

COVERAGE OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN UKRAINIAN MEDIA: FINDINGS OF MEDIA MONITORING

On May 20, 2019, the findings of the independent monitoring of media coverage of the presidential election campaign in Ukraine were presented at a press conference and discussed with Ukrainian national authorities, media experts and journalists at a roundtable discussion that followed. The monitoring was implemented by a coalition of NGOs consisting of "The Commission on Journalism Ethics", "Human Rights Platform", "Ukrainian Media and Communications Institute" and "StopFake" with support of the Council of Europe Projects ["Strengthening freedom of media, access to information and reinforcing the public broadcasting system in Ukraine"](#) and ["Supporting the transparency, inclusiveness and integrity of electoral practice in Ukraine"](#) which are implemented within the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021.

During 14 January - 21 April 2019, a team of 15 independent monitoring specialists and 5 media analysts and experts carried out quantitative and qualitative analysis of the media coverage of the presidential campaign on 12 national TV channels, 8 online media outlets and selected Facebook pages of opinion leaders, candidates and online media outlets, TV channels and/or separate monitored TV programs. In their work, the monitoring team used the monitoring methodology that was developed by the Council of Europe experts Rast'o Kužel (Slovak Republic) and Oleksandr Burmahin (Ukraine).

Based on the results of the monitoring, national media experts identified the main trends in coverage of the election campaign by the media outlets, pointed out the most common violations of the Code of Ethics of a Ukrainian Journalist and came up with practical [recommendations](#) for the stakeholders pertaining to the election campaign coverage and its regulation.

The monitoring revealed that during the presidential election campaign Ukrainian voters were in an oversupplied information space due to the increase in the number and variety of communication channels which were not used in previous election campaigns. Traditional media (television, print and online) were supplemented by social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube), various messengers; the significance of opinion leaders and bloggers increased and they used the new media for promoting their own political positions, and hence supporting one or another candidate. Despite the diverse media environment, the media remained under the strong influence of their owners and openly demonstrated their preferences to specific candidates and political actors during the campaign. The monitoring recorded a significant number of materials with violations of journalistic standards and materials with signs of being advertorial ("dzhynsa"). It is characteristic, that in the first round such materials positively presented all the front-runners of the presidential race. The materials with signs of paid journalism were detected in the work of all media from the monitoring sample, except for TV channel "UA:Pershyi" and website hromadske.ua.

Also, the monitoring explored the role of social media in the presidential election campaign. For the first time in Ukraine, in the second round of election, social networks began to set the tone of the election campaign, which was related to communication strategy of Volodymyr Zelenskyy. For some time, the role of the media was reduced to coverage of what was happening in social networks. Subsequently, the audience's attention switched to television several times, in particular during the talk shows with the participation of the candidates, where they made loud

statements. The monitoring component also focused on trends and signs of potential Russian influence on elections.

The cases identified in the course of the monitoring were filed as complaints for consideration by the Commission on Journalism Ethics. Namely, the Commission was to provide an assessment of materials' compliance with the requirements of the Code of Ethics of a Ukrainian Journalist in covering the electoral process. The Commission carefully reviewed the complaints and issued 17 decisions with friendly warnings and public condemnation addressed to those media that had violated the Code of Ethics.

The monitoring team established effective cooperation with the National Council of TV and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine. The monitoring analysts actively contributed to the working group on elections established by the National Council and shared interim and final reports of media monitoring. Also, with the purpose to have an extended presentation of the media monitoring findings, the Council of Europe Project ["Strengthening freedom of media, access to information and reinforcing the public broadcasting system in Ukraine"](#) organized a seminar for the National Council, which stimulated discussion on the role of the national media regulators in ensuring compliance with legislation during coverage of electoral campaigns in media.

The monitoring data showed significant differences in the coverage of the activities of women and men in the Ukrainian media, especially in the light of the election campaign. On the one hand, sensitivity to gender equality appeared in the work of some journalists, but on the other hand, its nature was a non-systemic and personality-based one. Media outlets gave preference to the voices and the faces of men, despite changes in society and the growing contribution of women to the media. According to the monitoring, disproportionately more time was provided to men compared to women on national TV channels - 85% of the prime airtime, whereas for women - only 15%.

The [Guide "Elections Coverage in Ukraine"](#) was produced by the Commission on Journalism Ethics) with recommendations for media outlets and journalists (within grant to CJE, provided by two Council of Europe Projects).

Reports on the monitoring results in Ukrainian and English, updates on the monitoring, decisions of the Commission on Journalism Ethics are available on the website of the Commission <http://www.cje.org.ua/ua/elections>.