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საქართველოსთვის
The European Union for Georgia



Study and Research on Media Coverage of 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia

TV Media Perceptions of Foreign Influence on Electoral Processes in Georgia

Pre-Election report on thematic monitoring of TV media

August 28 - October 7, 2020



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Introduction

In complement to the EU/UNDP media monitoring project “Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for the 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia”, CRRC-Georgia is implementing a thematic monitoring of media perceptions of foreign influence on election processes in Georgia. For this, CRRC-Georgia follows TV media coverage of Georgia’s 2020 parliamentary elections focusing on public statements, declarations and attitudes of third parties such as international observer missions; international and regional organisations; international and regional political alliances and groups; political parties and politicians; and various foreign state and non-state institutions. The monitoring effort studies which foreign actors are mostly frequently covered and in what context; which actions of outside actors with regards to the election processes in Georgia are under the focus of television media news and how media is covering these actions, how it is framing its perceptions of outside influence on the election processes in Georgia.

The monitoring covers the main evening news programs and political talk-shows of twelve TV channels - Channel 1 (Georgian Public Broadcaster—GPB), Adjara TV, Rustavi 2, Imedi, Mtavari Arkhi, TV Pirveli, Obiektivi, Formula, Maestro, Palitra TV, Kavkasia and Pos TV — and began on July 16, 2020. The monitoring of news programs includes quantitative and qualitative components, and focuses upon foreign individuals, organizations or state and non-state institutions, including abstract references to them. The monitoring’s quantitative component measures the duration of coverage devoted to them, specifying whether they commented on something themselves, the tone of their coverage, which along with other components, such as the perceived aim of covering foreign actors in a news story, is used to assess the media perceptions of outside influence. Qualitative monitoring observes how any signs of support for or opposition to electoral processes or political subjects in Georgia by foreign actors are covered in the news, how it is linked to media perceptions of outside influence and what means are used to represent the perceptions, e.g. balance of information, journalists’ conclusions and interpretations, manipulation with music and images.

This report summarizes the results of television news monitoring between August 28 and October 7, 2020. In terms of events related to the involvement of foreign actors in Georgian elections, television channels tended to cover larger topics such as the alleged funding of the Patriots’ Alliance by Russia, pre-election banner of this party, the report and the resolution passed by the European Union, visit of the Prime Minister to Brussels, his meeting with the Secretary General of NATO and his address to UN Assembly, case of David-Gareja, cyberattack against Lugar Laboratory, cybersecurity forum, a violent incident in Marneuli, election activities of political parties and so on. Political events that took place during the monitoring period largely defined quantitative and qualitative findings of the thematic monitoring.

The results presented include both quantitative and qualitative findings, and are grouped by channel.

Methodology

This is a thematic monitoring, which studies the coverage of foreign actors with regards to the 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia. The foreign actors or subjects of monitoring include any international or foreign organization, embassy, foreign ministry, fund or individual who is covered in news stories in connection with Georgia's upcoming parliamentary elections.

Monitoring of news: Quantitative and qualitative components

The quantitative component of the news monitoring includes the following:

- Time allocated to subjects (when subjects of monitoring appear on the screen or they are talked about);
- Time that subjects were given the opportunity to comment (i.e. direct speech, even though most of the subjects of monitoring do not speak the language of media coverage and are voiced over);
- Tone of coverage, whether it is positive, neutral or negative (evaluating the tone looks at the content of text as well as the context and visual cues); and
- The function of these subjects or the aim of including them in the news story.

The qualitative component of the news monitoring includes the following:

- Balance – whether issues covered in the news stories are presented in a balanced way, i.e. viewers are able to look at the issue from different angles and form their opinion. It looks at the sources of information the news story is based on;
- Accuracy – whether the conclusions of journalists and news story materials are consistent, whether there are factual mistakes in the coverage, and whether it is possible to draw a line between facts and opinion;
- Manipulation with frames/images or music – whether music or images were used to create a positive or negative impression;
- The language used by journalists when discussing subjects monitored – whether introductions or the conclusions they draw; and
- Foreign actors supporting or discrediting the election process or electoral subjects in Georgia.

The report will analyze each channel using these components and draw conclusions on trends of coverage.

Key Findings

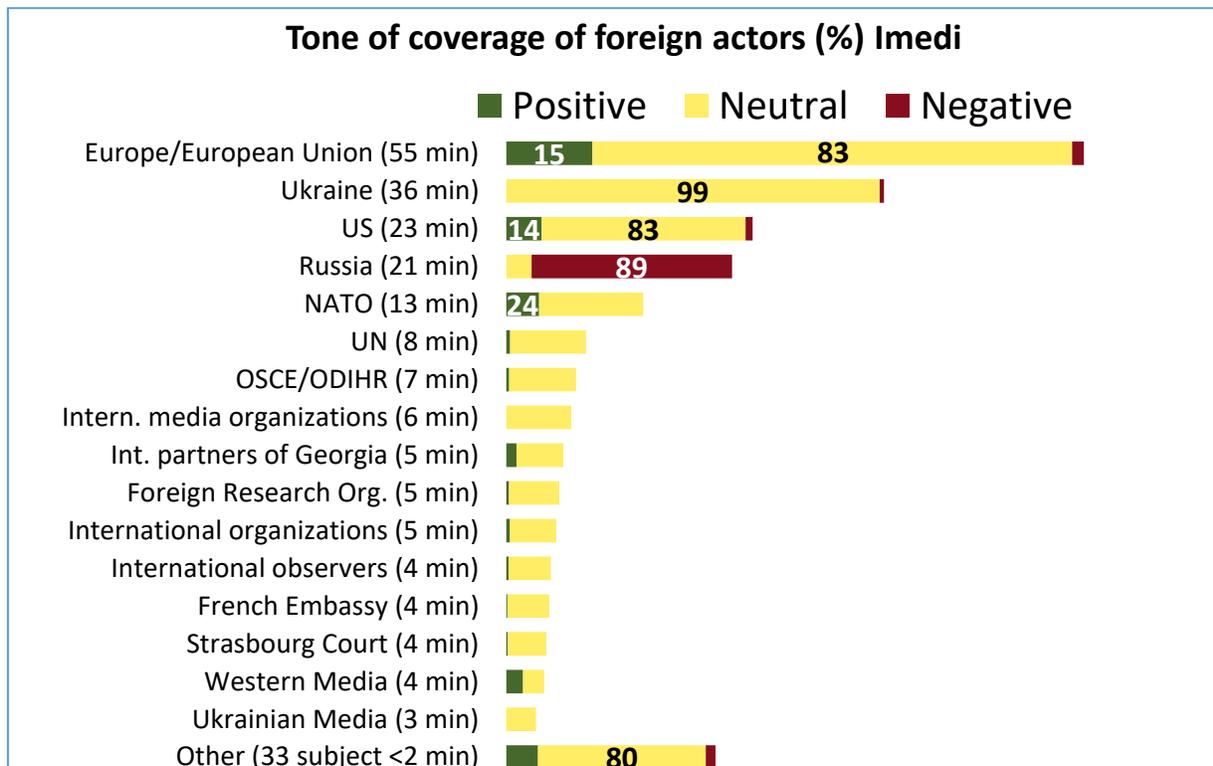
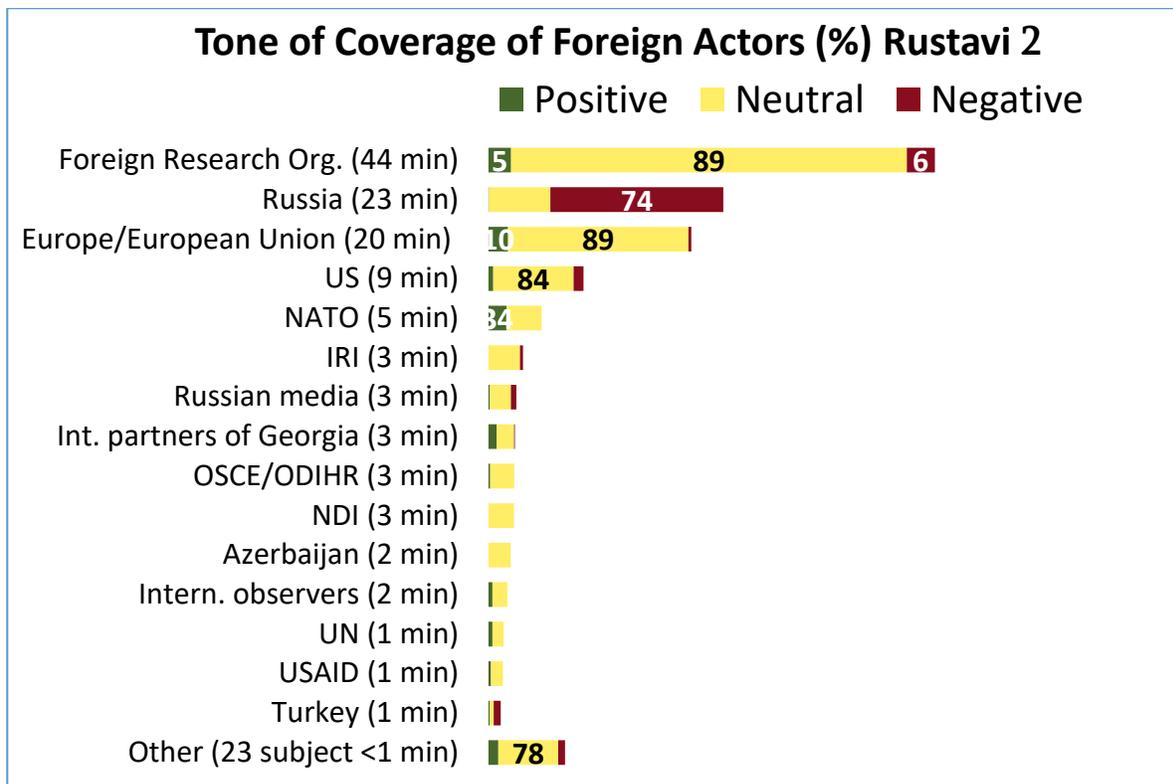
From 28 August to 7 October 2020, monitoring of main evening news releases on the selected twelve TV channels revealed the following key findings:

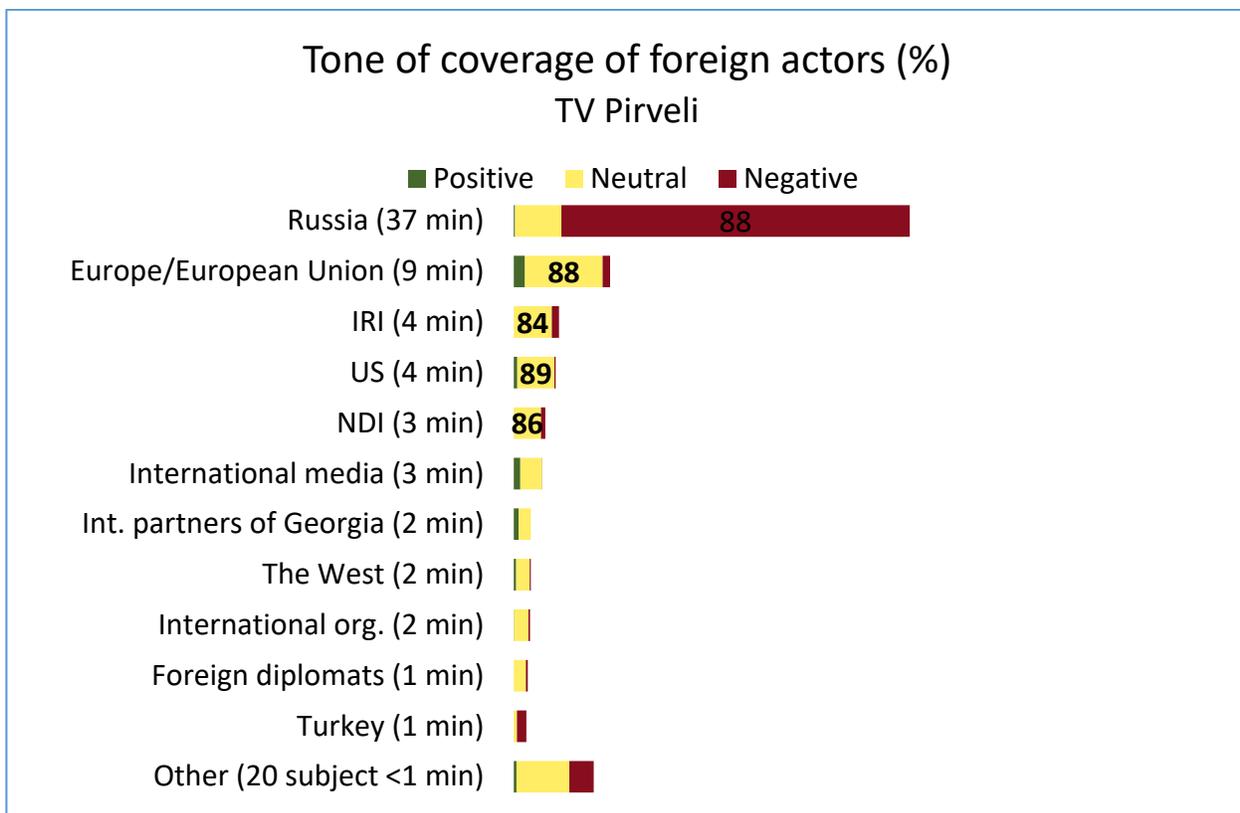
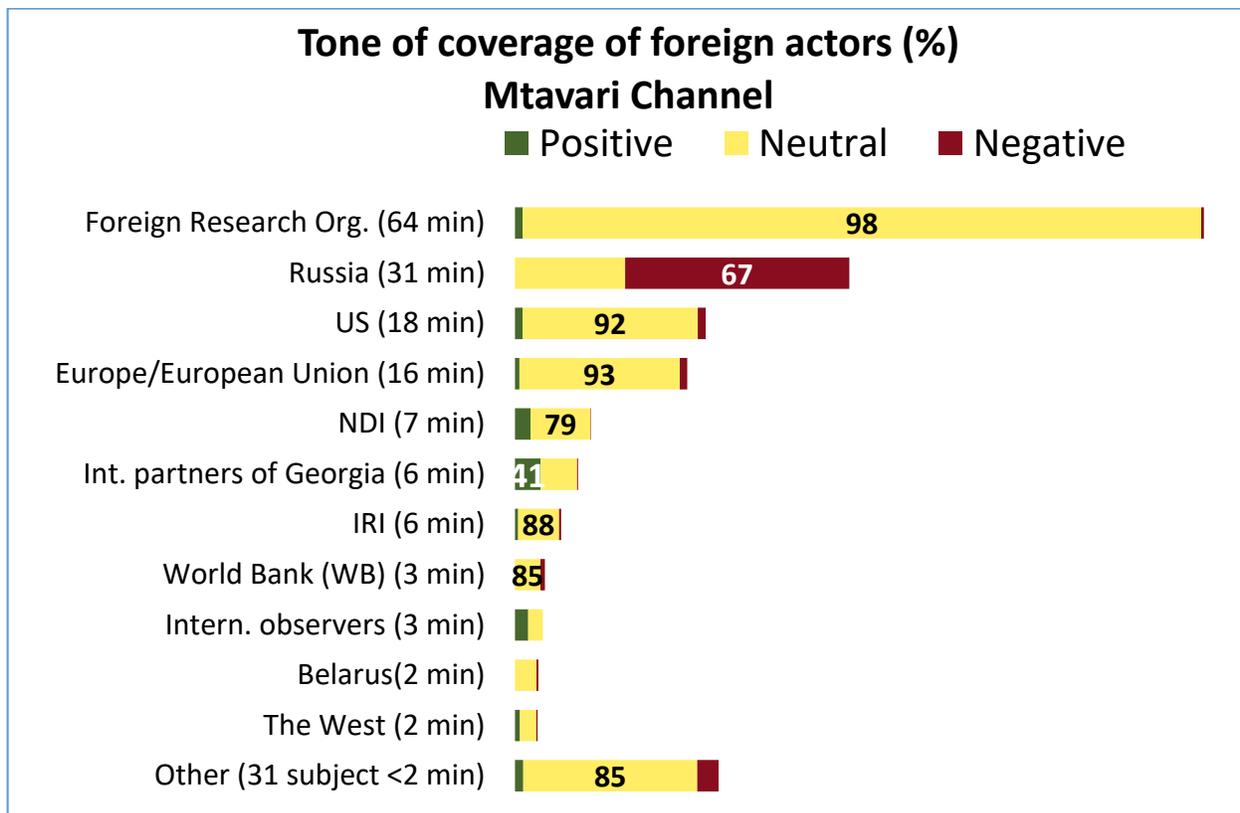
- Compared to the first period of thematic monitoring, which was carried out throughout the summer, the TV channels dedicated significantly more time to the coverage of election issues. Nevertheless, the share of coverage about the foreign actors remained largely the same (4-17%).
- Considering the events taken place during the period from 28 August to 7 October, the most frequently covered foreign actors were the European Union, Russia, the US and the NATO. Some channels also reported about the foreign research organizations conducting the election research and also about the international organizations that commissioned the research.
- In the second reporting period of the monitoring, the topic of Russian interference in Georgia's internal processes became a highlight. Almost all the channels focused their attention on the Russian cyber-attack on Lugar laboratory, the threats of misinformation by Russia, the Georgian cybersecurity forum, Russia's linkages with the Alliance of the Patriots and other local subjects.
- In connection to the same topic, the stories about the banner of the Alliance of the Patriots reported about the Russia's interests in stirring up the anti-Turkish dispositions in the country on the one hand, and the Turkey's economic expansion on the other.
- Another topic that was covered as a "Russian project" on many channels was the case of Davit Gareji. The TV channels reported that raising this issue was linked to Russia. Whereas the opposition channels considered that promoting this topic was commissioned by Russia in the wake of the tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the channels loyal to the ruling team used the discussion about this topic for discrediting the previous authorities and accused them of pursuing the Russian interests.
- Similar to the first reporting period of the monitoring, the ties with Russia was again used for discrediting the political forces, which we encountered in case of both the ruling team and the opposition. The ties with Russia had a negative impact on the reputation of political subjects.
- On the other hand, the western actors: the ambassadors, members of the Parliament of the European Union, congressmen were presented as authoritative persons who should be looked up to. While interpreting their statements and recommendations, some media outlets underlined the support to the government, but others focused on criticizing the government and pointing out shortcomings in the election process.
- As in the first reporting period, reporting about the foreign actors was linked to the political polarization of editorial policies of the channels.

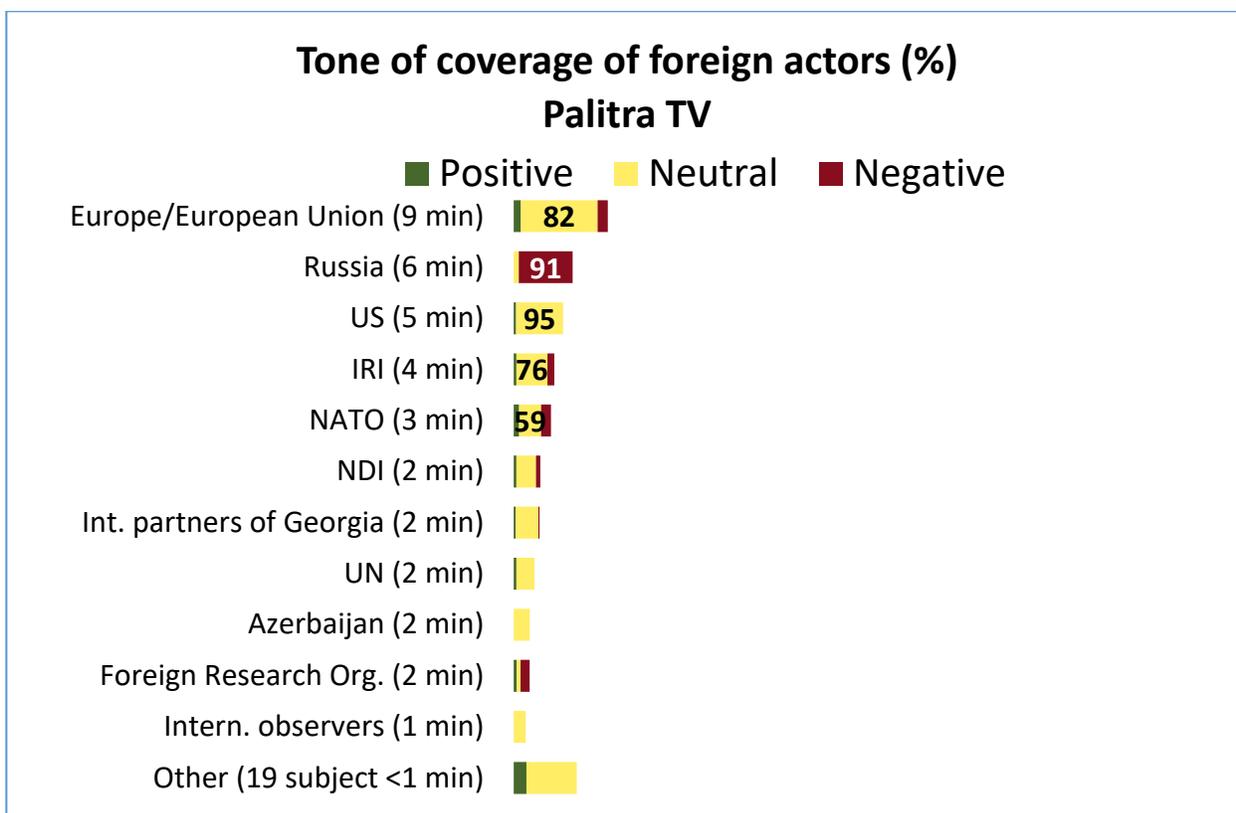
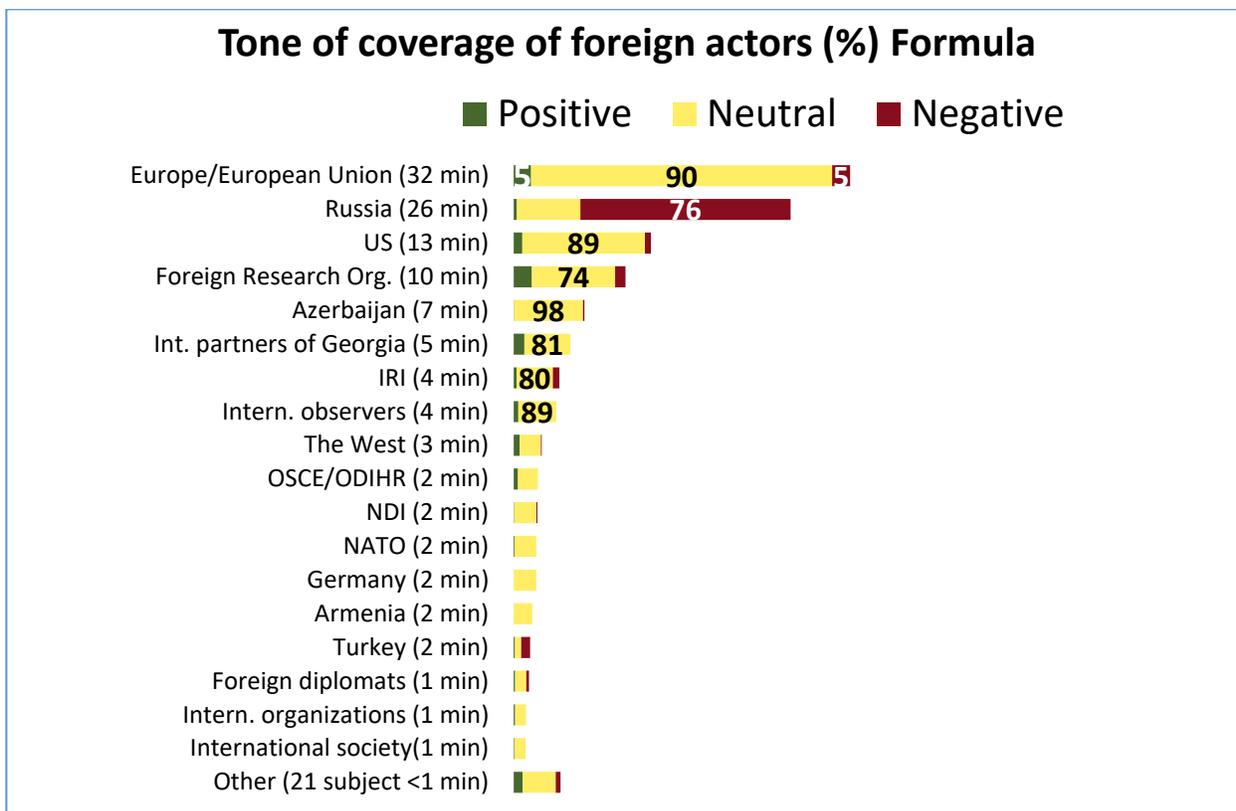
Information on key findings is summarized in more details below, per channels.

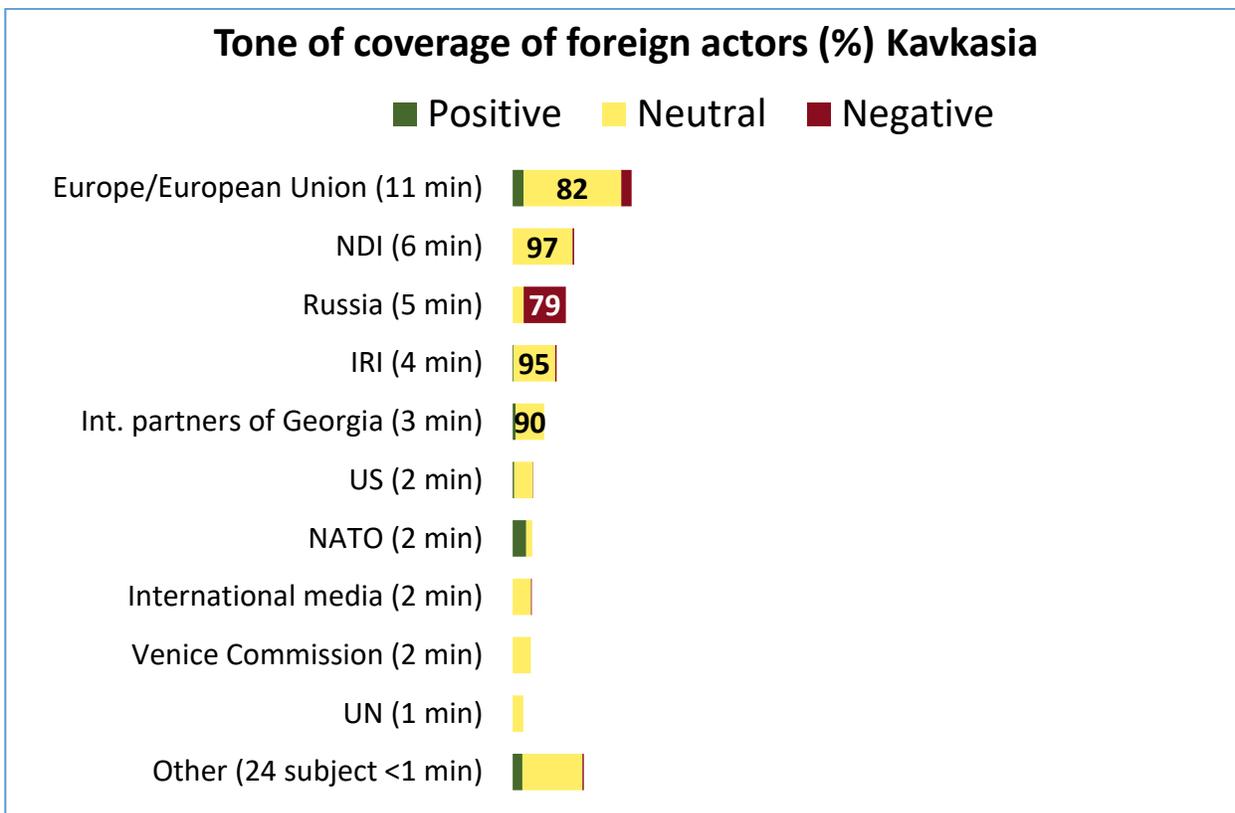
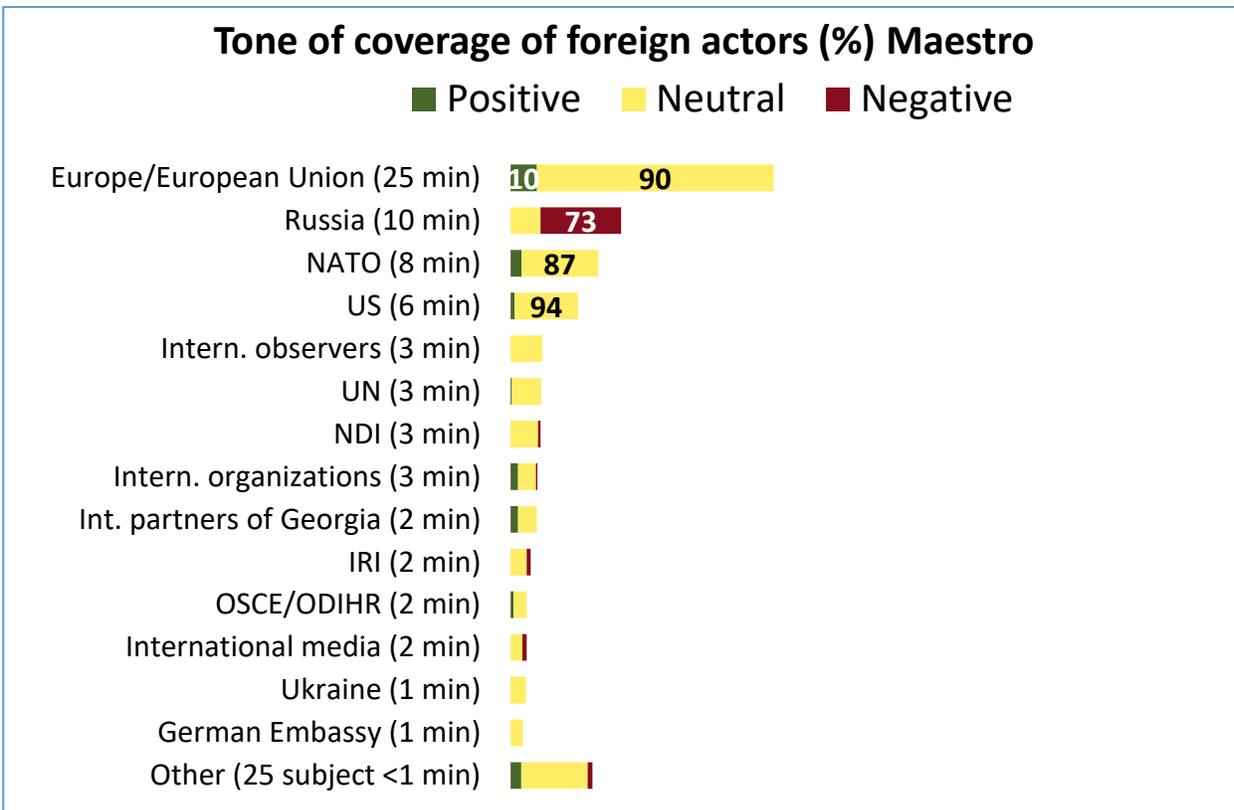
Annex. Charts:

Volume and tone of coverage of foreign actors

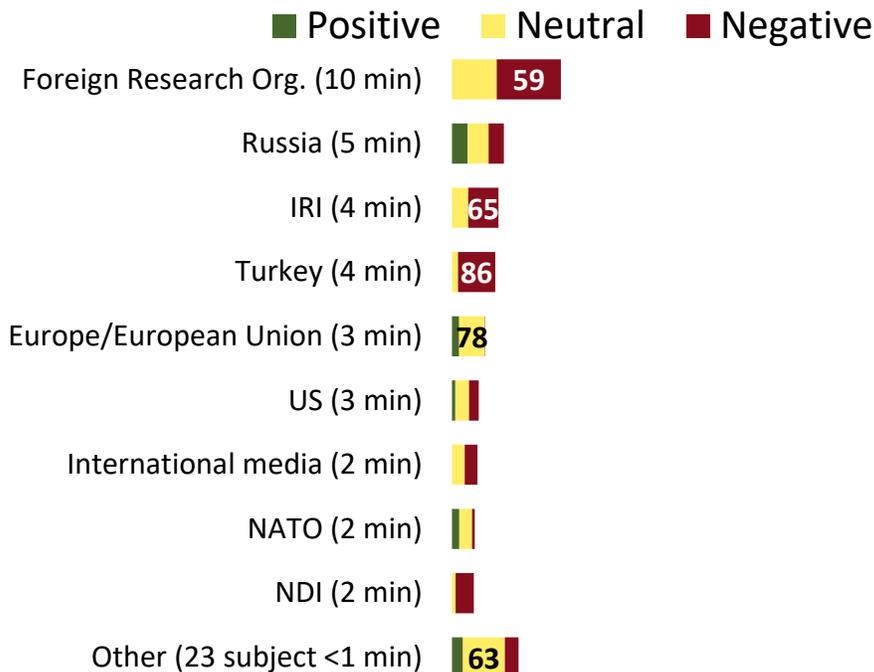








Tone of coverage of foreign actors (%) Obieqtivi



Tone of coverage of foreign actors (%) POSTV

