

Election Media Monitoring of Press

July 15 - August 15, 2013

The *International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED)* continues the election monitoring of press within the frameworks of the EU-UNDP funded project “Professional Media for Elections”, and presents the first interim report before the presidential elections of 2013, which covers the period from July 15 until August 15.

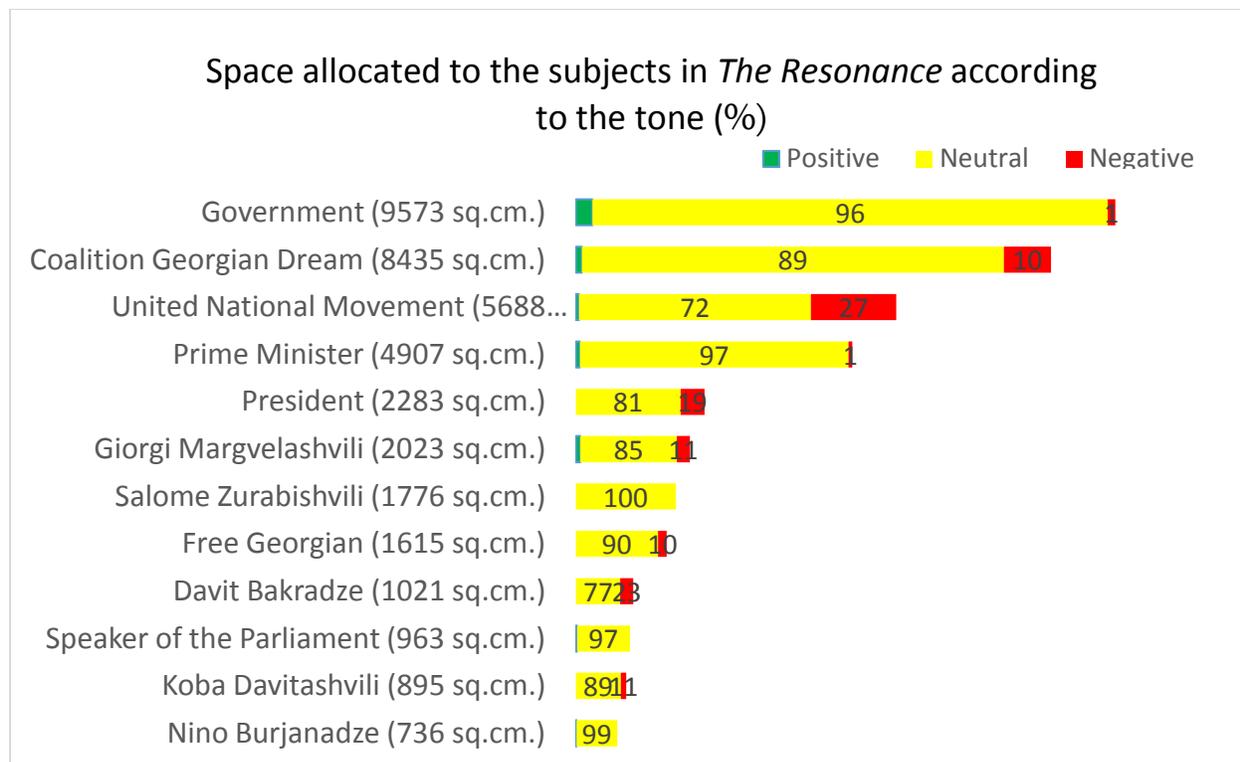
The monitoring will last until November 15 and during this period the organization’s media monitors will carry out the monitoring of the following outlets: the Resonance, the 24 Saati, the Akhali Taoba, the Akhali Versia, the Alia, the Kviris Palitra, and the Asaval-Dasavali.

Following key findings were identified after performing the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the material:

- The newspapers do not try to avoid the coverage of topical issues, and they publish not only the news, but also various analytical materials about them, except the “24 Saati”, where scarcity of analytical material is evident.
- The topic of elections remains to be focal, but there are no discussions yet about the candidates’ programs and promises.
- The outlets pay the most attention to the President, the Prime Minister, the Coalition Georgian Dream, the United National Movement and the government. The neutral tone dominates towards them, but the rate of negative tone is quite high.
- The negative tone for the Prime Minister and the Coalition Georgian Dream has increased in the last part of the reporting period, which is partially related to the acquittal of Bacho Akhalaia.
- Unethical expressions and discriminating attitude towards various people or groups of people is still observed in the Asaval-Dasavali and the Alia.
- The Akhali Versia is the only outlet where the journalistic investigation was published during the monitoring period.

The Resonance

The Resonance covers the ongoing events on a daily basis and tries to provide many-sided and exhaustive information to the readers. The Resonance is distinguished with diversity of sources, which can be evaluated positively, because the outlet enables the political subjects to inform voters about their position regarding the important political topics during elections¹. Other than the political subjects, emphasis was also laid on covering various expert opinions as well.



Subjects are mostly covered with neutral tone in the Resonance. Similar trend was observed also during the media monitoring last year, but at that time the outlet was more critical towards the former authorities.

This year, neither is there any bias observed for the favor of political forces. Criticism regarding the cohabitation of the former and new authorities has become frequent during the reporting period. The respondents quite often speak about this issue with negative tone. As the elections get closer, the number of articles dedicated to this issue is increasing, but the outlet is not focused on coverage of any particular candidate only.

¹ Due to a big number of subjects, only those subjects are displayed on the diagram, to which 2% or more was allocated in the outlet.

There were no cases of gross violation of ethical norms revealed during the reporting period. The journalists refrain from stating their own position towards any particular subject or event, unless the article is published in the section “Opinion”. Even in this case the criticism is not expressed with unethical expressions and discriminating statements.

The outlet has covered all the current events, and also discussed the topics, which were especially important for the public for several days. For example, extensive articles were dedicated to the elections at the Tbilisi State University in several issues of the newspaper, and same happened in regards to the results of the teachers’ certification exams.

The 24 Saati

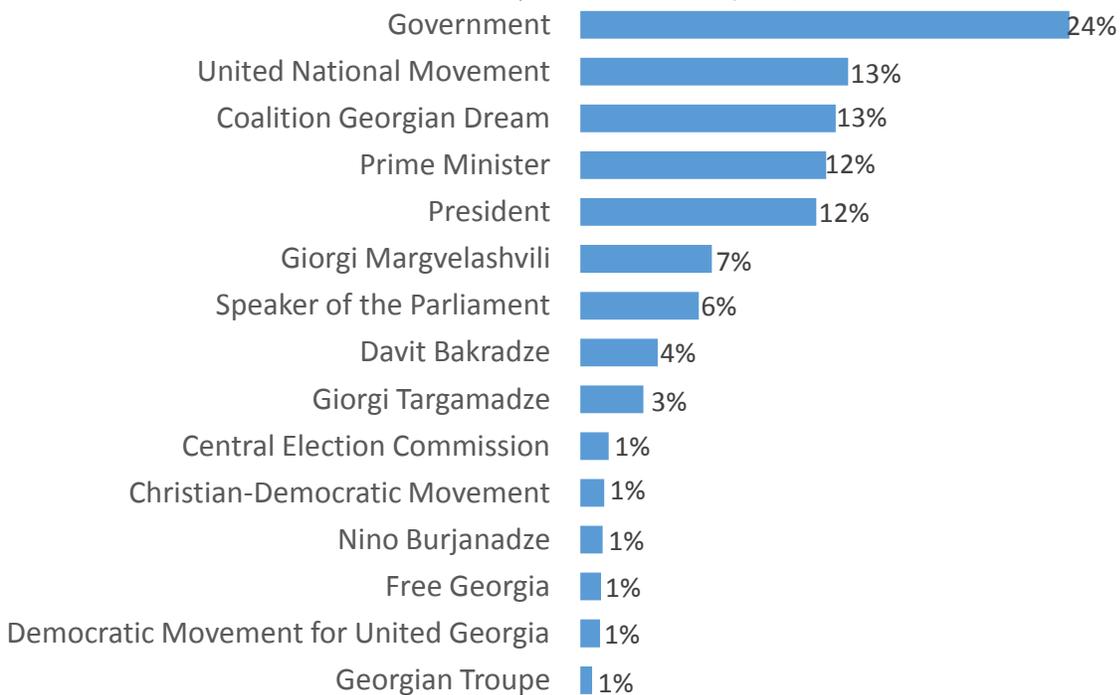
Like the Resonance, the 24 Saati is a daily newspaper. The outlet has reflected almost all the topical events that took place during the reporting period, but the articles do not provide an in-depth analysis to the reader. It only gives factual information about the happenings.

It should be pointed out that despite scarce analytical materials, articles of the 24 Saati, which are written by the outlet’s journalists and are not taken from news agencies, always have several sources related to the topic. As a result, the reader can get familiar with the position of various sides.

Interestingly enough, the elections do not stand out in this outlet as a topic. Presidential candidates are encountered only when commenting on various topics.

We do not observe diversity of tones in the 24 Saati. Almost all the subjects are covered with neutral tone. It is noteworthy that the outlet tries to allocate equal space to all the subjects from the quantitative standpoint, especially to the key political figures (the Coalition Georgian Dream and the United National Movement 13-13%, and the Prime Minister and the President 12-12%).

Space allocated to subjects in *The 24 Saati*
(Total 18632 sq.cm)



There was no case of manipulation with photos observed in the 24 Saati for a month. In general, the publication contains very little number of photos, but even when this is the case, they are always neutral.

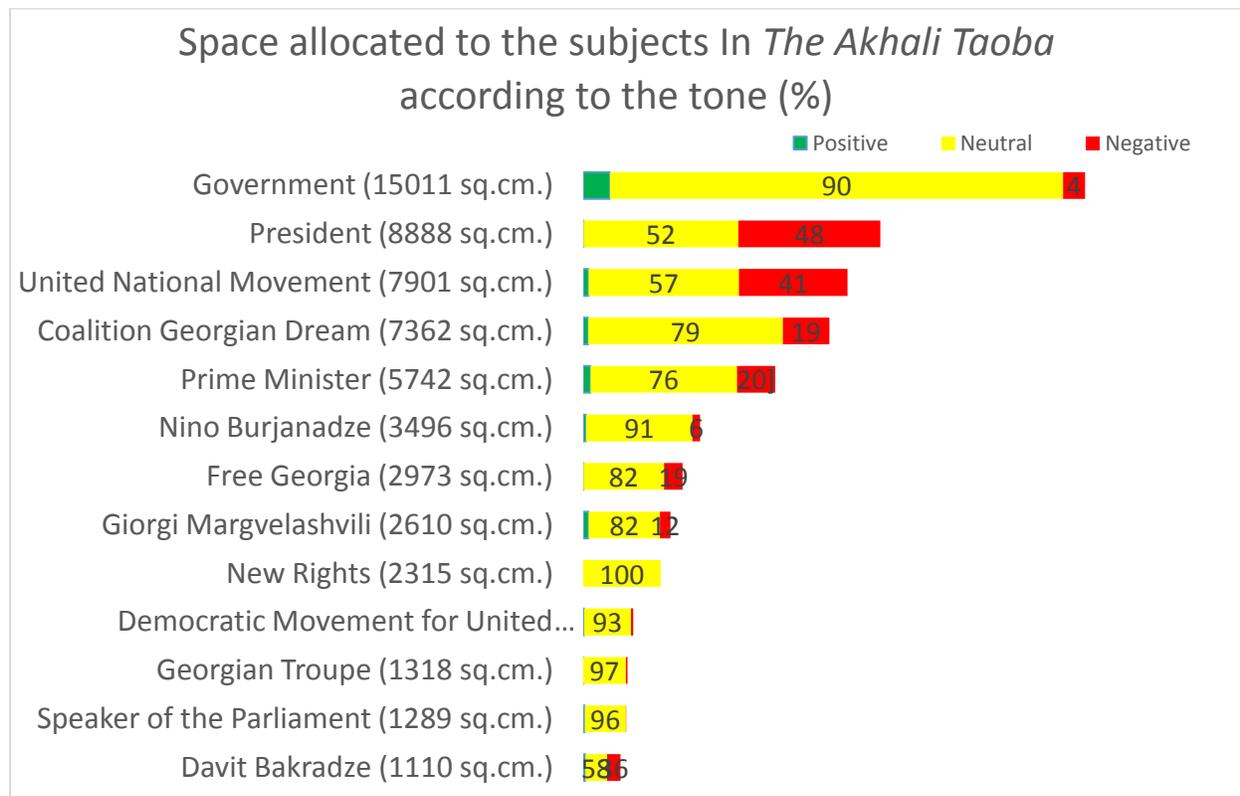
On one hand, it can be positively evaluated that the newspaper does not try to impose its position on the readers, but the materials are so superficial that the readers cannot get sufficient information for making an informed choice, which is especially important during the run-up to the elections.

The Akhali Taoba

Like other daily publications, the Akhali Taoba covers all the current events except the news, and offers analytical articles to the audience, and also the interviews with a broad spectrum of respondents.

Among the monitoring subjects, the most active coverage was provided for the government, the President, and the United National Movement. The tone is mostly

neutral for the government, but the President and the Parliamentary minority are almost equally covered with neutral and negative tone.



One of the main topics in the newspaper is the presidential elections and the candidates' chances of winning during the reporting period. Among the candidates the largest space was allocated to Nino Burjanadze, Giorgi Margvelashvili and Davit Bakradze. According to the tone, mostly the neutral tone prevails, but 36% of negative tone was also observed for the candidate of the United National Movement.

There has not been any case of manipulation with photos in the Akhali Taoba for a month. However, the articles are almost always accompanied with the thematically relevant illustrations, which provides additional information to a reader about the respondent or the issue discussed in the article.

Journalists of the Akhali Taoba mostly write with politically correct and neutral language, but in some cases we also come across with ironical expressions as well. For example: "Panicked Chiora wanted to review the case of tyrant Papuashvili"; "The United National Movement created buzz".

The Akhali Versia

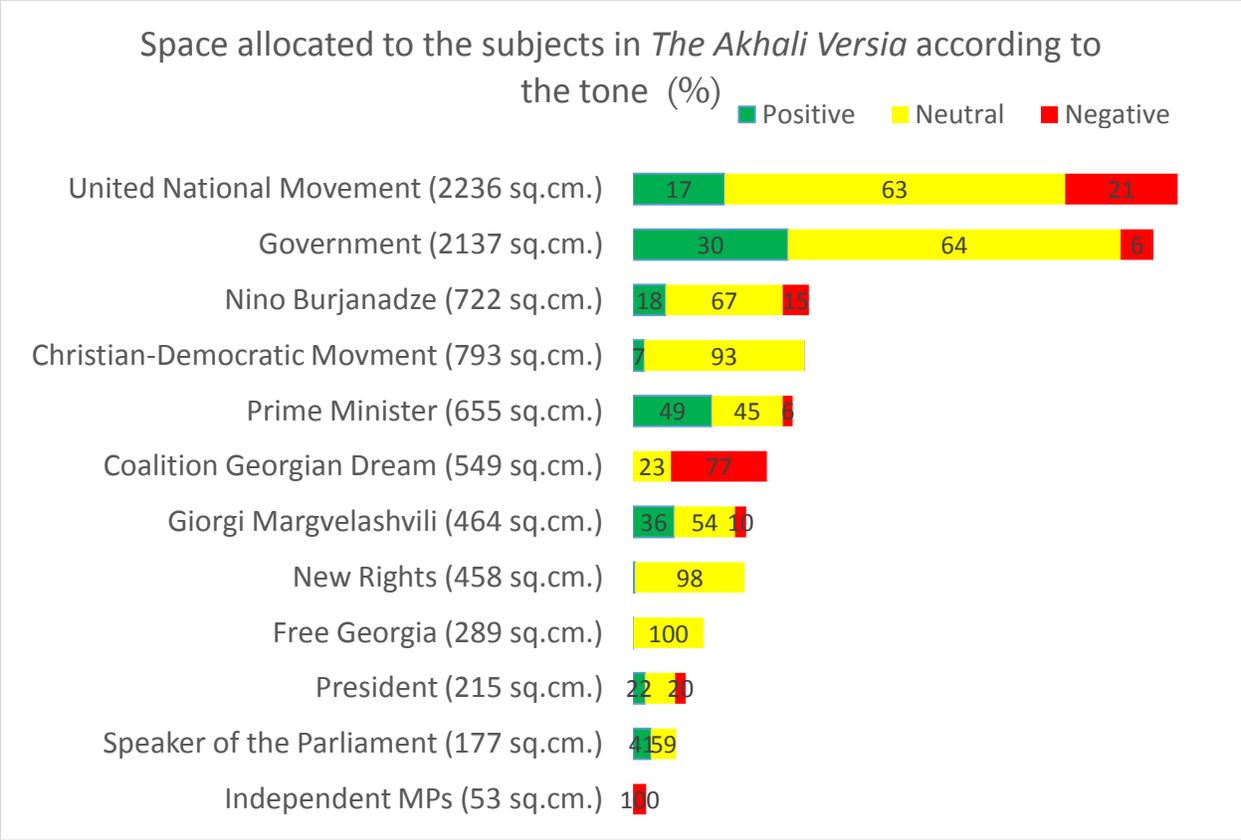
The newspaper The Akhali Versia is issued three times a week, and covers the current political and public events. The newspaper had a recess from July 19 until August 19, and consequently, only 3 issues of the newspaper were monitored during the reporting period.

It is noteworthy that the Akhali Versia did not omit any of the important events of the current week. Other than the brief news, analysis of current events and interviews, the newspaper also publishes journalistic investigations, which is to be evaluated positively, because we do not encounter such articles in another print media. The Akhali Versia published two journalistic investigations during a week.

The newspaper covered a broad spectrum of political parties. Other than parliamentary parties, the space was allocated to non-parliamentary opposition parties, which analyzed events and talked about future plans of their parties.

Among the parties, and in general, among the monitoring subjects, the largest space was allocated to the United National Movement, which is partially related to the primary within the party. Neutral tone prevails towards this subject; however, the positive (17%) and negative (21%) tones are also high.

Other than the United National Movement, the government was also covered actively, to which there is a significantly high rate of positive coverage (30%), and also Nino Burjanadze, to whom the largest space was allocated among the presidential candidates.



Negative coverage of the Coalition Georgian Dream (77%) is noteworthy, which is at large extent related to the topic of party financing, when the representatives of non-parliamentary oppositions openly expressed dissatisfaction and criticized the ruling party for the legislative initiative, based on which the funding was cut for the parties left outside the Parliament.

Journalists of the Akhali Versia try not to violate the norms of journalistic ethics and provide exhaustive information to its readers about the topic. However, during the monitoring period there were some cases when the information was disseminated based on an unverifiable or unidentified source.

The balance is mostly observed in broad analytical articles. Authors of the articles do their best to show different visions and positions. In regards to the interviews, which are published in the Akhali Versia, a big number and diversity of respondents are observed.

The Alia

The Alia is published more intensively this year – 4 issues a week, which enables the editorial board to cover the news promptly and provide their analysis to the readers.

The Alia is distinguished with its critical attitude towards almost all the political subjects. Criticism and negative attitude to the subjects is revealed not only by the respondents, but also by the journalists as well. Criticism of the government and in general, that of the politicians, is one of the key functions of a journalist, but the journalists of Alia go beyond the ethical norms and refer to specific subjects with insulting adjectives.

For example, “Alas, Mikheil, we are in trouble because you have other problems and have made deals with thousands of strangers! What responsibility are you talking about, doped loafer! If you had any responsibility, you would go to Gldani prison on your own except running from Batumi Port to your Mommy’s home!”.

All the topical events are covered in the Alia in the news format, and with interviews and extensive articles the journalists try to analyze the current situation. Analytical articles often speak about the cohabitation in the negative light. Even in the interviews the journalists often ask the respondents to comment on the coexistence of old and new political teams. A journalist asked even such a question to Manana Kobakhidze: “Why do you force us cohabitate with the ‘Nationals’?”

The journalists also very often speak about the President’s health, namely about his mental condition. He is also talked about as a criminal.

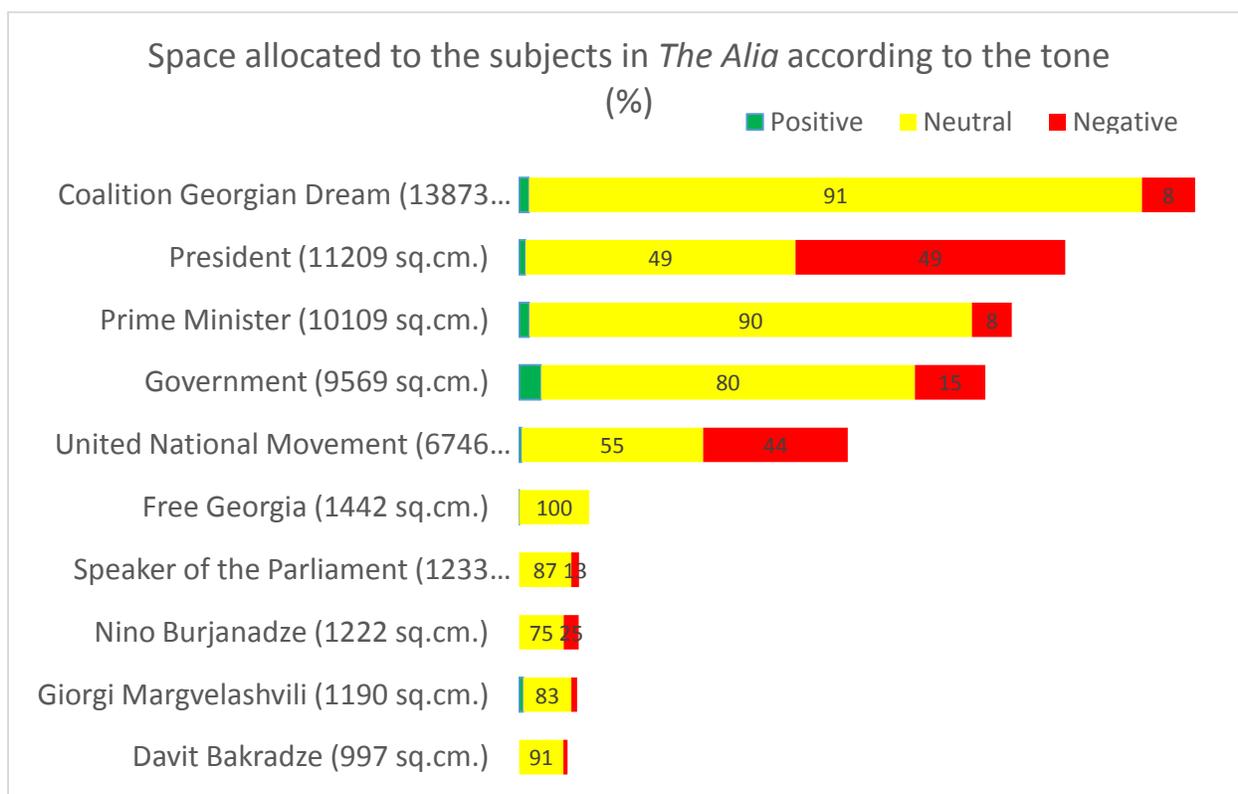
“No excuses will help you any more, insane!” Mikho, if you had brains, you would compare yourself with Lavrenti Beria, but you have so much disorder in your mind that you don’t know what to speak about... Misha, are your dreams disturbed at night by the sounds of handcuffs, you the chieftain of ‘national’ rats...”

There is an explicit hate also towards sexual minorities expressed in this newspaper. Couple of examples: “everyone knows that he cannot stand faggots, and this is the way it should be”. “For Rasmussen, safety of buttocks of Georgian faggots and a pink sex of lesbians turned out to be equally important as anti-terrorist missions for NATO”.

Such discriminating statements directly violate the ethics of journalism, more specifically, the Article 7 of the Charter of Journalistic Ethics, which obligates the journalism not to discriminate any person based on various grounds.

There were some instances observed in the articles of Alia during the reporting period, when the source of information remained unknown for the reader. In some cases the source is a reliable person who provides information from behind the scenes to the journalist, and sometimes – abstract (“according to the disseminated information”, “it is known that”).

As it has already been mentioned, the Alia lays more emphasis on the coverage of various representatives of the authorities, than showing the activities of presidential candidates. The subjects are very rarely represented in a positive context in the pages of this newspaper, and mostly they are covered with neutral or negative tone.

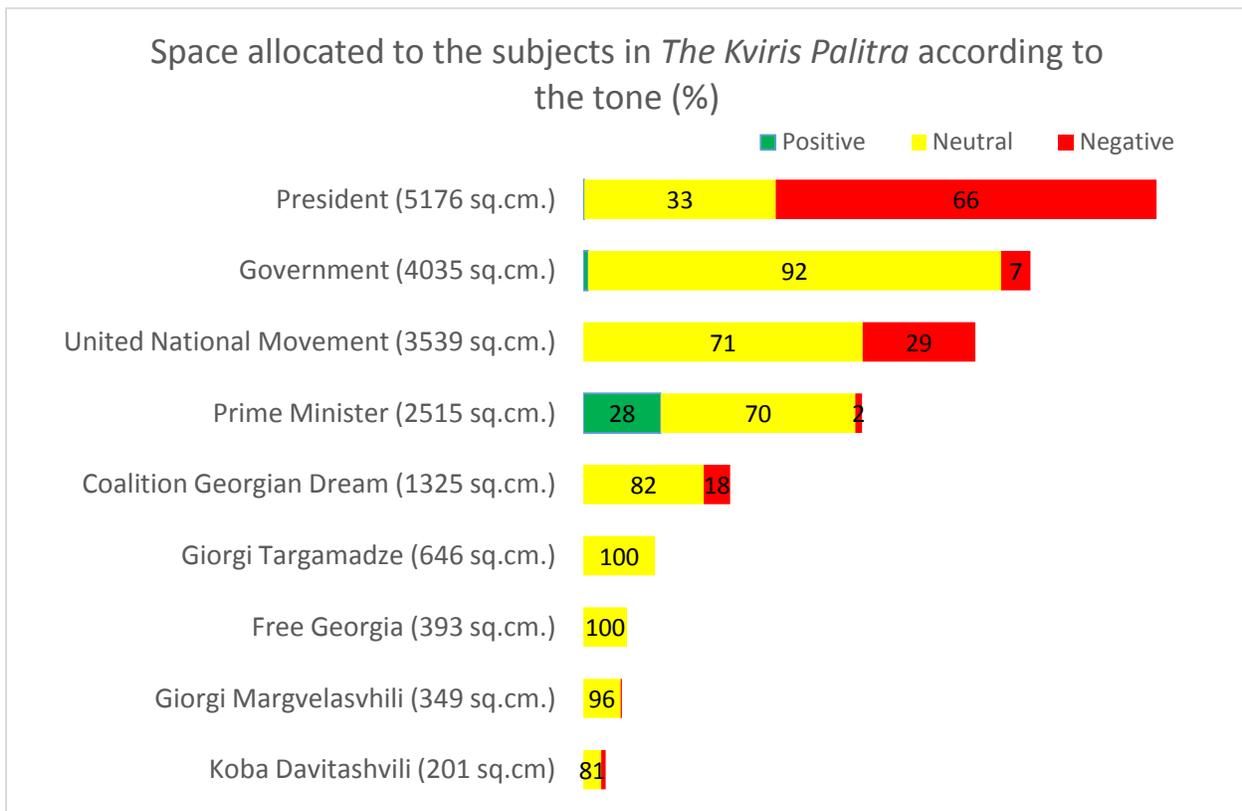


The Kviris Palitra

The Kviris Palitra is published once a week, which enables the editorial board to be more focused on the analytical material than the news. Nevertheless, the publication does not omit any of the topical issues.

The newspaper often publishes interviews with various experts, who analyze the ongoing events. Such articles make it easier to the reader to see a certain political event in a perspective.

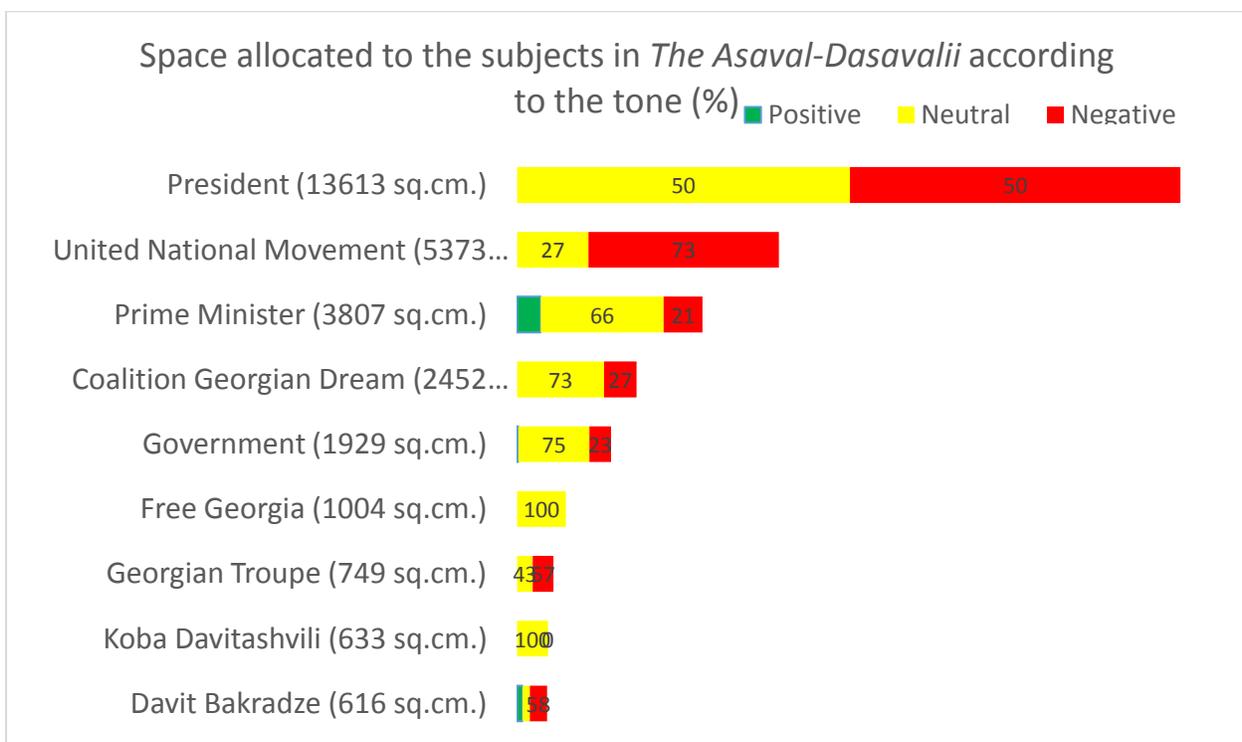
The publication is especially critical towards the President. In one of the issues there was an extensive article dedicated to the discussion of Mikheil Saakashvili’s mental state, discussed broadly by Petre Mamradze. However, the criticism of the Coalition Georgian Dream and the government increased in the last part of the reporting period. This trend is partially related to the trial of Bacho Akhalaia, after which the respondents started to talk about cohabitation in a negative context more often.



We encounter neutral material about the presidential candidates in the Kviris Palitra. The outlet tries to provide diverse information to the reader not only in a specific article, but also in the whole issue.

The Asaval-Dasavali

Like the monitoring of 2012, the Asaval-Dasavali is distinguished with critical attitude towards political subjects this year too. It is noteworthy that before the Parliamentary elections of 2012 the outlet was biased for the favor of the Georgian Dream. They promoted this force and Bidzina Ivanishvili as a savior of Georgia. After the elections and before the monitoring was over (for 1 month), it kept on criticizing the United National Movement and the President. During the first period of the monitoring of 2013, criticism of the currently effective ruling force was observed, but for the outlet it is still topical to mention the President in the negative context. This is clearly seen also on the diagram reflecting the allocation of tone-based time to the subjects.



The cohabitation is a topic which is often discussed in a negative context. The respondents and the journalists sharply criticized the ruling party because of a constructive attitude to the United National Movement.

Like 2012, we quite often come across with unethical expressions and insult towards various politicians in Asaval-Dasavali. "Baramidze is coward, scoundrel, who did nothing to investigate the Zura's murder."

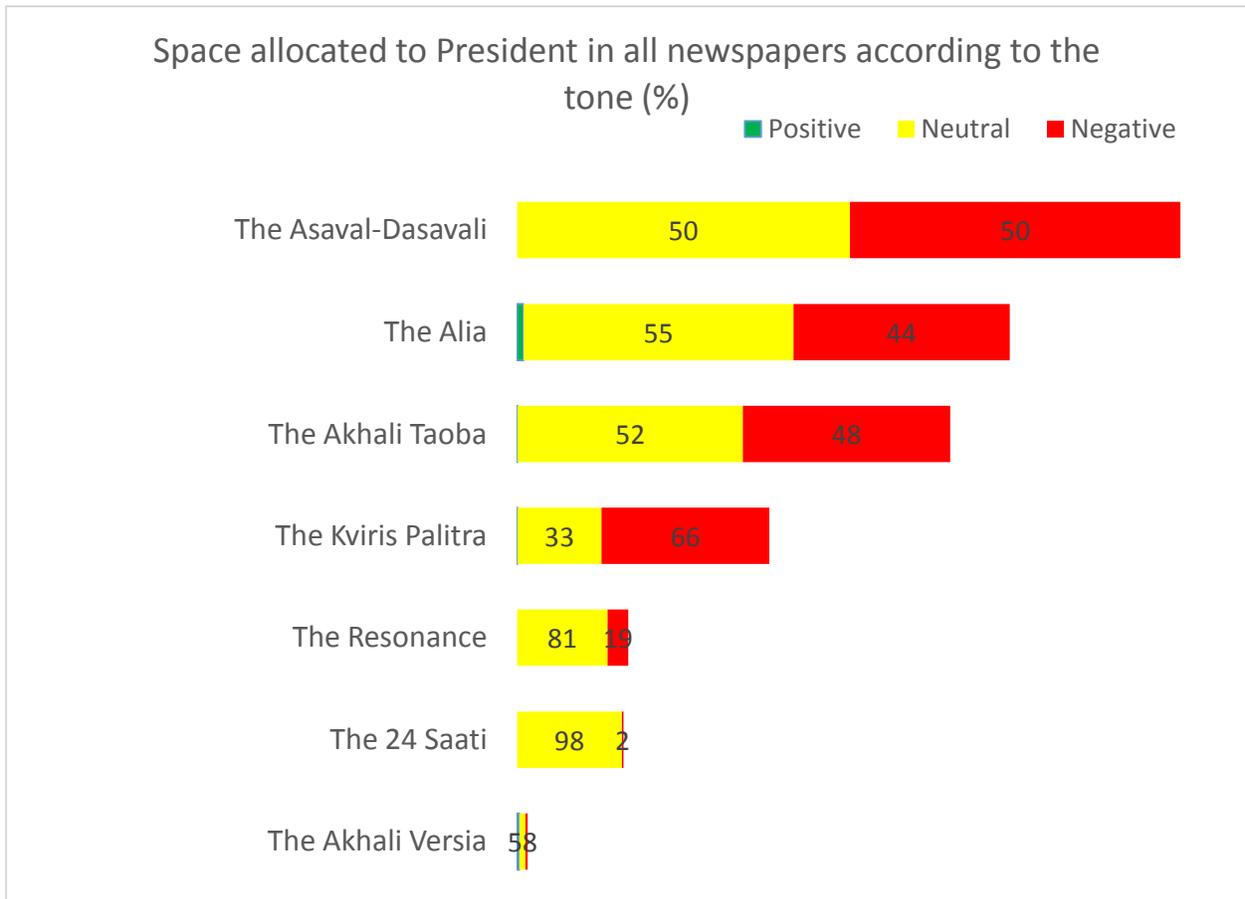
The outlet also disregards the presumption of innocence and quite often refers to the members of the United National Movement as criminals.

“It is obvious that the United National Movement wants to have Kbilashvili fired, because the criminals can no way like the chief prosecutor.”

The outlet does not pay much attention to the verification or provided facts. For them it is enough to have at least one anonymous source to confirm a fact and to provide it to a reader as reliable information. However, sometimes there are no such sources at all, but still they talk about the event as a true fact.

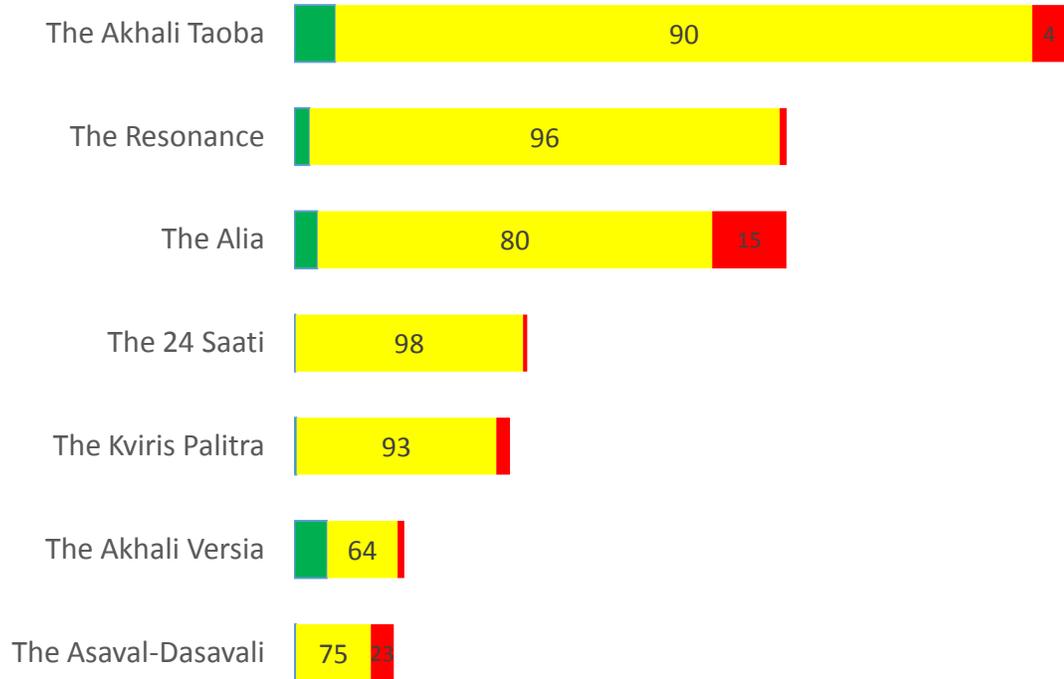
Conclusion

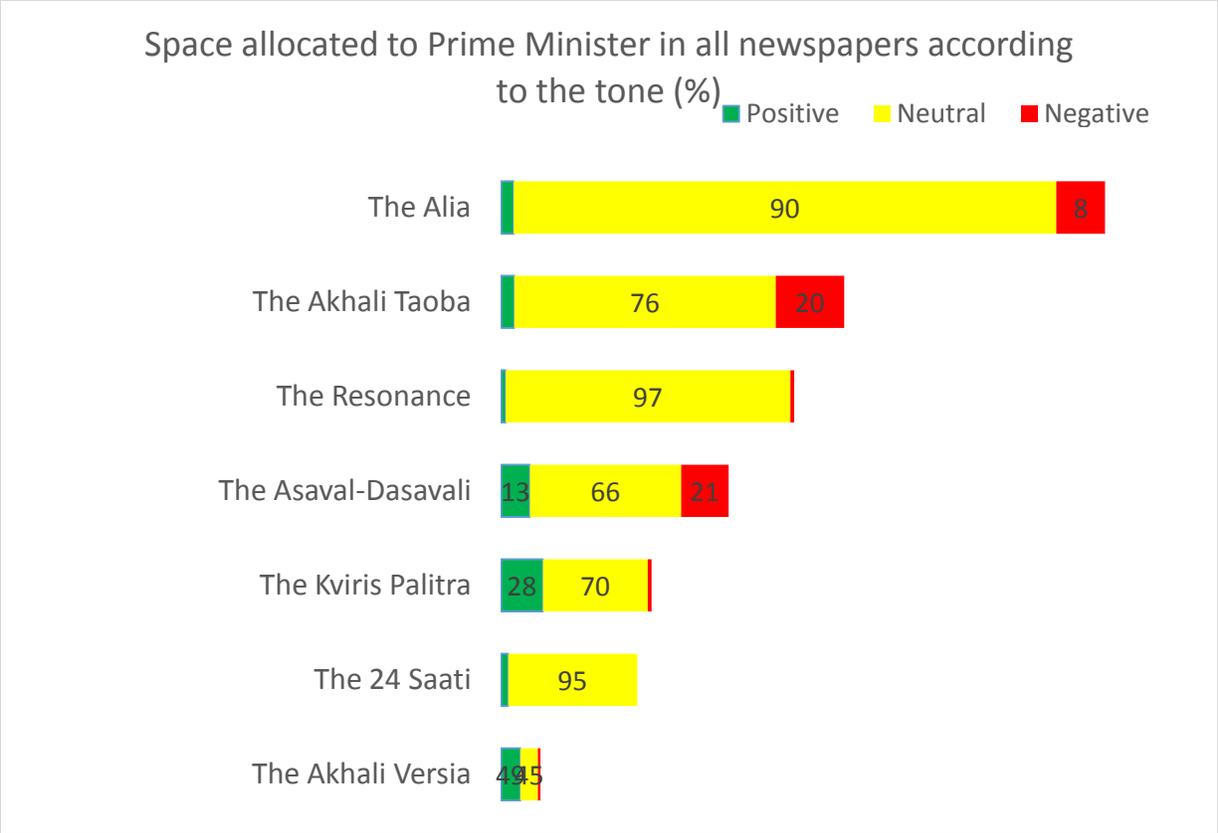
To conclude, we can say that from the quantitative viewpoint, the President, the Prime Minister and the government were most actively covered. Tone-based breakdown of their coverage is given in the chart:



Space allocated to Government in all newspapers according to the tone (%)

■ Positive ■ Neutral ■ Negative





Monitoring of the press from June 15 until August 15, 2013 has shown that the majority of the monitored print outlets is very focused on adhering to the journalistic standards and provision of relevant analytical information to the reader.

Topic of elections is gaining current significance gradually in the newspapers, but at this stage the attention is diverted to the activities of the ruling party, parliamentary opposition, government, President and the Prime Minister. Less attention is paid to the presidential candidates, especially to those ones who are less known to the public and do not represent any strong political party.

Unlike the monitoring of 2012, cases of manipulation with photos are reduced in those outlets, where this was a frequent case before the parliamentary elections, however, we do not observe this in the majority of outlets.

Unethical expressions towards the politicians and discriminating attitude towards various minorities remain a significant problem.

Within the frameworks of the project “Professional Media for Elections, the *International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy* continues the monitoring of Georgian print media, and the next report will be submitted in September, 2013.