



## **Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for 2016 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia**

### **Election Monitoring of Radios**

**11 July – 30 August**

**2016**

Internews-Georgia is monitoring radio channels within the frameworks of the EU-UNDP funded project “Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for Parliamentary Elections in Georgia”. The monitoring started on May 20 and will last through December 19, 2016. Evening news releases of 12 radio broadcasters are monitored. The list of broadcasters includes Radio 1 (Public Broadcaster), Imedi, Fortuna, Radio Liberty, Palitra, The First Radio, City, Maestro, Hereti (Lagodekhi), Rioni (Kutaisi), Atinati (Zugdidi) and Ajara (Batumi).

The monitoring of the radio channels for the period of 11 July through 30 August has revealed the following **key findings**:

- Most broadcast time was allocated to the “Georgian Dream” party, the government of Georgia, and the “United National Movement”;
- The coverage of the opposition parties, including the non-parliamentary ones, has increased;
- The competition among the broadcasters was minor. Journalists rarely prepared exclusive stories;
- Many broadcasters aired identical news. This trend was especially notable when covering election campaigns;
- The coverage of regional news was negligent in the majority of radio broadcasters;
- The majority of radio broadcasters provided almost no attention to issues and problems of minorities and other vulnerable groups;
- No cases of deep analyses of election programmes and political visions were identified during the reporting period. The radio audiences had to listen to general promises of politicians in their election campaigns;
- Little time was allocated to majoritarian candidates. No substantial information apart from their party affiliation was delivered to the radio audiences;
- Radio journalists followed the agenda set by politicians, without attempts at discovering and discussing issues;
- The task of assessment of sociological polls and surveys were entirely handed over to politicians and did not try to deliberate upon them together;

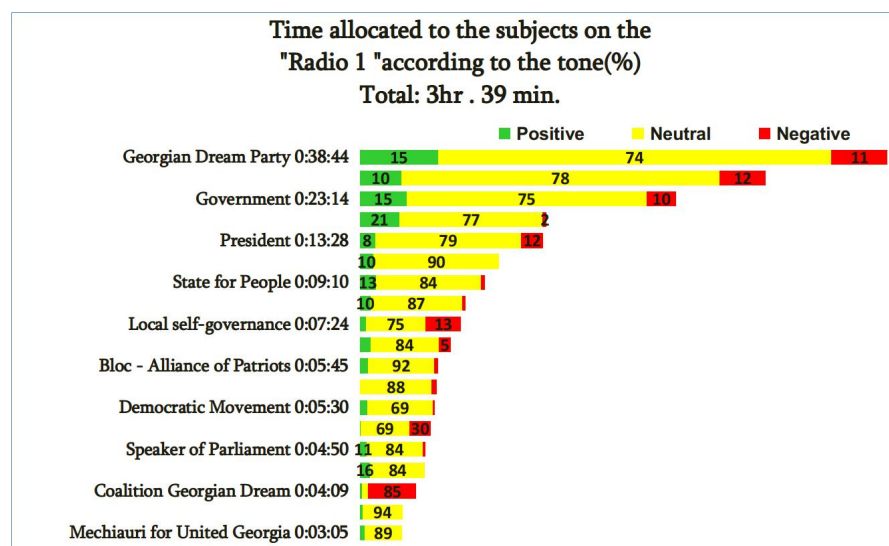
- Radio broadcasters were unbiased. No cases of violation of the standards of Journalistic Ethics were observed.

### “The Radio 1” (Public Broadcaster)

“The Radio 1” provided brief and superficial coverage of key political news. In the reporting period, in total 3 hours and 39 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. The most of the time was provided to the party “Georgian Dream”, then come – “United National Movement” (14%) and the Government - (11%). Time was not used for direct speech, the journalists quoted the respondents’ statements, which demonstrates that the politicians had to provide general answers to their opponents’ questions instead of responding to the journalist’s tough questions. No deep analyses of the events were reflected on the chart, just Coalition “Georgian Dream is an exception, due to being often mentioned negatively by opposition parties.

Pre-election coverage got increased in the news produced in reporting period. The journalists sounded the politicians’ meetings with population and the promises made there, however no story was prepared providing critical analyses of the election programmes or the journalist’s summary of the visions of political teams for coping with the challenges facing the country.

The journalists of “Public Broadcaster” paid less attention to the events developed in the regions. The voice of vulnerable groups was not heard also, while it would enable the audience to have deeper understanding of the visions of political parties. The fact that “the Radio 1” is unbiased and does not demonstrate subjective attitude to any of political forces, does not facilitate informed choice of the audience, unless more analytical stories are prepared and journalists at own initiative obtain additional information.

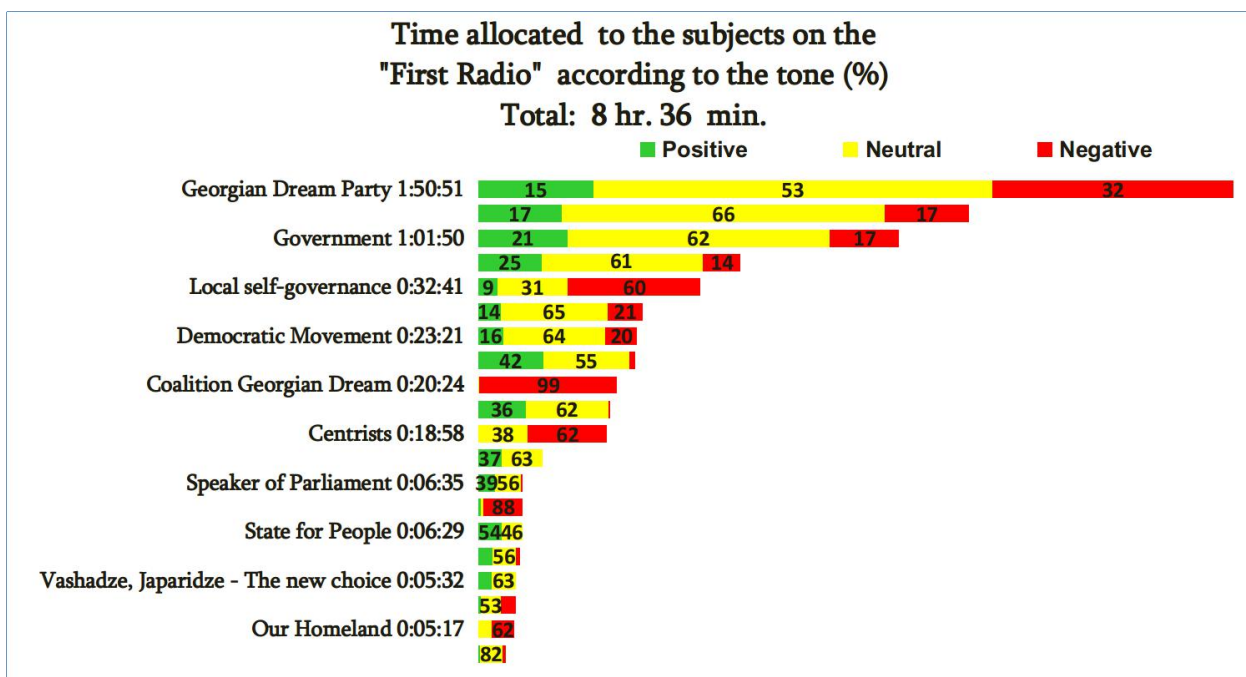


## **“The First Radio”**

In pre-election period “the First Radio” actively covered political processes developed in the country. Compared to the period before reporting, time dedicated to the monitoring subjects was increased and in total compiled 8 hours and 36 minutes. 21% of this time was allocated to the party “Georgian Dream”, 14% - to “United National Movement” and 12% - to the Government. The radio broadcaster allocated almost equal time for direct speech to the subjects (44% in average). Similar to previous reporting period, in some cases time in news was irrationally distributed. This again was related to the director general of TV company Rustavi 2 – Nika Gvaramia. His briefing was the only new information in news of 13 September, and his voice was heard in live for 13 minutes. Since Gvaramia was talking about the pressure from the government, majority of this time was reflected on negative tone of the coalition “Georgian Dream”. However, such cases were not repeated in following programme and the news became relatively diverse.

The news basically was limited to coverage of the politicians’ statements and the opponents’ responses. Since opposition parties, use the most of time allocated to them for criticizing ruling team, the party “Georgian Dream” got 32% of negative tone. The members of the party “National Movement”, often mentioned Bidzina Ivanishvili in negative context, consequently negative coverage of the latter got increased. As for local government, the City Hall was presented negatively (62%), in conditions of the protests of environmental organizations.

“The First Radio” allocated significant time for political parties as well as for the CEC. However, pre-election campaign was covered superficially, since no deep analyses were made with the regard to the election programmes. The events developed in the regions were not covered at all. Social or minority problems were also left beyond the attention of the radio broadcaster. In the event of solving above mentioned problems, the radio broadcaster will assist the voters in making informed choice.



### “The Radio Palitra”

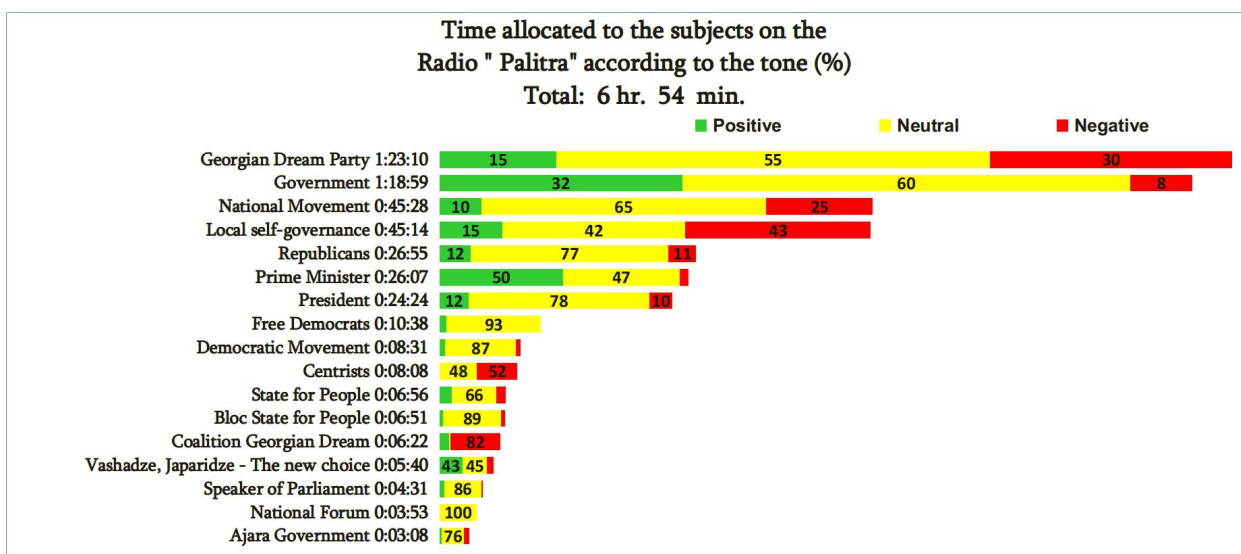
“The Radio Palitra” covered events in balanced and unbiased manner. In total 6 hours and 54 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects, out of which 21% was provided to the party “Georgian Dream”, 19% - the Government and 11% - to the party “United National Movement”. The radio broadcaster allocated in average 28% of the time for the respondents’ direct speech, used almost equally by different political teams.

With the intensification of election campaign, the opposition parties became more and more critical towards the government and ruling team. The protests of environmental organizations in front of the City Hall were added to that. All mentioned was reflected on diversity of the tones of the radio broadcaster. On one hand, the government basically was covered in negative tone, while on the other hand the journalists provided the responses of the ruling team, consequently the subjects got time in positive tone as well.

The radio broadcaster did not make in depth analyses of pre-election campaign, just information given by the politicians during the meetings with the population was covered. The journalists balanced the stories and presented different positions regarding particular issues, however the analyses were lacking on this channel as well. Besides, some issues remained unclear, due to superficial coverage. For example, on 27 July in the news we heard that National Bank of Georgia

reduced refinancing rate, while understanding the essence of such change is quite difficult without respective education.

The journalists of “the Radio Palitra” produced the most balanced news. The trends identified during the monitoring of broadcaster rises expectation that more analytical information will be broadcasted and the journalists will become more proactive. Their effort for obtaining exclusive information, asking critical questions, more attention to the events ongoing in the regions and so on, would facilitate the voters in making informed choice.

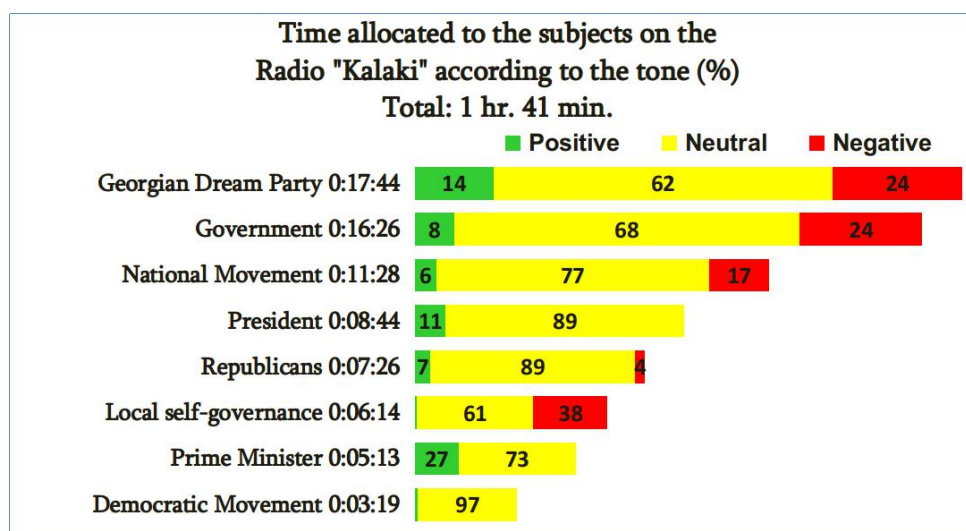


### “The Radio City”

“The Radio City” produced 5-6 minutes’ news, where the anchor provided brief information regarding important events developed during the day. Although, in total the monitoring subjects were discussed for 1 hour and 41 minutes, this was indirect coverage, without hearing their voice on the air. Like previous reporting period, superficial coverage of news and less engagement of the citizens and nongovernmental sector still remains a problem. Diversity of the tone chart is not caused by varied and deep analyses, this is rather explained by quoting the politicians’ critical statements towards one another.

In reporting period, time allocated for the politicians was even more reduced. In previous report seven parties got more than seven minutes, while now this figure is decreased to four. Besides, the stories prepared regarding pre-election campaign was not about the election programmes and basically were focused on the politicians’ meetings with population.

Although, “the Radio City” was not biased towards any of political teams, superficial coverage in style of information agencies, will not promote improvement of public awareness. Maybe it is impossible to produce analytical stories, due to brief news format. However balanced stories, presenting opinions of the specialists and civil sector would help the audience in making conclusions.

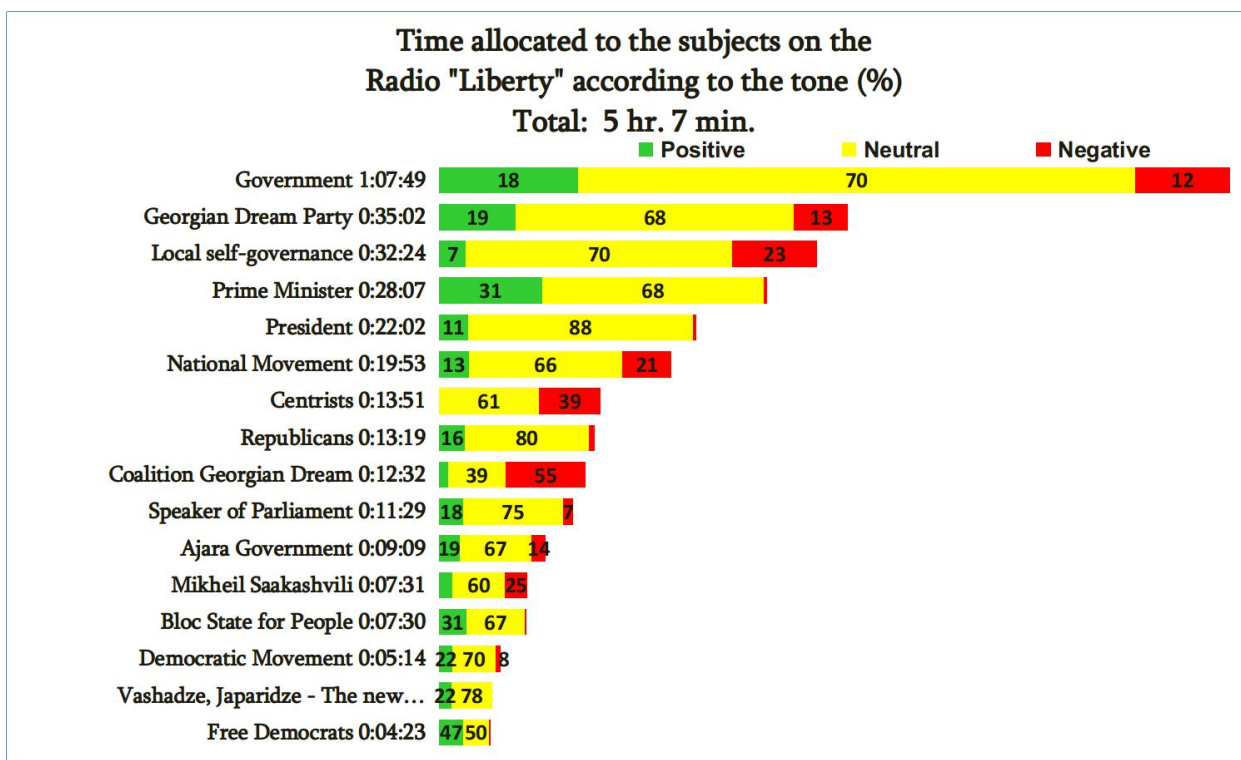


### “The Radio Liberty”

“The Radio Liberty” was still distinguished with its in depth and analytical news. In total 5 hours and 7 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. The most time was given to the government (22%), then comes the party “Georgian Dream” (11%) and then – local government (10%). 25% of the time allocated for the subjects, was used for direct speech.

“The Radio Liberty” daily covered less news compared to other broadcasters, however comprehensive and balanced stories were prepared on selected topics. The journalists often asked critical questions and used different data. The audience had opportunity to hear the opinions of nongovernmental sector and experts, besides the politicians. That made the news diverse and relatively comprehensive.

“The Radio Liberty” allocated much time for covering the events ongoing in the regions. It is distinguished from all other radio broadcasters, with its balanced and diverse topics covered in different perspectives. However, the information regarding the election programmes of political parties was still lacking.



### “The Radio Maestro”

“The Radio Maestro” broadly covered the events developed in the country. In monitoring period, the channel allocated to the subjects 8 hours and 11 minutes, the most of which was given to the party “Georgian Dream” (23%), then come the government with 15% and “United National Movement” with 13%.

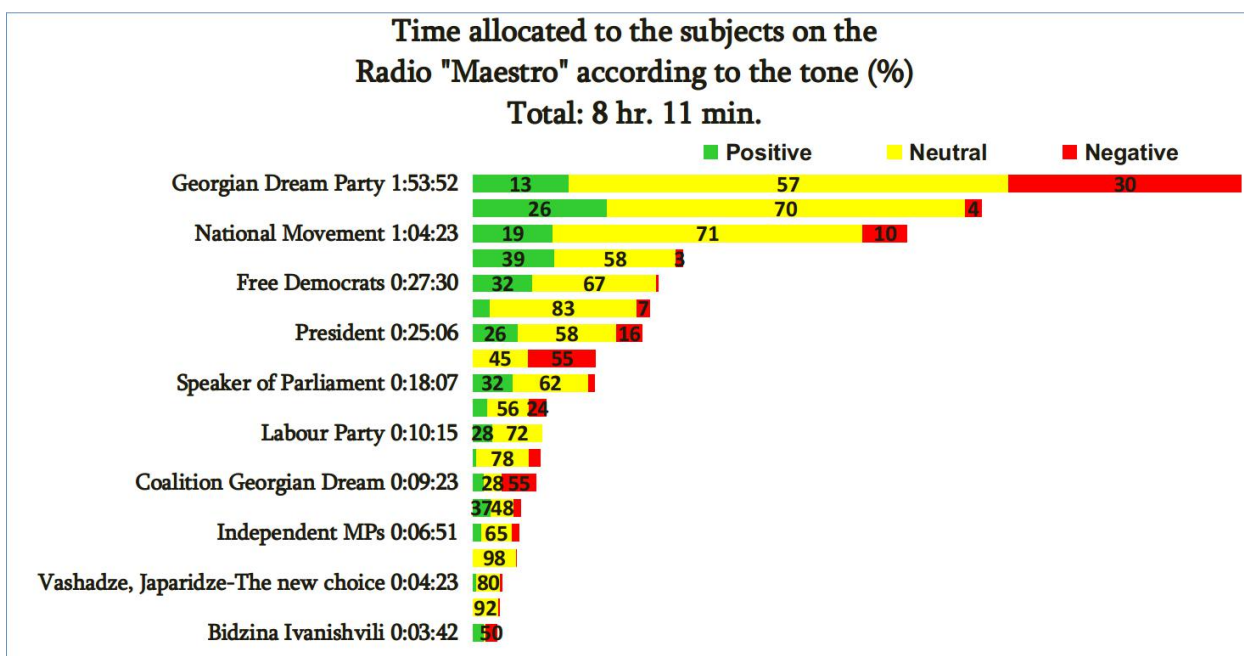
Despite of quite extensive running time of the programme (20 – 25 minutes), the news was limited with the overview of the politicians’ statements. 40% of time was allocated for direct speeches of the respondents. Similar to the previous reporting period, social issues and problems of minorities and other groups were less covered, except for the stories related to the politicians’ meetings with the population.

In fact, nothing is changed after previous reporting period. The journalists still did not ask critical questions and politicians were offered the opportunities for talking about their positions without respective justification. The problem becomes even more acute, when the journalists do not try to obtain additional information to transform the politicians’ general and less justified statements into healthy discussions/disputes.



In reporting period, there were some cases of irrational distribution of air time. For example, the news of 31 July informed the audience just about the assembly of the party “Georgian Dream”, where the broadcaster allocated more than 10 minutes to just direct speech of George Kvirikashvili. While the journalists have not analyzed deeply pre-election programs and no stories on of the same duration were prepared about other political parties. However, this does not mean that the journalists were biased to the ruling party, this is proved by negative tone (30%) got by the party “Georgian Dream”.

The radio broadcaster balanced the majority of stories, presenting different positions regarding particular issues. Consequently, “the Radio Maestro” has potential for contributing to development healthy electoral environment. Thus, the journalists’ higher initiative is important: they shall analyse the events with the focus on the issues not covered by the politicians at own their will.



### “The Radio Fortuna”

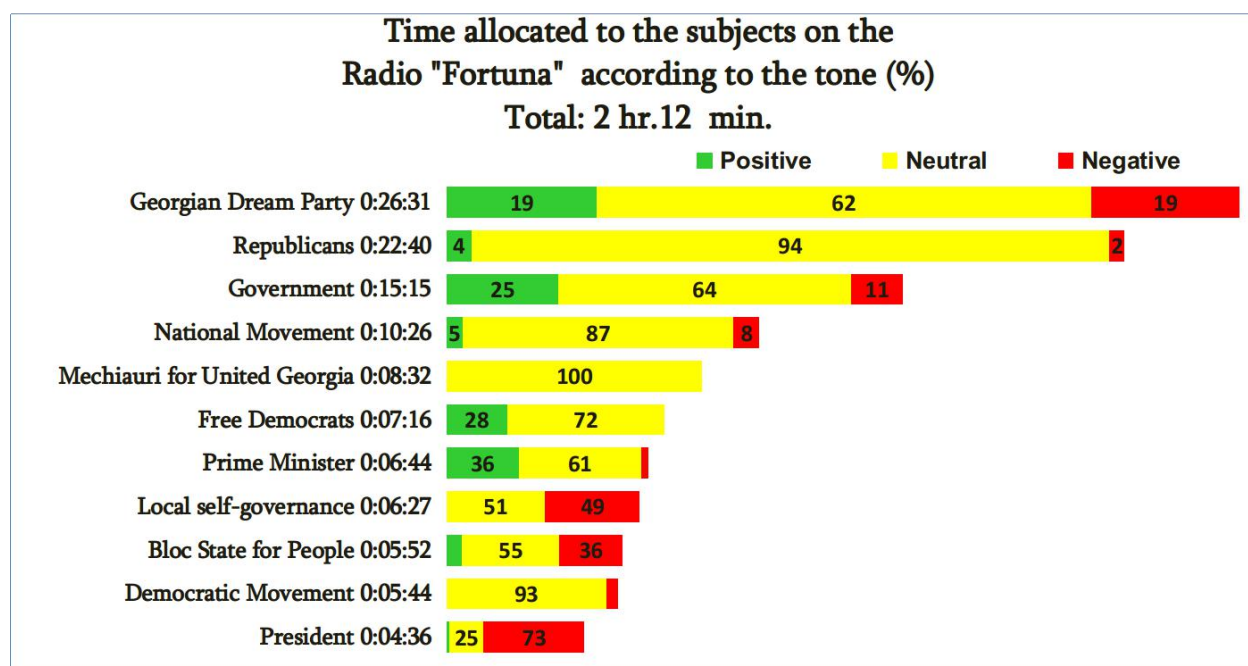
“The Radio Fortuna” produced the news basically in form of information digest. The journalists provided brief information regarding topical issues of the day, which basically was limited with quoting the politicians. In total 2 hours and 12 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subject; the most of which (20%) was given to the party “Georgian Dream”, 17% - to the Republican Party, and 11% - to the Government. Although, the voice of respondents was not heard in the stories, the news



had separate block “Headline News”, in which the experts, political parties and the representatives were invited and the subjects had opportunity for direct speech respectively.

Compared to previous reporting period, news programmes of “the Radio Fortuna” were more balanced and the number of news produced based on one source was reduced. Despite of short running time, it was obvious that the journalists were prepared for covering the issues less obtained by other broadcasters. For example, the problems of public transport, conditions of the road and so on. Time was allocated for pre – election activities of political parties, however in this component “the Radio Fortuna” did not differ from other radio broadcasters and pre-election programmes were not discussed as well.

Improvement is obvious compared with previous reporting period, however most of the news continues to be short and shallow. Obtaining additional information, asking hot questions and covering different positions have double importance in pre – election period.



### “The Radio Imedi”

“The Radio Imedi” covered the events ongoing in the country in balanced and unbiased manner, with the focus on political movements. In total 5 hours and 45 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subject. 20% of this time was given to the party “Georgian Dream, 15% - to the Government and 12% - to the party “United National Movement”. The journalists did not make much effort to collecting

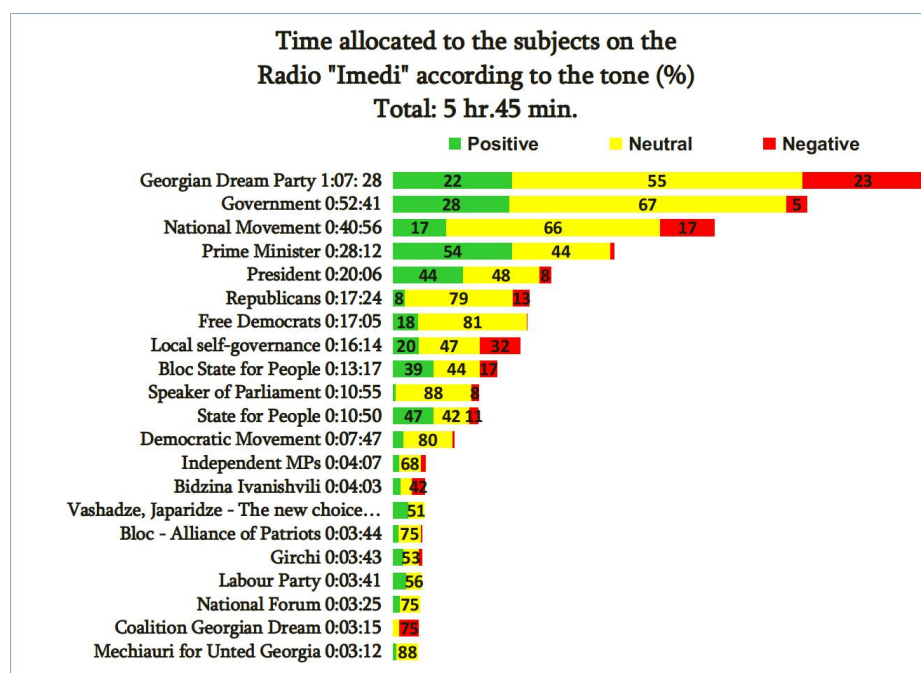
exclusive material and detecting the problems, which is proved by the increase of positive tone. The politicians got significant part of the time (in average 42%) for direct speech.

With the regard to pre-election campaign the journalists prepared separate block – “The Elections 2016”, the format of which offered the opportunity for deep and detailed review of the parties’ opinions on different issues. However, at this time just the meetings of politicians with population and their general statements were covered, without paying much attention to the election programmes.

The radio broadcaster tried to cover the assessments of nongovernmental sector and specialists, regarding main issues. For example, in contrast to other broadcasters, on 29 July “the Radio Imedi” in the story prepared about the NDI study, besides the politicians’ assessments allocated time for the opinions of the experts. Such coverage of the studies, reduces the possibility of the politicians’ using air time in accordance with their interests. However, for some reasons the study carried out by the company GFK, ordered by the company Rustavi 2 was not covered in the programme of 23 August, while other broadcasters dedicated long stories to that.

Introduction of the respondents in the news programs still remains the problem. Often it was not clear whose voice was heard in the air, sometimes preciseness, in particular improper generalization was a problem. For example, in the programme of 13 July, the journalist said that nongovernmental sector assessed positively the election environment, while the mentioned was supported by just very brief sound bite and the author of the statement was not mentioned as well.

Reactiveness of the journalists and more scepticism towards the respondents’ statements still remained the challenge for “the Radio Imedi”, since that would complicate positive presentation of their teams by the politicians.

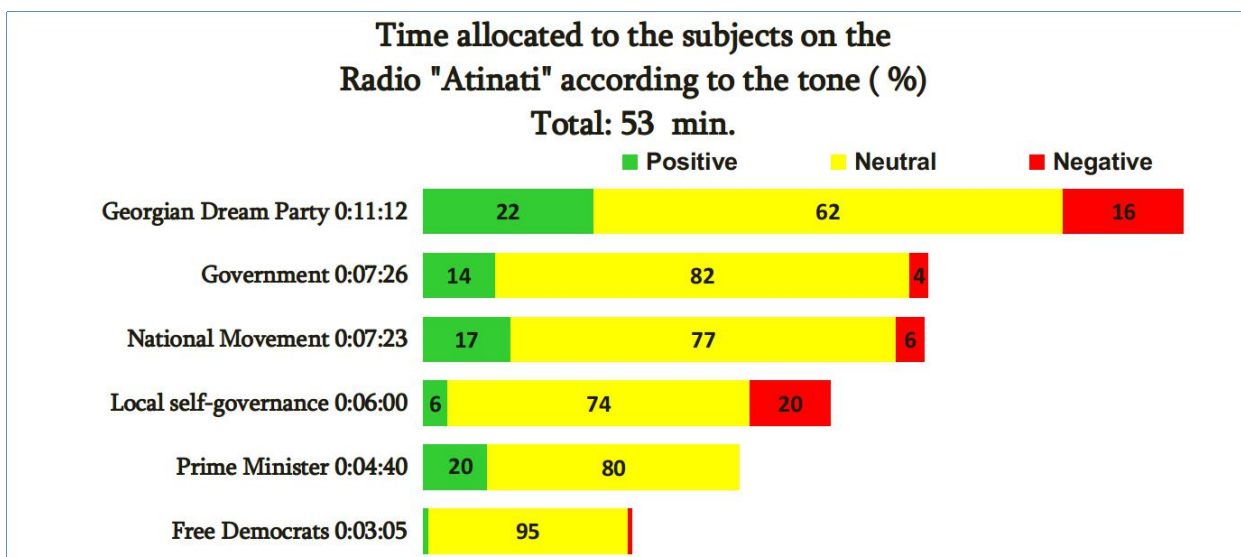


### “The Radio Atinati” (Zugdidi)

“The Radio Atinati” produced brief news, lasting in average for 8 minutes. Consequently, small time (53 minutes) was allocated for the monitoring subjects. In reporting period, the party “Georgian Dream” (21%) was the most frequently covered, next were the Government (14%) and “United National Movement (14%). The anchor was quoting the respondents’ statements and just 4% of time was spent for direct speech.

The radio broadcaster did not pay much attention to the coverage of pre-election campaign. Time longer than three minutes was allocated for the coverage of just three political parties. Besides, their election programmes remained beyond the attention and the stories about the majoritarian candidates nominated in the regions and their action plans were not prepared as well.

Compared with previous reporting period, the radio broadcaster paid more attention to the events developed in Samegrelo region. The journalists prepared the stories about social problems, but empirical coverage still remained a problem. Due to short running time, the radio broadcaster might not be able to prepare analytical stories, but the journalists could cover the events from different perspectives, by verifying the information with different sources and collecting additional information.



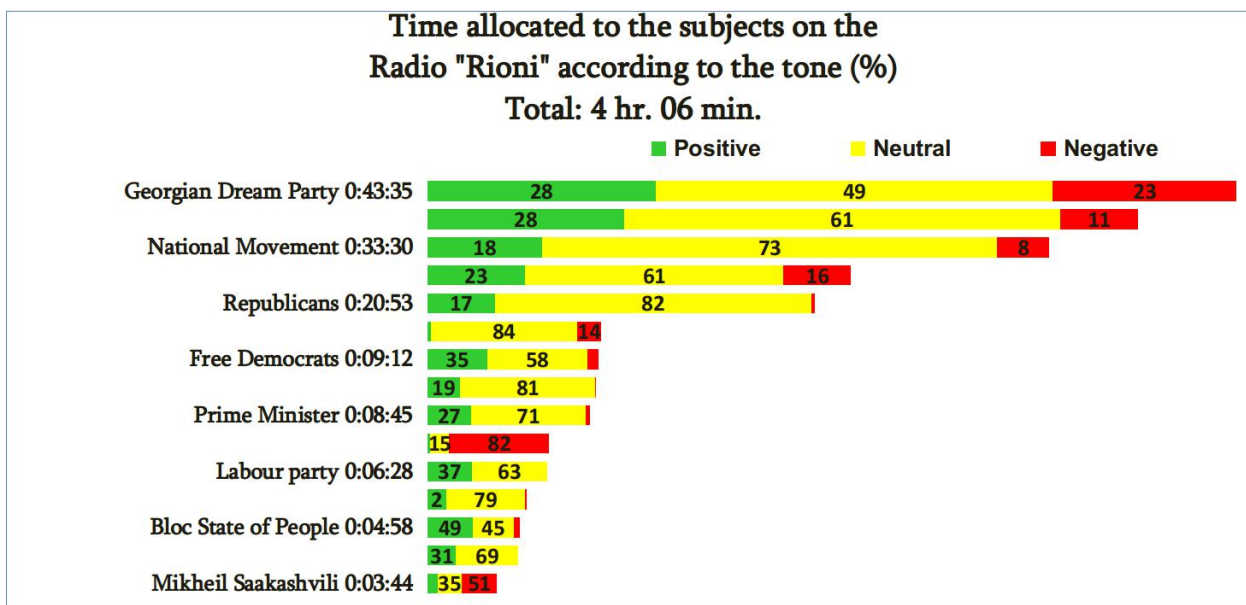
### “The Radio Rioni” (Kutaisi)

“The Radio Rioni” actively covered the events on going centrally and in Imereti region. Compared with previous reporting period, time allocated for the monitoring subjects was reduced in one hour, probably could be caused by the summer holidays of the Parliament in Kutaisi. 18% of the time was allocated to the party “Georgian Dream”, 14% - to the government and 14% - to the party “United National Movement”. 24% of time was dedicated to direct speech of the respondents.

Similar to previous reporting period, the journalists did not often ask tough questions and analytical stories were not produced frequently. However, the number of the stories prepared on social problems got increased, in which the journalists requested responses from the authorities. Thus, operation of self-government was covered in more balanced manner, and the city officials did not have opportunity for using the air for their PR. This is proved by the fact, that if in previous reporting period 63% of the time was dedicated to the local government in positive context, now this figure is decreased up to 28%.

The radio broadcaster actively covered pre-election campaign as well; preparing the stories about regional offices of political parties and majoritarian candidates nominated in Imereti. However, the questions regarding how the politicians planned to fulfil the promises given to population during the meetings were not asked by the journalists.

The journalists covered the events impartially, but they also shall ask tough questions and for in depth analyses of the events cover the opinions of nongovernmental sector and specialists.

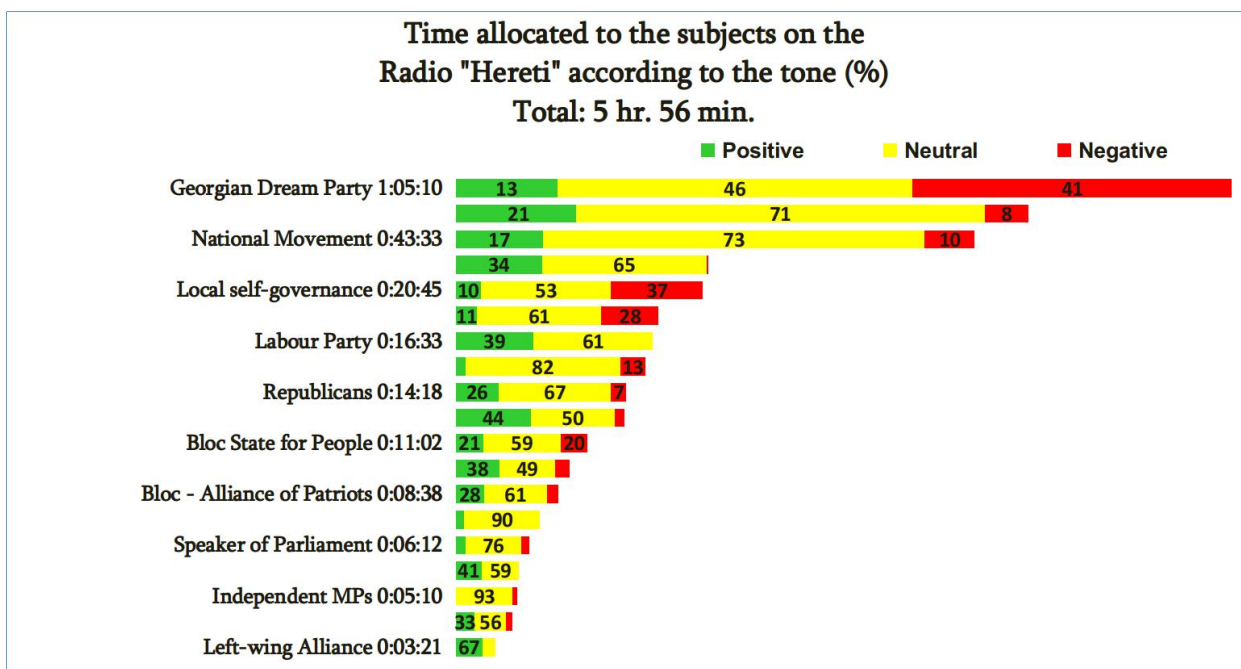


### “The Radio Hereti” (Lagodekhi)

“The Radio Hereti” actively covered central and local issues. In total 5 hours and 45 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. 18% of the time was dedicated to the party “Georgian Dream”, 14% - to the Government and 12% - to the party “United National Movement”. 47% of the time was allocated for direct speeches of the respondents, however the journalists often asked tough questions, preventing the politicians from using the air time for promotion of their teams. This is proved by the fact that significant part of the time allocated to the subjects was in negative tone.

Similar to other broadcasters, the journalists empirically covered central news, but provided in depth analyses of local issues. They viewed the events from different perspectives and presented different opinions regarding the issue. The news was not limited just by the quoting the politicians’ assessments and the journalists used to work on so called exclusive stories as well. The topics were about social problems, challenges in agriculture and other issues concerning local population.

In reporting period, the journalists of “the Radio Hereti” were distinguished with their proactivity not just from regional but from the majority of central radio broadcasters. However, it is necessary to prepare in depth stories about election programmes of political parties, since that will help voters in making informed choice.



### “The Radio Adjara” (Batumi)

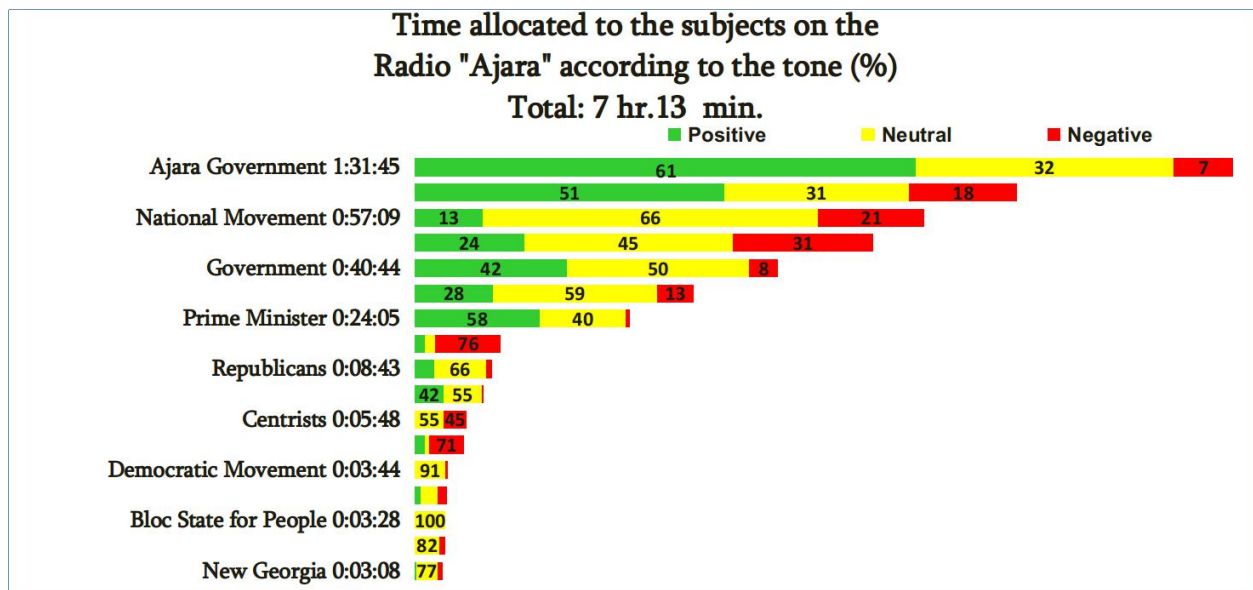
“The Radio Adjara” dedicated a lot of time to covering central and regional news. In total 7 hours and 13 minutes were allocated to the monitoring subjects. 21% of the time was given to the Government of Adjara, 16% - to local government and 13% to the party “United National Movement”. About 34% of the time was allocated for direct speeches of the respondents and no misbalance was with this regard between the political parties.

Different political parties were covered frequently, which facilitated the prevention of polarization. Although the number of stories about the CEC was increased, this seems not enough for rising the voters’ awareness, since the number stories about pre-election programmes was still insufficient.

The problem identified during previous reporting period, regarding collection of additional information appeared to be more acute in current reporting period. Positive tone shown on the chart, especially in cases of the Government of Adjara (61%) and local Government (51%) also points to that. Quantitative monitoring did not cover sub agencies subordinated to the state (the departments of tourism, roads and so on), counting of which would even more increase positive tone. During the monitoring the stories were prepared about big and relatively small projects, funded by the state. It is expected that the journalists will detect the problems and ask respective tough questions to the responsible persons. In case of “the Radio Adjara”, positive coverage of the Government’s operation

significantly exceeded to positive tone allocated to this subject by other broadcasters. For example, regarding compensation provided to the disaster affected population, the journalists did not ask questions regarding selection of the beneficiaries of the programme, or how the funds allocated by the government comply with the losses or whether there is a victim who still expects compensation in vain. Instead of this the representatives of the had opportunity to use the air for presenting their team in positive context. Besides, the comments of the members of ruling team regarding not just political and economic also about cultural and sport events were often covered. Demonstration of more scepticism by the journalists is important, this will prevent questions regarding their unbiased work.

Long news programme of the broadcaster gives opportunity for more analytical and critical coverage of the events. With this regard, the journalists have opportunity for collecting more information and asking tough questions. The mentioned will enable “the Radio Adjara” to cover the events from different perspectives and leave less unanswered questions.





## Conclusion

In the reporting period the radio broadcasters actively covered political events and more attention was paid to pre-election campaign as well. the radio is not polarized media segment and more and more time was allocated to the coverage of parliamentary and non-parliamentary opposition parties. The audience had possibility to hear the politicians' promises, although pre-election programmes were not covered in depth. Consequently, the news of the radio channels has not answered the question regarding the way in which particular political team planned to fulfil its promises. Insufficient information was distributed about majoritarian candidates, nothing was told to the audience except for their affiliation with any of political parties.

Empirical coverage of the events still remains the problem in reporting period. Although the radio broadcasters worked in unbiased manner, lack of tough questions and analytical stories did not give possibility for making conclusions. The journalists shall put in the agenda the problems, important for building democratic state, but not discussed by the politicians at their own will. Awareness of the voters will be improved, if radio broadcasters pay attention to vulnerable and marginal groups and present positions of different political parties regarding the mentioned issues. That on one hand would facilitate to their integration and on the other hand the politicians' positions would become clear.

Besides, it is important to prepare stories beyond Tbilisi and regional centres, since the problems of the residents of villages and small towns could become the subject for discussions.

More and more pre-election sociological studies and reports of nongovernmental sector were covered in the news programmes, but the journalists gave full freedom for interpretation of the data to the politicians. The explanations of the specialists were less heard in the stories. Consequently, empirical coverage enabled politicians to use the results of the surveys for their own interests, good example of which is NDI survey. When the audience hears just counter statements of the politicians and competent opinions are not known, it might lose confidence in the studies.

The stories prepared on different issues could hardly be met, even if listening to different broadcasters. This means that the journalists did not make effort for obtaining exclusive information and basically followed the agenda defined by the politician, covering topical events without collecting additional information. Consequently, many unanswered questions are left regarding certain issues, which instead of supporting the voters' informed choice, might make it even more difficult.