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MEDIA MONITORING FOR 2018 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS INTERIM REPORT





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The European Union for Georgia



Media Monitoring for 2018 Presidential Elections in Georgia

Print Media Monitoring

Interim Report

June 18 – October 15



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Tbilisi, 2018

About the Project: The Civic Development Institute (CDI) is monitoring the coverage of 2018 Presidential Elections in print media as part of the UNDP Project – Media Monitoring for 2018 Presidential Elections in Georgia, supported by the European Union. The monitoring was launched on 18 June and will be concluded in November, 2018.

The monitoring is performed on the following print media outlets: Alia, Rezonansi, Akhali Taoba, Qronika +, Kviris Palitra, Sakartvelo da Msoplio.

Research methodology: Quantitative and qualitative monitoring is carried out on media outlets selected for monitoring. Quantitative research focuses on the frequency and the tone of the coverage of subjects in selected media outlets. Qualitative research focuses on whether the selected media outlets comply with the norms of journalistic ethics and encompasses the following components: coverage of verified facts, language used by journalists, diversity of sources of information, reasonable balance in the coverage of topics, refraining from visual, audio, or any other kind of manipulation, evidence-based reporting, etc. Monitoring was performed on all articles of selected media outlets from the beginning of monitoring up to its completion.

The following **key findings** have been identified following quantitative and qualitative analysis of the content:

- Diverse types of violations of journalistic standards and norms of ethics are found in absolute majority of selected print media outlets;
- Explicitly positive or negative attitude towards various political forces can be observed in most of print media outlets. As a result, there is little fact-based coverage of politicians, but rather a continuous attempt to discredit them;
- Major challenge of Georgian print media is systematic dissemination of unverified and unconfirmed information. Reporters do not refrain from disseminating gravest allegations against politicians or state authorities, without relevant supporting evidence;
- Severe allegations in the statements of respondents is a regular occurrence and print media journalists do not attempt to appropriately verify them. As a result, print media readers are offered allegations against politicians in a biased manner, without contrary opinions or arguments;
- Print media journalists are not duly critical towards respondents' statements. During the monitoring there were regular cases when grave allegations against a politician or a state agency propagated by a respondent was accepted by journalists as genuine facts and they would not ask additional questions to confirm the accuracy of the information;
- One of the biggest challenges in Georgian print media is insulting and discriminatory language in the texts of journalists. In a number of print media outlets selected for monitoring we found regular use of extremely offensive language in the coverage of various politicians;
- In addition to the texts of reporters, insulting and discriminatory language was often found in the statements of respondents. Notably, print media journalists did not try to disassociate

themselves from offensive statements made by respondents. Even the more, often, especially offensive statements of respondents towards politicians are found in headings of articles;

- One of the challenges of print media is the lack of sources of information. Majority of articles are produced based on a single source of information, depriving readers of the possibility to read different opinions and arguments about specific issues;
- In a number of print media outlets articles prepared based on suspicious sources of information are found. The mentioned problem is exacerbated when severe allegations towards a politician or a state authority is disseminated through the article;
- Systematic, purposeful criticism of specific individuals, including presidential candidates, can be observed in a number of print media outlets. This creates the impression that the goal of the mentioned media outlets is not collecting and disseminating impartial information about these individuals, but rather, staining their reputation and dignity;
- In a number of print media outlets selected for monitoring improper differentiation of articles prepared under a commercial agreement from editorial materials could be observed. Media outlet should appropriately mark articles prepared under a certain commercial agreement;
- Impartial, verified analysis of visions and pre-election promises of presidential candidates are absent altogether in most of selected print media outlets. Some newspapers are distinguished by extremely partisan and biased coverage of presidential candidates. Biased criticism, personal offense and unjustified allegations against candidates can be observed as a rule.

Rezonansi

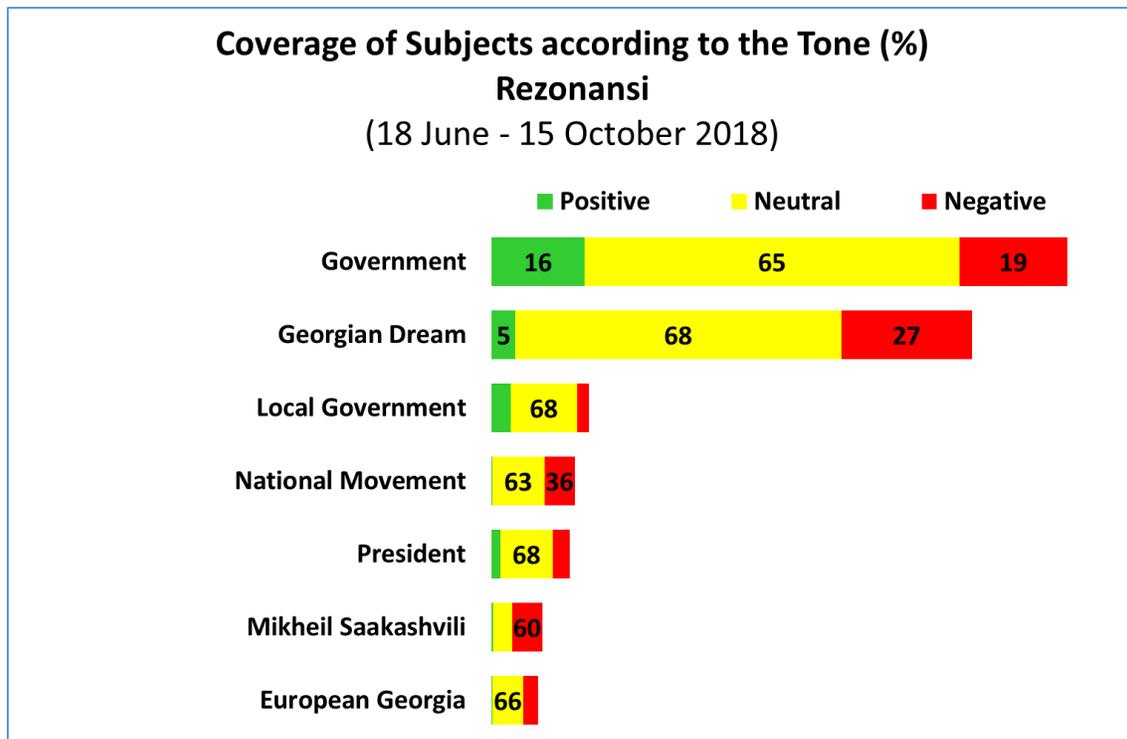
During the monitoring period, explicitly positive or negative attitude towards any political force could not be observed in Rezonansi. Among presidential candidates, negative tone indicators were prevalent in the coverage of Salome Zurabishvili. The articles were prepared primarily in compliance with the norms of journalistic ethics. Although, there were numerous cases of publishing unverified information. Furthermore, sponsored articles are not clearly delineated from editorial content in the media outlet.

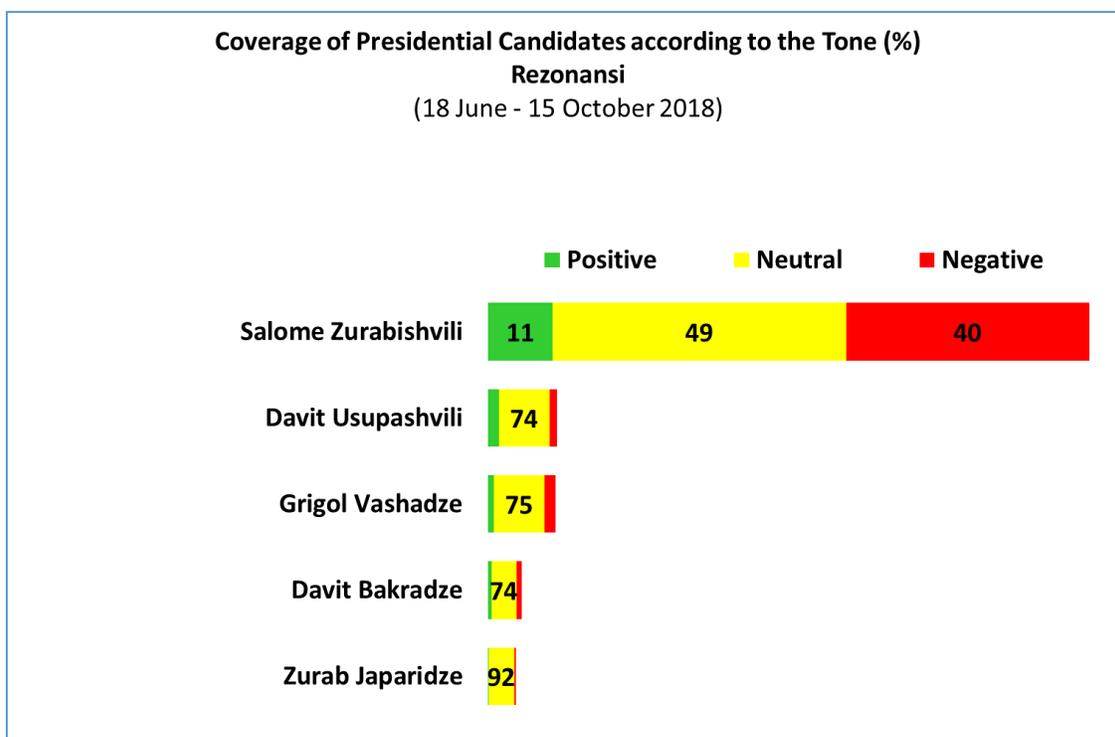
In Rezonansi, the activities of the Government (32%) and the Georgian Dream (27%) were most actively covered. Highest indicators of negative tone were found in the of coverage of Mikheil Saakashvili (60%). Exceptionally high percentage of positive or negative tone was not observed in the coverage of other subjects. In the coverage of presidential candidates, the neutral tone was prevalent. Salome Zurabishvili was covered most actively by Rezonansi among presidential candidates; she had the highest indicator of negative tone (40%). Negative tone towards her was mostly found in the statements of respondents.

Although majority of articles of Rezonansi are prepared in compliance with journalistic standards, a number of cases of disseminating unverified information were revealed in this media outlet. For example, severe allegations against the Prime Minister not supported by relevant facts are found in an article published on June 25 *“the years when Bakhtadze worked at Center Point have been erased from*

his biography” (Pg. 2). In the article, TV Company Rustavi 2 is referenced as a source of information, although, it is not shown how Rustavi 2 had obtained the information. Furthermore, the article does not reveal a journalist’s attempt to present relevant evidence for the mentioned allegation. There were also cases in Rezonansi when a journalist’s attempt to verify information disseminated by a respondent was not seen. For example, in an article published on September 21 “*the plan to abolish the national exams*” – *Levan Khabeishvili*” (Pg. 12), the respondent makes severe allegations against the government, since, according to him, there is a plan to abolish the national exams in Georgia. The article does not show a reporter’s attempt to verify the accuracy of the information with any of the government agencies.

Sponsored articles are not duly distinguished from editorial content in Rezonansi. On August 31, the following article was published in Rezonansi without relevant indication: “*Nikoloz Gagua: economic growth of Georgia is one of the most sustainable in the region*”; this article, with the same text, the same heading and appended photo, was printed in other selected mass media outlets as well (Newspaper Akhali Taoba; websites ipess.ge and interpressnews.ge). Notably, on website interpressnews.ge the same article was published with the indication of a paid content.





Kviris Palitra

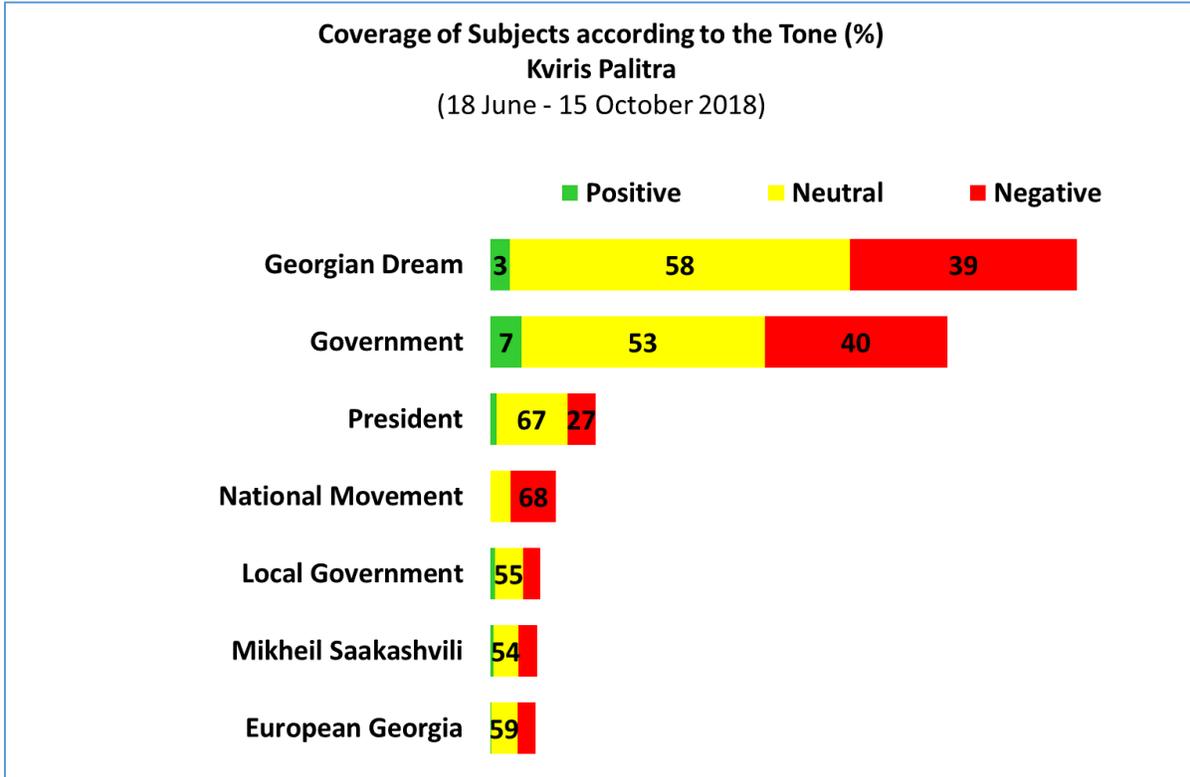
During the monitoring period, negative tone was prevalent in the coverage of the ruling team and the presidential candidate supported thereof, as well as in the coverage of the United National Movement and their presidential candidate. The coverage of political processes was largely in compliance with journalistic standards. Although, notably, the criticism of a specific minister, Tea Tsulukiani, was observed quite often in Kviris Palitra. The cases of propagating biased and unsubstantiated allegations were often observed in the above-mentioned articles.

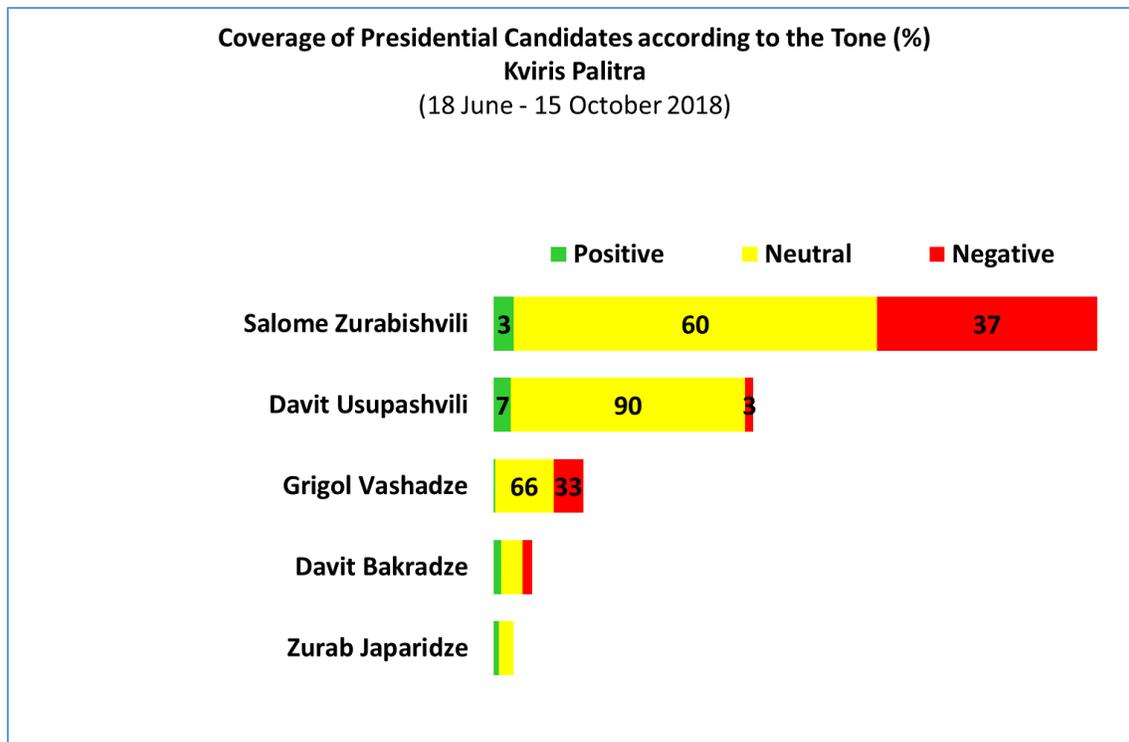
Kviris Palitra most actively covered the activities of the Georgian Dream (34%) and the government (26%). Negative tone was prevalent in the coverage of both subjects. Lowest indicator of negative tone among the monitored subjects was found in the coverage of the United National Movement (68%). Especially high indicators of positive tone have not been observed in the coverage of any of the subjects of monitoring.

In case of the coverage of presidential candidates, high indicators of negative tone were found in the coverage of Salome Zurabishvili (37%) and Grigol Vashadze (33 %) in Kviris Palitra.

Regular criticism of Tea Tsulukiani, the Minister of Justice can be observed in Kviris Palitra. Such criticism is one-sided, often unfounded allegations are made and the attempt of journalists to present differing opinions in response to the mentioned allegations cannot be seen (for example, in articles: *“Tsulukiani is not acting upon the decision of court “reformed” by her?!”, June 18-24, pg. 6; “Tea Tsulukiani will stick at nothing to preserve her post”, June 25-July 1, pg. 6; “Tsulukiani herself will be*

a compromising material for the government”, July 16-22, pg. 6-7; “Your property at the Registry is absolutely insecure”, July 9-15, pg. 10-11;“Lia Mukhashavria: “Presently, courts are managed according to the Cosa Nostra Principle”, August 13-19, pg. 7). Along with presenting allegations and criticism of respondents in a one-sided manner in the mentioned articles, journalists’ texts, too, regularly reveal explicitly negative attitude towards the above-mentioned minister.





Asaval-Dasavali

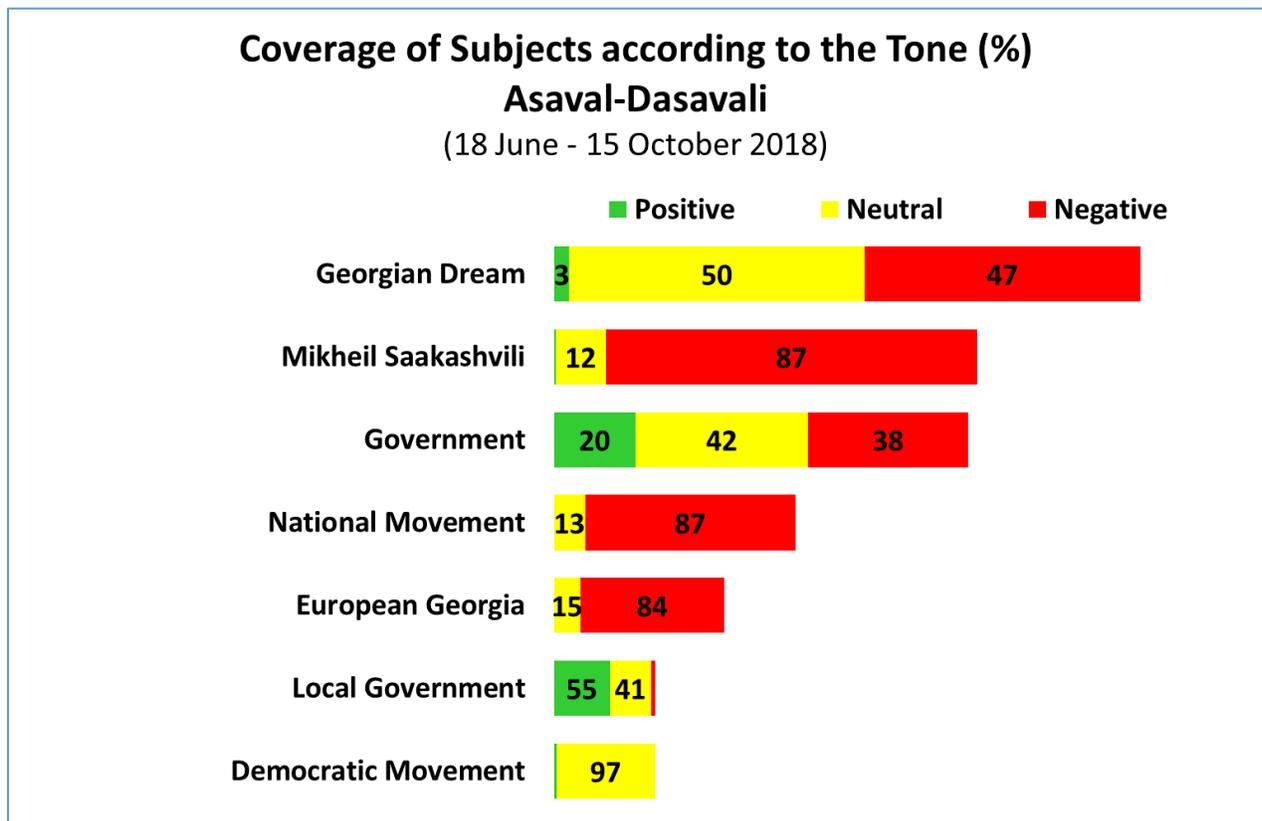
During the monitoring period, the cases of extremely gross violations of journalistic standards and norms of ethics were regularly observed in Asaval-Dasavali. The texts of journalists often contained unconfirmed information and insulting language. The newspaper allocates especially large space to the respondents that are prominent in bringing unsubstantiated allegations and grossly offensive speech towards politicians or other people of renown.

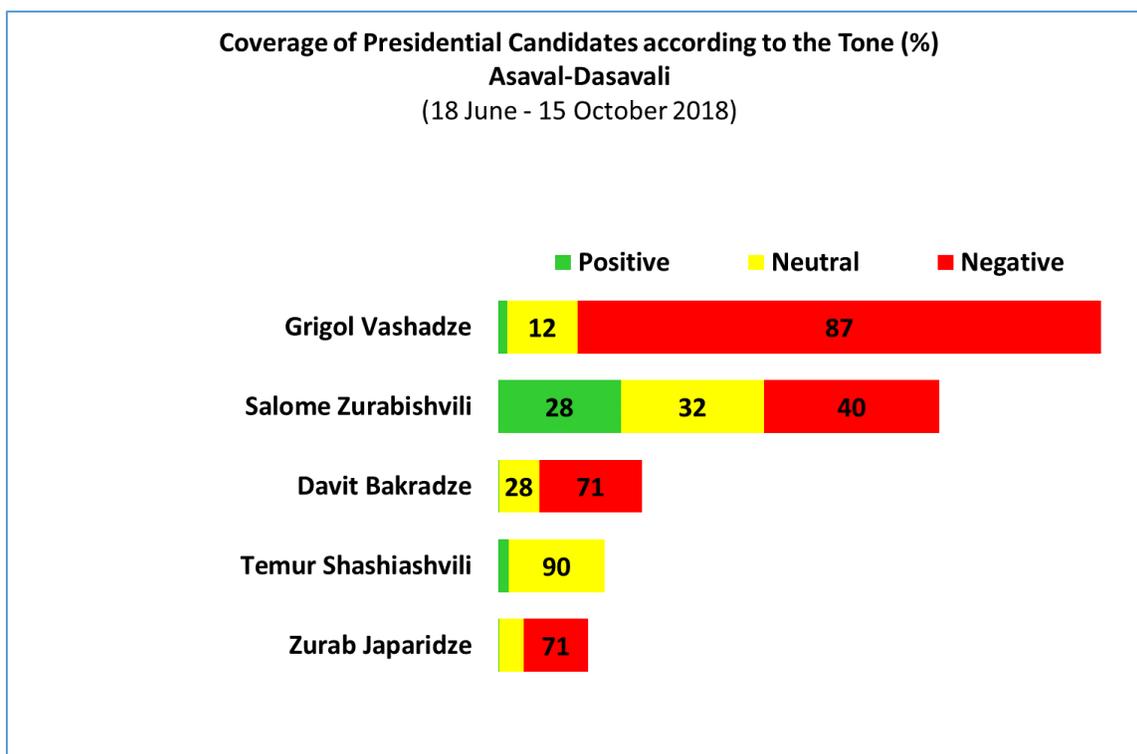
According to quantitative data, negative tone indicators are prevalent in Asaval-Dasavali in the coverage of the government team, as well as opposition parties. Extremely high indicators of negative tone were identified in the coverage of ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili (87%), United National Movement (87%), European Georgia (84%) and the President (81%). Among presidential candidates, high indicators of negative tone were found in the coverage of Grigol Vashadze (87%), Davit Bakradze (71%) and Zurab Japaridze (71%), while highest indicators of positive tone were identified in the coverage of the Tbilisi Mayor’s Office and the Mayor (55%).

In Asaval-Dasavali, extremely offensive language was regularly observed in the texts of journalists; for example: “No matter if Nika Gvaramia and Nationals Sect representatives eat hot pepper or even swipe it in their butts, Grigol Vashadze-Ananiashvili is not going to be the president of Georgia.” („They are eating poop and pepper!“, September 24-30, pg. 11). Unsubstantiated allegations and offensive vocabulary was often found in the statements of respondents as well. During such interviews, instead of disassociating from respondents’ offensive statements and unfounded allegations, in the majority of

cases, journalists of Asaval-Dasavali engaged in mentioned discussions. For example, in the article “*I support Salome Zurabishvili!*” (October 15-21, pg. 18) the respondent’s statement “*Grigol Vashadze is a representative of the bloody gang that was raping fathers in front of their children and wives – in front of men!*” was not followed by an appropriate response from the journalist.

In the coverage of presidential candidates, negative attitude towards all candidates was observed in Asaval-Dasavali. Journalists of the newspaper often used offensive and discriminatory language during the coverage of candidates. According to quantitative data, highest indicator of positive tone was identified in the coverage of Salome Zurabishvili, although the coverage of the mentioned candidate was often performed in gross violation of the norms of journalistic ethics. For example, “*Even a child in Georgia knows about “liberalistic” inclinations and views of Ms. Salome whom people call a Parisian, but these “analysts” is really too much! Now, entire Georgia is thinking what does this “analysts” Salome has said means – those who have got into the anus or those who have climbed out of it?!*” (“what does ‘analysts’ mean August 13-19, pg. 19).





Alia

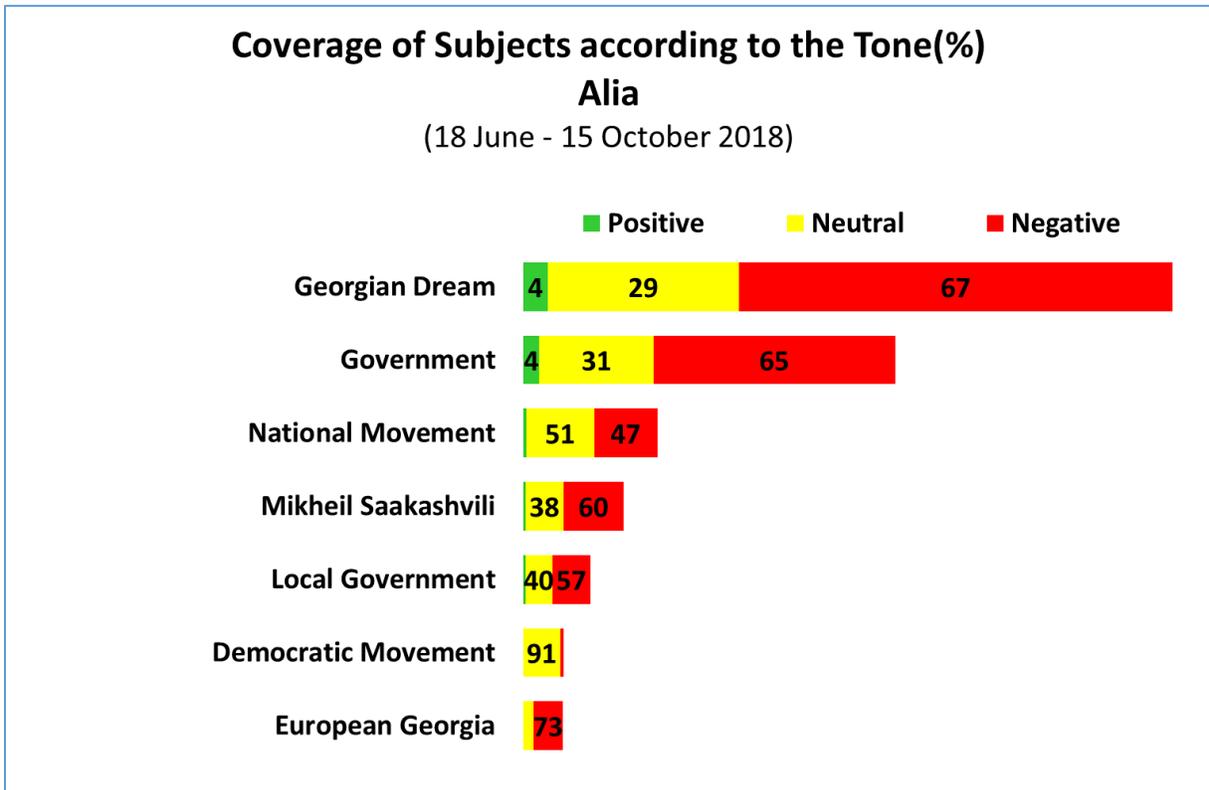
During monitoring, extremely negative attitude was observed towards the ruling team, as well as oppositional parties, in Alia. Extremely gross violations of journalistic standards and the norms of ethics were regularly observed in the newspaper. Journalists of Alia often used offensive language in the coverage of politicians. We identified regular cases of unsubstantiated allegations and propagation of unverified information.

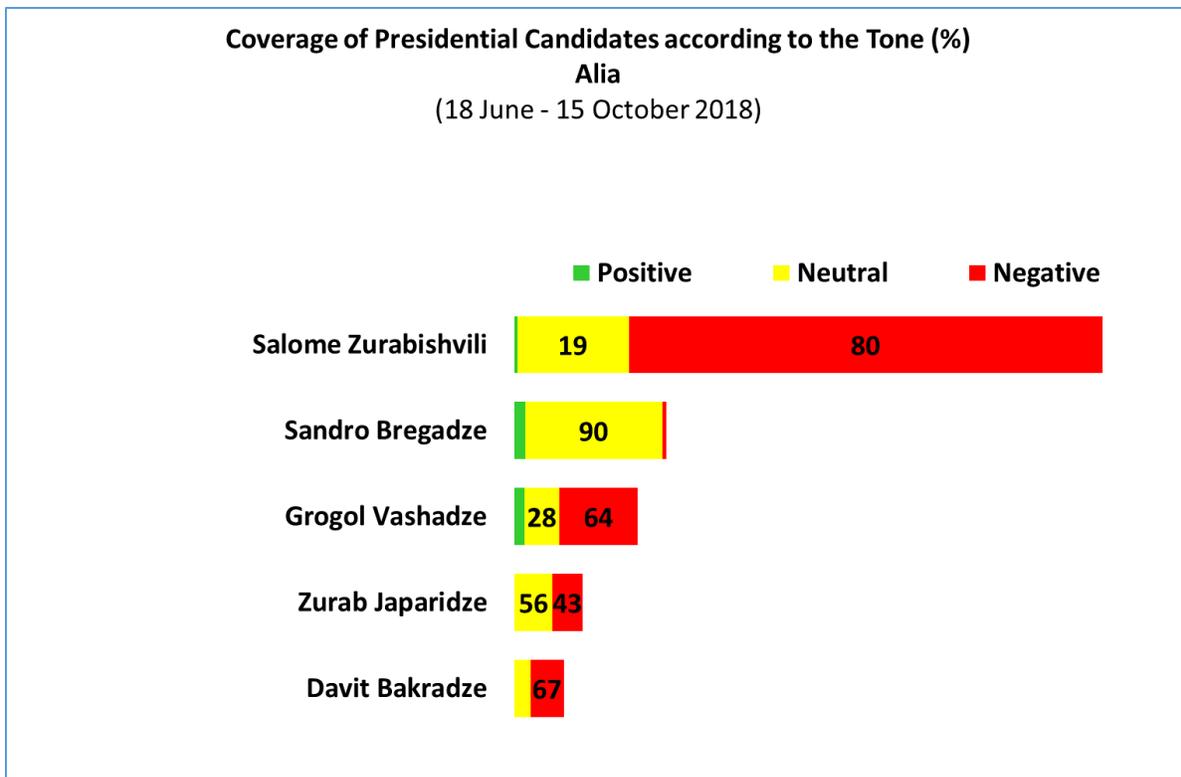
In Alia, the activities of the Georgian Dream (35%) and the Government (20%) were most actively covered. Extremely high indicators of negative tone were found in the coverage of all political parties except for Democratic Movement – United Georgia. Extremely high indicator of negative tone was found in the coverage of presidential candidates as well. Candidate Sandro Bregadze is an exception; in his coverage, neutral and positive tone indicators were predominant.

In Alia, offensive language and quite grave allegations towards politicians are regularly observed; these allegations are not supported by any relevant facts. For example, in an August 6 article “*What scandalous stories were disclosed to Alia about one of the candidates for the position of the chair of the Supreme Court?*” the journalist writes: “*and Margvelashvili – maybe not himself, but some of his family members and close friends, when they are short of methadone, add heroine to get quality “kaif”.*”

In Alia presidential candidates were covered primarily against the background of personal offense and unfounded allegation towards candidates. Especially grave offensive and discriminatory terms were observed in the coverage of Salome Zurabishvili. For example, in September 23-29 issue a long

interview about Salome Zurabishvili’s candidacy, has a heading: *“Dolt, nasty-tongued, impolite woman with anti-State thinking is striving towards presidency”* (Pg. 19). Moreover, Alia journalists were not distancing themselves from extremely offensive statements towards the mentioned candidates. For example, in an article published on September 30 *“I mean it! I can smell the revolution”*, a journalist did not distance himself from the statement of a respondent, Gia Korkotashvili, one of the leaders of Georgian March: *“against the background of total collapse, Georgian Dream is bringing forward a candidate that, wherever you dig, willing or not, you have to dig to her!”* (pg. 3).





Akhali Taoba

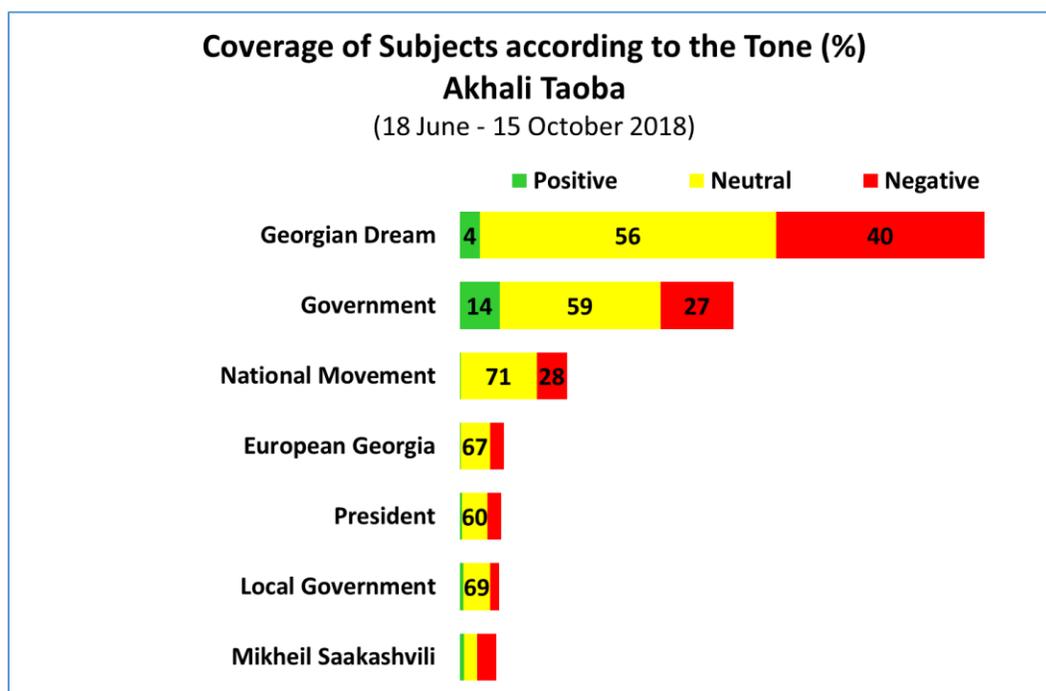
During the period of monitoring, especially positive or negative attitude towards any political force or a presidential candidate was not found in Akhali Taoba. Although, numerous cases of breach of journalistic ethics were found in the publication. Biased coverage of events, dissemination of unsubstantiated allegations and non-verified facts were observed.

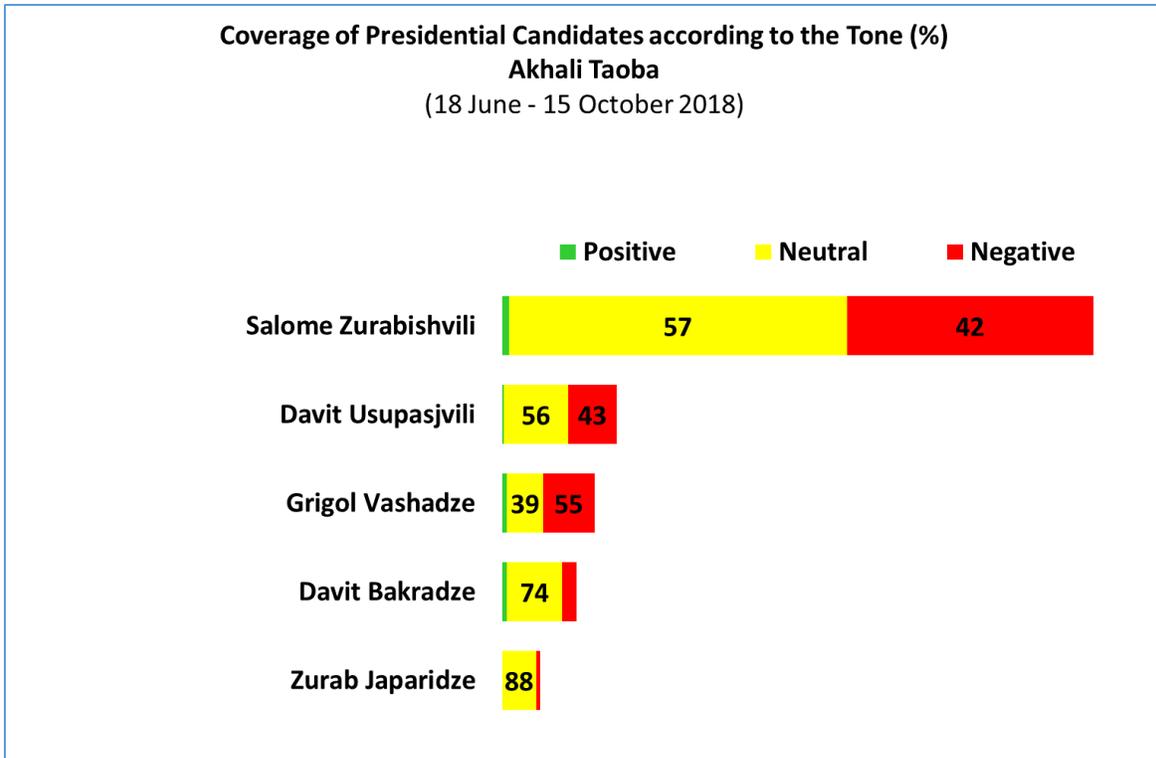
The activities of the Georgian Dream (39%) and the Government (21%) were most actively covered in Akhali Taoba. High indicators of negative tone were found in the coverage of Democratic Movement-United Georgia (60%) and Georgian Dream (40%). Especially high indicators of positive or negative tone was not identified towards other subjects of monitoring. During the coverage of presidential candidates, indicators of negative tone were predominant.

In Akhali Taoba the articles prepared based on only a single source of information were frequent; allegations presented against various individuals were unsubstantiated and the attempt of verifying of facts by journalists was not seen. For example, in an article published on September 6 “*Levan Khabeishvili: “If we keep silent, they will eat us as well”*” (Pg. 2) statement of a respondent about the spending of GEL 45,000 in 20 days from the budget by the Tbilisi Mayor in restaurants was not followed by the attempt of a journalist to duly verify the accuracy of the mentioned information. In Akhali Taoba, often, instead of verifying and requesting additional evidences for gross allegations made by respondents, journalists were accepting those as genuine facts. For example, instead of verifying the fact about appointing the brother of the Minister of Health without a competition to a highly paid position at the Tbilisi Mayor’s Office stated by the respondent “*Kaladze hired Sergeenko’s brother at a*

job that pays GEL 3,000”(pg. 2) in an article published on September 28, the journalist made a comment “*well, how would they leave the brother of the Minister of Labor and Employment unemployed*”. Moreover, in an article published on August 7, “*Bidzina Ivanishvili bribed government representatives*” (pg. 2), instead of attempting to obtain additional evidences about the mentioned allegation, the journalist asks the respondent “*Is it only the ministers who benefit from the black cash or the members of the Parliament as well?*”. Journalists have to take a more critical stance towards grave allegations of respondents towards prominent individuals or government agencies. Especially in cases when such allegations contain the facts of the breach of law.

During the period of monitoring, in Akhali Taoba, a sponsored article was published without relevant indication. On August 31, an article was published without the indication of a sponsored content: “*Nikoloz Gagua: economic growth in Georgia is one of the most sustainable in the region*”. This article, with the same text, same heading and photo was also published in other selected mass media outlets (Newspaper Rezonansi; websites ipress.ge and interpressnews.ge). Notably, on the website interpressnews.ge the same article was published with sponsored indication.





Sakartvelo da Msoplio

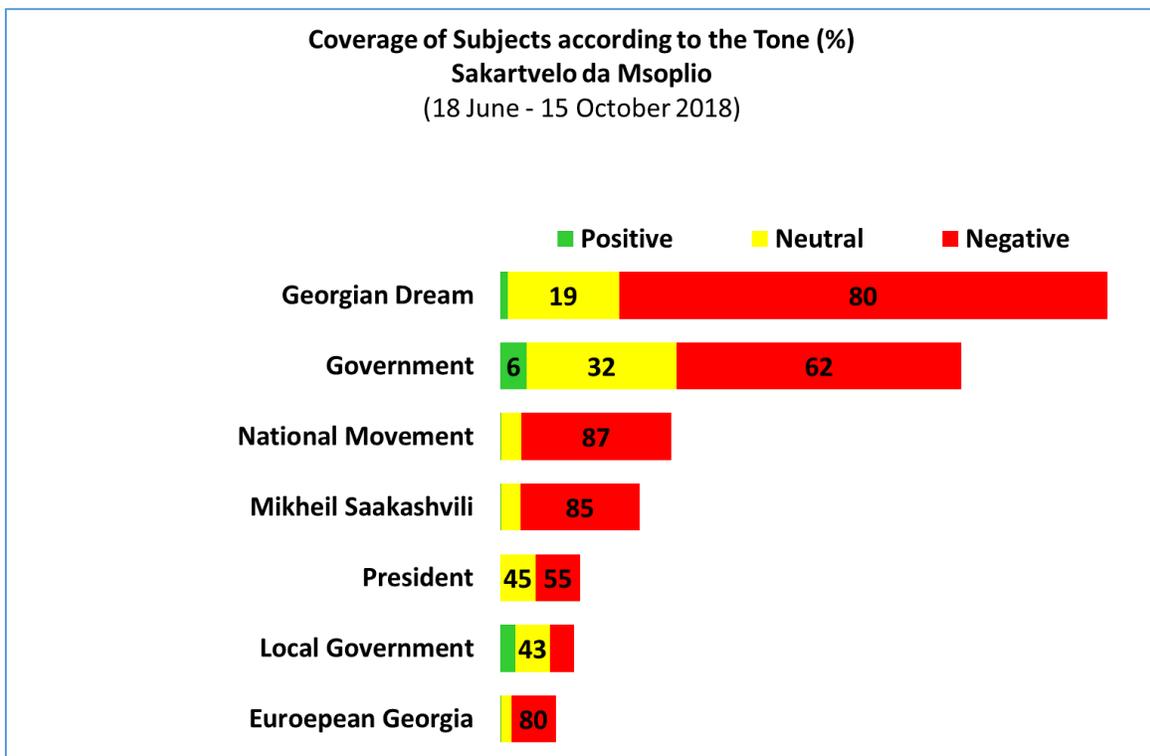
During the period of monitoring, regular cases of gross violation of journalistic standards and the norms of ethics were found in Sakartvelo and Msoplio. The cases of the dissemination of unverified information by journalists and the cases of the use of offensive language during the coverage of politicians were often observed. Extremely negative attitude towards effectively all political forces or presidential candidates is evident in the newspaper.

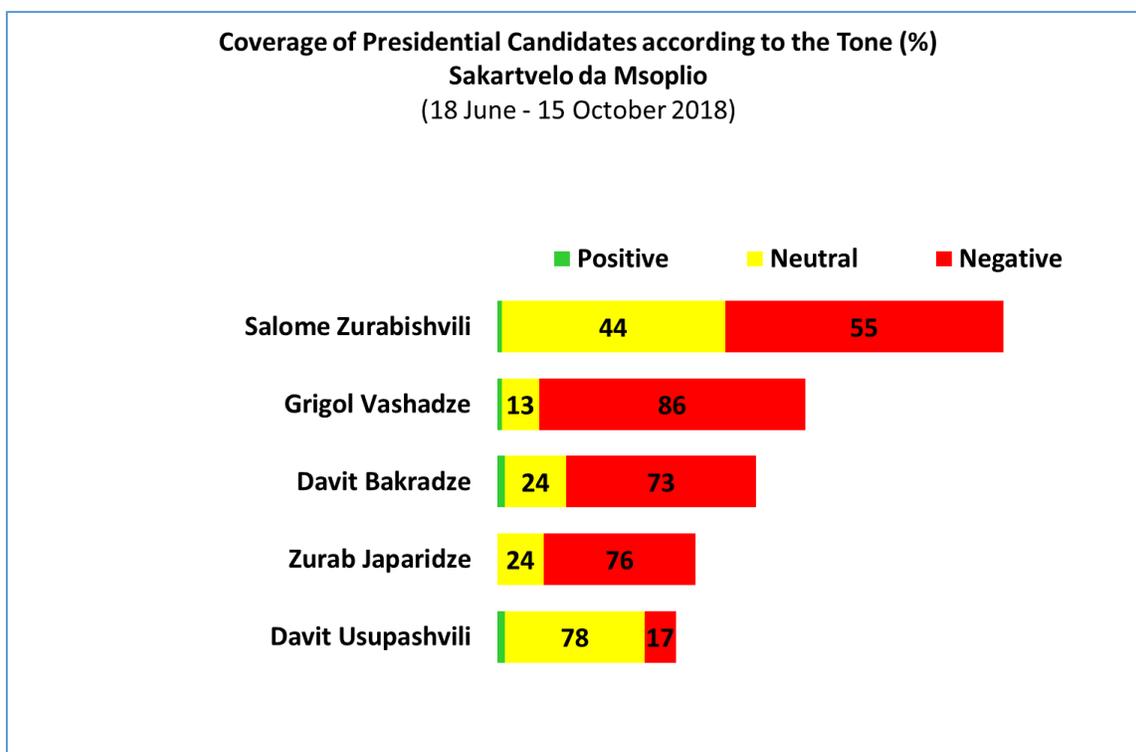
In Sakartvelo and Msoplio, activities of the Georgian Dream (30%) and the government (23%) were most actively covered. Extremely high indicators of negative tone were observed towards all subjects of monitoring. High indicator of positive tone was not identified in the coverage of any of the subjects. High indicators of negative tone were found in the coverage of presidential candidates as well.

In Sakartvelo and Msoplio, the issues related to NATO are covered especially actively, and political parties in Georgia are often covered in light of Georgia-NATO relations. During the coverage of the mentioned issues, the journalists regularly disseminate unverified information and unsubstantiated allegations. For example, three articles were published in July 18-24 issue (*“they did not mention Georgia...”, pg. 4; “Moscow: France Croatia – 4:2, Helsinki: Trump-Putin - ?”, pg. 5; “Trump, Russia and Globalists”, pg. 7*) Containing information that Donald Trump, US President, during NATO Summit, demanded that the President of Georgia be removed from the hall: *“Donald Trump, US President, who arrived at the Brussels Summit, asked Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General for a list of delegations attending the Summit. And, allegedly, was surprised: what are they doing here?!- and then, Ukraine’s drunkard President and Georgia’s weaver President – Petro Poroshenko and Giorgi*

Margvelashvili “were removed” from the hall (pg. 5). Like the majority of articles of Sakartvelo and Msoplio, the source from which the journalist had obtained the mentioned information is not clear in these articles either.

During the monitoring period, personal insult and unsubstantiated allegations in the coverage of presidential candidates were frequently observed in Sakartvelo and Msoplio. For example, in an article *“what morals should a woman who had married a godfather of her child should be teaching us?!”* (August 15-September 4, pg. 7) we see allegations against Salome Zurabishvili, presidential candidate, that are not supported by relevant facts. The entire article is directed at discrediting Salome Zurabishvili, a presidential candidate.





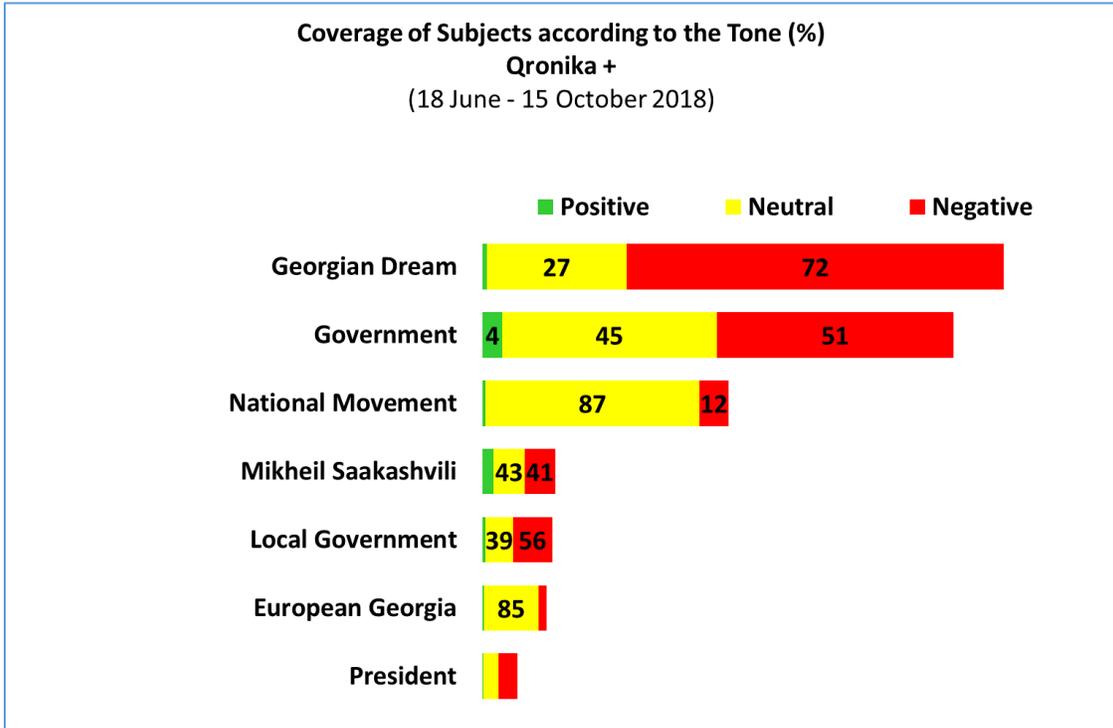
Qronika +

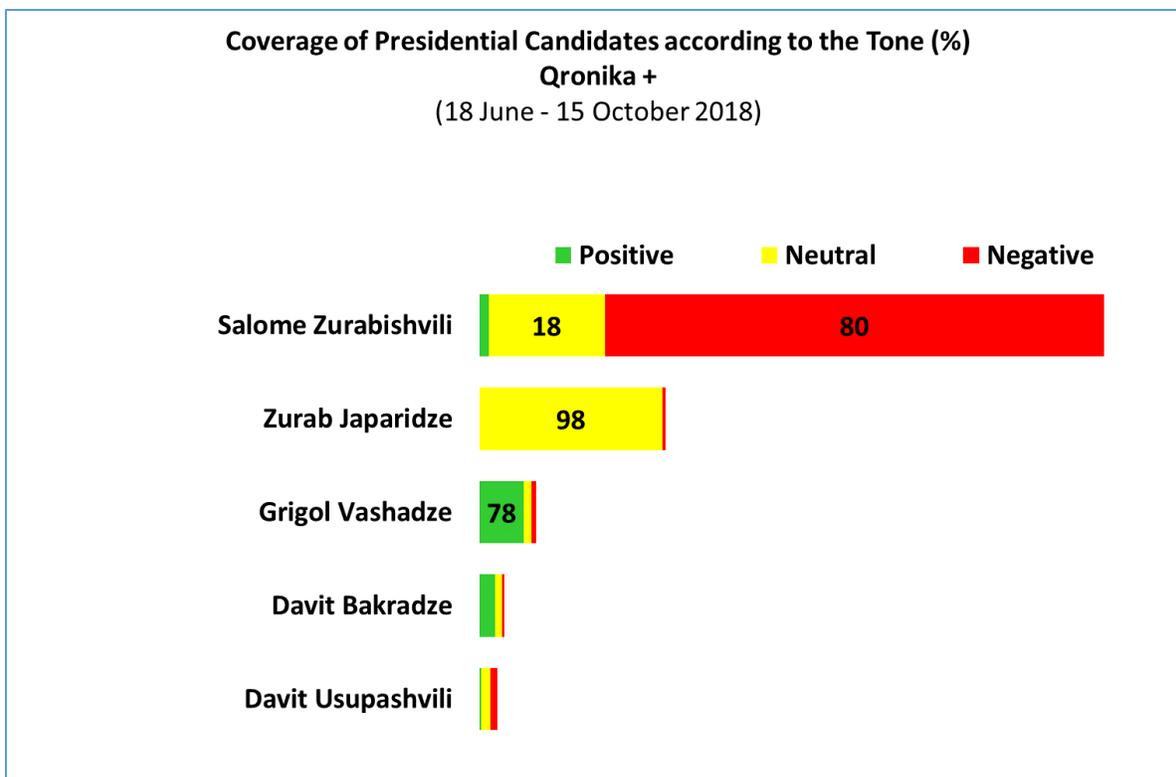
During the monitoring period, extremely negative attitude towards the ruling team and Salome Zurabishvili, a presidential candidate, on the one hand, and extremely positive attitude towards Grigol Vashadze, presidential candidate was explicitly observed in Qronika +. In the newspaper, offensive language and unconfirmed allegations were frequent in the coverage of government representatives. There were grave allegations against the ruling team that were not supported by relevant evidences.

The activities of Georgian Dream (28%) and government (25%) were most actively covered in Qronika +. Extremely high indicators of negative tone were identified in the coverage of Georgian Dream (72%) and Salome Zurabishvili (80%). While extremely high indicator of positive tone was observed in the case of Grigol Vashadze (78%).

Articles of Qronika + often contained reasoning of journalists that were not supported by relevant facts. For example, in articles “*Good-for-nothing and treasury thief Dimitri Kumsishvili will be jailed?*” (June 19-25, pg. 2-3); “*Internal wars of Dreamers*” (October 9-15, pg. 22-23); “*What scandalous compromising material about Ivanishvili Tsulukiani has?*” (July 17-23, pg. 10-11) The journalists presented numerous important information and serious allegation towards representatives of the ruling team, although it was not clear from the articles as to what was the source for such information and how reliable it was. Moreover, offensive terms during the coverage of the ruling team was also frequent in Qronika +; for example, title of an article “*Kotsistan’s male and female suns*” (July 24-October 6, pg. 13). In Qronika + unsubstantiated allegations from journalists could be found in their questions to respondents as well. For example, in an article published in September 25 issue, “*Salome Zurabishvili is worse than a stick since the stick is zero, while she is in minuses, people hate her*” (Pg. 14-15) respondent’s statement that

the chair of the Central Election Commission will “refine” election results, journalist responds with a question “*why not, here, allegedly she received GEL 20 thousand salary in August. And for GEL 20,000 salary she will make not only Salome Zurbishvili, but even Tutankhamun a president?!*” (Pg. 14).





Conclusion

It was revealed as a result of monitoring that neglecting journalistic standards and norms of ethics is a major challenge of the Georgian print media. This leaves the impression that majority of print media outlets are not concerned about accuracy of information they disseminate. Reasoning of journalists that are not supported by relevant facts and the dissemination of unverified information is observed on a regular basis.

Respondents, too, regularly disseminate unverified information. In most cases, journalists, instead of asking for evidences, accept the above-mentioned statements that often contain gross allegations towards politicians or state authorities, as authentic facts. Journalists almost never attempt to somehow verify the information disseminated through their newspaper. The mentioned problem becomes especially grave when information disseminated thereof contains allegations of gross crime against certain individuals.

The frequency of offensive and discriminatory statements in Georgian print media should be mentioned. Journalists of a number of selected newspapers use offensive language during the coverage of politicians or other renowned persons. Insulting language is frequent in the statements of respondents as well and notably, journalists effectively never attempt to dissociate from grave offensive statements of respondents. Even the more, often particularly insulting statements of respondents are often used as the headings of articles.

The above-mentioned trends are observed in the coverage of presidential candidates. Often, the coverage of presidential candidates is performed against the background of extremely grave personal offense and discrediting. Impartial, substantiated reasoning about visions and plans of candidates is rarely observed.

It can be concluded as a result of monitoring that overwhelming part of Georgian print media is unable to present to their readers objective and multi-faceted analysis around electoral processes in the country. The attempt of print media to offer to readers different opinions about various political forces or presidential candidates cannot be observed.