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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

July 16 - November 21, 2020



This report was prepared by the Caucasus Research Resource Center - Georgia with the assistance of the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Caucasus Research Resource Center - Georgia, and can in no way be taken to reflect the views or positions of the EU and UNDP.

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.

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.

Main Findings

The following are the main findings of the monitoring of the evening news programmes of 12 selected television channels between the 16th of July and the 21st of November 2020:

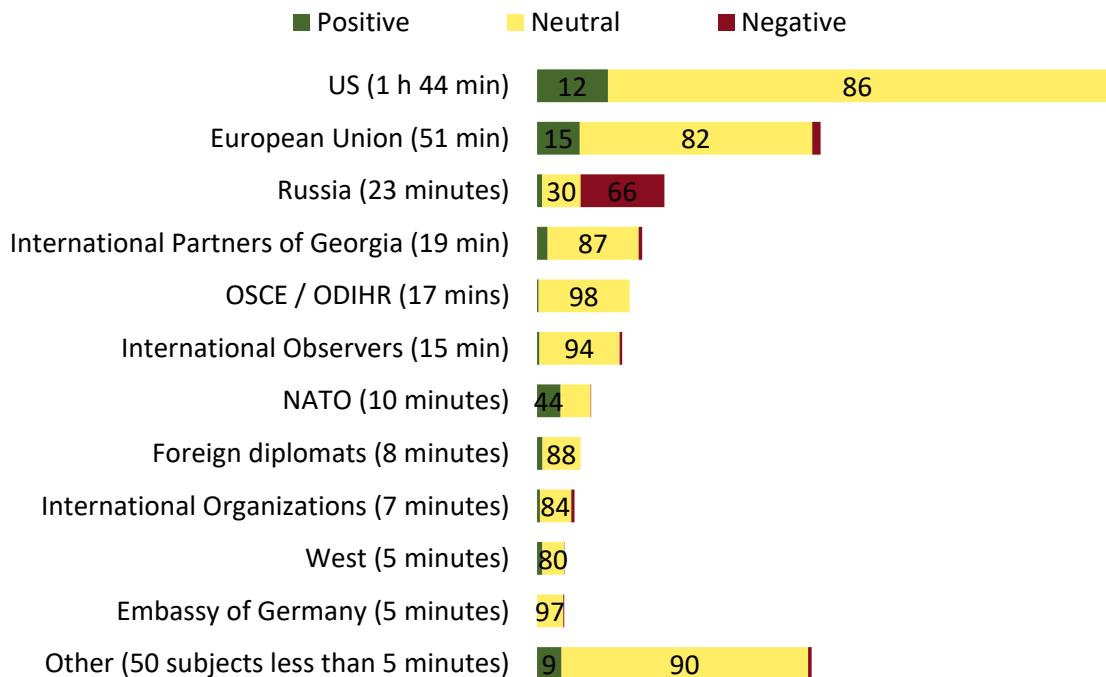
- With the approach of the elections, discussions on general election topics increased in the news along with the coverage of foreign actors with regard to the elections and political processes. This tendency became even stronger after the elections due to the importance of the evaluation of the elections by foreign actors as well as to the visit of Mike Pompeo and the involvement of the U.S. and E.U. ambassadors in negotiations between the Government and the opposition.
- During the monitoring, and considering the development of events, the most covered foreign actor on almost every channel were the United States. Compared to other foreign actors, much time was also dedicated to the European Union and Russia. Some channels also devoted much of their coverage to foreign research organizations, and particularly to the surveys that the channels had commissioned them to undertake.
- Mike Pompeo's visit had an important impact on qualitative data. Airtime allocated to the United States increased on every channel, with Pompeo's visit sometimes even being covered 'live', and much coverage was also devoted to the expectations of different political parties before the visit and to assessments following it. It is interesting to note that perceptions of Pompeo's visit varied according to the channels' loyalty to the Government or the opposition: channels supporting the Government covered the visit mostly in terms of its geopolitical significance and its implications for the Georgia-U.S. military and strategic partnership, and less in relation to the elections; whereas opposition channels linked Pompeo's visit to the crisis that followed the elections, even raising certain expectations that Pompeo's visit would serve as a warning to the Government and would turn the situation in their favour after the elections. In terms of evaluation, on every channel Pompeo's visit was mentioned as the most significant event and the U.S. as Georgia's closest strategic partner.
- During the monitoring period, and especially before the elections, the topic of Russia's involvement in Georgia's internal affairs grew in importance. Almost every channel noted Russia's cyber-attack on the Lugar Laboratory, on the threat of Russian disinformation, on Georgia's cyber-security forum, and on Russia's links with the Alliance of Patriots and other local actors. Stories on channels favouring the opposition also focused upon links between Russia and the Georgian Dream, whereas channels loyal to the Government spoke about Russia and its links with the previous National Movement government.
- In this regard, the case of Davit Gareji was an important topic, with many channels describing it as a 'Russian project'. All television channels linked the emergence of this issue to Russia: where-

as pro-opposition channels described it as ordered by Russia against the background of the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, channels loyal to the Government used this topic to discredit the previous government, whom they accused of doing Russia's bidding.

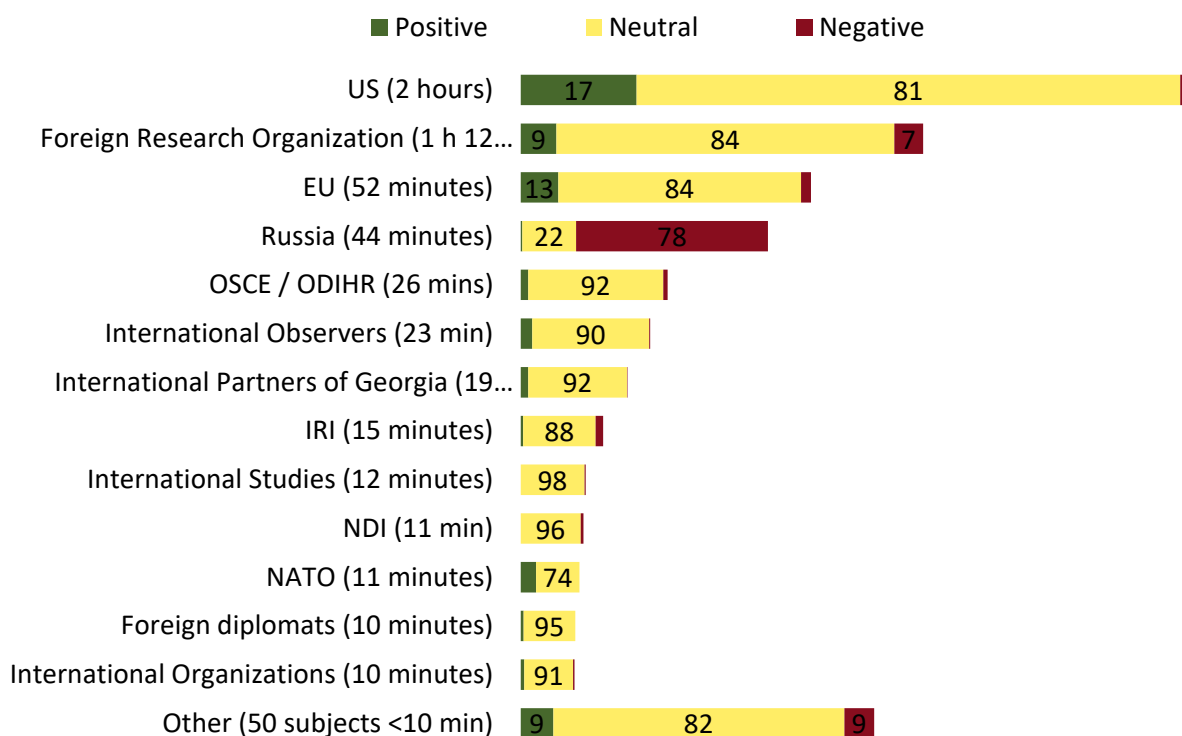
- During the entire period of monitoring, links and associations with Russia were used to discredit certain political forces both within the ruling party as well as among the opposition. Links with Russia damaged the reputation of political subjects.
- On the other hand, Western actors such as ambassadors, Members of the European Parliament and US Congressmen were presented as authoritative and accountable officials. When interpreting their statements and recommendations, some channels underlined these officials' support for the Government and others their criticism thereof and dissatisfaction with failings during the pre-electoral period.
- News programmes gave much importance to foreign actors with regard to the question of the elections' legitimacy, and presented their statements as firm evidence.
- When covering the opposition boycott, many channels presented Members of the European Parliament, European ambassadors and the U.S. ambassador and State Department representatives as authoritative officials whose statements both the Government and the opposition were interpreting differently. Some channels also used coverage of these actors to underline the contrast between their calls for negotiation and the opposition's recalcitrance.
- Coverage of foreign actors reflected the political polarization of the channels' different editorial policies.

ANNEX 1. Charts.

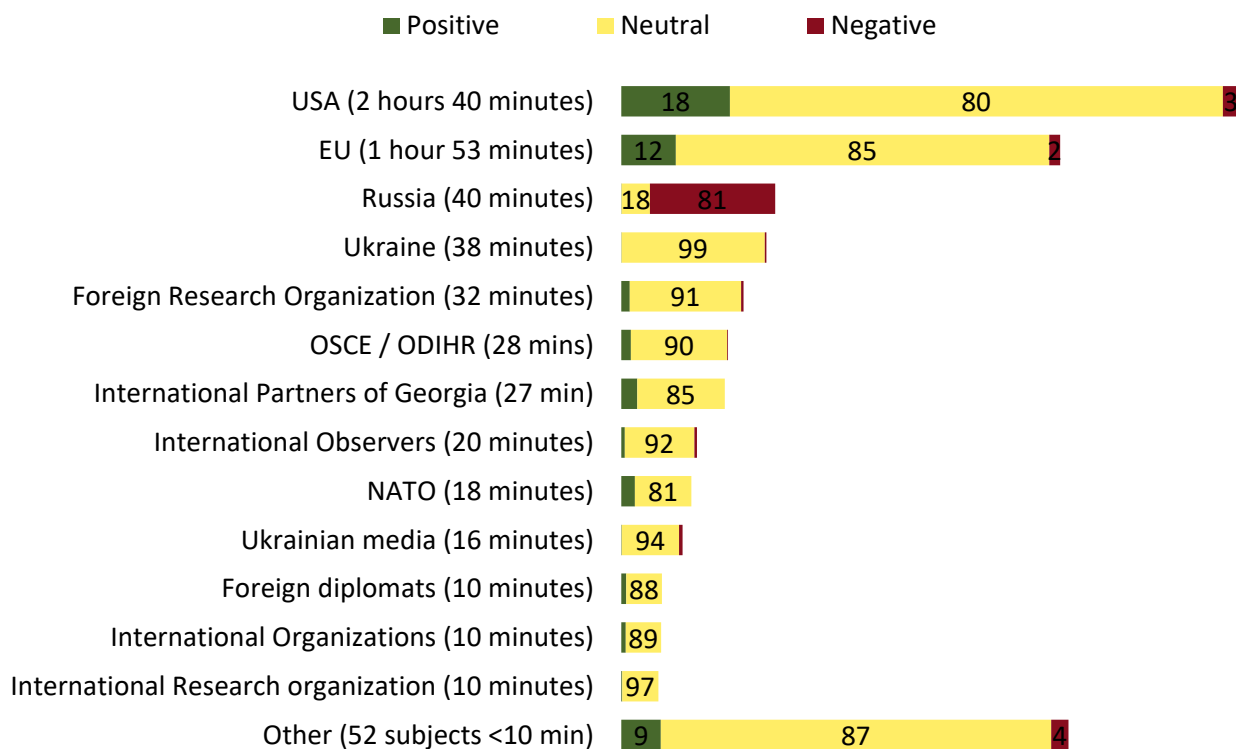
Tone of coverage of foreign actors (%) First Channel of the Public Broadcaster



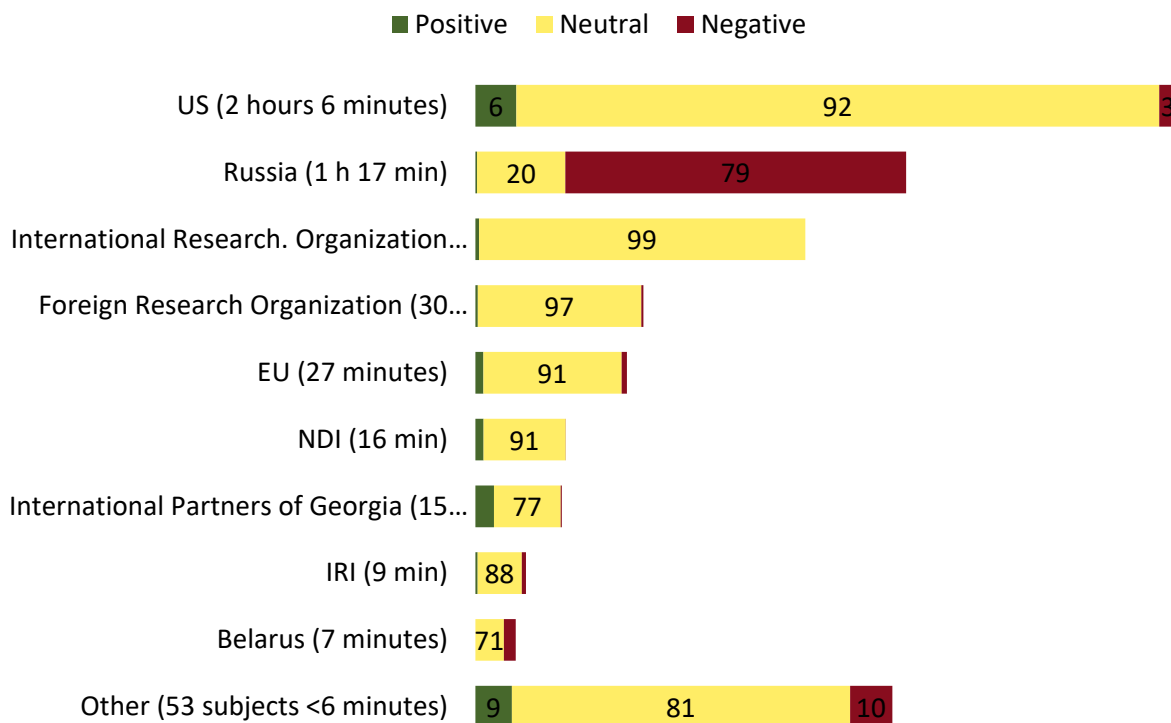
Tone of coverage of foreign actors (%) Rustavi 2



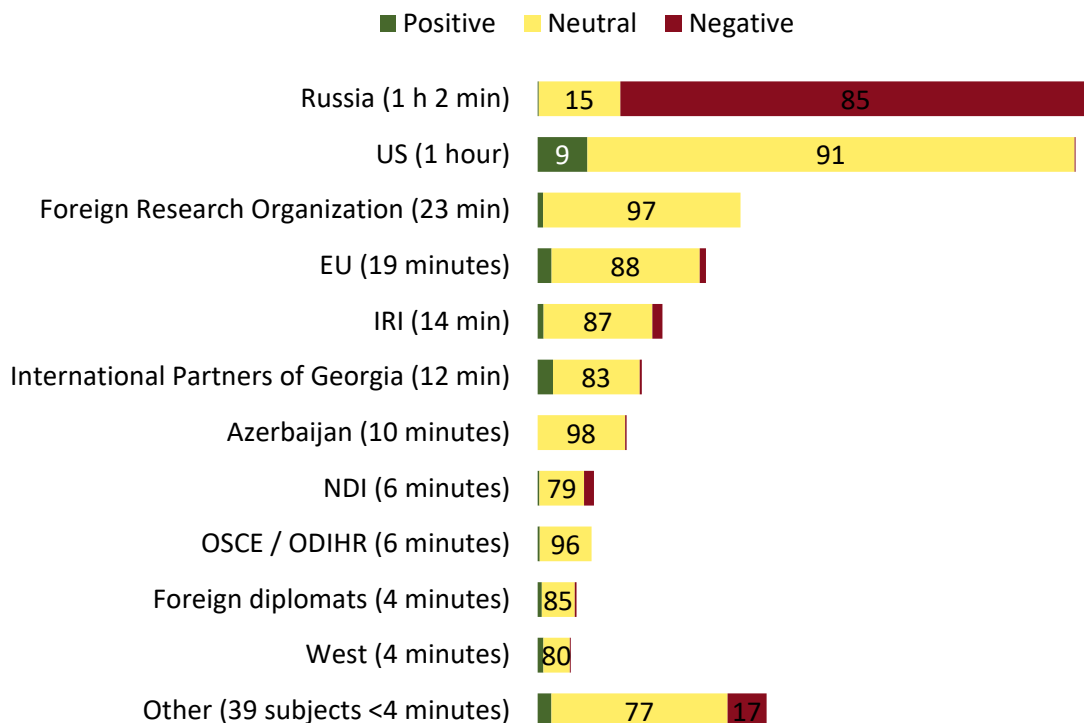
Tone of coverage of foreign actors (%) Imedi



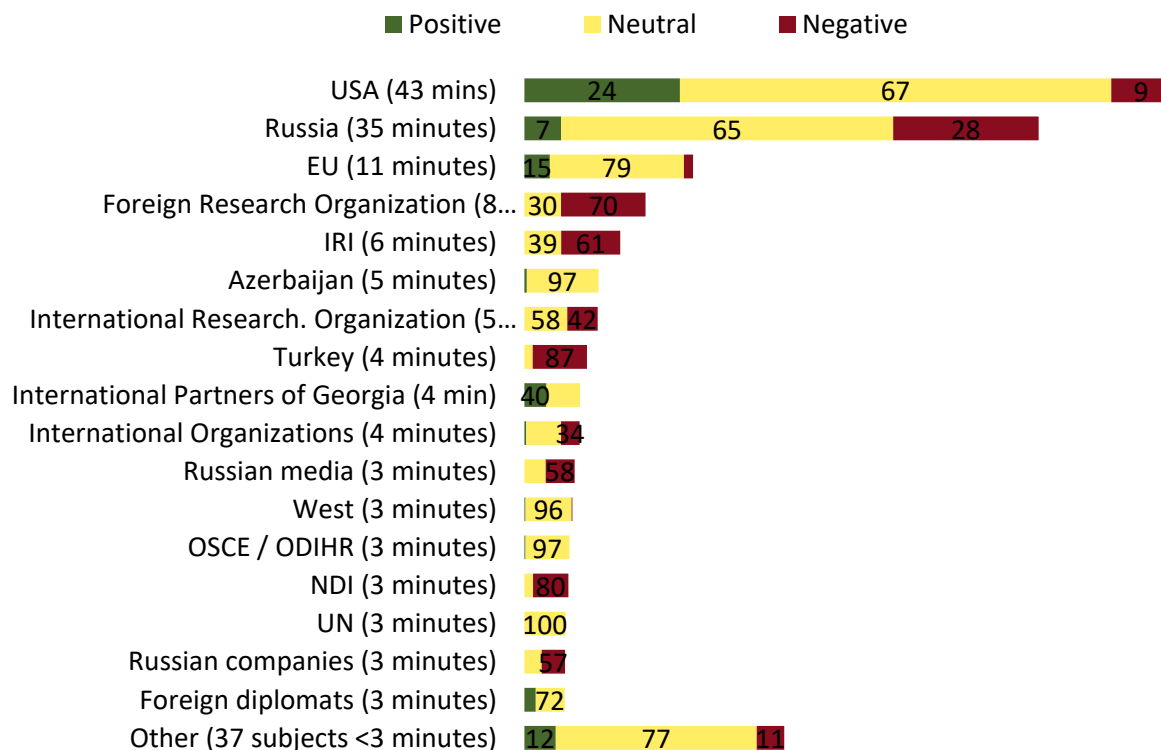
Tone of coverage of foreign actors (%) Mtavari Arkhi



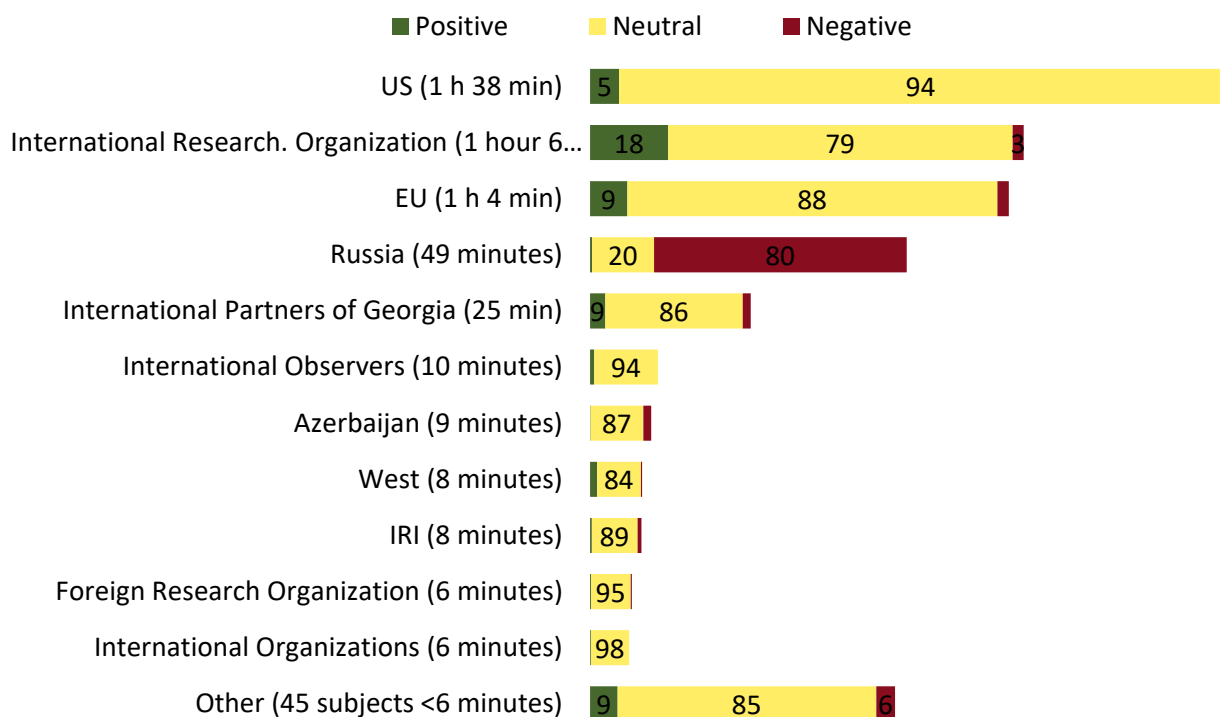
Tone of coverage of foreign actors (%) TV Pirveli



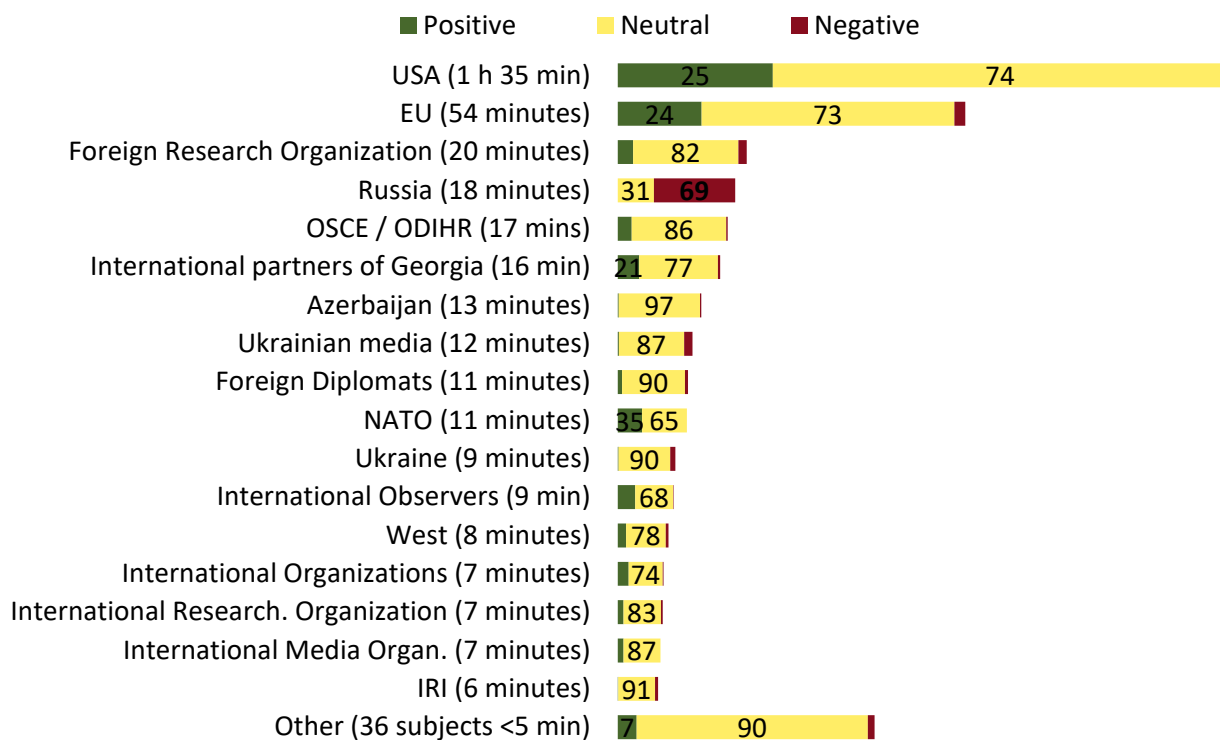
Tone of coverage of foreign actors (%) Obiektivi



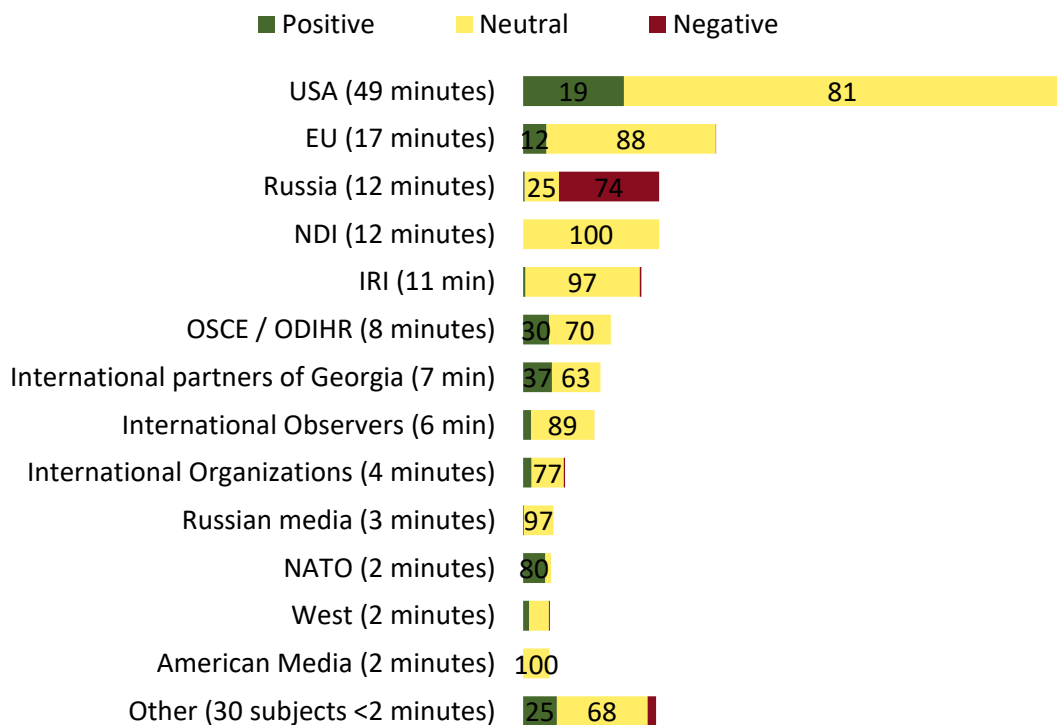
Tone of Coverage of Foreign Actors(%) Formula



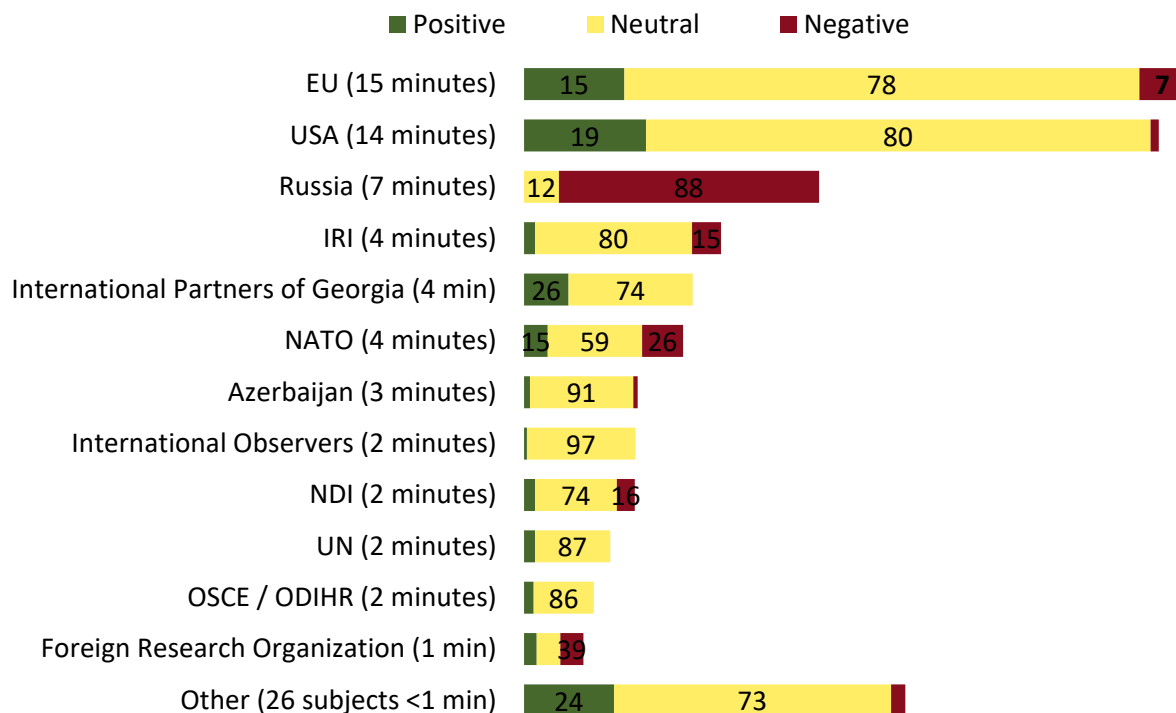
Tone of coverage of foreign actors (%) Pos TV



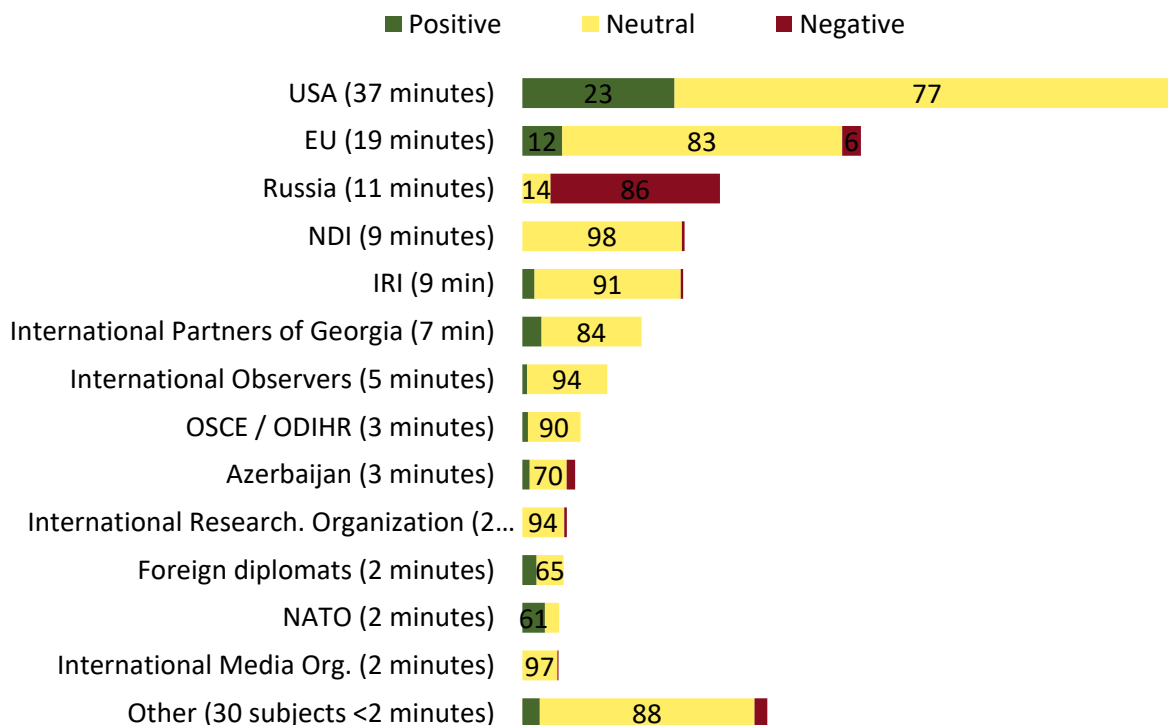
Tone of Coverage of Foreign Actors (%) Ajara TV



Tone of coverage of foreign actors (%) Palitra News



Tone of coverage of foreign actors (%) Kavkasia



Tone of coverage of foreign actors (%) Maestro

