fact that majority of CCA board members who were present at the session were in favour of imposing the next stage of sanctions, the board did not manage to secure enough votes to adopt the decision in this respect (two out of nine members of the board were not present during the 28 November session).

Several media stakeholders including NGOs dealing with media monitoring during the elections perceived the imposed punishment as inadequately small given the obvious media bias. The law prescribes that the sanctions must be imposed gradually. The CCA is lacking the power to take more severe actions immediately before applying 'softer' penalties, and this mechanism limits CCA's powers to enforce campaign regulations. On the other hand, the current system provides genuinely more protection of the media right for freedom of expression.

Assessing the first monitoring period the CCA applied the first level of sanction available for media misconduct during the campaign (warning), and sanctioned the following TV stations: "Prime", "Publika TV", "Channel 3", "Channel 2", "n4", "TV 7", "Jurnal TV", "Accent TV", "Euro TV" and "Ren Moldova".

All four channels owned by the General Media Group: "Prime", "Publika TV", "Channel 3", "Channel 2" were warned for lack of equitable coverage in the first media monitoring period. The bias coverage of these four TV channels were assessed as of concern, also during the second and fourth CCA campaign assessment sessions, and during the second session the CCA has imposed the most severe sanctions available at that stage - the max. fine of 5500 lei to all four broadcast media. Their coverage in the third period was assessed as improved, while in the fourth and fifth (the fifth period was not yet discussed by the CCA in the time of submission of this report) monitoring periods the TV channels again failed to comply with the legal requirements and showed clear preference to PDM.

In the first monitoring period TV channels "TV 7", "n4" and "Euro TV" were found in violation of principles of impartial and balanced coverage by promoting the PLDM and its leader V. Filat. While the coverage of the political actors in these TV channels improved after the first week monitored, during the second session of the campaign period "Euro TV" was also penalised (with however only minimum fine) for slightly favouring PLDM and its leader V. Filat.

Journal TV was warned during the first media monitoring period, and at the second session of the CCA during the campaign period it was fined (but not the maximum fine) for unbalanced coverage of candidates.

### **Acknowledgments and recommendations**

Consultant (submitting this report) was supporting the CCA, in particular its Media Monitoring Department, during three separate missions that took place in the period preceding 30 November Parliamentary elections (21 – 24 Oct., 3 – 6 Nov., and 25 Nov. – 2 Dec.) primarily in the area of training of CCA media monitors. The overall goal of his missions was to increase media monitoring capacities of media regulatory bodies prior to the 30 November elections.

In addition to training, the consultant was also supporting the CCA in the process of control of media monitoring data and related process of production of charts and tables that were used by the CCA as a basis for quantitative assessment of the media coverage of election campaigns and other political actors.

This report is based on the media monitoring results gathered by the Media Monitoring department of the CCA in the period 20 October – 28 November. The combined media monitoring results provided in this report have not yet been presented to the public in the moment of submission to the Council of Europe of the present report by the expert.

While the consultant was primarily tasked to support the CCA in its daily activities related to the conduct of the media monitoring department, during his mission he had

also met with interlocutors from the media community or international organisations, to gather their views concerning the conduct of the media in the 2013 campaign period. This report also reflects some views gathered during these meetings.

The Consultant has, during the first four-day visit, established contacts with the NGOs involved in the media monitoring project during the current election campaign. Out of three organisations jointly conducting the media monitoring, the Electronic Press Association from Moldova (APEL) is in charge of monitoring of Television channels. While the methodology of the media monitoring used by APEL is slightly different, the main findings and overall trends identified by this NGO were in line with the media monitoring findings identified by the CCA media monitoring activity.

#### *Recommendations:*

Concentration of media ownership and reported links between political parties and media sector could limit freedom of expression. The legal framework governing the media coverage of the campaign could be revised to address high concentration of media ownership and to improve transparency in the ownership structures.

The CCA in order to increase its effectiveness in regulating the media activities could benefit from legislative changes allowing the media regulator to decide on the volume of sanctions in case of severe violations of law without the need to strictly follow the gradual system of sanctions. The relevant bodies could consider its revision, considering however also its implications on freedom of expression and editorial independence of media.

The CCA could benefit from more advanced databases that would allow the media regulator to make media monitoring and reporting more effective (please see previous reports from 21 – 24 Oct, and 3 – 6 November). More effective systems would allow the CCA to conduct the media monitoring of a higher number of broadcast media, or to increase the range of the monitored programmes to include also election programmes of current affairs programmes (currently the CCA is conducting analyses of only main news casts of each monitored TV channel). The CCA was already internally considering the option, in case such database (or more broadly the whole media monitoring software) is purchased, in order for self-monitoring to be made available to broadcasters (especially during the election campaigns).

#### *Overview of the Media Monitoring results:*

Pages 8 – 46 feature the overview of the media monitoring results.

Explanation of the charts: The pie charts show the percentage of airtime allocated to contestants and other subjects. The bar charts show how much airtime contestants and

other subjects received, and the tone of their coverage - positive (green), neutral (white) and negative (red).

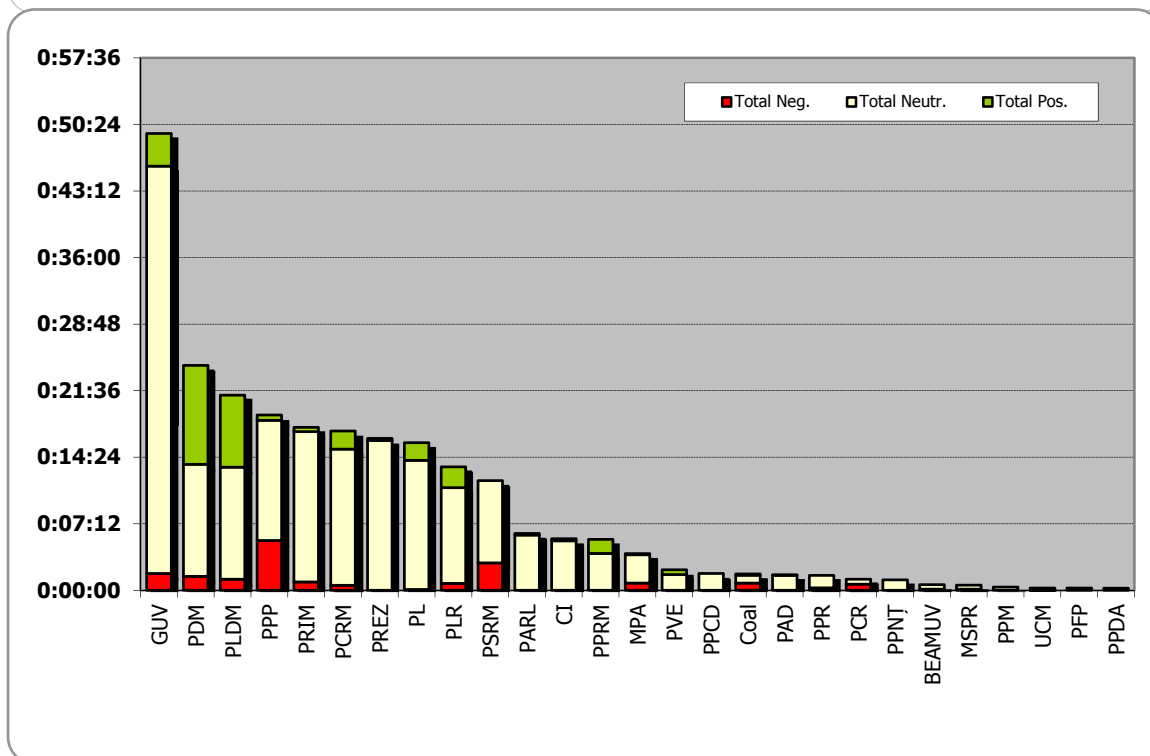
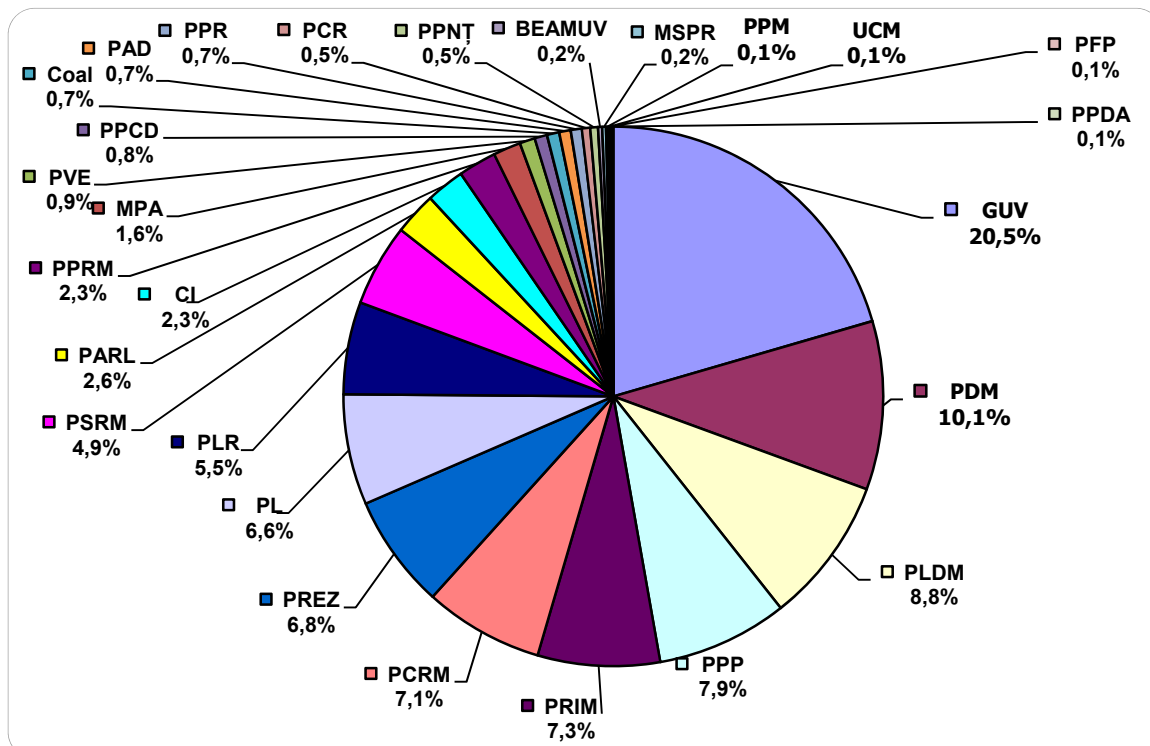
List of subjects presented in the report (with names in local language):

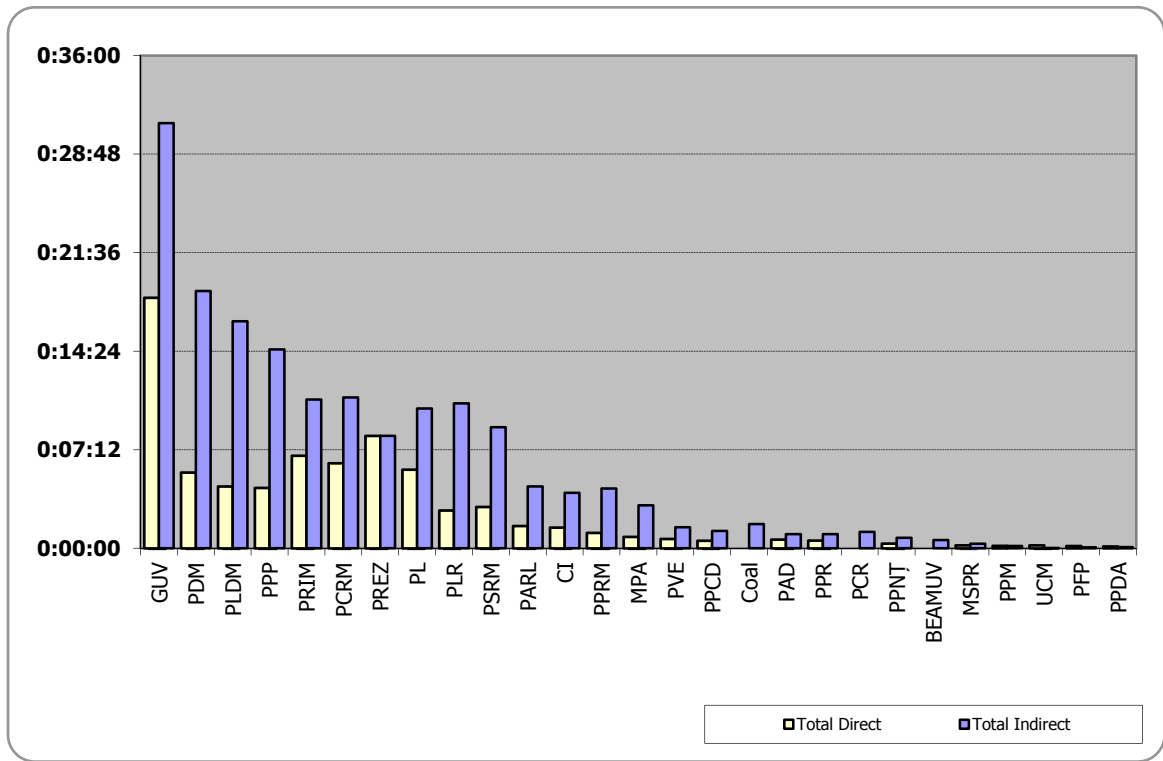
PREZ	Președintele / Președinția Republicii Moldova; (President, Presidency)
PARL	Parlamentul Republicii Moldova; (Parliament)
GUV	Guvernul Republicii Moldova; (Government)
Coal	Coaliția de guvernare; (Governmental coalition)
PRIM	Primăria mun. Chișinău; (Mayor of Chisinau)
ALȚII	Cetățeni ai Republicii Moldova din diverse localități; (Other subjects)
PLDM	Partidul Liberal Democrat din Moldova;
PDM	Partidul Democrat din Moldova;
PL	Partidul Liberal;
PLR	Partidul Politic „PARTIDUL LIBERAL REFORMATOR”;
PCRM	Partidul Comunistilor din Republica Moldova;
PSRM	Partidul Politic „Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova”;
PNL	Partidul Național Liberal;
PAD	Partidul Acțiunea Democratică;
MPA	Partidul politic Mișcarea Populară Antimafie;
PPM	Partidul ”Patrioții Moldovei”;
PFP	Partidul Politic „Partidul Forța Poporului”;
PPCD	Partidul Popular Creștin Democrat;
PPRM	Partidul Politic Partidul Popular din Republica Moldova;
PPP	Partidul Politic „PATRIA”;
PVE	Partidul Politic Partidul Verde Ecologist;
MSPR	Mișcarea Social-Politică „Ravnopravie”;
PCR	Partidul Politic „PARTIDUL COMUNIST REFORMATOR DIN MOLDOVA”;
BEAMUV	Blocul Electoral „Alegerea Moldovei–Uniunea Vamală”;
PPDA	Partidul Politic „Democrația Acasă”;
PPR	Partidul Politic Partidul „Renaștere”;
APL	Autoritățile Publice Locale; (Local authorities)
PPNȚ	Partidul “Pentru Neam și Țară”;



# Moldova 1

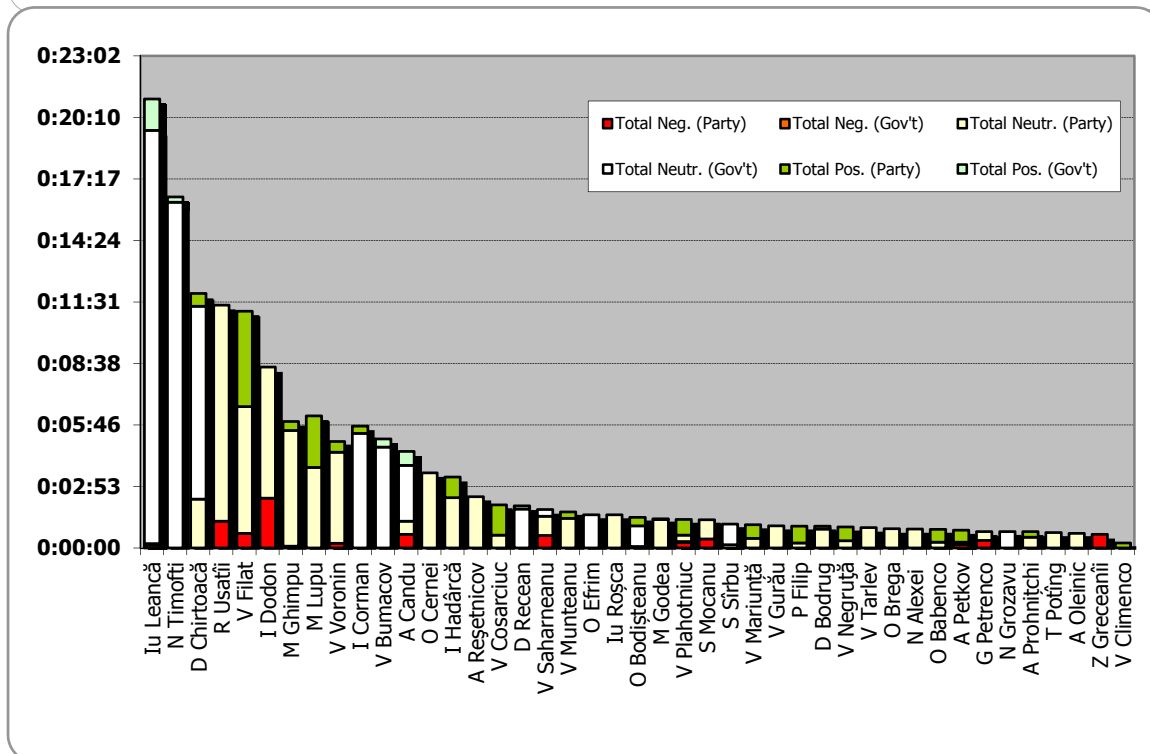
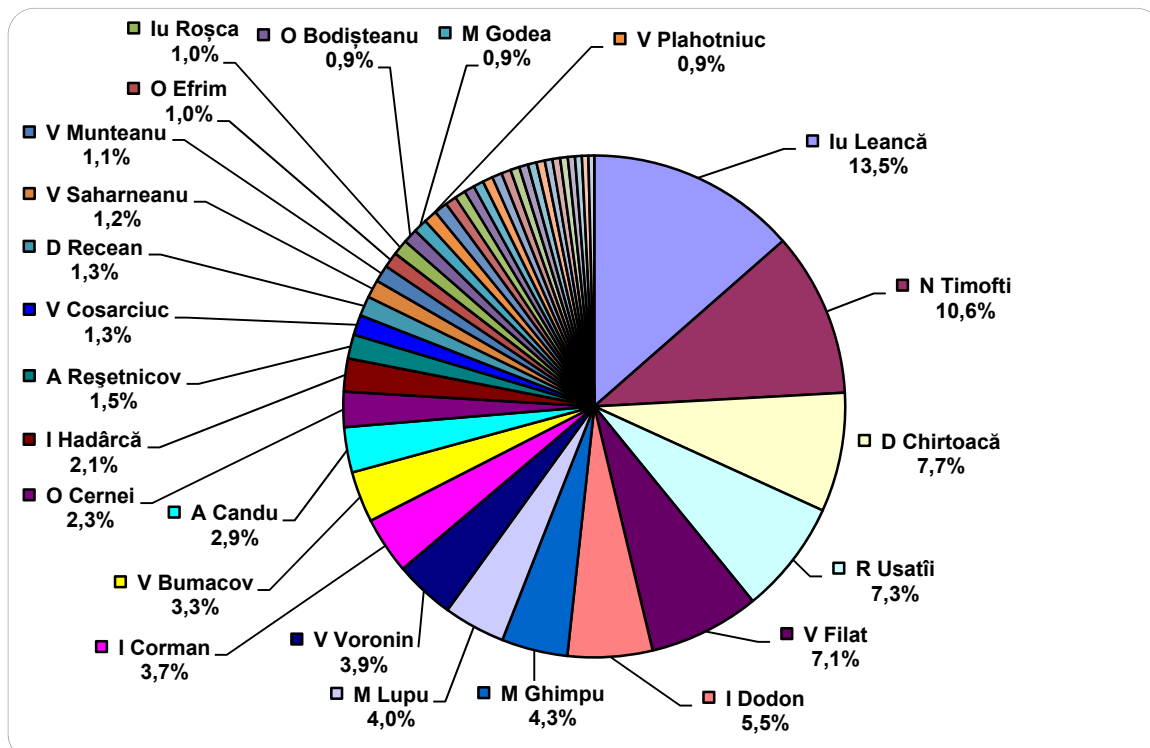
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# Moldova 1

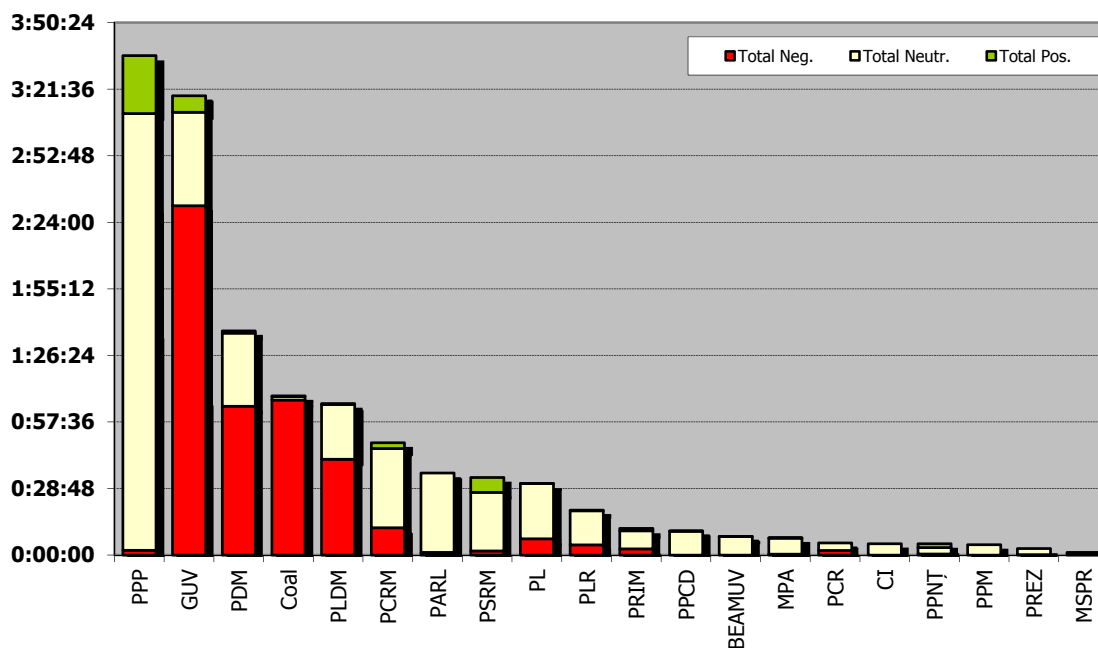
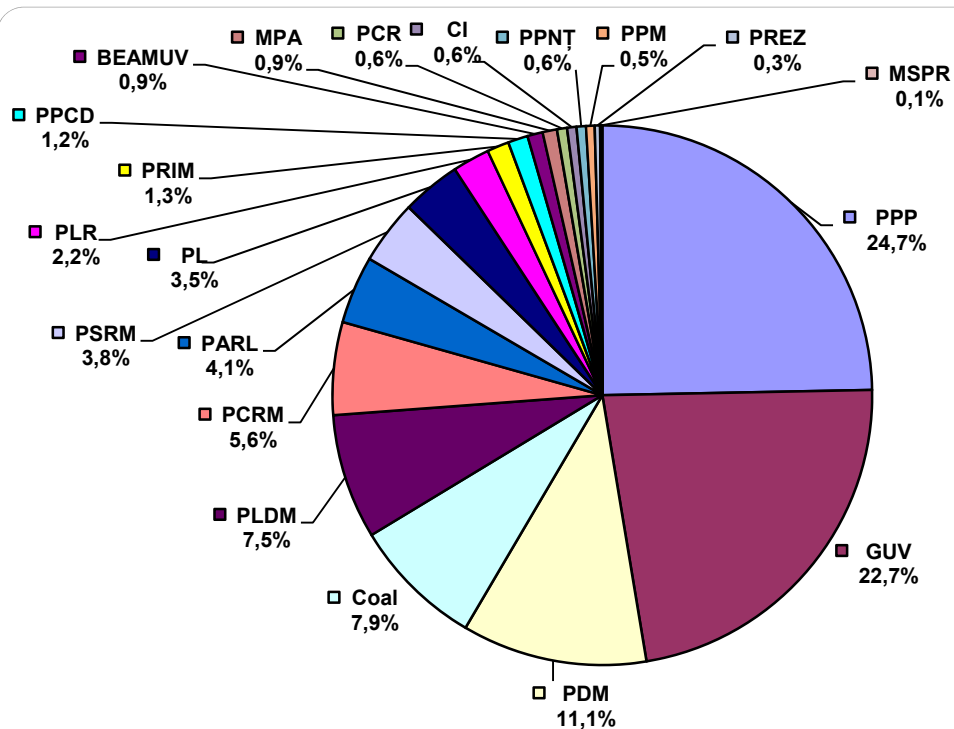
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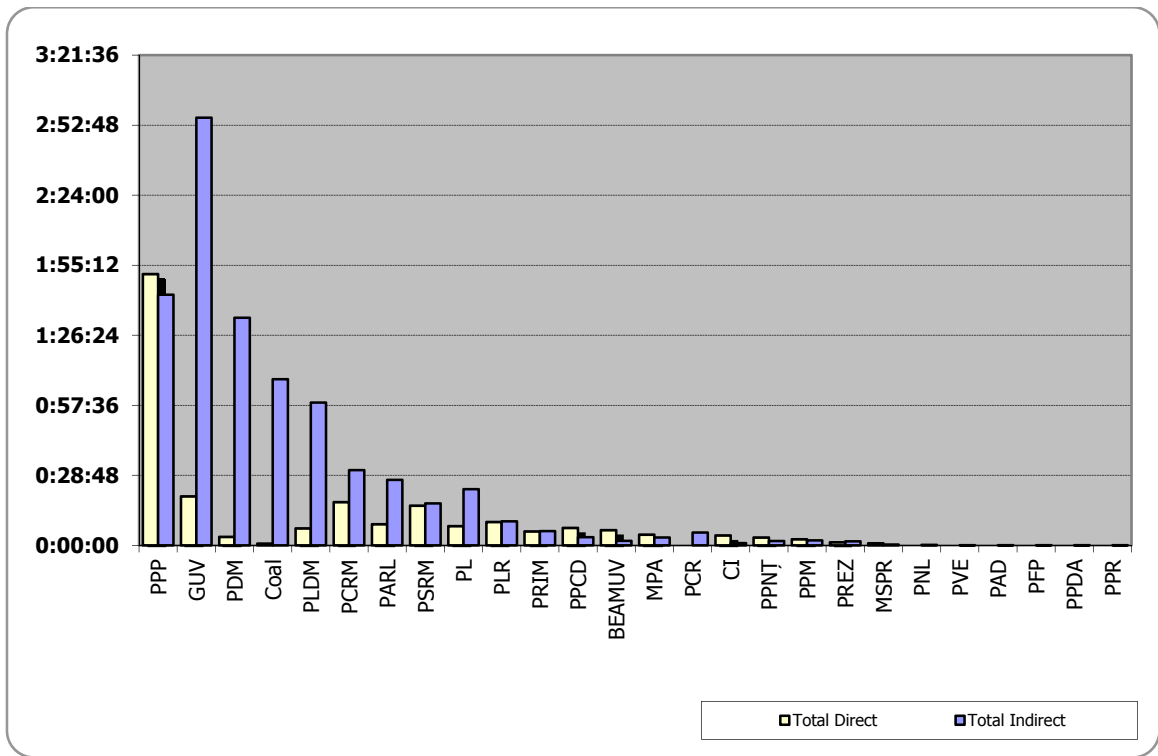




## Accent TV

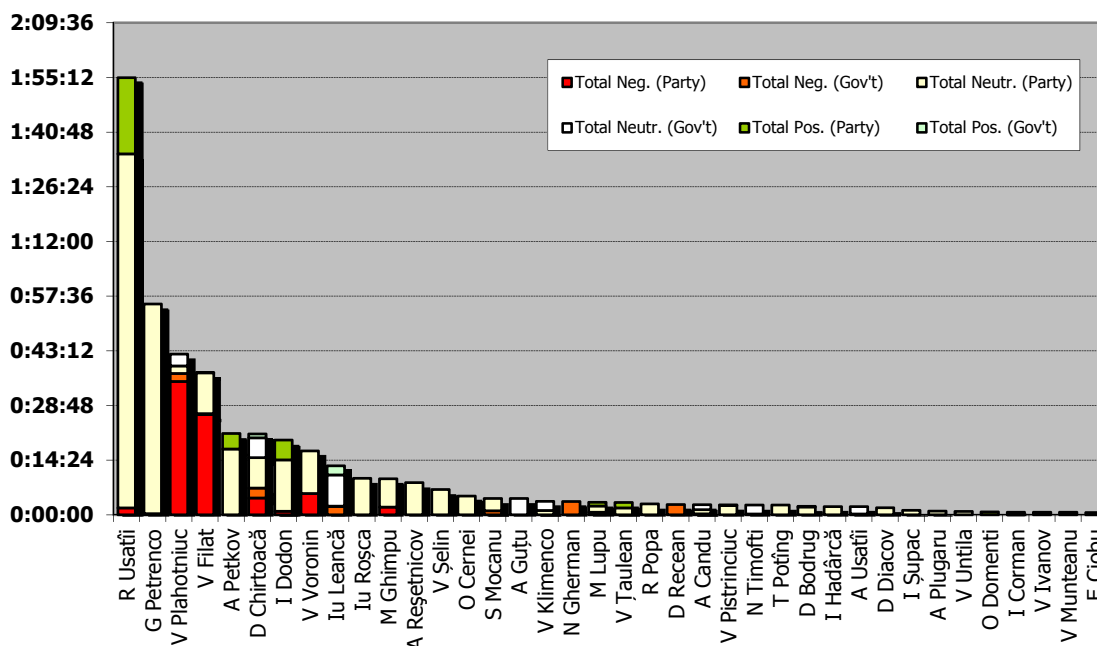
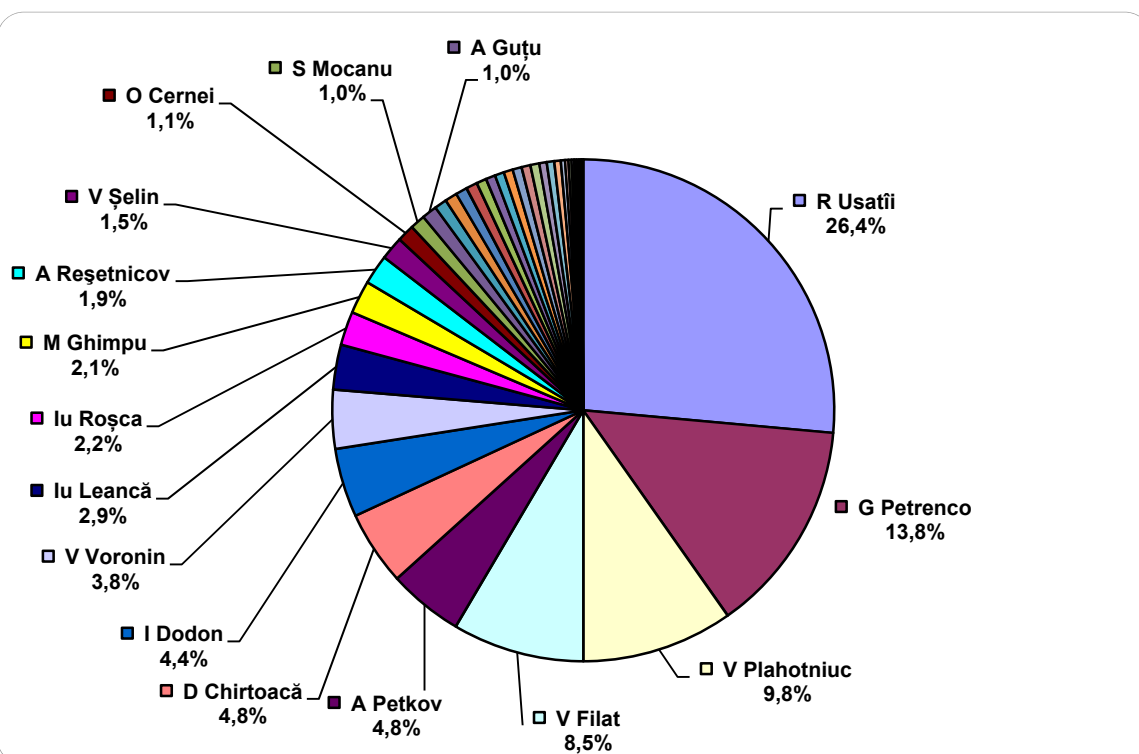
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## Accent TV

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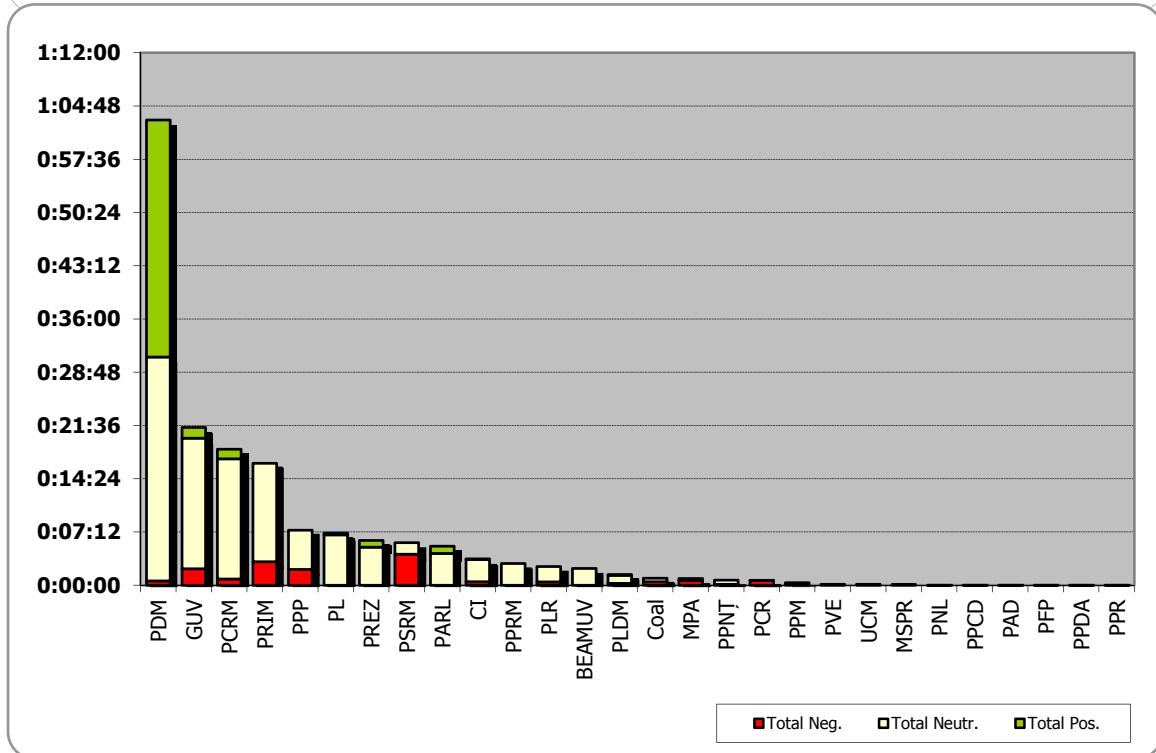
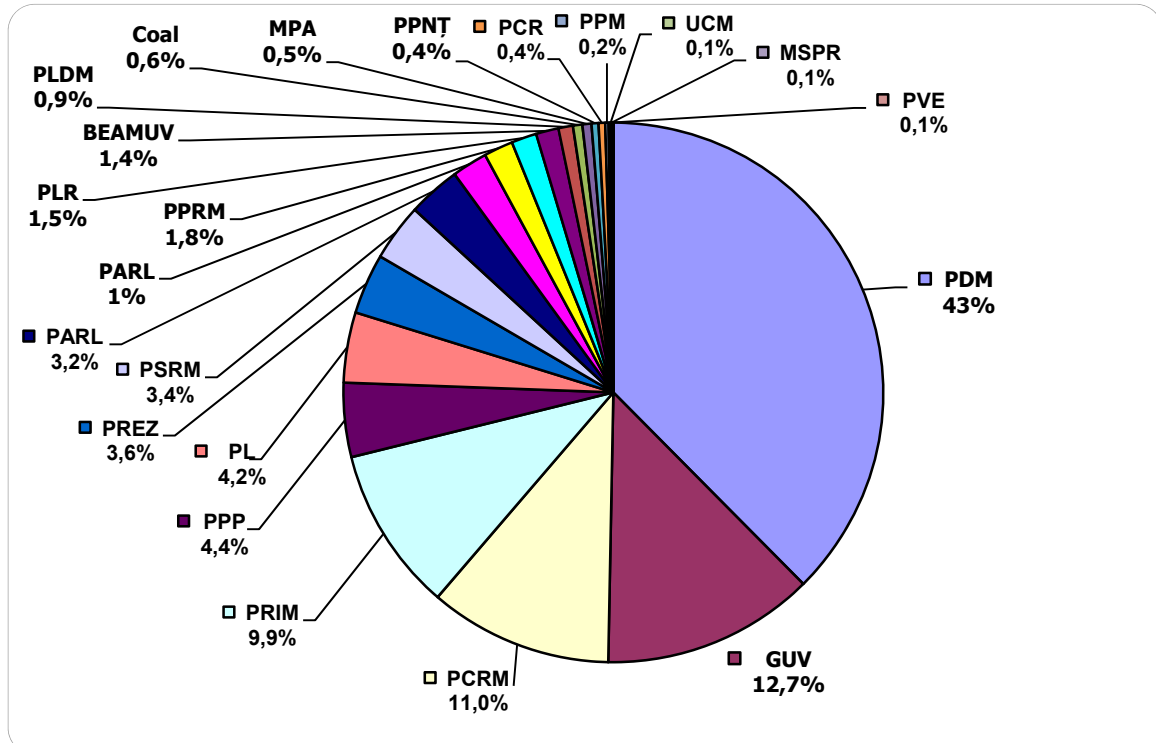


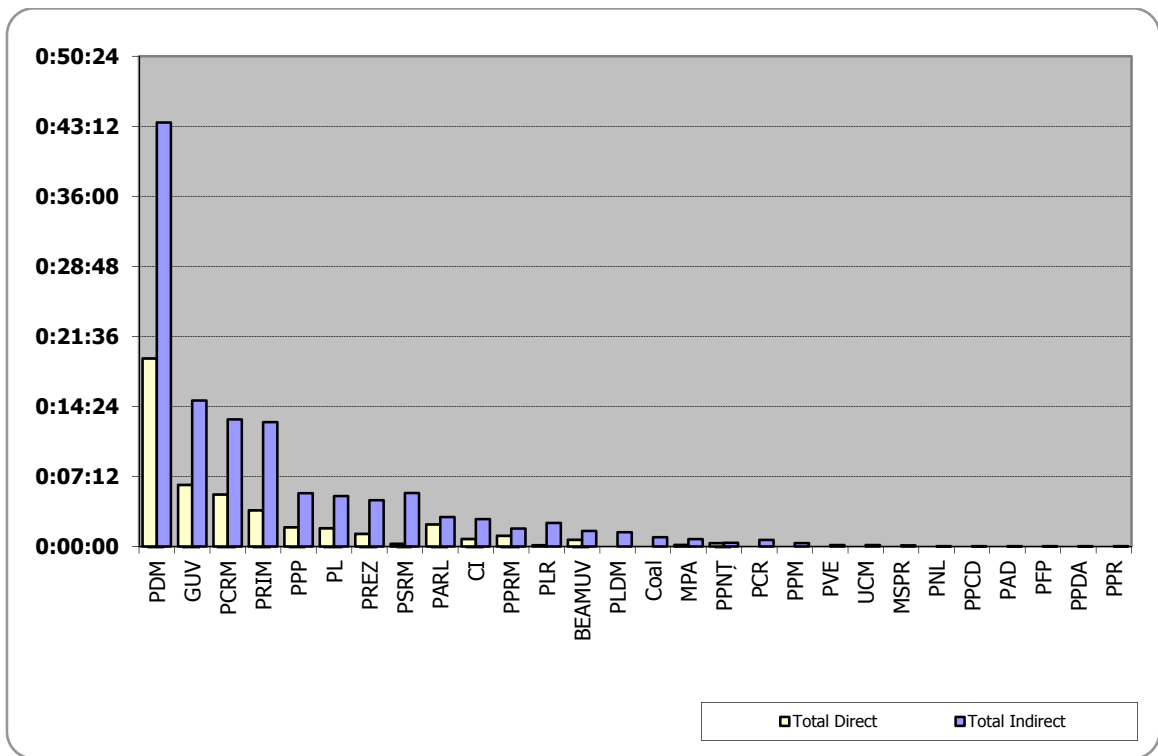




## Canal 2

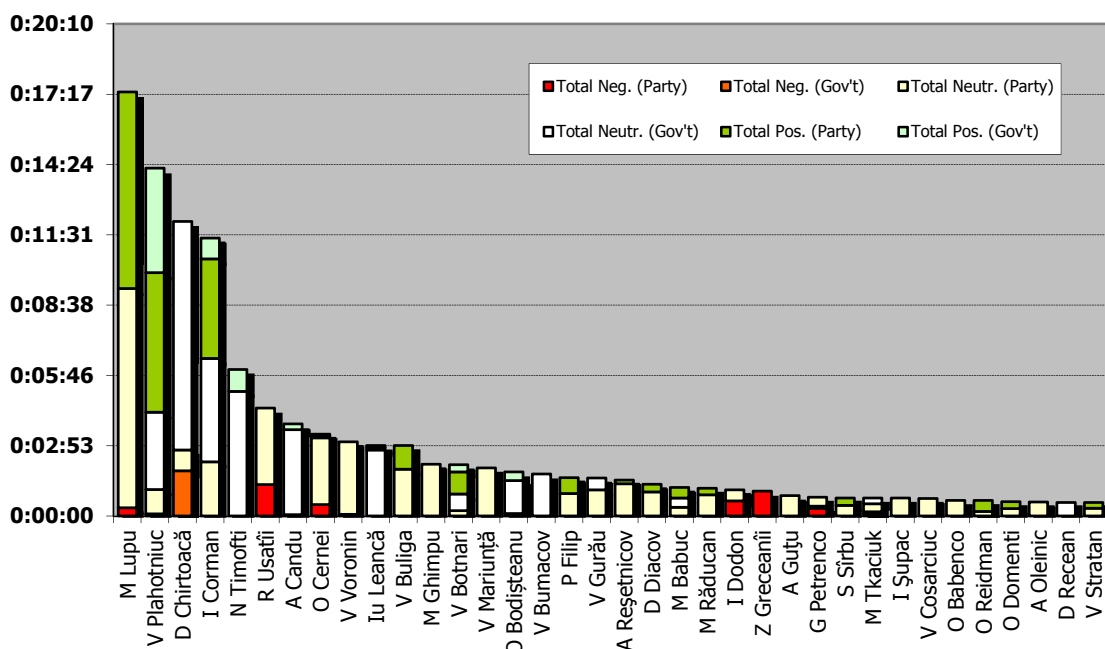
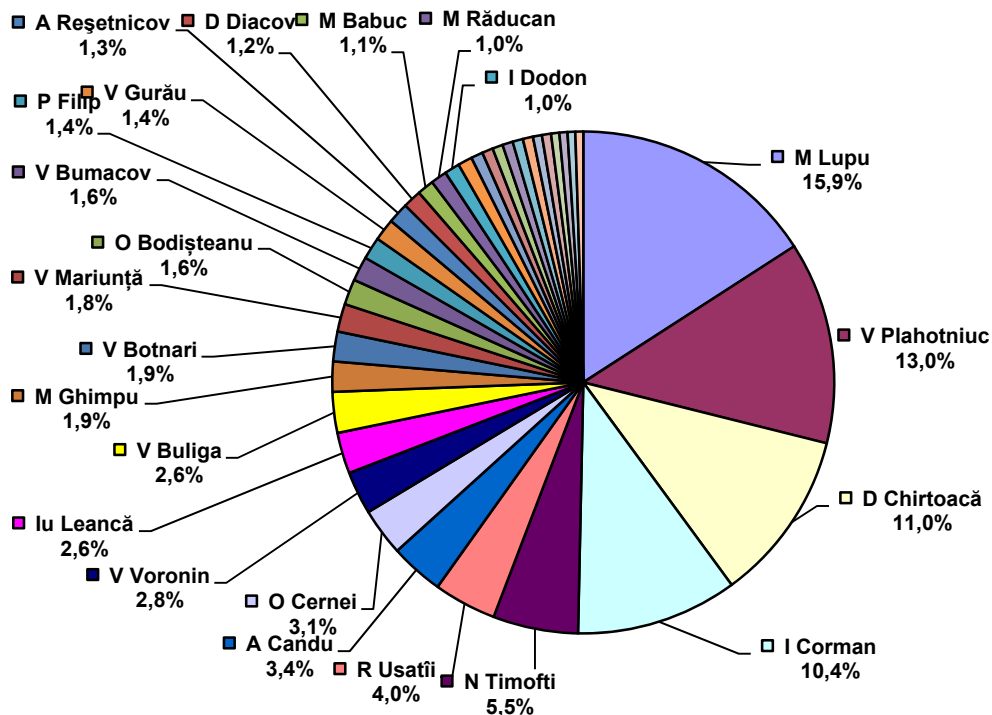
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## Canal 2

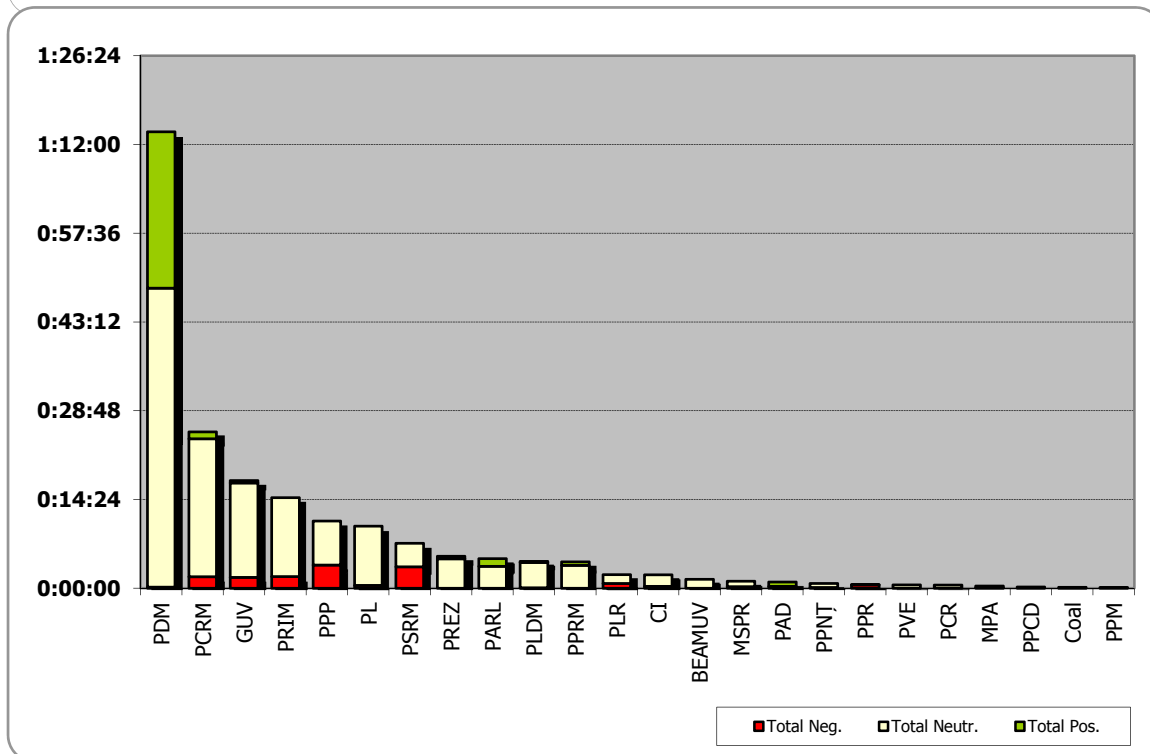
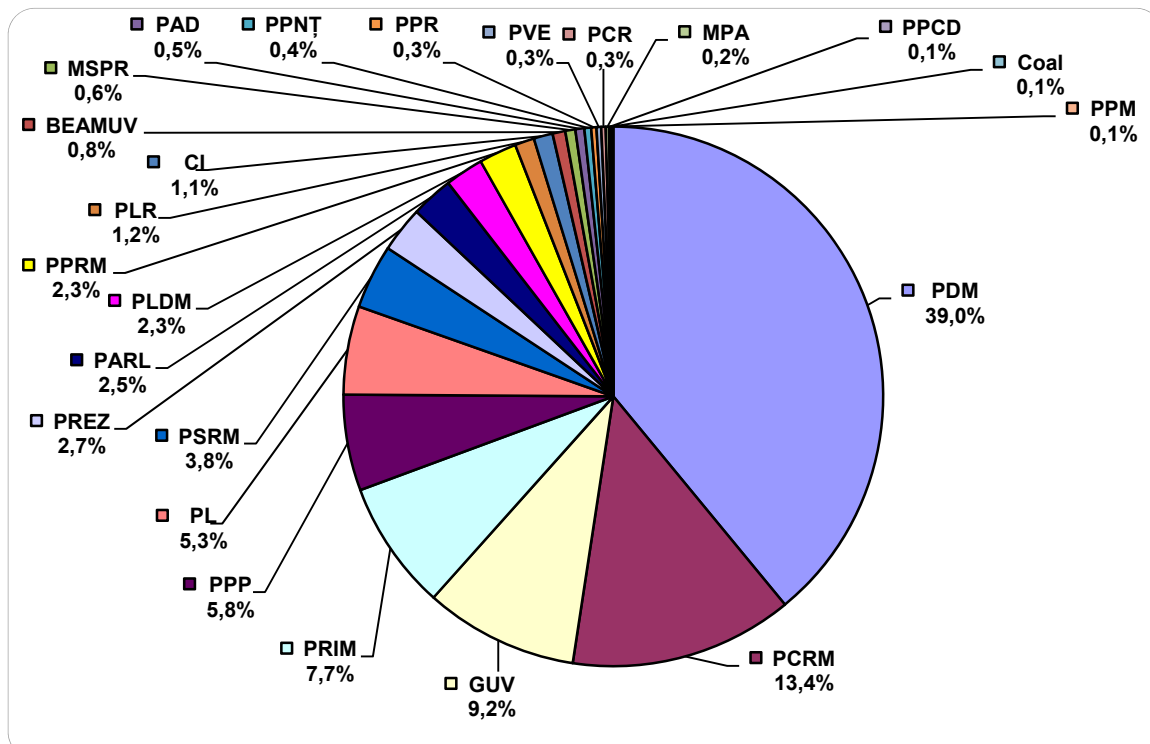
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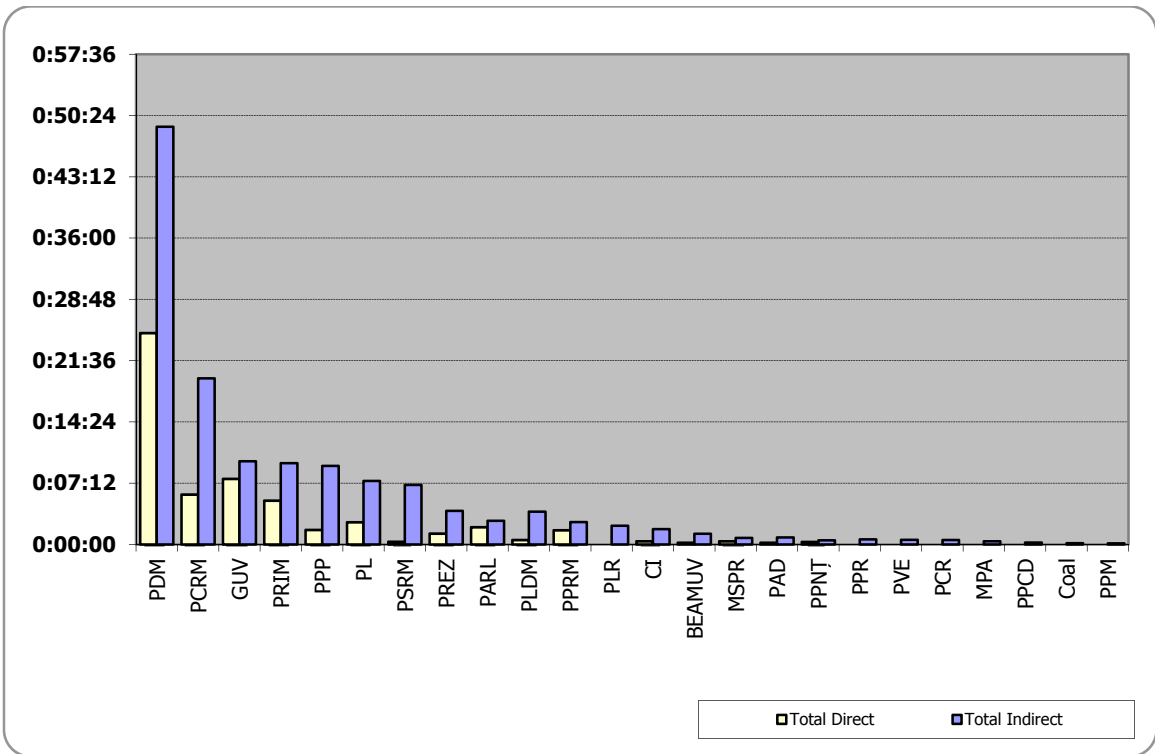




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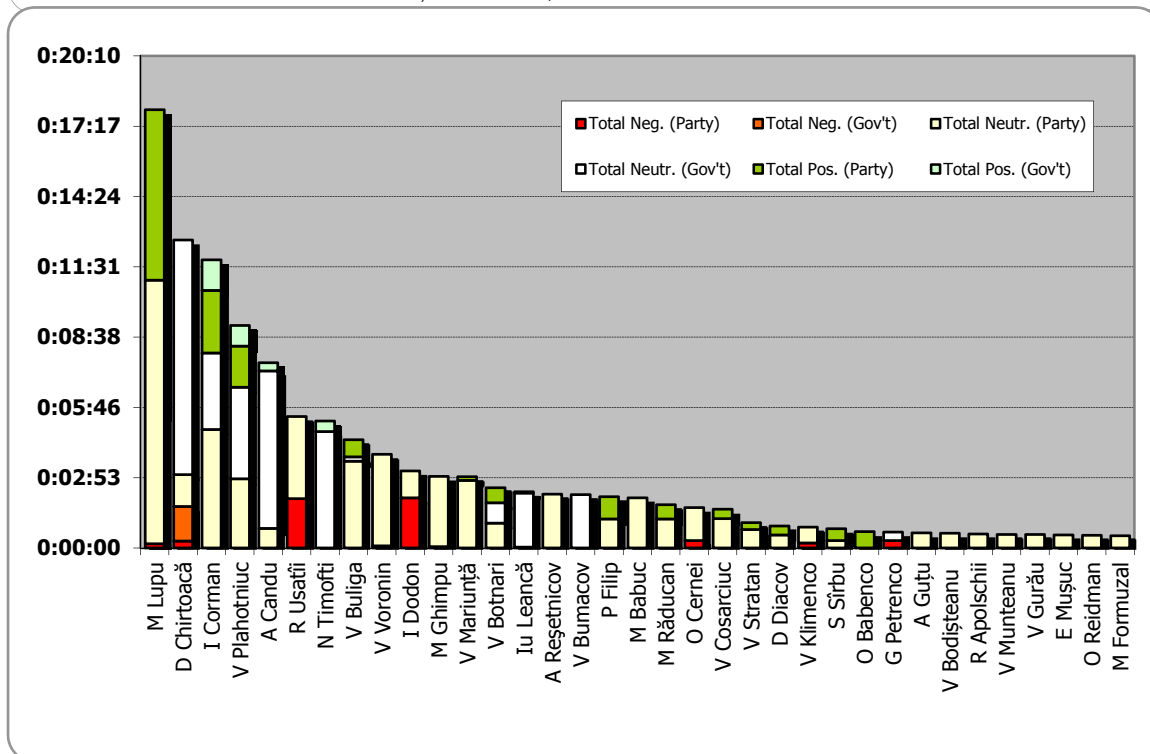
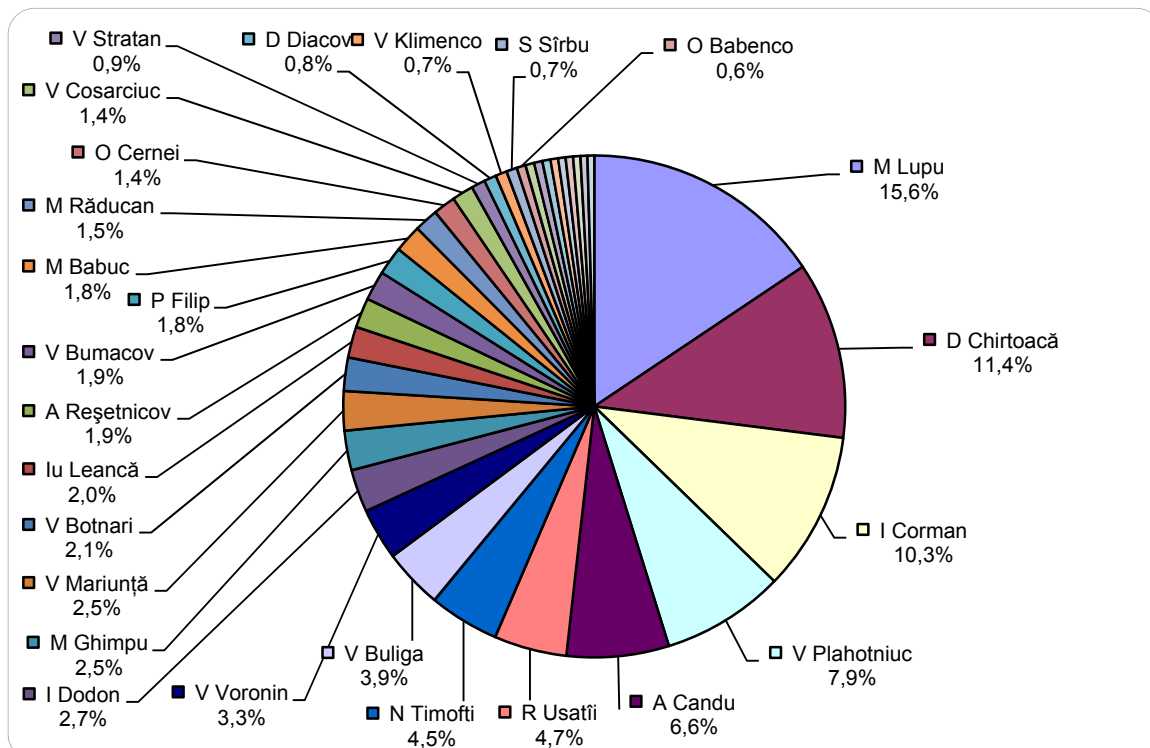
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## Canal 3

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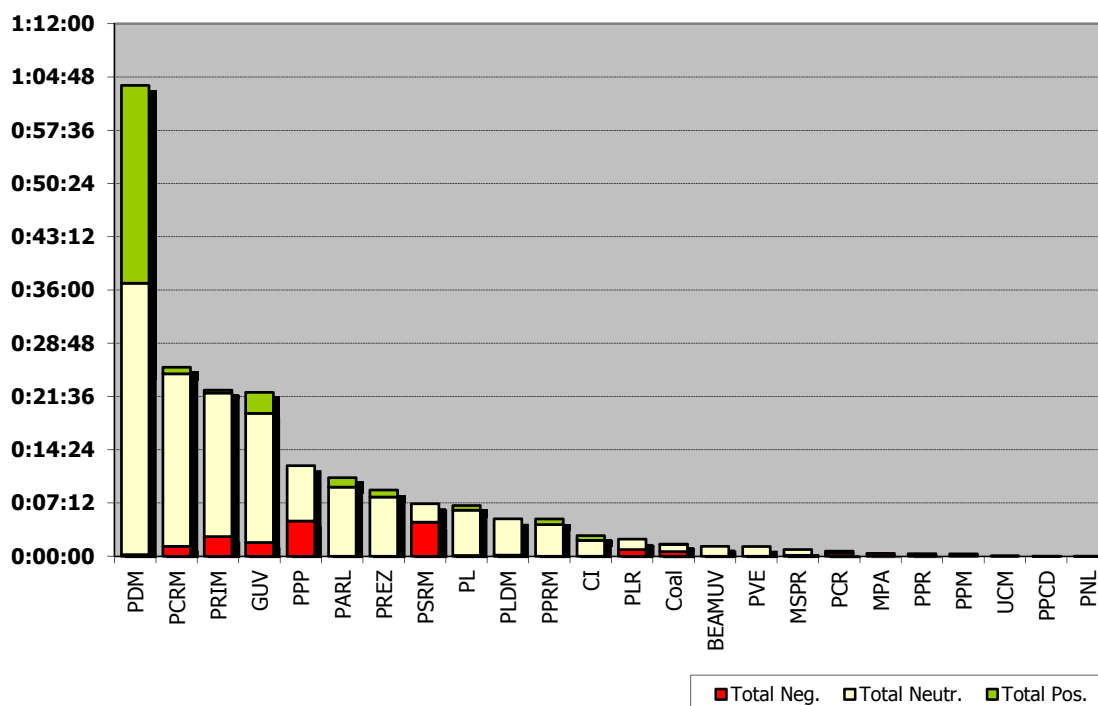
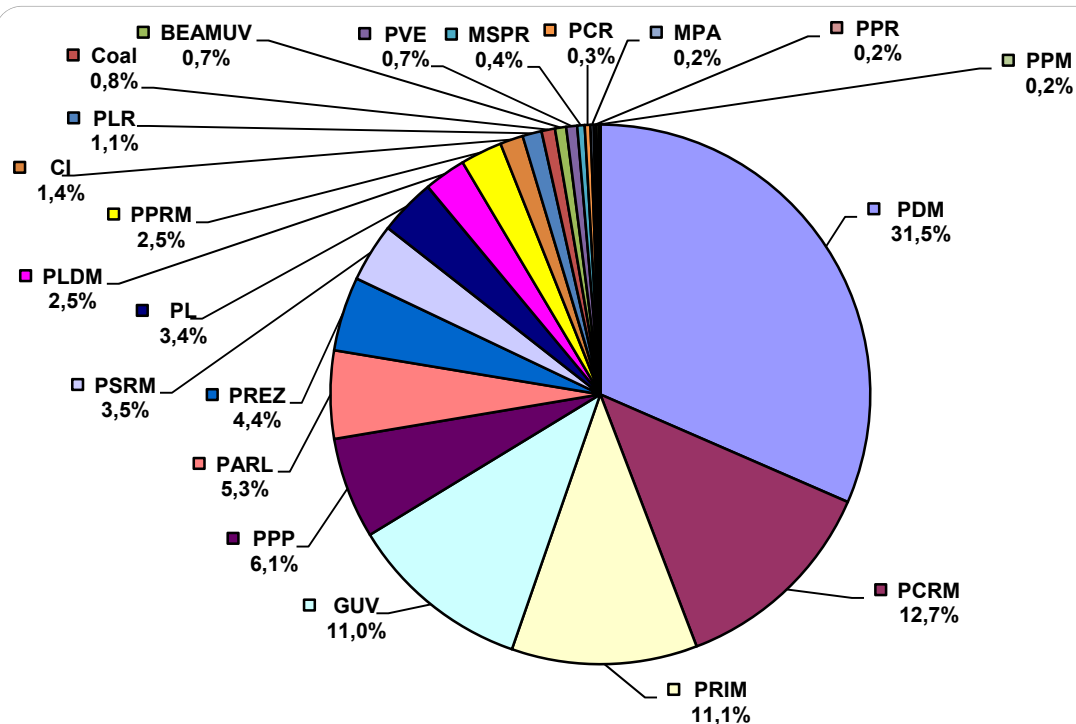


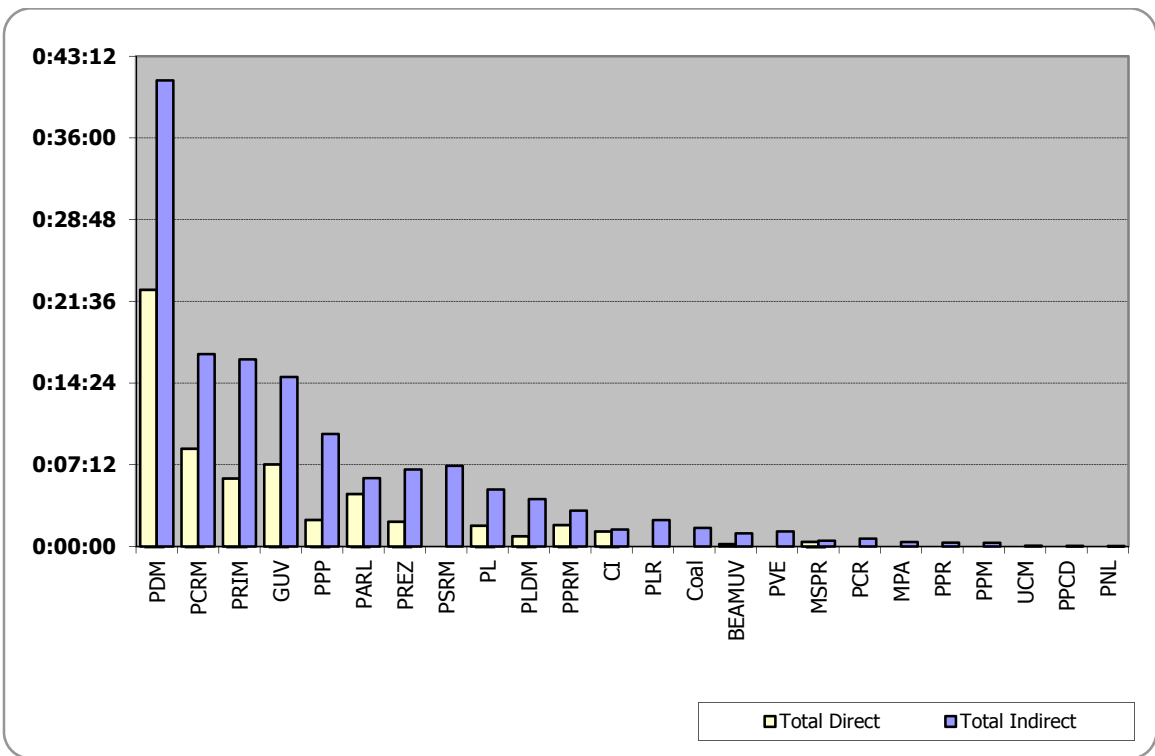




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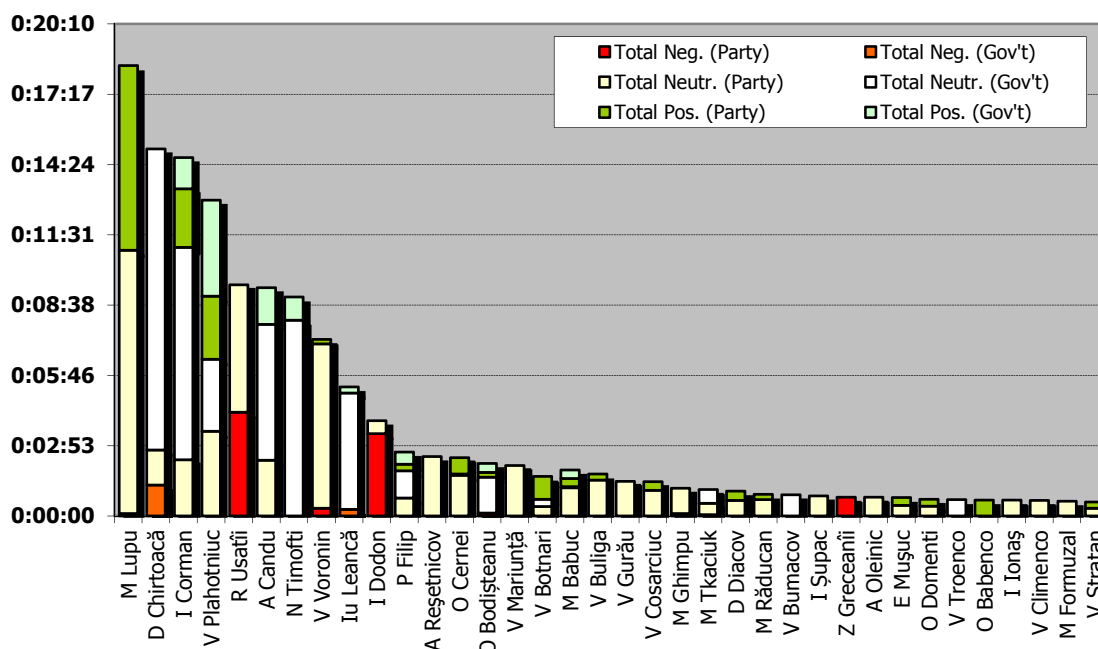
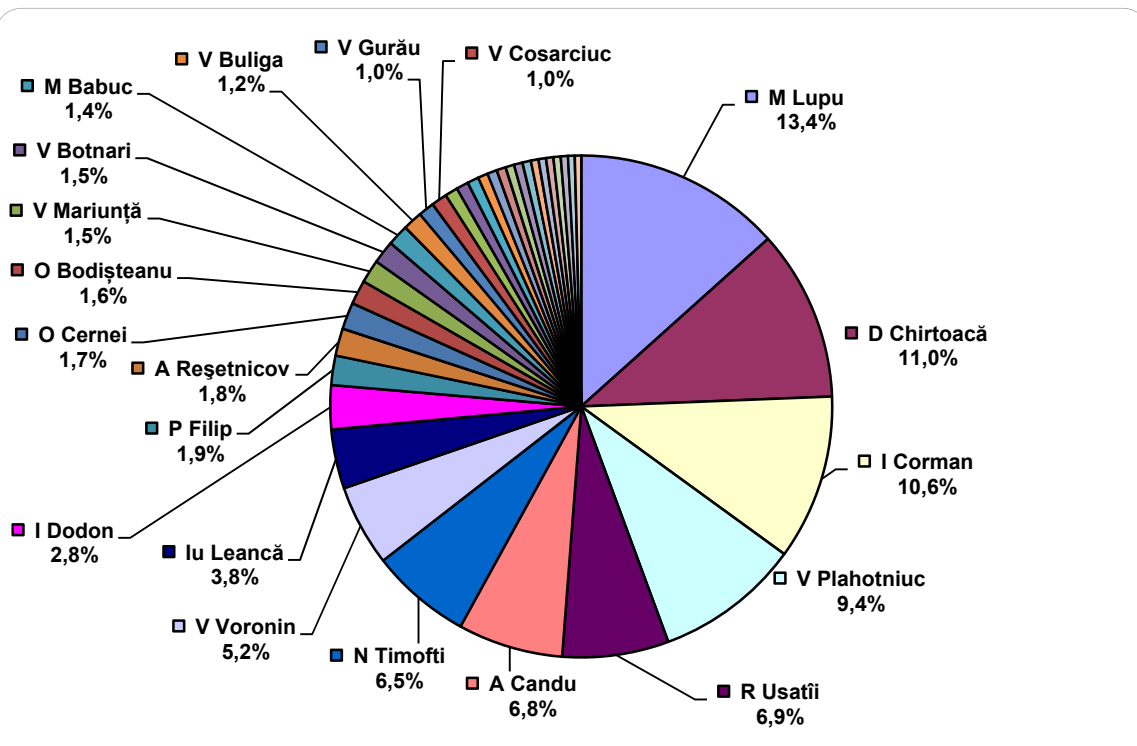
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## Prime TV

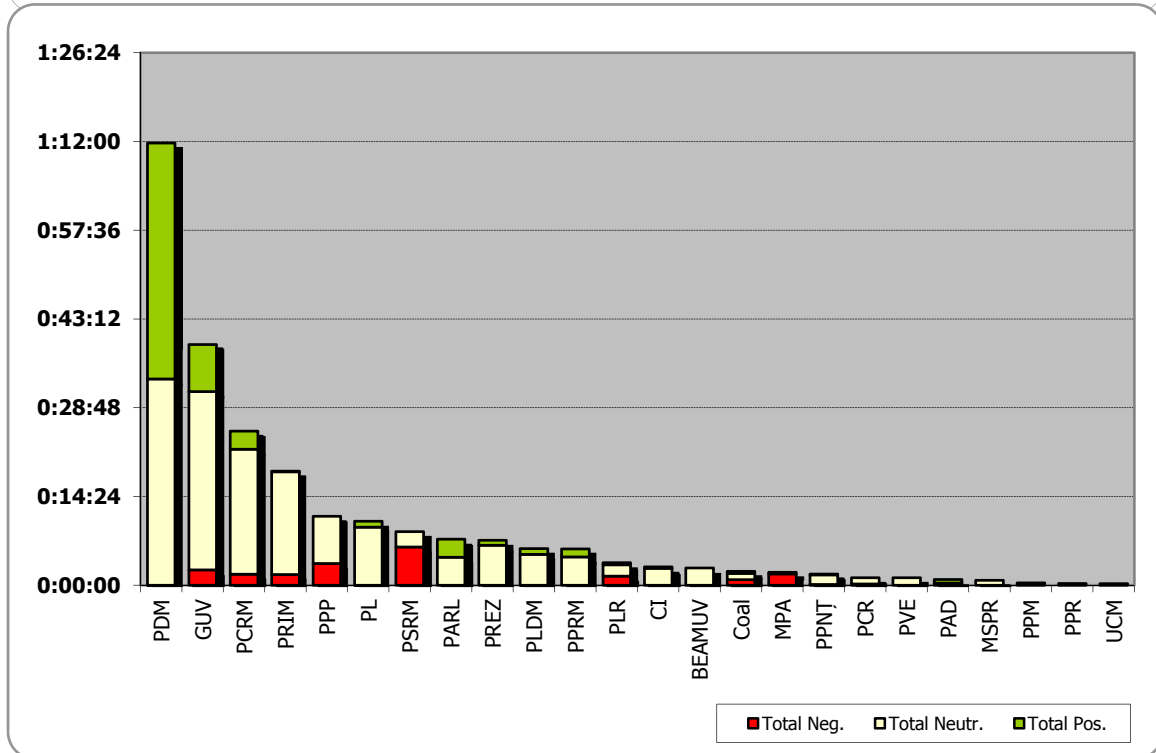
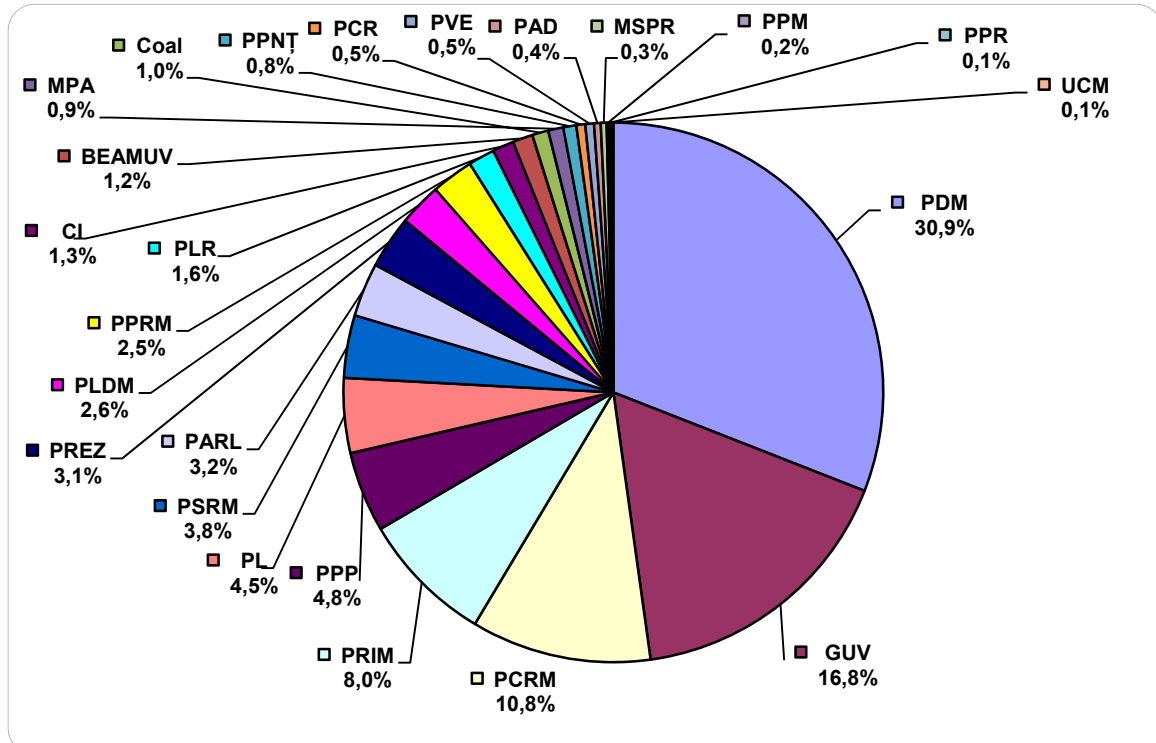
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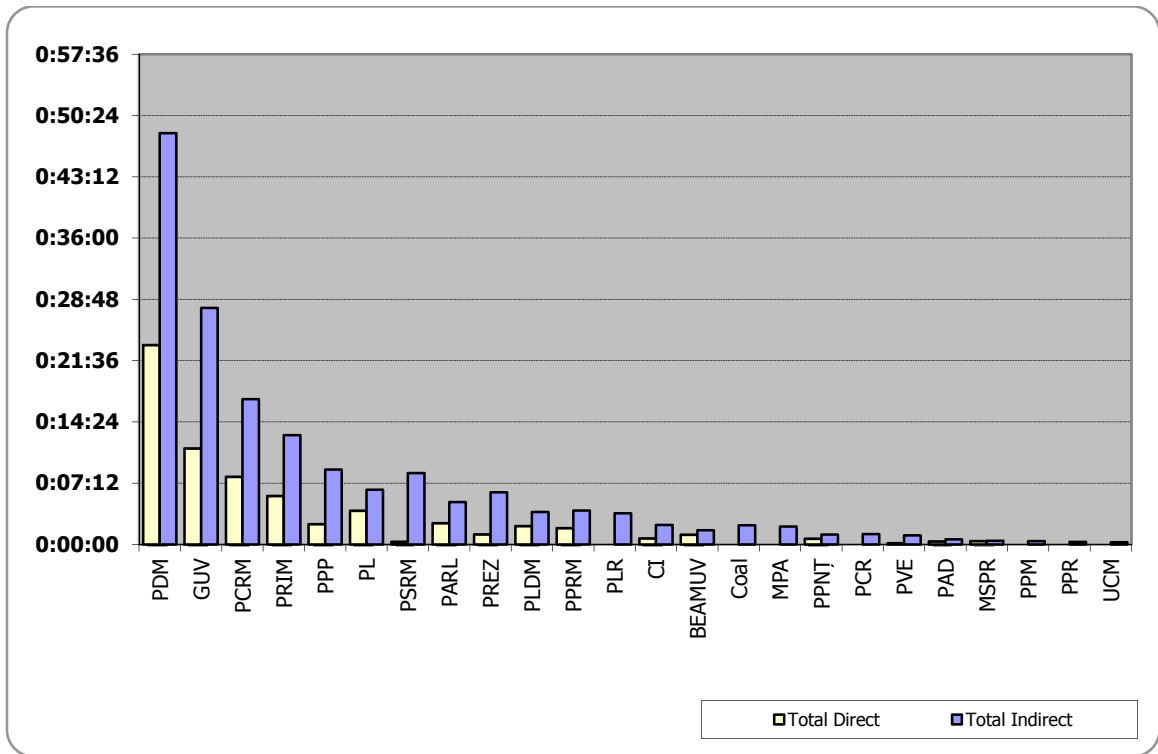




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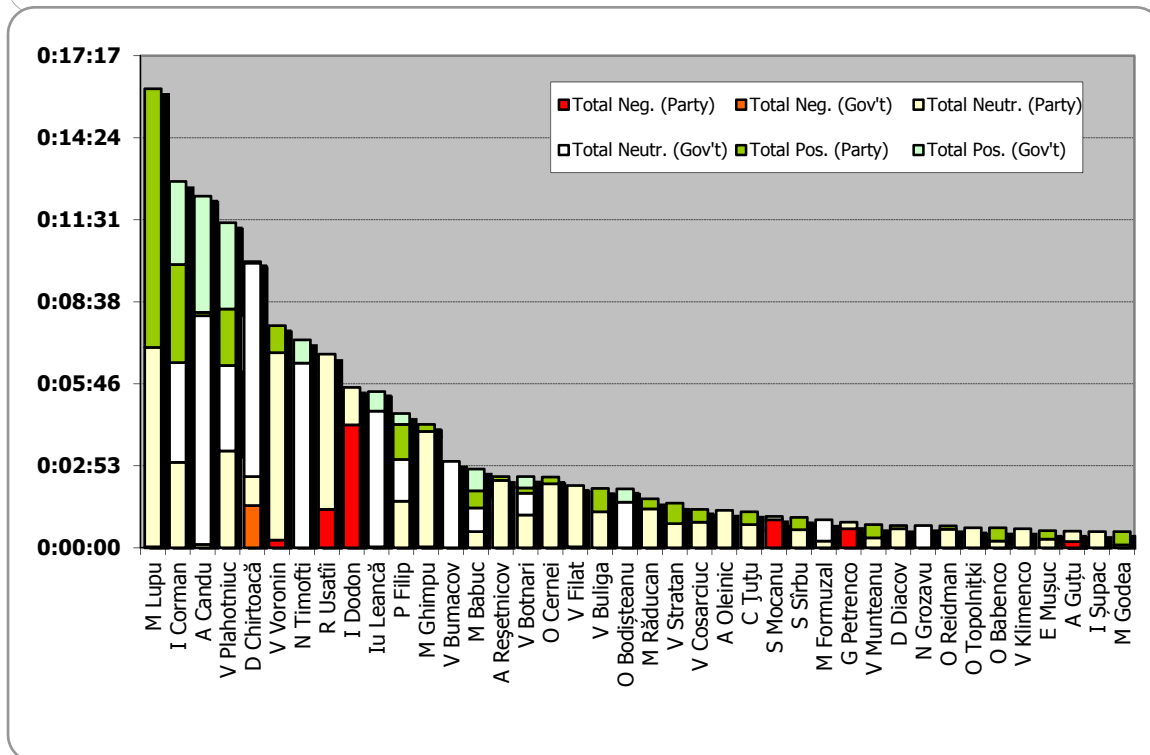
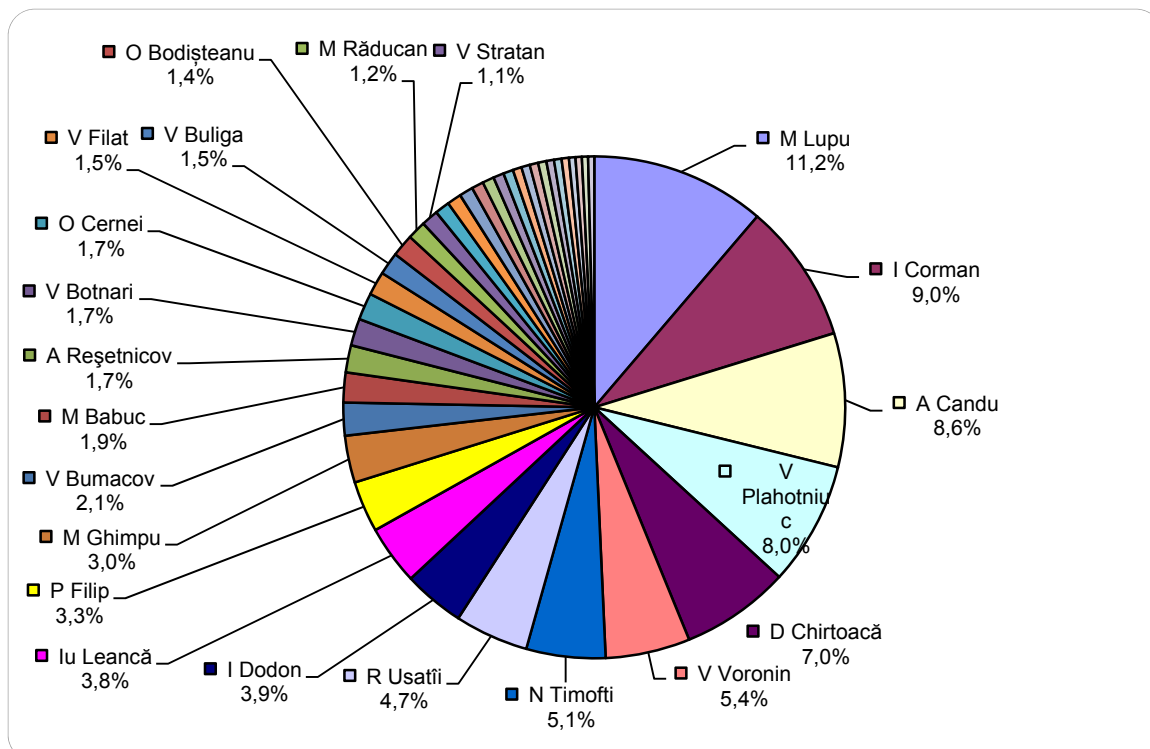
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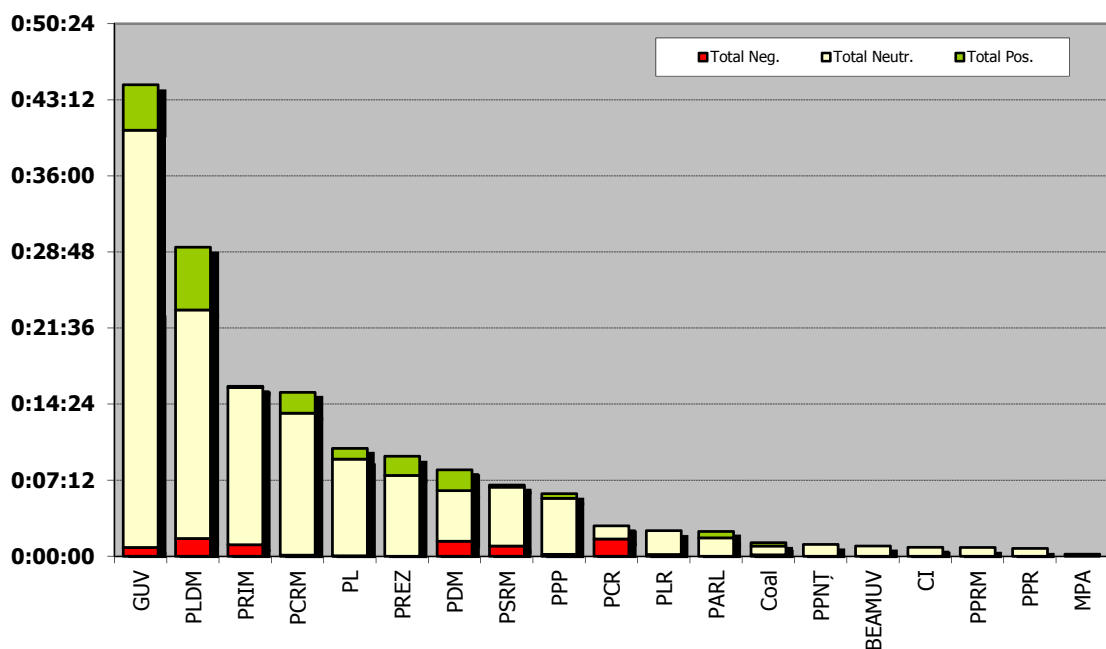
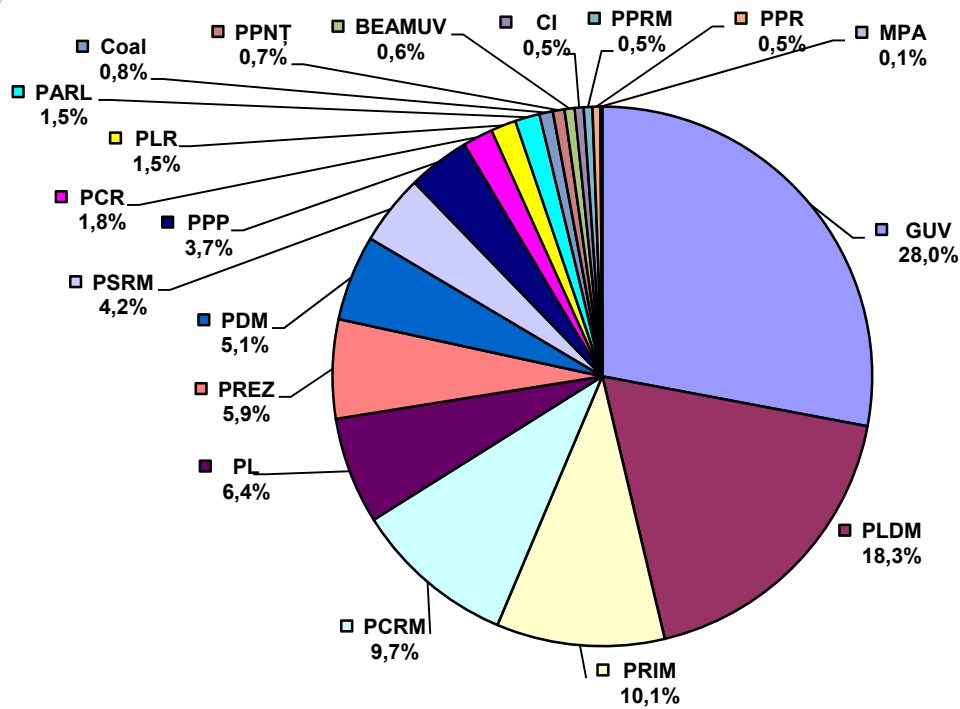


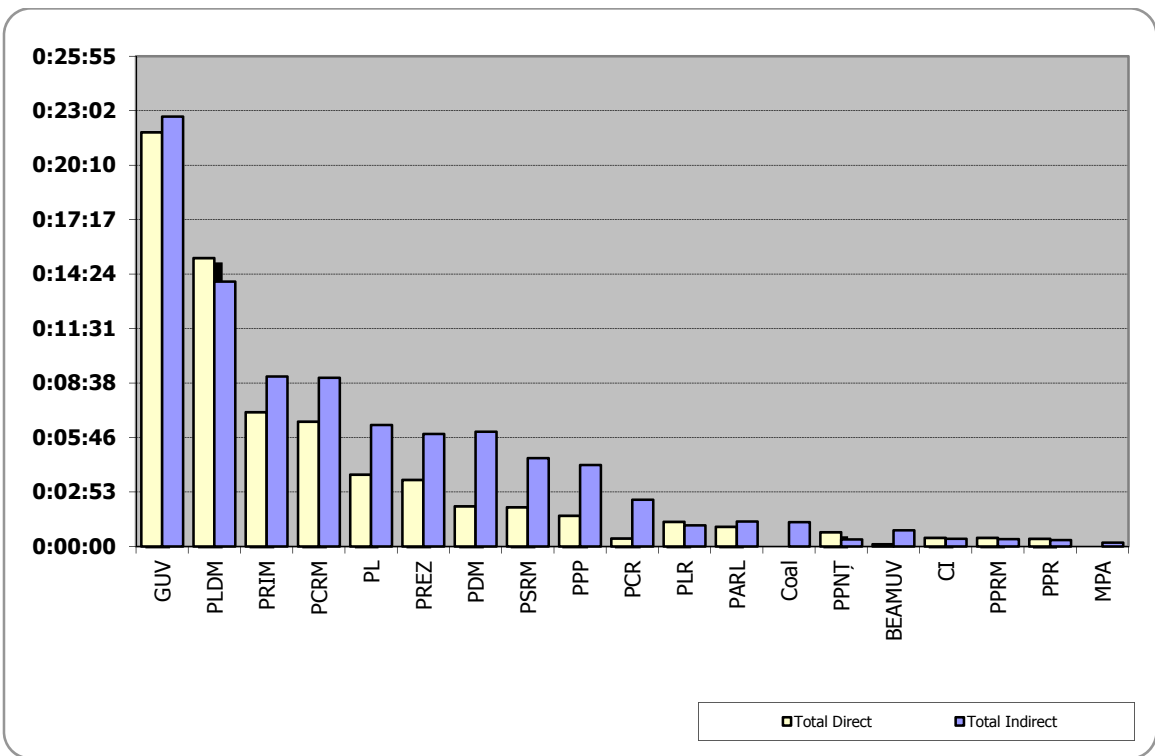




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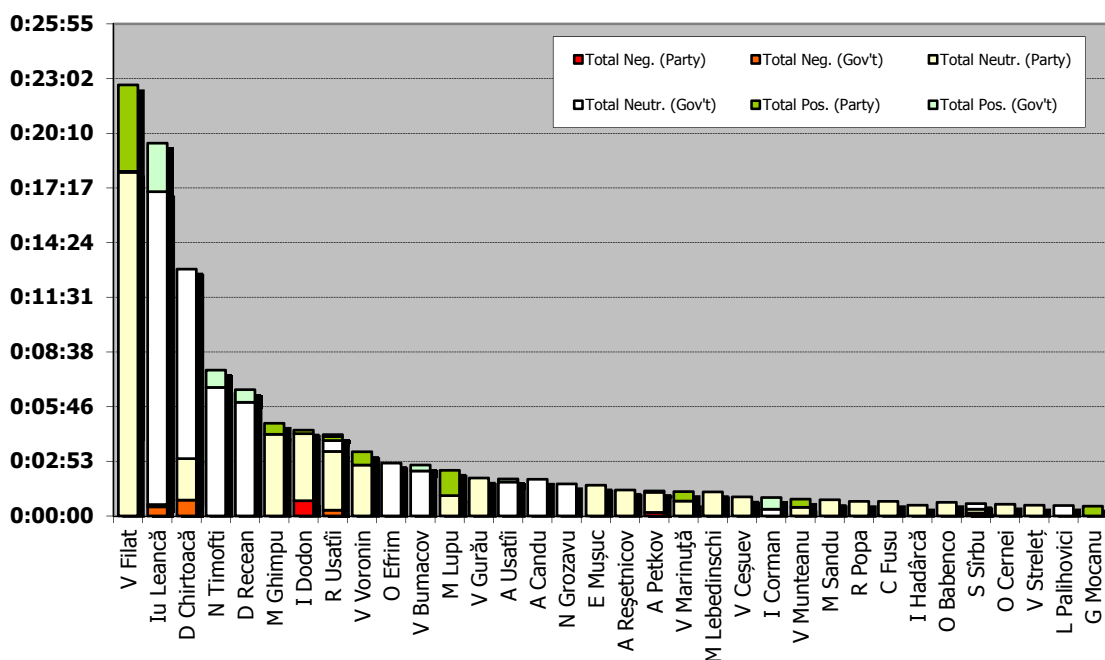
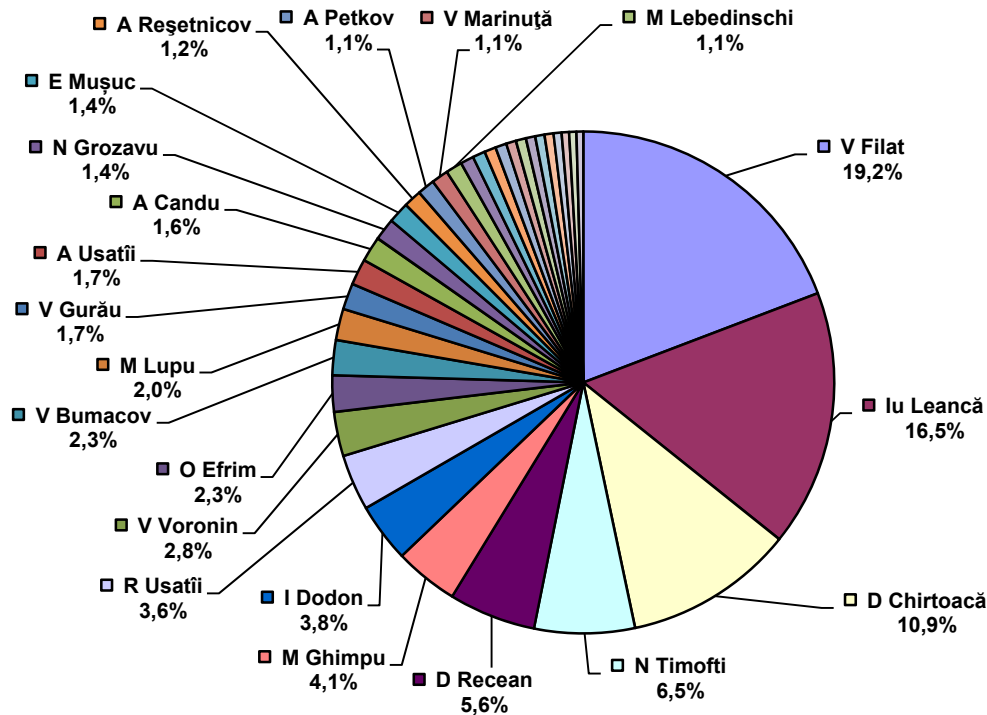
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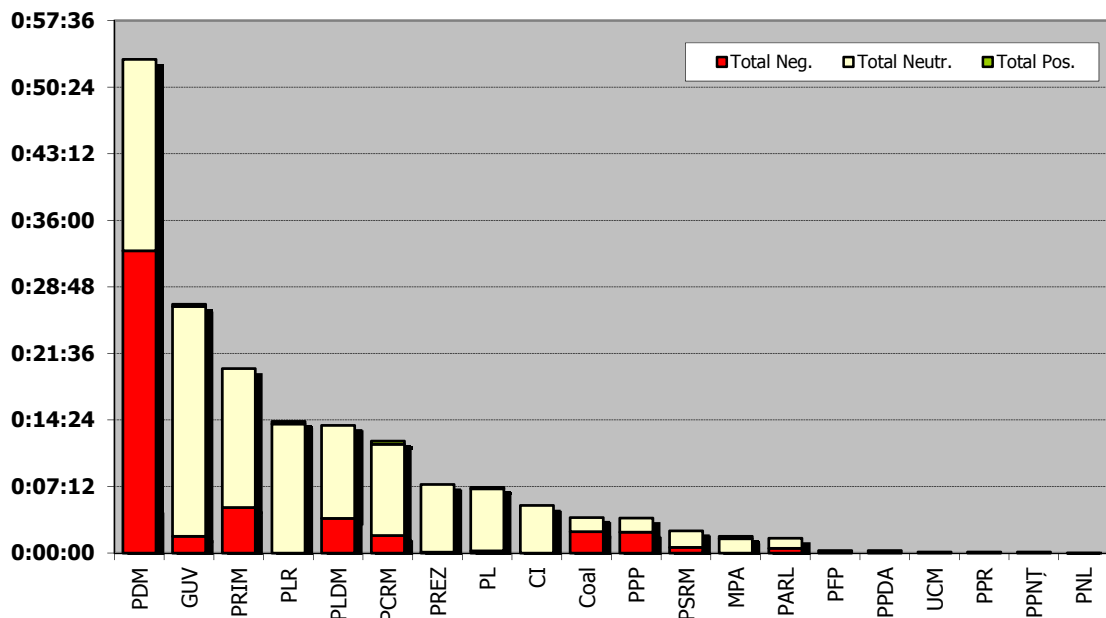
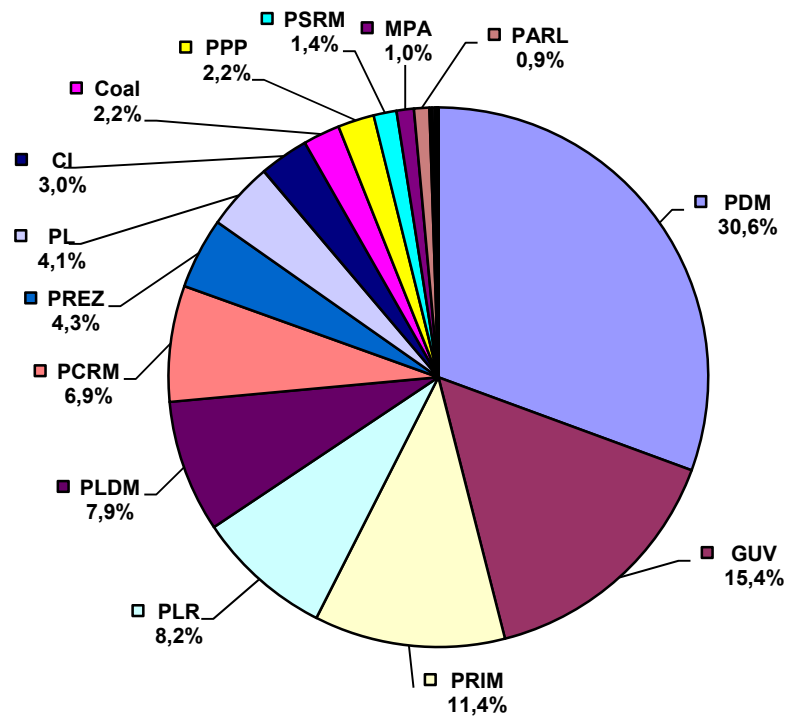
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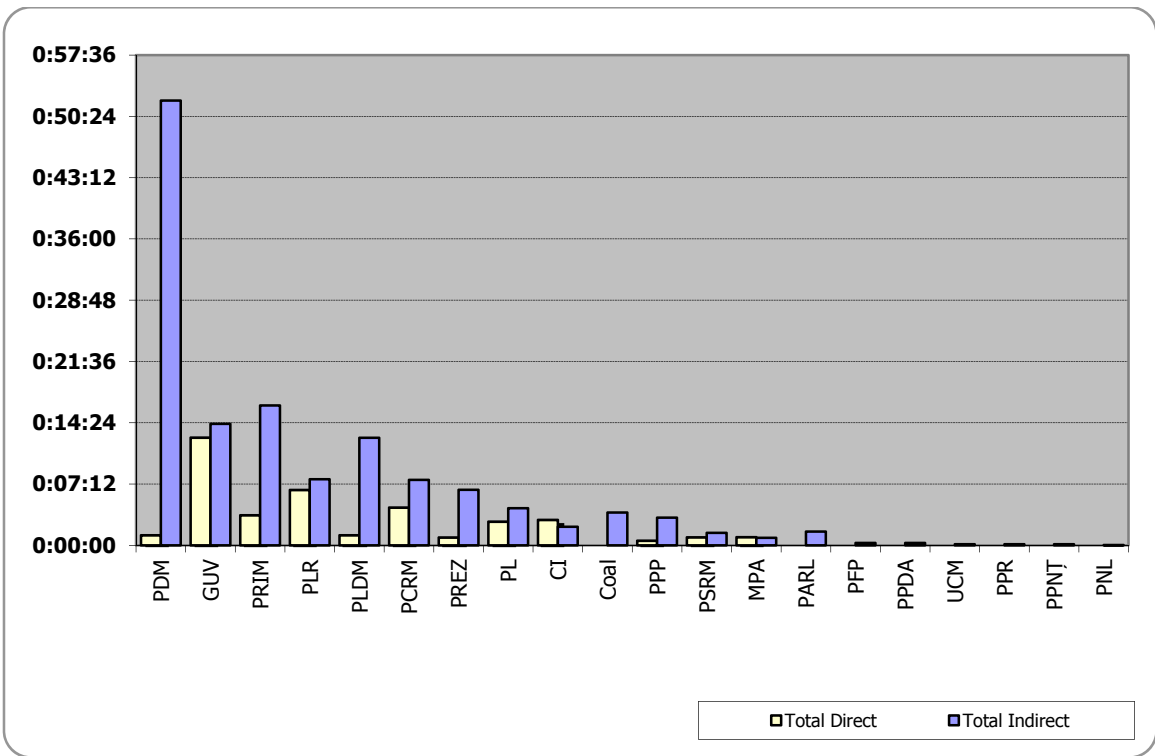




# Jurnal TV

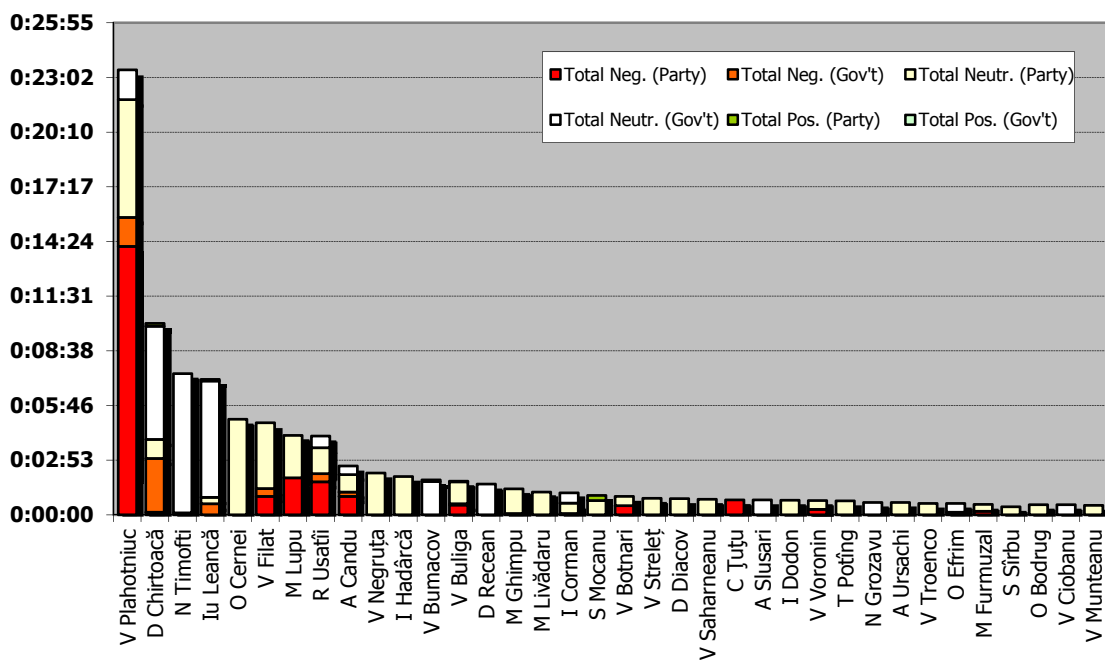
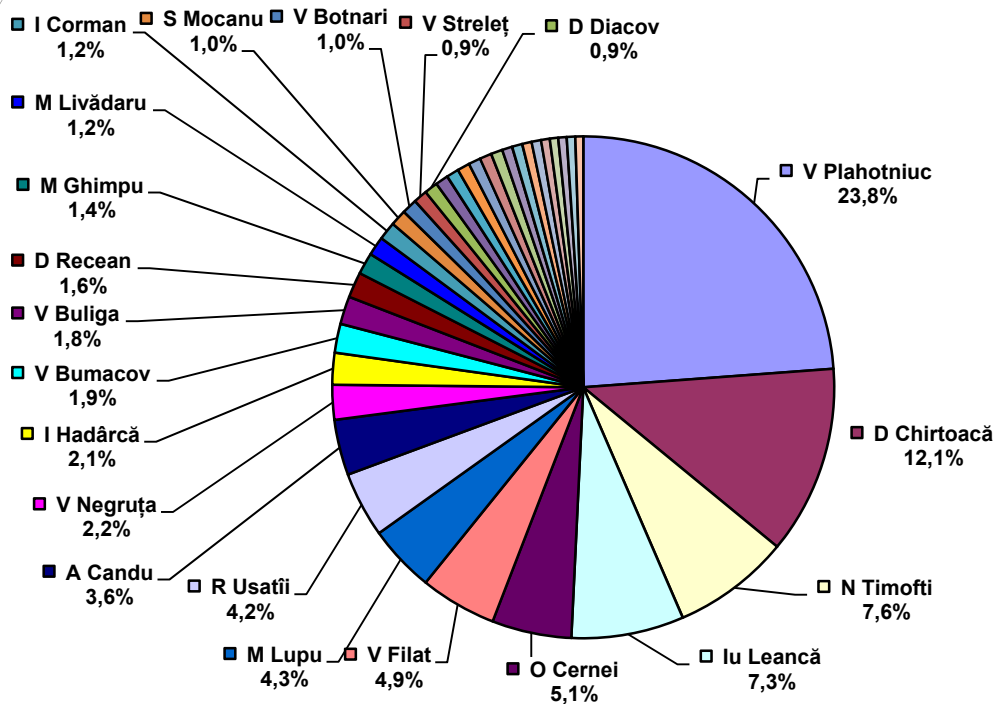
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# Jurnal TV

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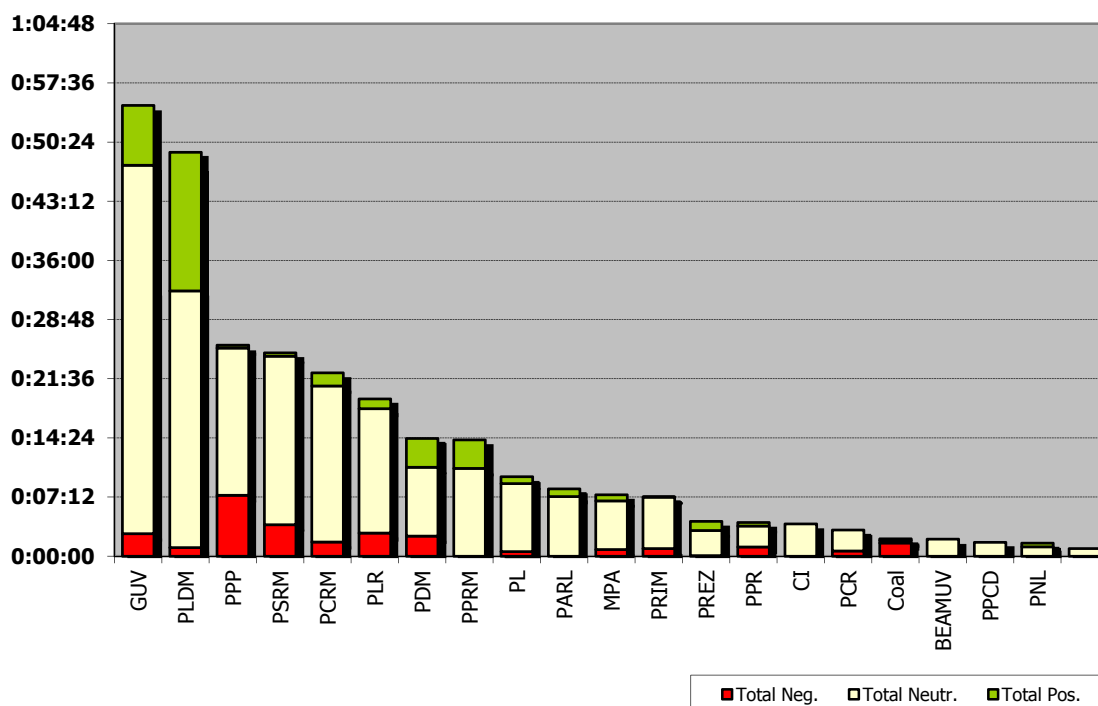
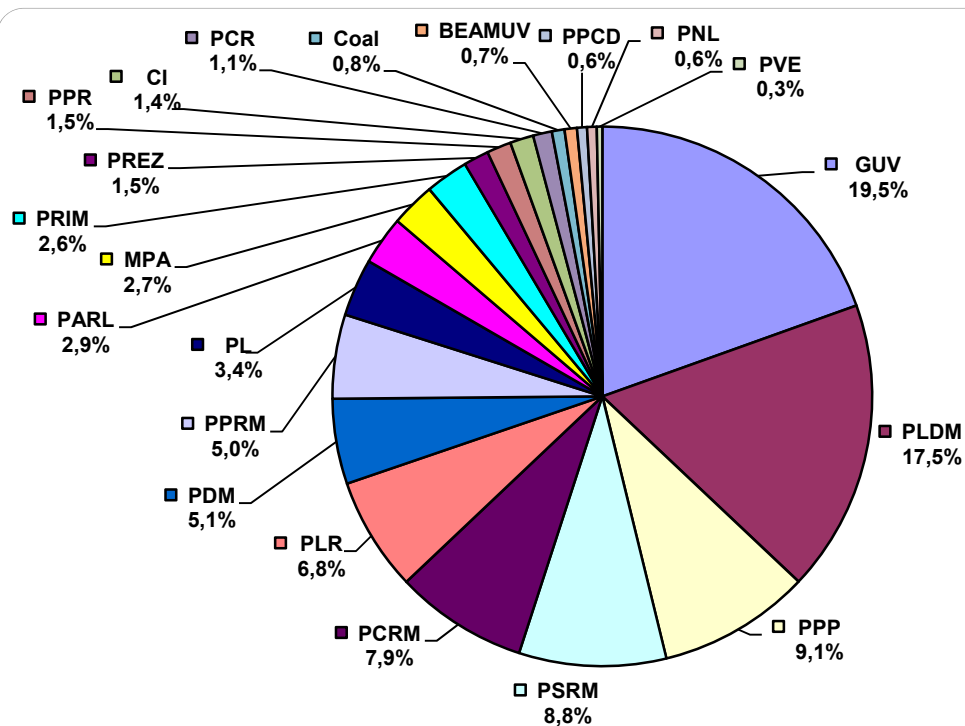


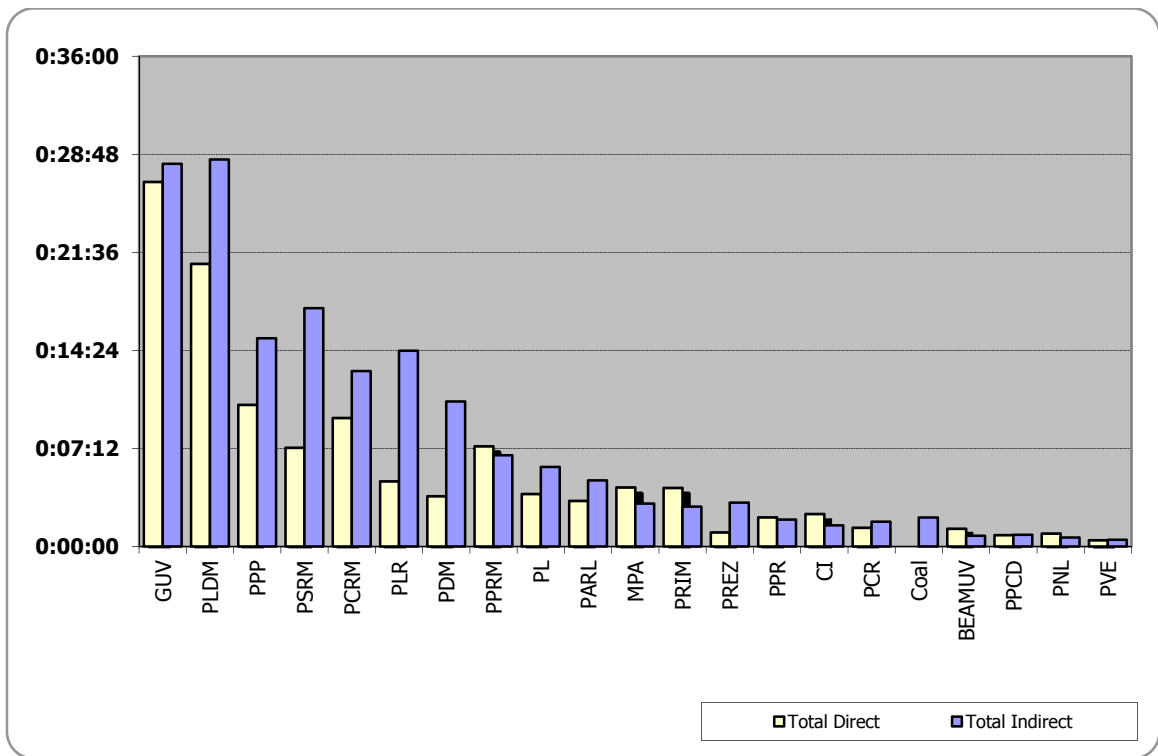




## N 4

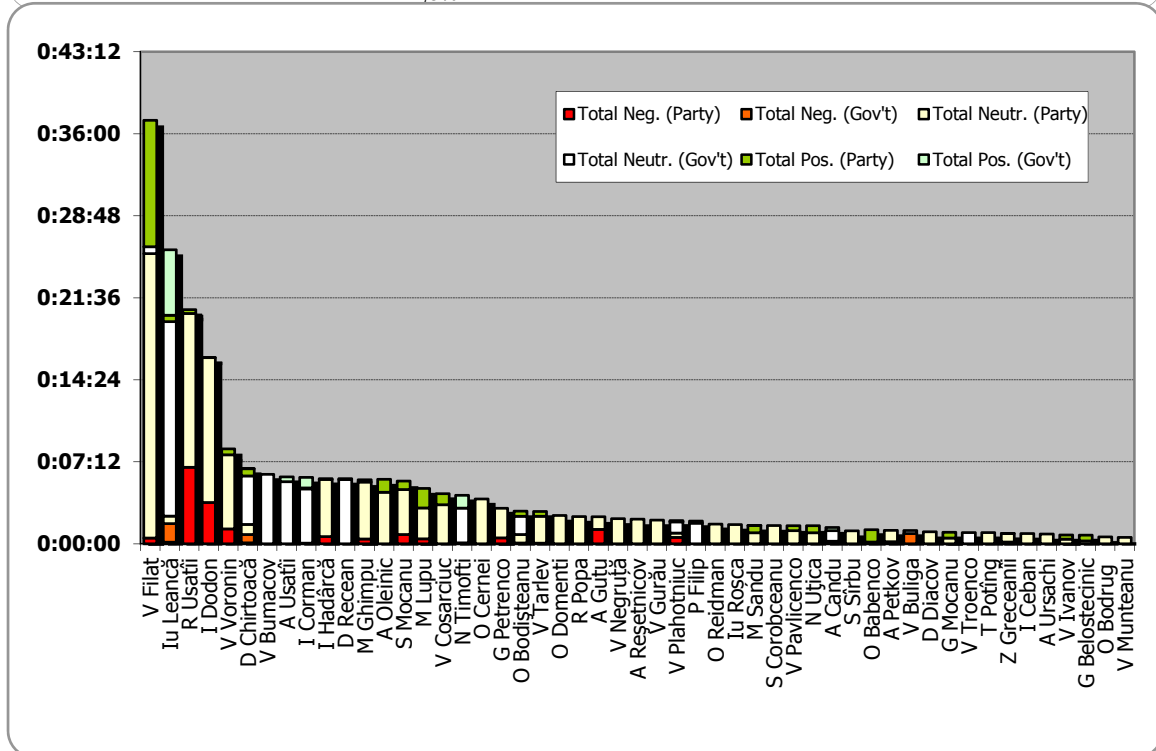
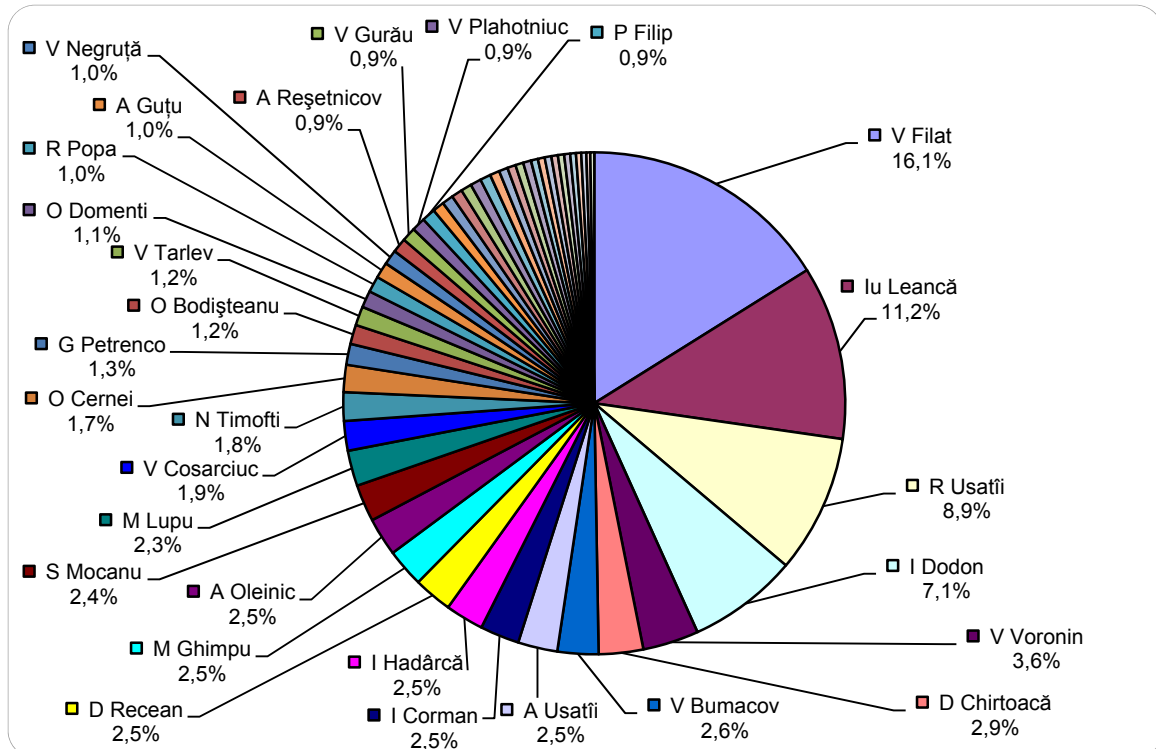
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# N 4

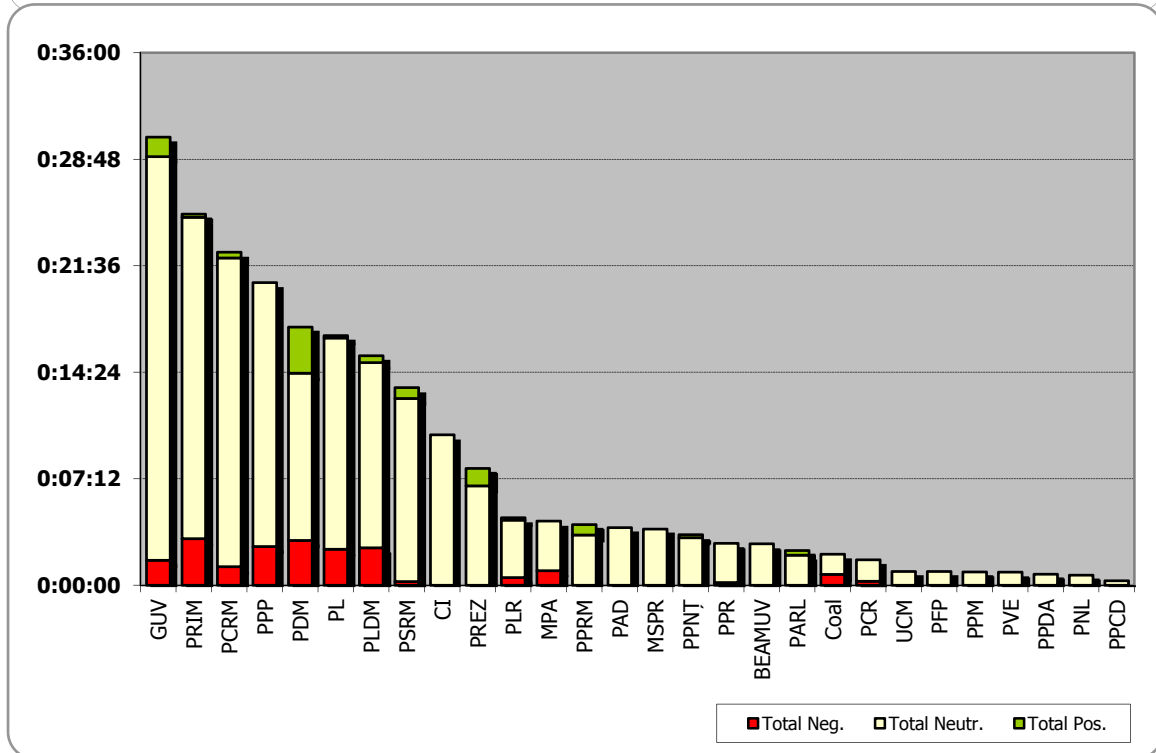
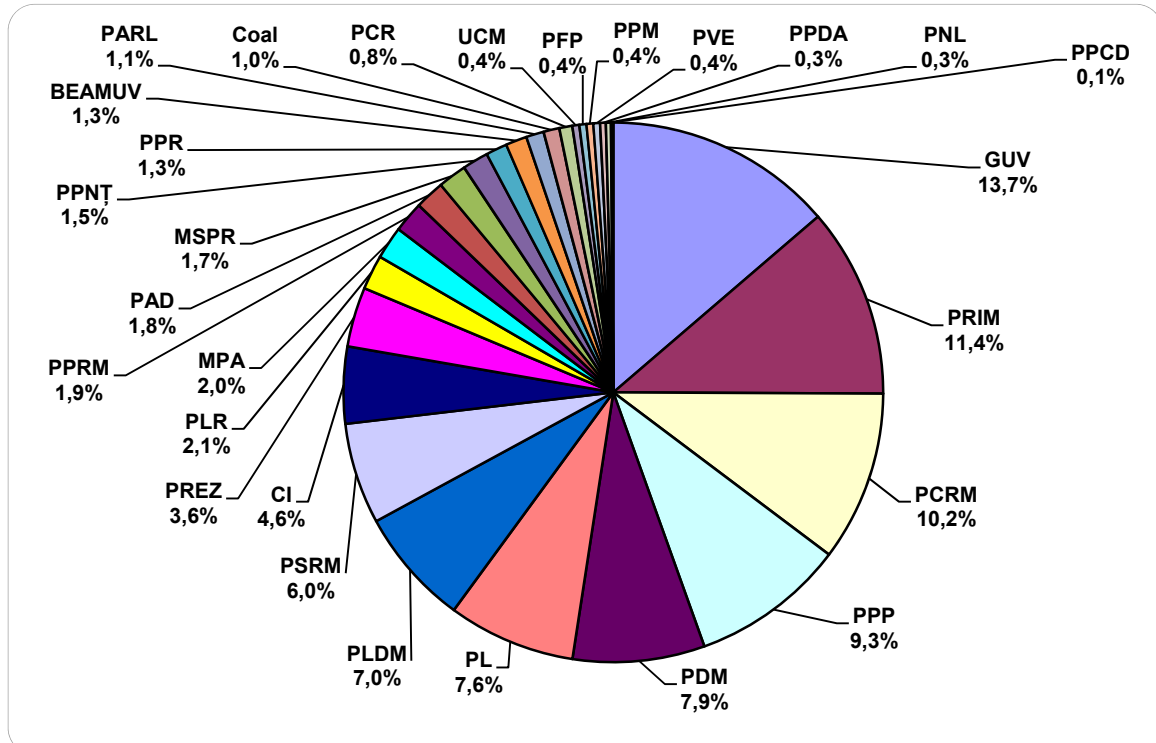
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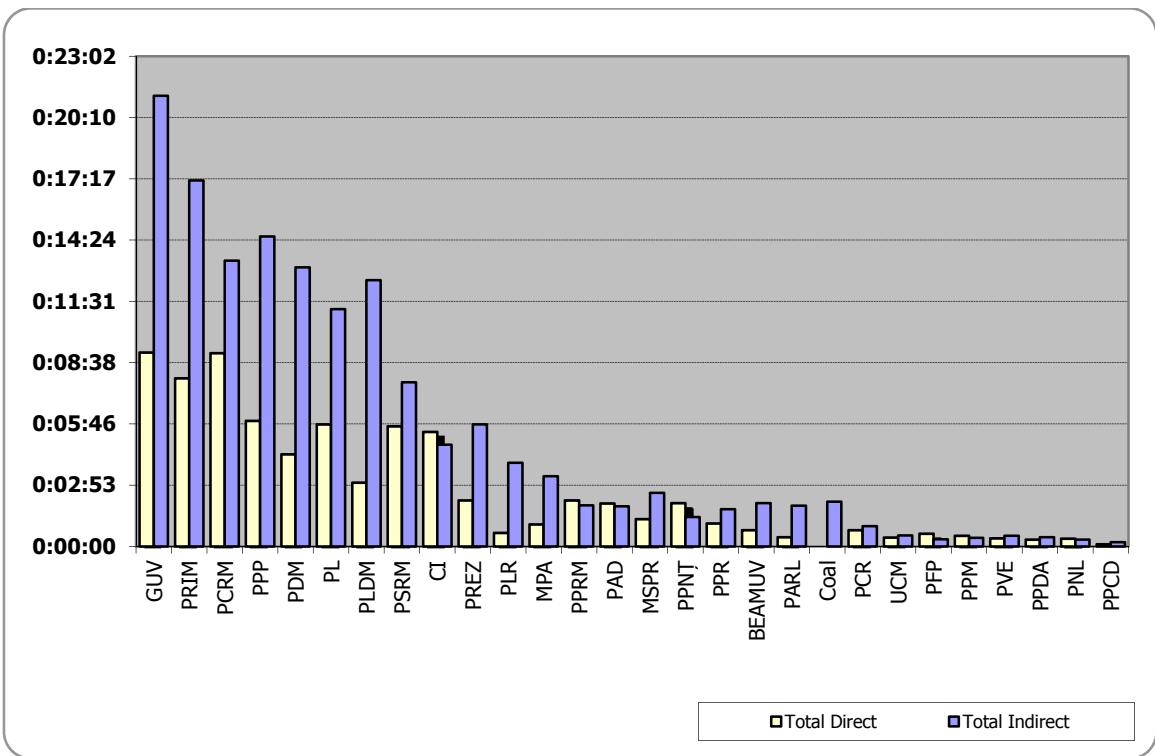




## Pro TV

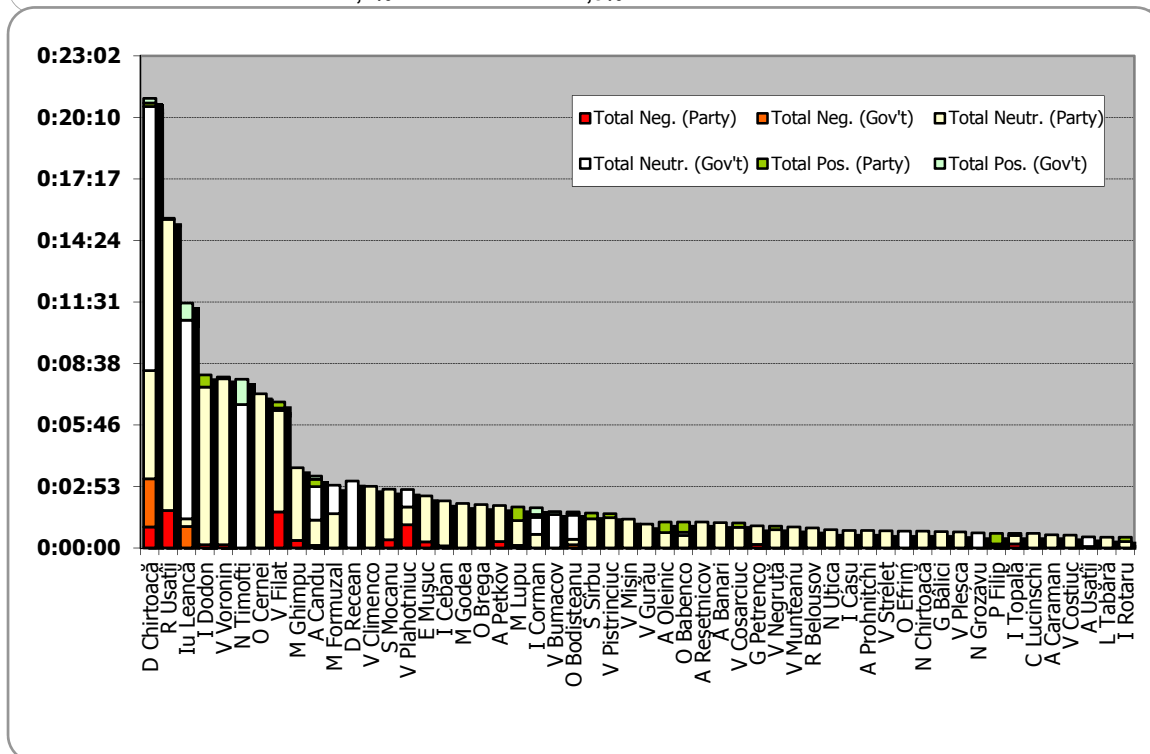
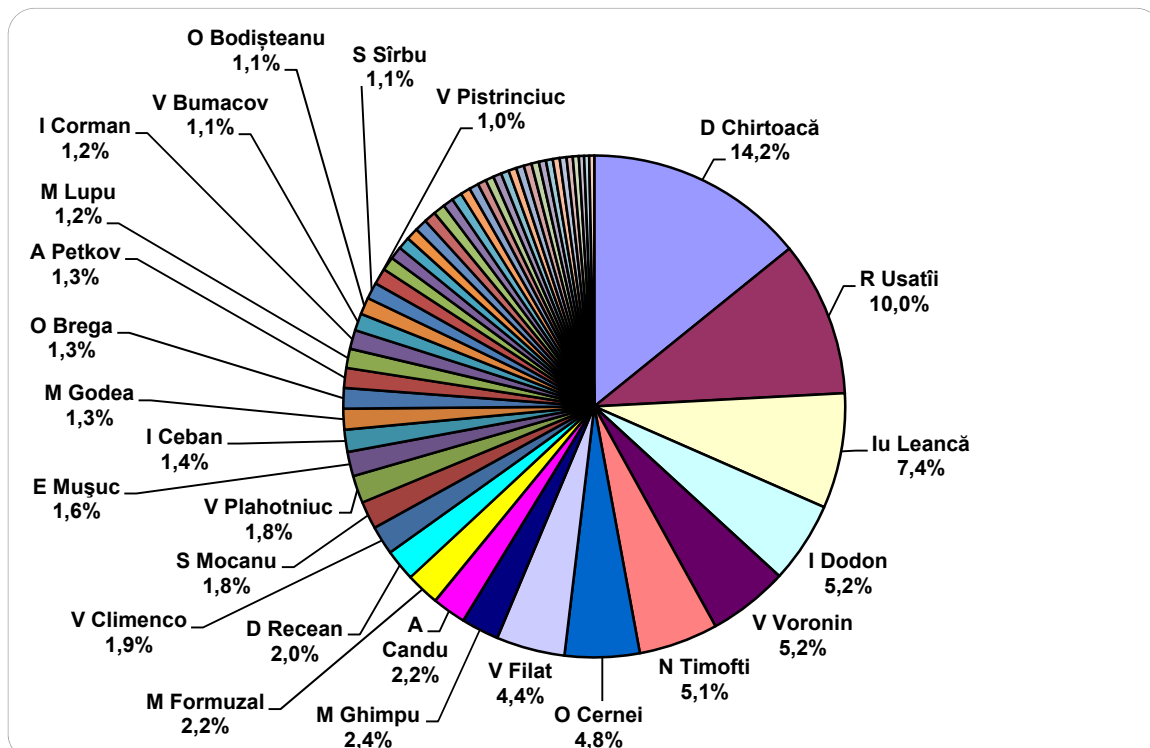
20.10-28.11.2014





# Pro TV

20.10-28.11.2014

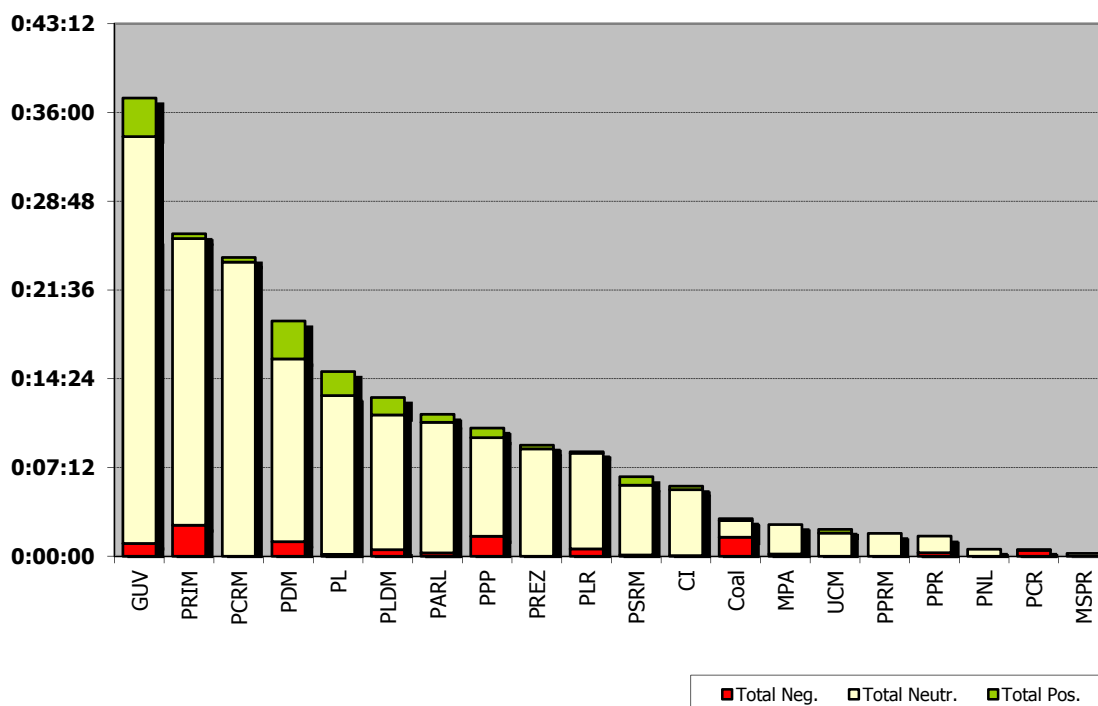
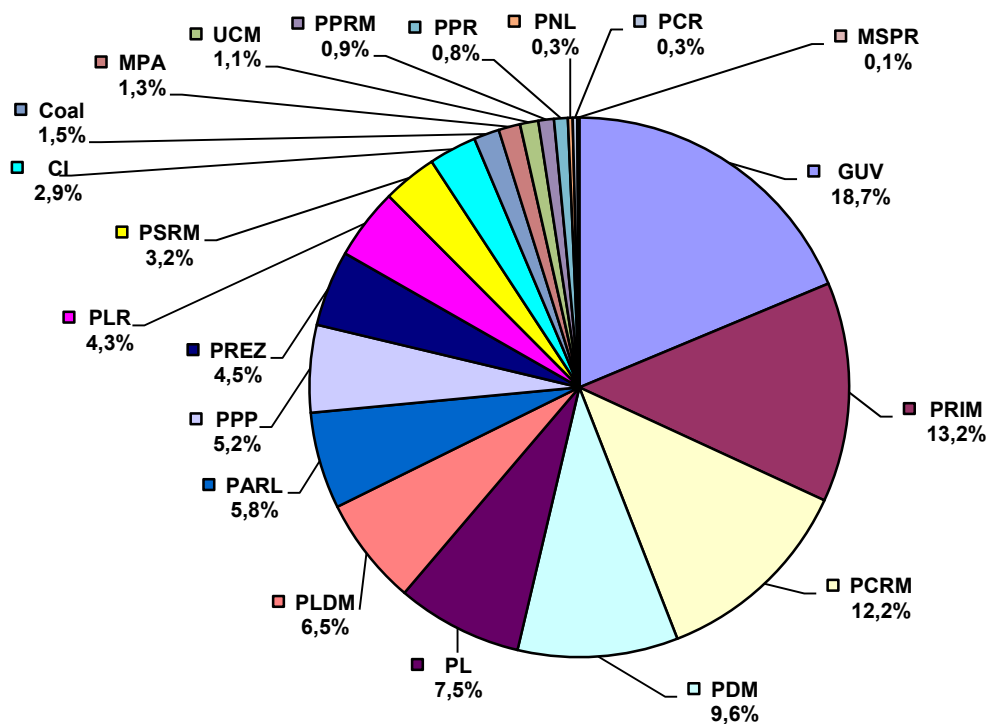


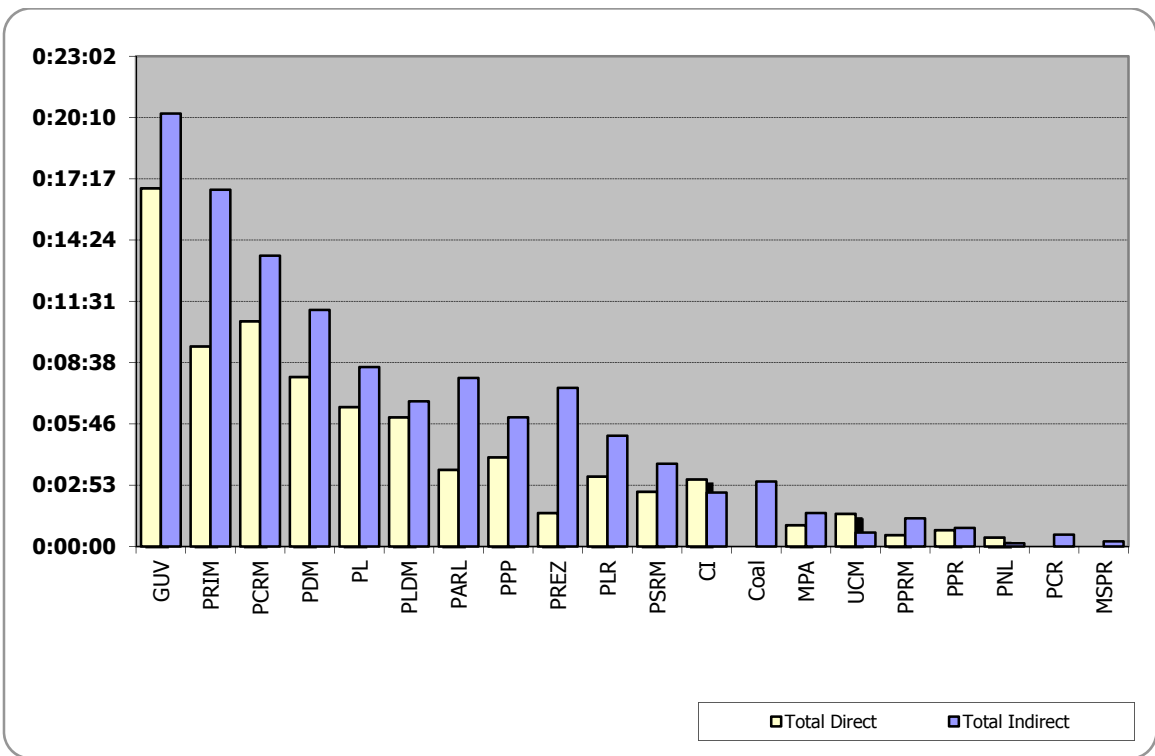




# Ren TV

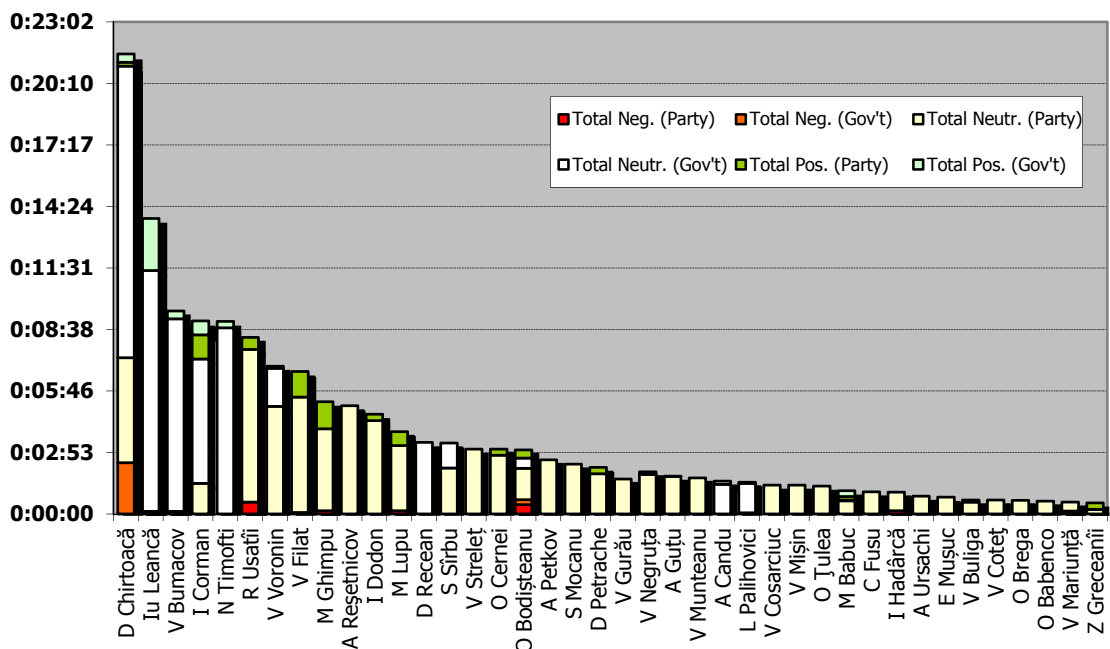
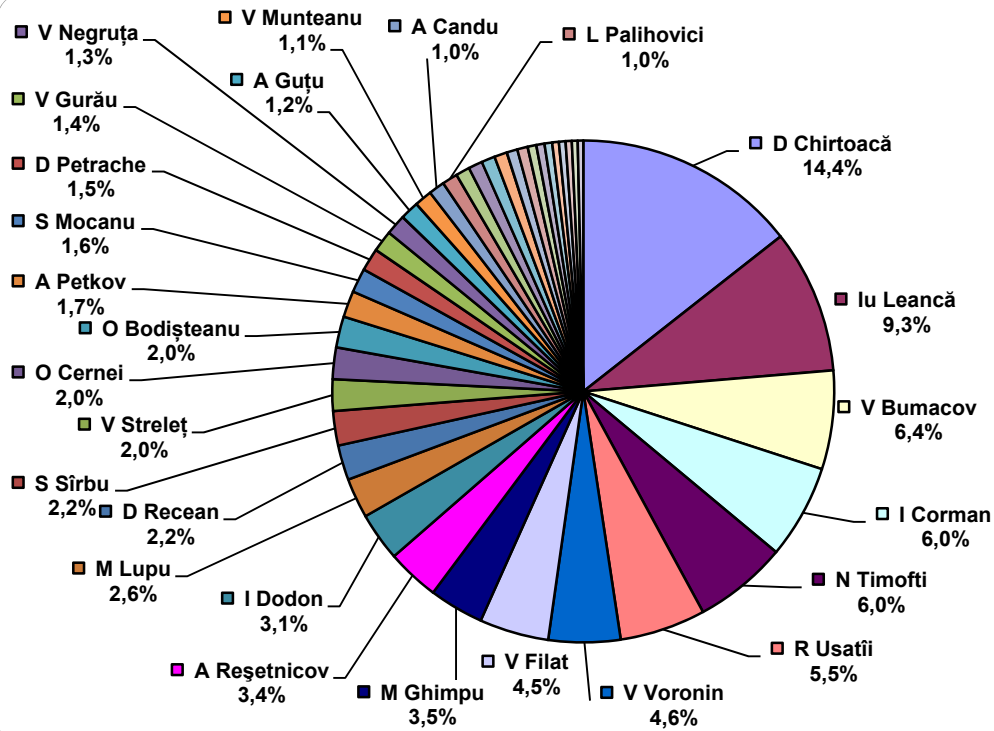
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# REN TV

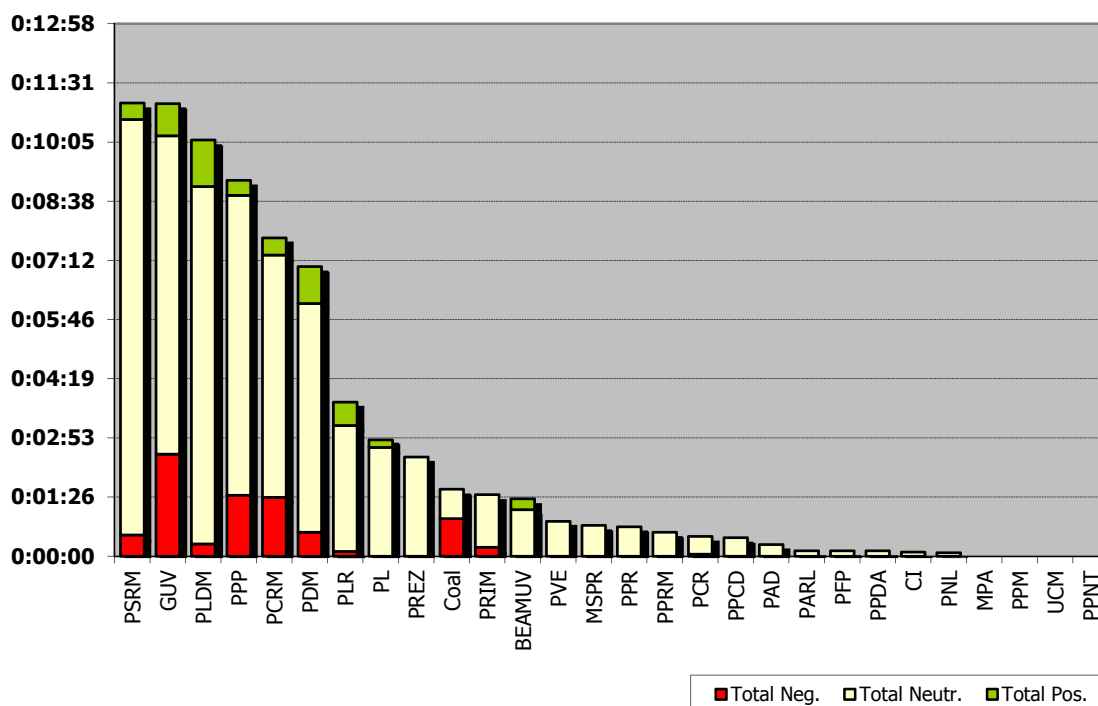
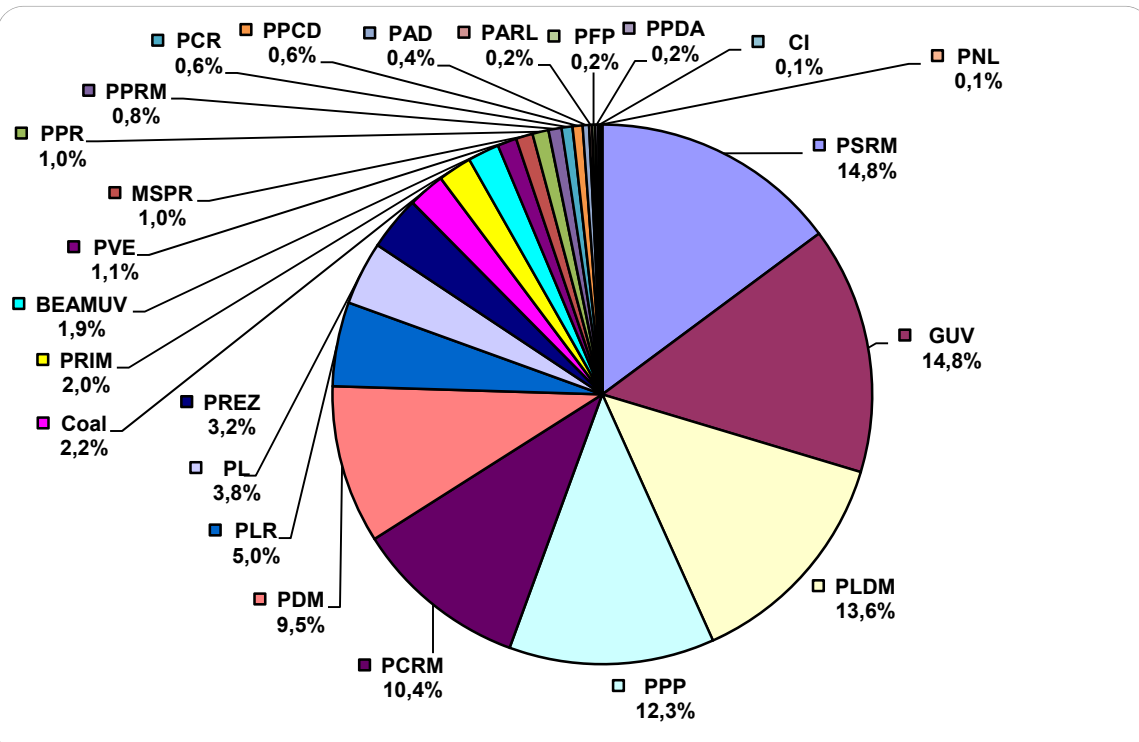
20.10-28.11.2014

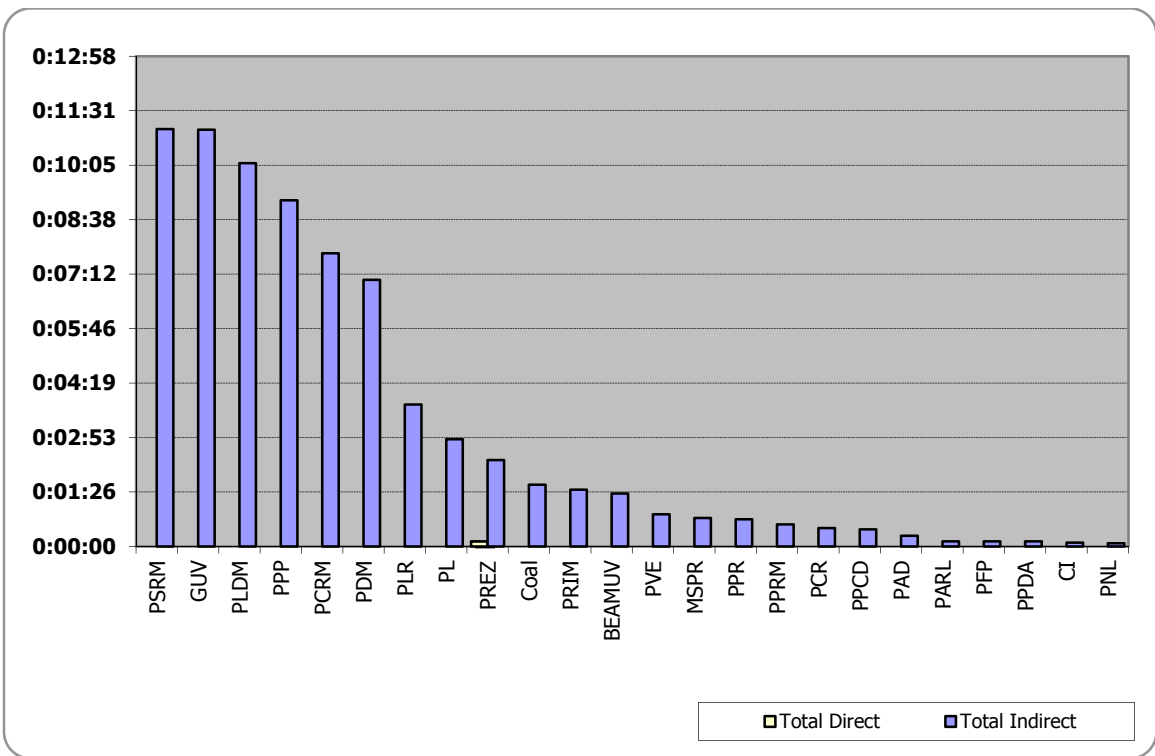




## RTR Moldova

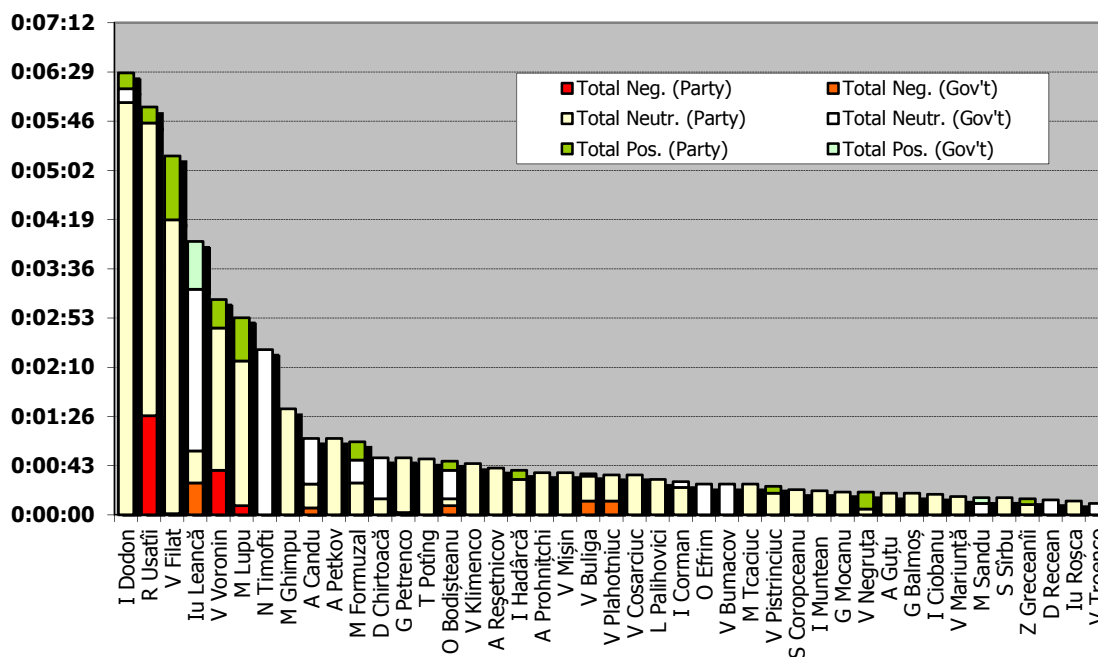
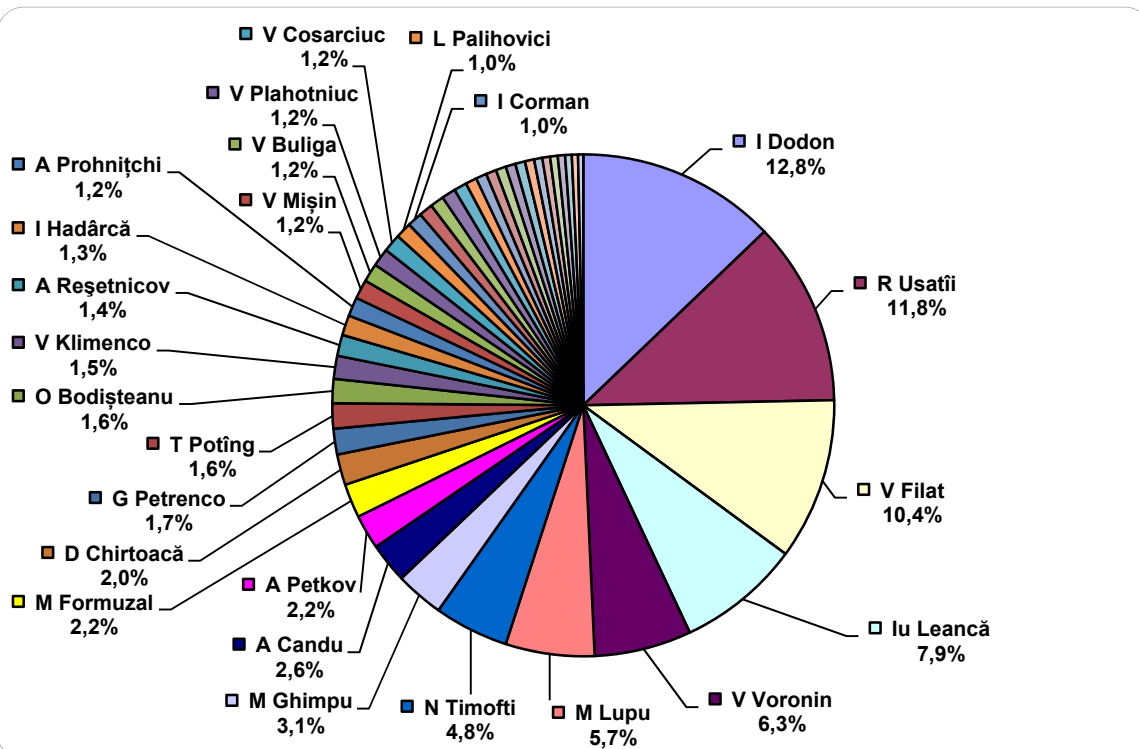
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## RTR Moldova

20.10-28.11.2014

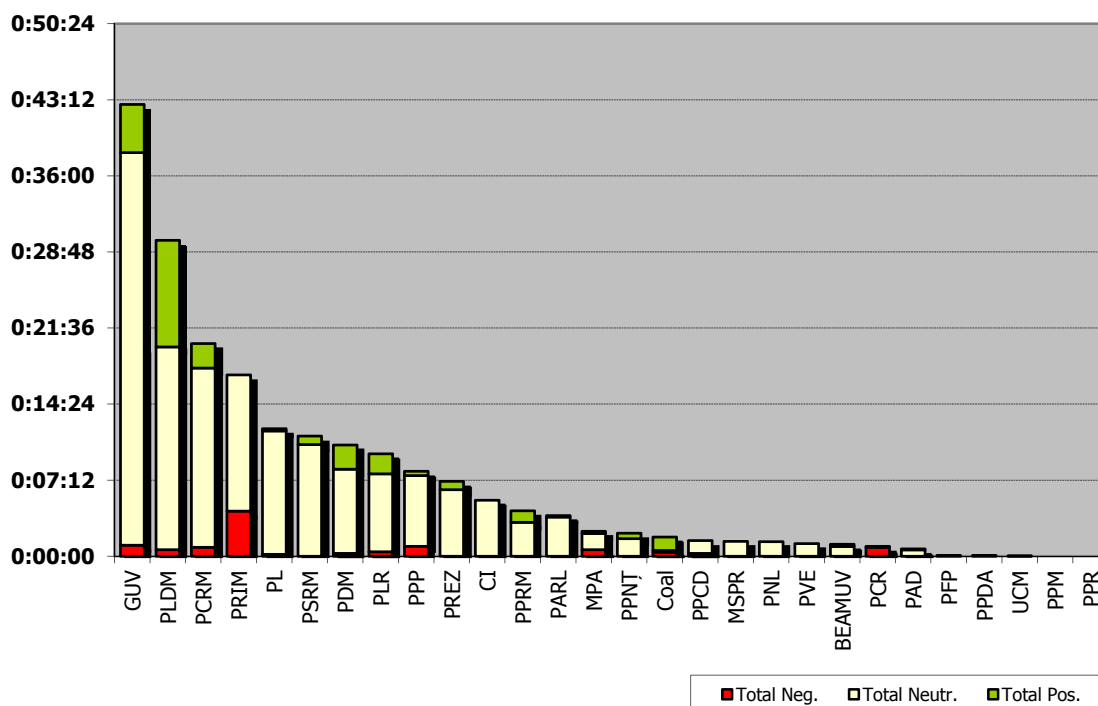
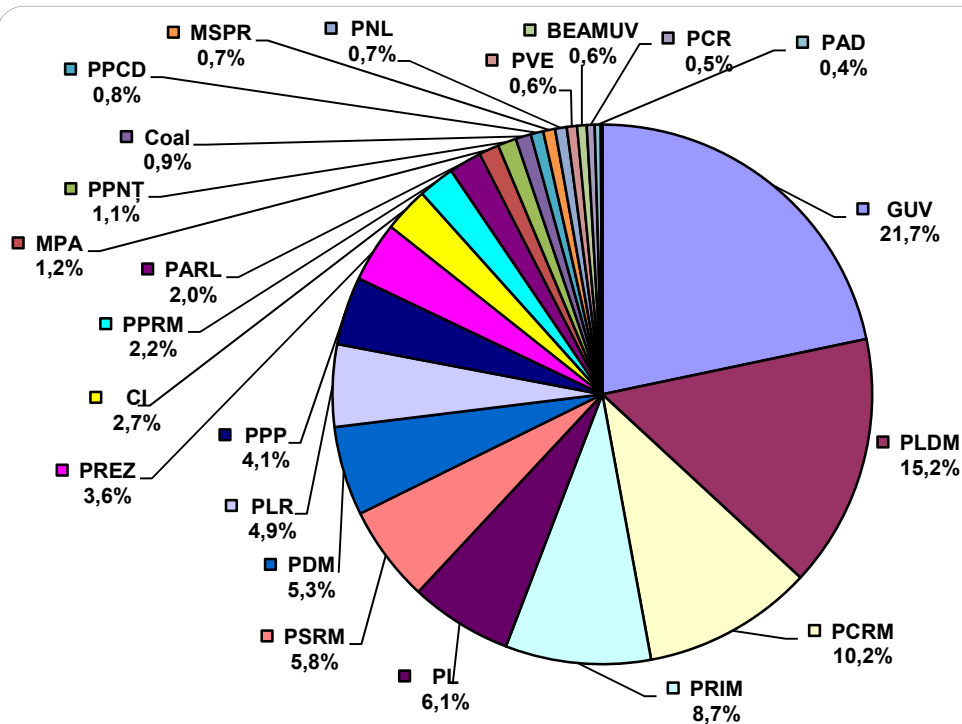


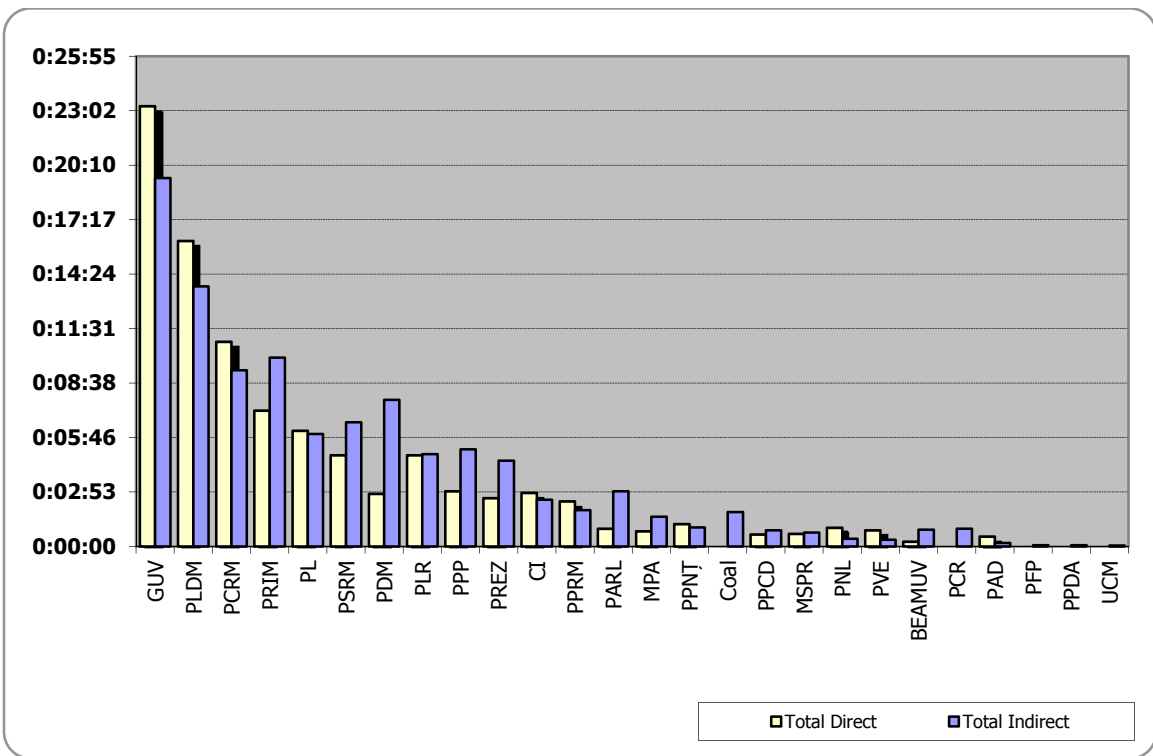




# TV 7

20.10-28.11.2014





# TV 7

20.10-28.11.2014

