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საქართველოსთვის  
The European Union for Georgia



## Research on Media Coverage for 2017 Local Government Elections

### Monitoring of Radios

19 June- 8 October 2017



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Internews-Georgia is implementing the monitoring of radios for coverage of the 2017 Local Government Elections within the framework of the project Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for 2017 Local Government Elections in Georgia supported by the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The monitoring started on June 19 and will last until November 19 inclusively. It includes the monitoring of 14 radio broadcasters. The list of the radio outlets monitored in 2017 includes: Radio 1 (The Public Broadcaster), Imedi, Fortuna, Radio Liberty, Palitra, Pirveli Radio, Maestro, Abkhazetis Khma, Dzveli Kalaki (Kutaisi), Rioni (Kutaisi), Atinati (Zugdidi), Hereti (Tbilisi/Lagodekhi), Marneuli and Adjara (Batumi).

#### **Monitoring methodology:**

The monitoring of radio broadcast news outlets consists of quantitative and qualitative researches. Quantitative monitoring determines the indicators, that can be counted and analysed. As concerns the qualitative monitoring, it is used to evaluate the effectiveness of media, regarding the indicators such as ethical and professional standards, quantitative measurement of them is difficult. In particular, the attention is paid to distortion of an information, unbalanced coverage, tendency and any fact that has a crucial meaning to provide the quality of information.

#### **Quantitative research includes:**

- ***Counting the time allocated to the subject*** - time (seconds) is counted, when a news anchor speaks about subject, as well as the journalist or any respondent. The time allocated for the subject is summed up during the analyses;
- ***Direct/indirect coverage*** - All the cases, when the subjects of a monitoring speak themselves, (voice sounds) The time is counted as a direct coverage. When others are talking about the subject, journalists or respondents, the time is counted as an indirect coverage.
- ***Tone of coverage*** – The coverage tone is given to all subjects under monitoring. There are three types of categories to evaluate the tone: Positive, neutral and negative. Whenever the time is allocated to the subject, the tone of coverage is evaluated too, so that means that, the seconds/minutes that were allocated to a subject or were talking on a subject in a particular tone is regarded as the quantitative. While evaluating the tone, the attention is paid not only the content of the text but also a context. It is essential that behaviour of media is evaluated and not the controlled subject. Positive and negative assessment aims to determine if we are making a positive or negative impression regarding the subject.

#### **Qualitative research includes:**

- ***Balance*** – Monitoring observes, if the facts/issues covered in the news outlets are balanced and if the listener has an opportunity to hear the report in a various points of view and evaluate the given event in its own discretion. In such cases the attention is paid to information sources and respondents with different opinions;

- ***Impartiality*** – Observation is conducted not only based on one of the stories, but on the basis of total results. Partiality is determined by any of the subject/subjects distinguished with high coverage and often with positive or negative tones.
- ***Precision*** – Monitoring observes, how the journalist's conclusion and materials used in the report coincide. Are there errors in the names, numbers, identity of respondent;
- ***Fact based coverage*** – Attention is paid, whether there are the comments that confirm the facts presented in the report. Does the listener have the ability to convince in the reality of the journalist story;
- ***Timely reporting of facts*** - Monitoring observes how timely is covered the facts and after a certain period of time how relevant is to prepare a report on this issue in terms of other events.
- ***Ignoring news*** – If a significant fact that occurred in the country is not covered by any news outlet or channels, it is recorded during the monitoring.
- ***Facts of the using "hidden political advertising"*** - surveillance will be carried whether the PR is separated from the information, are there places for hidden positive or negative ads.
- ***Manipulation with music/sound*** – when the music used in the report creates a certain mood and causes positive or negative associations, it's considered that music is used in order to manipulate.

The monitoring methodology stipulates, that some politicians may change the party and political blocks, they may be united in any coalition / block, or may be separated from any coalition / block or may be registered with another name. All monitoring subjects will have their own data - both quantitative and qualitative, which will be analysed. Monitoring is carried out not only from the reports prepared on election, but also to all TV reports, where the monitoring subjects will be discussed.

During June 19 to October 8 the monitoring of radio channels revealed the following key findings:

- The most time was dedicated to the government, coalition Georgian Dream, United National Movement, European Georgia; also, the coverage was allocated to central and local government representatives;
- Radio broadcasters paid the most attention to political parties Georgian – Dream and United National Movement. However, compared to previous years less polarization was observed and time dedicated to other political parties was relatively increased;
- The competition is less felt among the radio broadcasters: journalists rarely prepare exclusive stories;
- The news provided by different broadcasters was sometimes identical, seems anchor distributes information provided by information agencies and journalists do not try to collect additional facts;

- Majority of radio broadcasters dedicated less time to events developed in the regions;
- Majority of radio broadcasters provided less coverage of social issues and problems of minorities;
- No deep analyses of election programmes of political parties and visions for the country's development were observed during the reporting period;
- The public broadcasters would much less contribute to the voter's informed choice: The 'Radio 1' had been working impartially, however the information was superficial; 'Adjara' had been presenting the government in the clear-cut positive context;
- Most of the radio journalists did not try to substantiate and verify the statements of the respondents.

Radio broadcasters were unbiased, no cases of violation of the standards of Journalistic Ethics were observed.

### Radio 1 (The Public Broadcaster)

*Radio 1 had been impartially covering events. Compared to the previous years, the time of the news program was increased for a few minutes and that allowed the journalists to broaden the themes of discussions and present different positions around the issues. Thus, the news became relatively diverse, but it was still a problem for the journalists to substantiate the comments of the respondents, to reveal additional information and there was lack of the tough and critical questions.*

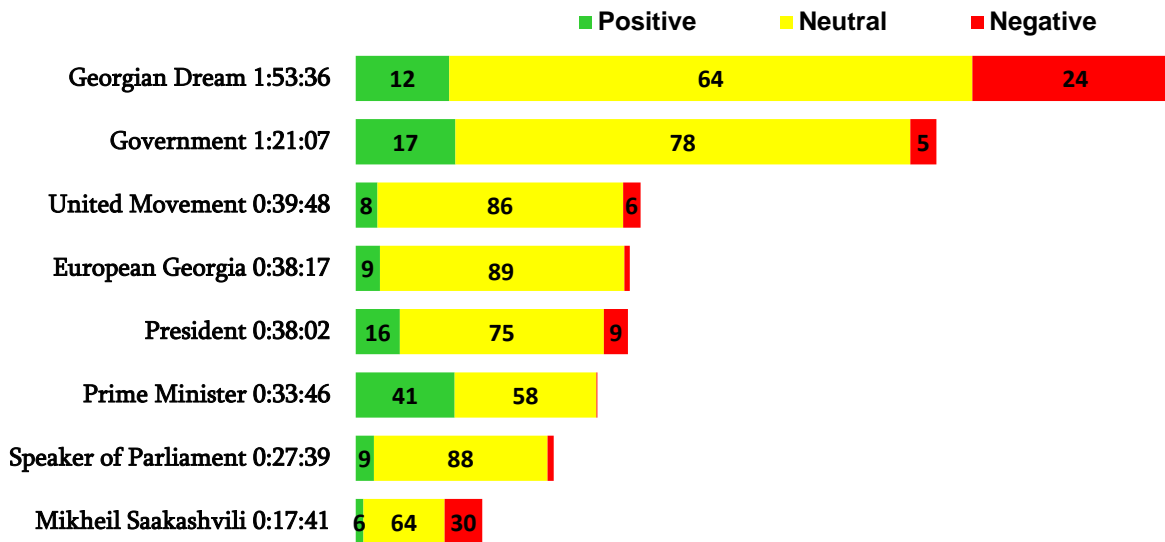
The radio broadcaster allocated total 7 hours and 53 minutes of coverage to the monitoring subjects, out of which 24% was allocated to Georgian Dream, 17% to the government and 8% to United National Movement. The radio broadcaster had been actively covering the pre-election campaign. 11% of the coverage time was dedicated to the non-parliamentary opposition parties but the news on their mayoral candidates had been rarely covered. The stories were mostly limited to the bald quotes on the statements of the politicians. That was reflected in the increase of the neutral tone indicators. The broadcaster itself had been making mostly the stark citations on the statements of the leading respondents, that gave an average of 11% to the direct speeches.

The standards of journalistic ethics were observed on-air of the radio broadcaster. When reporting on the rally of the 'Georgian Marsh', during which the participants had been making comments of the xenophobic character, the reporter explained to the audience that the Public Broadcaster rejected the discriminatory statements made during the rally.

Like in the previous years, the radio broadcaster was unbiased towards any of the political subject. The balance in the news coverage was much more observed.

## Time allocated to the subjects on the Radio 1 according to the tone (%)

19 June - 8 October, 2017



### Pirveli Radio

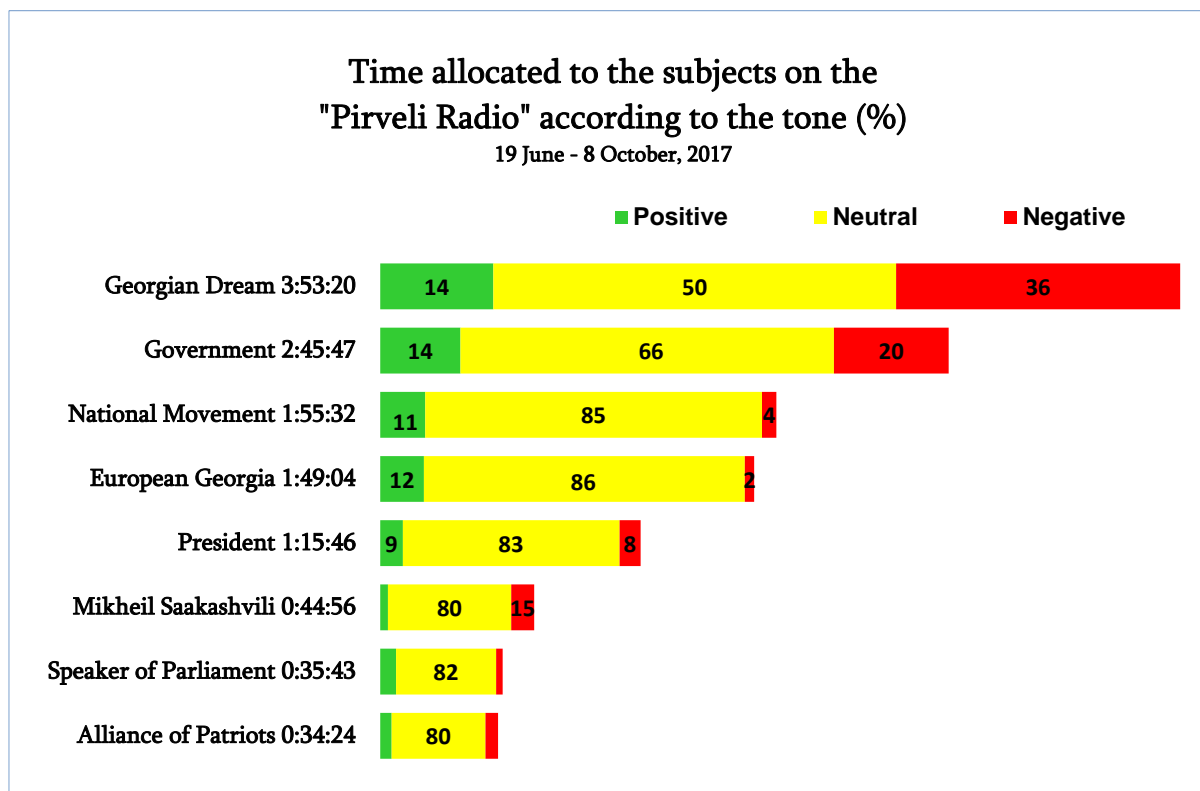
*The daily news had been intensively covered. Compared to the previous years, the news program releases prepared by the radio broadcaster were much more balanced, though, the entire process lacked in depth analysis. The journalists had not been asking tough and critical questions despite the lengthy timing and their proactivity remained a problem.*

The radio broadcaster allocated total 16 hours and 54 minutes of coverage to the monitoring subjects. Most of the coverage time (23%) was dedicated to the party Georgian Dream, then come the government (16%) and the ‘United National Movement’ (11%).

The radio broadcaster had been actively covering the pre-election campaign. The Georgian Dream had accumulated the highest negative coverage (36%) in Pirveli Radio broadcasting. The criticism of their opponents had been frequently heard in their address, and this fact increased the negative coverage rate. In addition, there was unequal distribution of coverage time allocated for direct speeches. For example, the ‘United National Movement’ and the ‘European Georgia’ had been given more than twice as much coverage time for direct speeches than the ruling party.

The activities of the Tbilisi mayoral candidates in the radio broadcast releases were the most intensive, though, they were quite superficially covered. Most of the coverage time (21 minutes) was accumulated by Kakha Kaladze, the candidate of the ruling party. Then, with 14 minutes come Elene Khoshtaria, the mayoral candidate of the ‘European Georgia’ and Zaal Udumashvili, the mayoral candidate of the ‘United National Movement’, with 13 minutes.

Compared to the previous reporting period, the stories were more balanced. However, the journalists covered just the information provided by the politicians during the meetings with population, without asking the critical questions. The news covered by the broadcaster were more balanced and the journalists were unbiased towards any of the political power. The voice of the NGO sector was often heard in the news program, but the journalists did not quite try to substantiate the facts and find more information.



## Radio Palitra

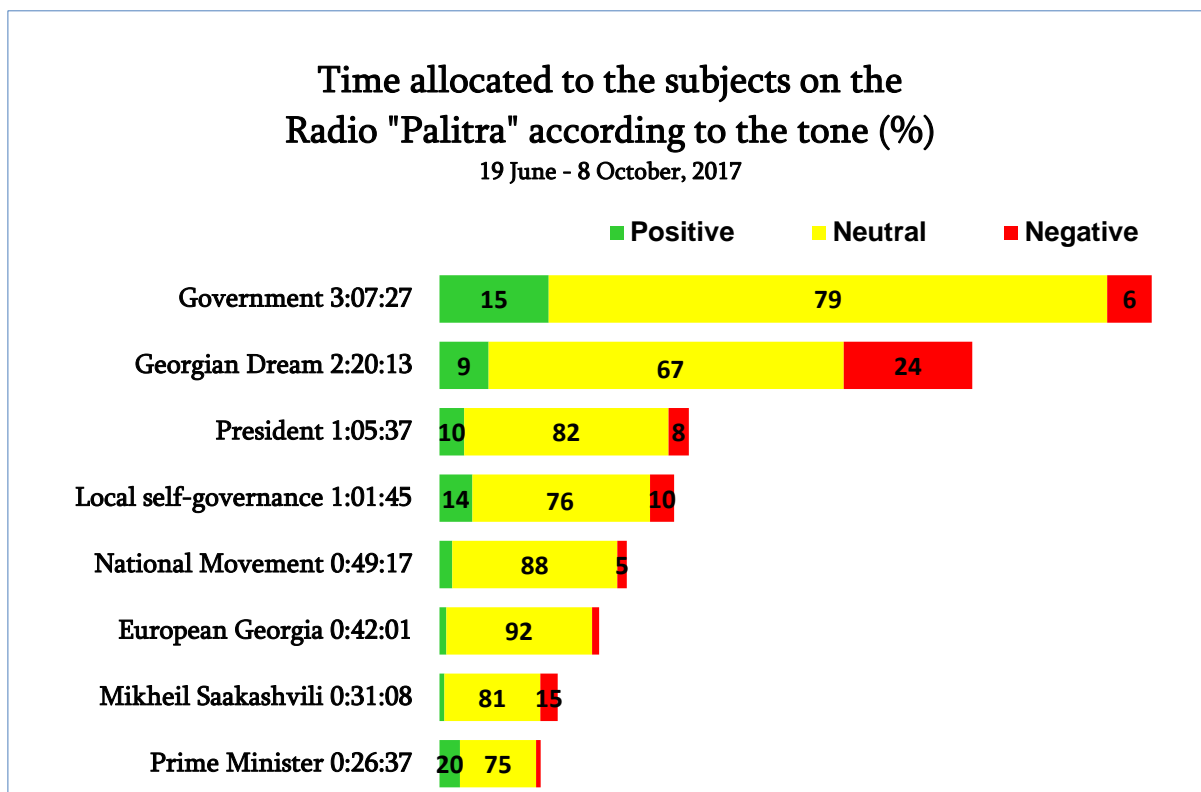
*Radio Palitra had been actively broadcasting the daily news. The broadcaster was notably balanced with the variety of information sources like in the previous years. Though, compared to the past period, the proactivity of the journalists was less visible and the number of exclusive stories prepared by them was limited in number. The critical questions had been also rarely asked and that eventually resulted in the significant increase of the neutral tone indicators.*

Radio Palitra allocated total 11 hours and 53 minutes of coverage to the monitoring subjects. The monitoring subjects had the equal opportunity for the direct speeches (An average 24% of the coverage time). 26% of the coverage time was dedicated to the government, 19% to the Georgian Dream and 9% to the President. The voice of the non-parliamentary political parties had been much less heard and only 8% of the broadcasting time was allocated to them.

The radio broadcaster had been covering the pre-election campaign quite superficially and was limited to the announcement of the candidates' addresses. From all the Tbilisi mayoral candidates more than five minutes were allocated only to Kakha Kaladze, the candidate from

the ruling party and Alexandre Elisashvili, the independent candidate. The pre-election campaign in the regions was practically not covered.

The audience had a chance to listen to the considerations of politicians, as well as of the NGOs and specialists. There were no cases of biased coverage of any of the subjects observed. However, due to the positive tendencies revealed in the past years, there was much more expectation towards the radio broadcaster that the events would be covered critically and more comprehensive information about the pre-election campaign would be provided.



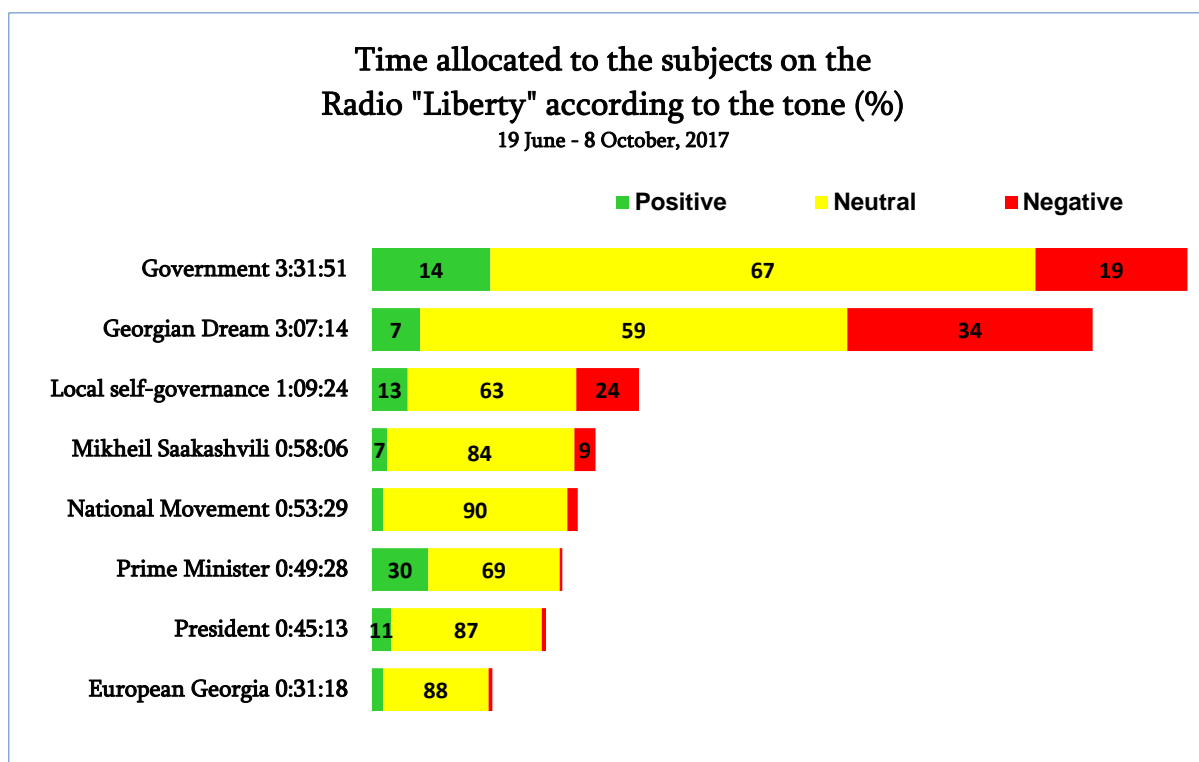
### Radio Liberty

*Radio Liberty continues to preserve the high standards of journalism. The listeners had the opportunity to be acquainted not only with the statements of politicians but also with the analyses of the events. The journalists had been raising critical questions and preparing the exclusive stories. The regions and the problems existing there were also in the focus of the radio broadcaster's attention. However, the limited coverage time was allocated to the pre-election campaign coverage, like it was observed in the previous years.*

The radio broadcaster allocated total 13 hours and 37 minutes of coverage to the monitored subjects. The biggest coverage time was allocated to the government (26%), the Georgian Dream (23%) and the local government (9%). A quarter of the coverage time allocated to the subjects was dedicated to the direct speeches.

The positions of all the political parties, including politicians, the NGOs and experts were presented in the analytical stories. The journalists tried to find interesting topics that had been less likely be covered by other media.

The radio broadcaster had been covering the events impartially and extensively. The journalists were also trying to verify the statements of politicians and thus, the audience had much more opportunity to draw conclusions. It would be desirable that the Radio ‘Liberty’ would take more responsibility to cover the pre-election campaign of the political parties more frequently and with high professional standards.



## Radio Maestro

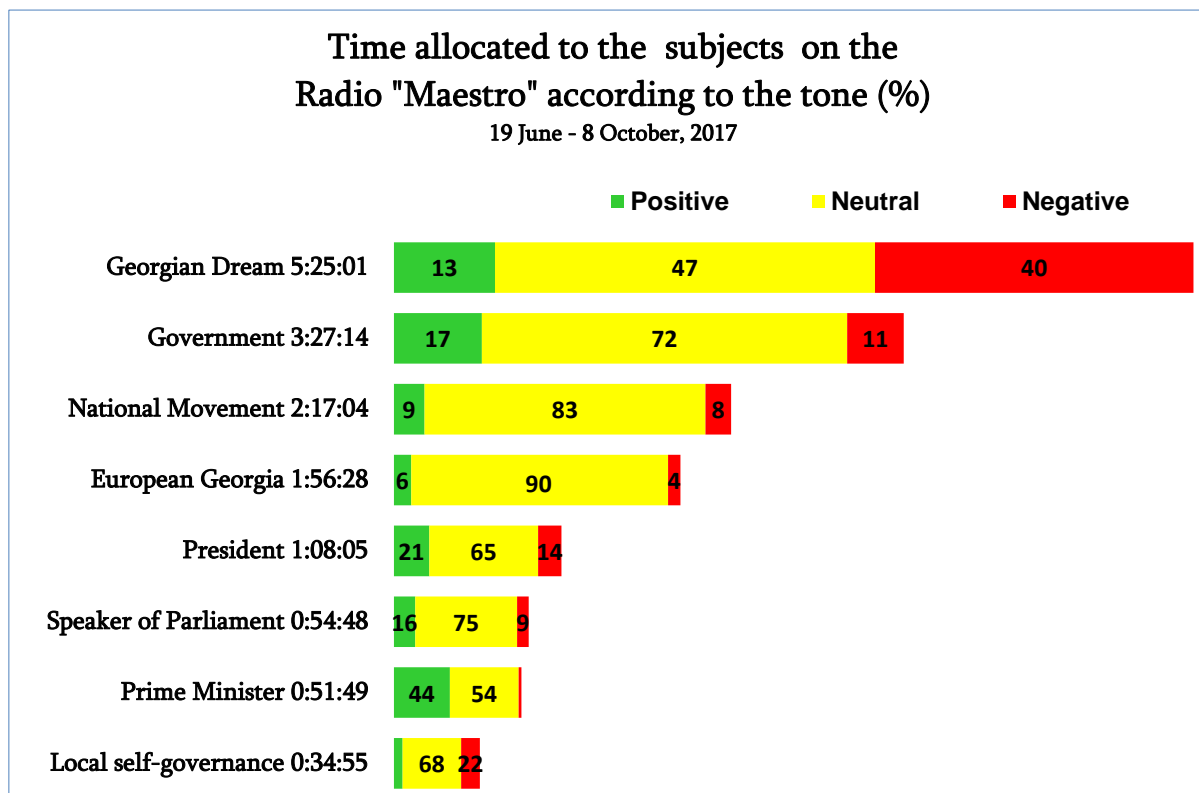
*Radio Maestro had been preparing the extensive news program with active involvement of the political parties, including the activities of the political parties involved in the election campaign. Compared to other radio broadcasters, important coverage time (1 hour and 38 minutes) was allocated to the Tbilisi mayoral candidates. However, the listener heard their speeches only and as for the journalists, they could not find the additional information, did not verify the facts and could not manage to ask politicians the critical questions.*

The radio broadcaster allocated 20 hours and 40 minutes of coverage to the monitored subjects. Most of the coverage time was allocated to the Georgian Dream (26%), the government (17%) and the ‘United National Movement’ (11%). However, quite often the coverage time was allocated to the non-parliamentary opposition political parties (2 hours and 35 minutes in total).



The radio broadcaster had been covering the events impartially. However, the cases of unbalanced coverage were observed: the opponents often accused the Georgian Dream and the positions of the ruling team were not covered sometimes, nor did the journalists try to verify the issues with the third parties.

Time coverage for the news programs allowed the radio broadcaster to cover the topics more deeply. It would be desirable that the emphasis would be made not only on the capital but the regions as well. In addition, the journalists lacked proactively, and thus, the information in the news program releases was largely determined by the general statements of the politicians and not the issues raised by the journalists, as well as those that were on the agenda.

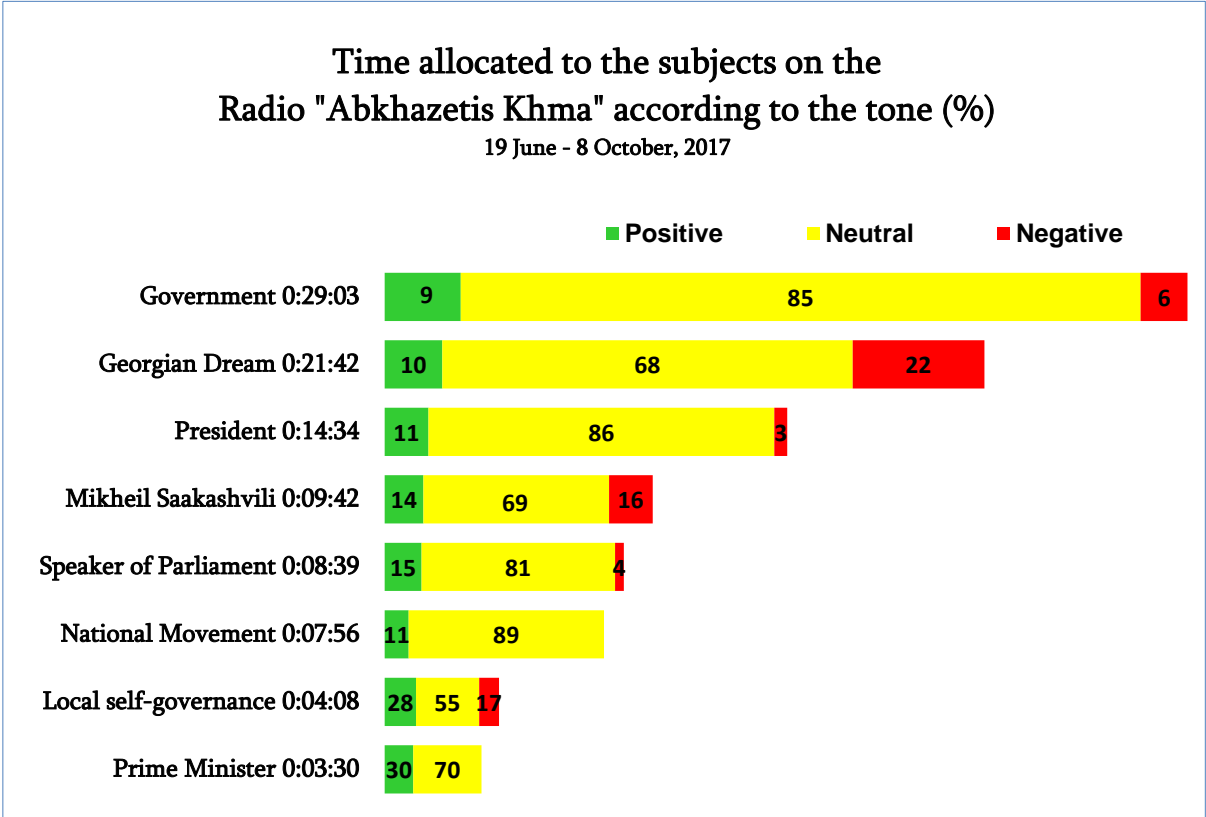


### Radio Abkhazetis Khma

*Radio Abkhazetis Khma produced short programs. The journalists reported news briefly in the style of the news agencies. The radio broadcaster did not express biased attitude towards any political subject, though the listener could not make the argumentative conclusions because of the superficial coverage of the events.*

The monitoring subjects were allocated only 1 hour and 53 minutes of coverage. Most frequently, the government (26%), the Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia' (19%) and the President (13%) had been covered. Respondents did not have the opportunity to make the direct speeches. The journalist's text and the quotations were mostly neutral.

The balance in news was quite often observed and demonstrated the assessments both government and the opposition. However, the listener lacked any additional information and analyses. The journalists could have had more clarity on the certain issues by finding a variety of sources and with more active involvement of specialists and the civil society sector.



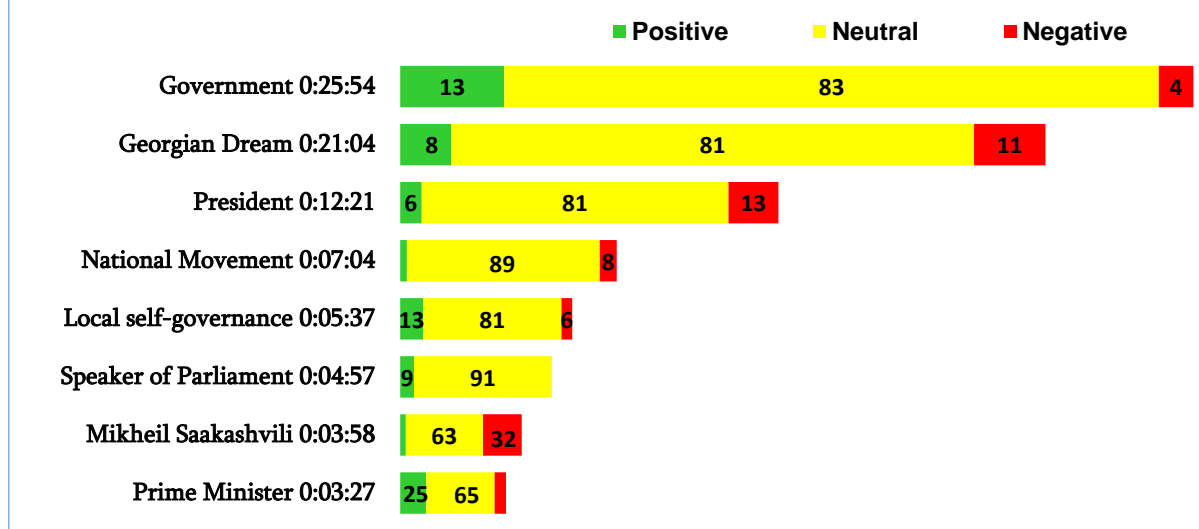
**Radio Fortuna**

*Radio Fortuna had been broadcasting the news program with short timing and the news were briefly and superficially covered. The materials prepared in the format of the news agencies did not allow to provide the comprehensive information in full and to make the analyses.*

The radio broadcaster allocated 1 hour and 37 minutes of coverage to the monitoring subjects. The journalists themselves quoted comments of the respondents, out of the allocated coverage time 26% had been given to the government, 21% to the Georgian Dream and 12 % to the President. The radio broadcaster had been covering the pre-election campaign rather superficially. The coverage time allocated to the mayoral candidates did not exceed 4 minutes. Although, the biased attitude towards any of the monitoring subjects was not observed, however, the news program, in case if considered separately, was unbalanced and frequently relying only on one single source. Thus, the broadcaster still faces the challenge to solve the problems that have been observed for several times over the past years.

### Time allocated to the subjects on the Radio "Fortuna" according to the tone (%)

19 June - 8 October, 2017



#### Radio Imedi

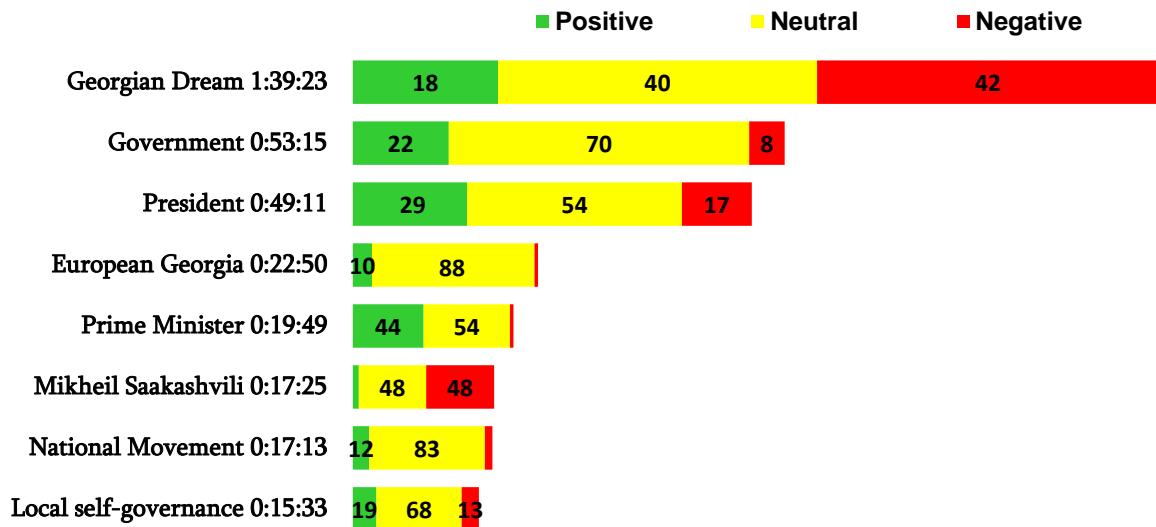
*Radio Imedi was covering the news on a brief manner.. The journalists were mostly limited to the bald quotes of the politicians statements and did not ask any critical questions and did not try to verify the statements of the respondents. Compared to the last year, imbalance was no longer in favor of the ruling political party and the formal balance was more observed in the covered stories. However, the lack of proactivity and monotonous issues remained a serious problem, and if not solved, the broadcaster would not be definitely able to contribute to the voter's awareness.*

5 hours and 44 minutes of coverage were allocated to the monitoring subjects. 29% of the coverage time was allocated to the Georgian Dream, 15% to the government and 14% to the President. The respondents, on average, had 33% of the coverage time for the direct speeches, however, the news reports did not provide additional information, did not involve specialists in the discussions and had lack of analyses.

The journalists were not even preparing the exclusive stories and no covering of the news on the vulnerable groups or the minority issues had been observed. The programing would be more diverse and informative in case of more proactivity of the journalists and coverage of the topics on which politicians usually do not talk at the press conferences.

### Time allocated to the subjects on the Radio "Imedi" according to the tone (%)

19 June - 8 October, 2017



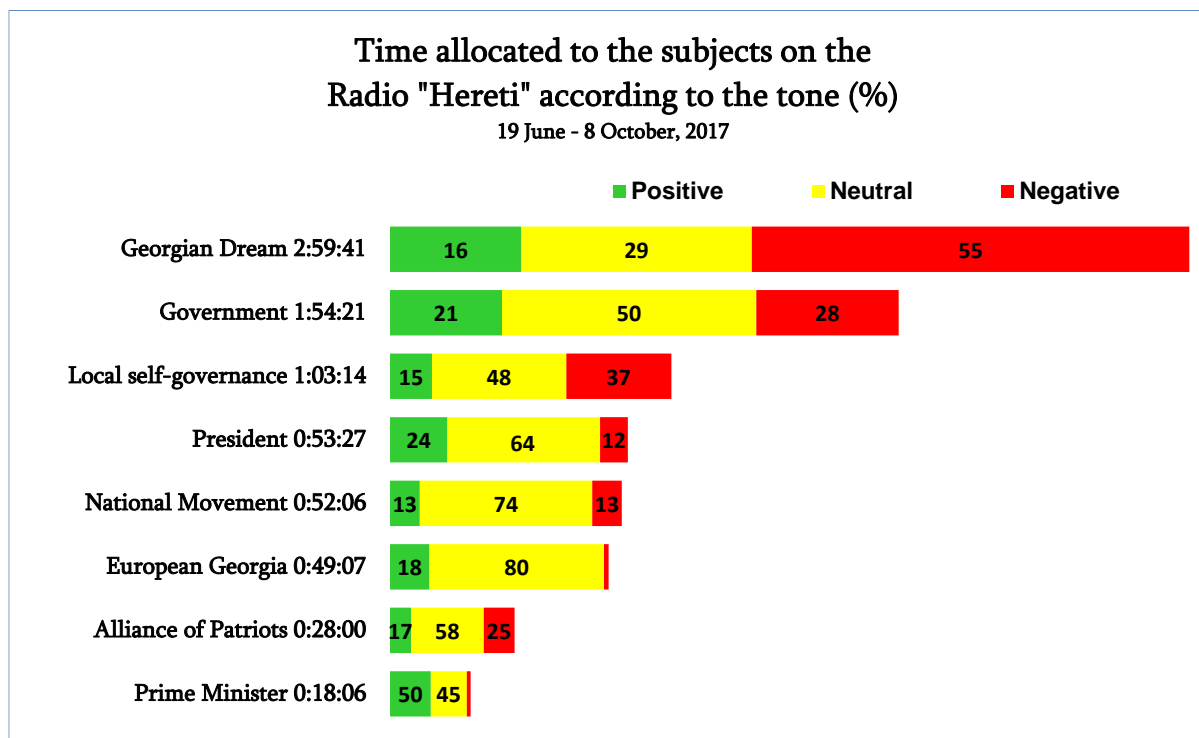
#### Radio Hereti (Tbilisi / Lagodekhi)

*Radio Hereti had been preparing extensive news programs where journalists did not hesitate to ask critical questions and tried to present events within the different perspectives. In the past years, much attention was paid to cover the events in Kakheti and its capital, though recently, the content of the news program had become more diverse and covering the problems of other regions had been initiated. The superficial coverage of the pre-election campaign remained a problem like it was in the previous years.*

11 hours and 18 minutes of coverage were allocated to the monitoring subjects. 26% of the coverage time was allocated to the Georgian Dream, 17% to the government and 9% to the local government. In general, the governmental team had been referred in the coverage in more negative than positive context because of the tough questions asked by the journalists together with the critical statements of the opposition. The balance was observed in most of the stories and the ruling team could make comments in response. An average 33% of the coverage time was allocated to the direct speeches of the subjects. The non-parliamentary opposition parties were not among the most frequently covered subjects, though, 1 hour and 11 minutes in total were allocated to them.

The journalists worked proactively. They were also preparing exclusive stories and addressed the topics that most other radio broadcasters did not cover. For example, the stories were prepared on the problems of peasants, gender issues, socially vulnerable people and the similarly sensitive matters. This allowed the radio broadcaster to emphasize the specific

problems and focus the positions of those people who were responsible for the problems, instead of covering the defamatory statements of politicians. In addition, the journalists were not limited to a single coverage of the events and had been returning back to the discussions on the mentioned problems during the next radio broadcasting.



### Radio Dzveli Kalaki (Kutaisi)

*Radio Dzveli Kalaki was covering mainly current events in the Imereti region. The news was balanced and the positions of different political parties were presented, though the journalists were less likely to ask the critical questions, thus, both the government and the opposition had more positive than the critical coverage.*

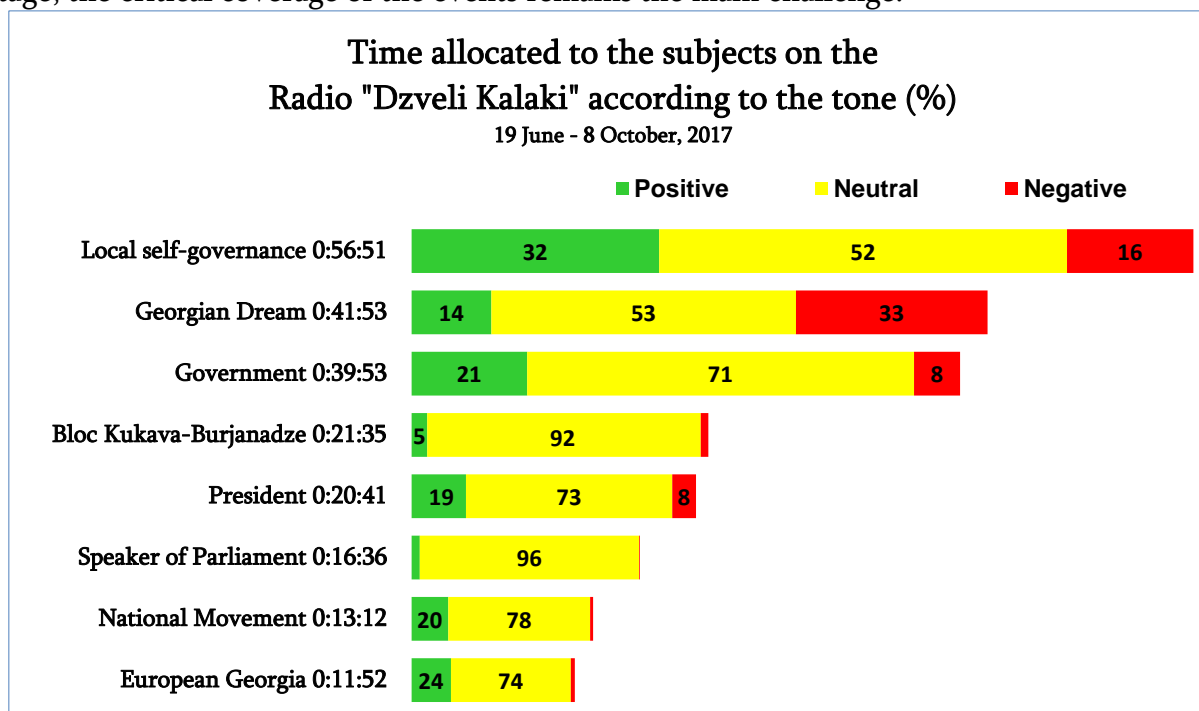
The radio broadcaster allocated 4 hours and 17 minutes of coverage to the monitoring subjects. 22% of the coverage time was allocated to the local government, 16% to the Georgian Dream and 16% to the government. Relatively little coverage time was dedicated to the opposition parties, including the non-parliamentary opposition. The respondents had the possibility to deliver the direct speeches ( An average 28% of the coverage time).

The journalists often covered the pre-election campaign. In one of the program, they compiled the pre-election promises of the Kutaisi mayoral candidates and introduced them to the

listeners. Similar information is especially important for the people living in regions because other radio broadcasters rarely speak about their mayoral candidates.

The radio broadcaster often covered the problems of the population and commented on the opinions of those responsible for these issues. For example, the problems related to drinking water, infrastructures, IDPs and socially unprotected families were included in the coverage. The journalists were gradually providing the updated information on the issues that already had been covered.

The journalists were proactively working and tried to find relevant topics for the news. At this stage, the critical coverage of the events remains the main challenge.



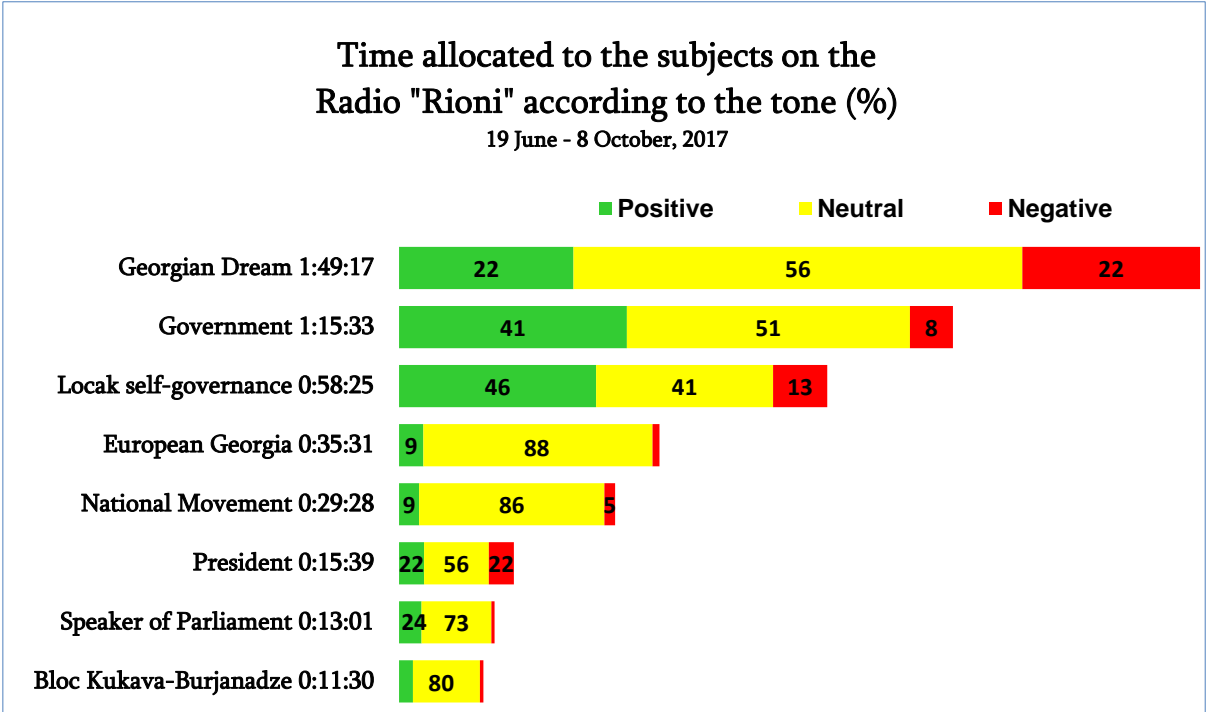
### Radio Rioni (Kutaisi)

*Radio Rioni actively covered both the main and the local news. The radio programs were dedicated to the coverage of the political issues and the political pre-election activities, though the journalists did not ask critical questions and thus, the representatives of the government authorities were able to present themselves in a positive way.*

The total time for coverage of the monitoring subjects was 6 hours and 33 minutes on the radio broadcaster. Most of the coverage time was allocated to the Georgian Dream (28%), the government (19%) and the local government (15%). An average, 40% of the coverage time was allocated to the direct speeches. Like in the past year, coverage of the government in the positive context remained the mainstream. That particularly referred to the local government authorities and Shota Murgulia, Mayor of Kutaisi, who also participated in the news coverage of the cultural events.

The radio broadcaster often covered the pre-election campaign. However, the listener had little information about the views and programs of the mayoral candidates.

The journalists were less likely to talk about social and other vulnerable groups. They were not proactive and had been mainly following the agendas of the politicians, thus, the news were largely limited to the statements of the politicians and the existing problems remained not being prioritised by the journalists. The key challenge of the radio broadcaster is the critical coverage of the news and coverage of events from the different angles.



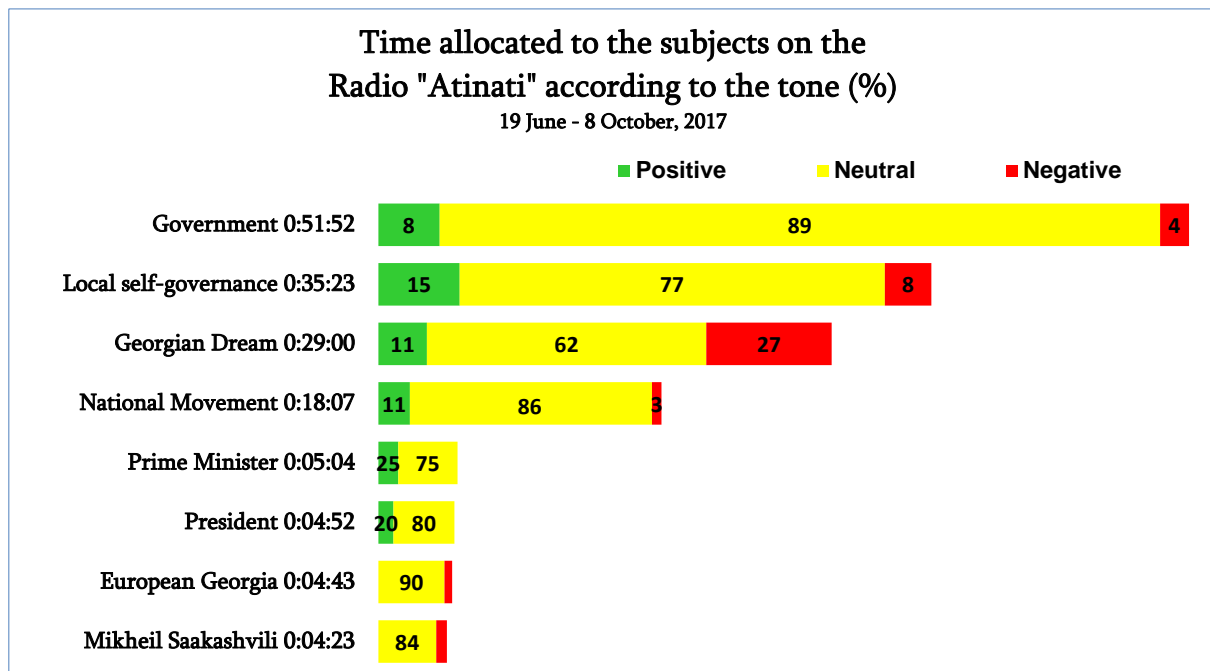
**Radio Atinati (Zugdidi)**

*Radio Atinati mainly covered the events in Samegrelo region. The news were short and superficial. The journalists had been working impartially, though presented the statements of the politicians without putting any critical questions, without giving any analysis or verifying the information.*

The radio broadcaster allocated 2 hours and 42 minutes of coverage to the monitoring subjects. Most of the coverage time was allocated to the government (32%), the local government (22%) and the Georgian Dream. The respondents had an average 18% of the coverage time for the direct speeches.

The journalists quoted the statements of the local mayoral candidates while covering the pre-election campaign, though their views and different programs of other mayoral candidates were not covered.

The radio broadcaster dedicated much time to cover cultural events, though much less attention was paid to the problems of the vulnerable groups.



## Radio Marneuli

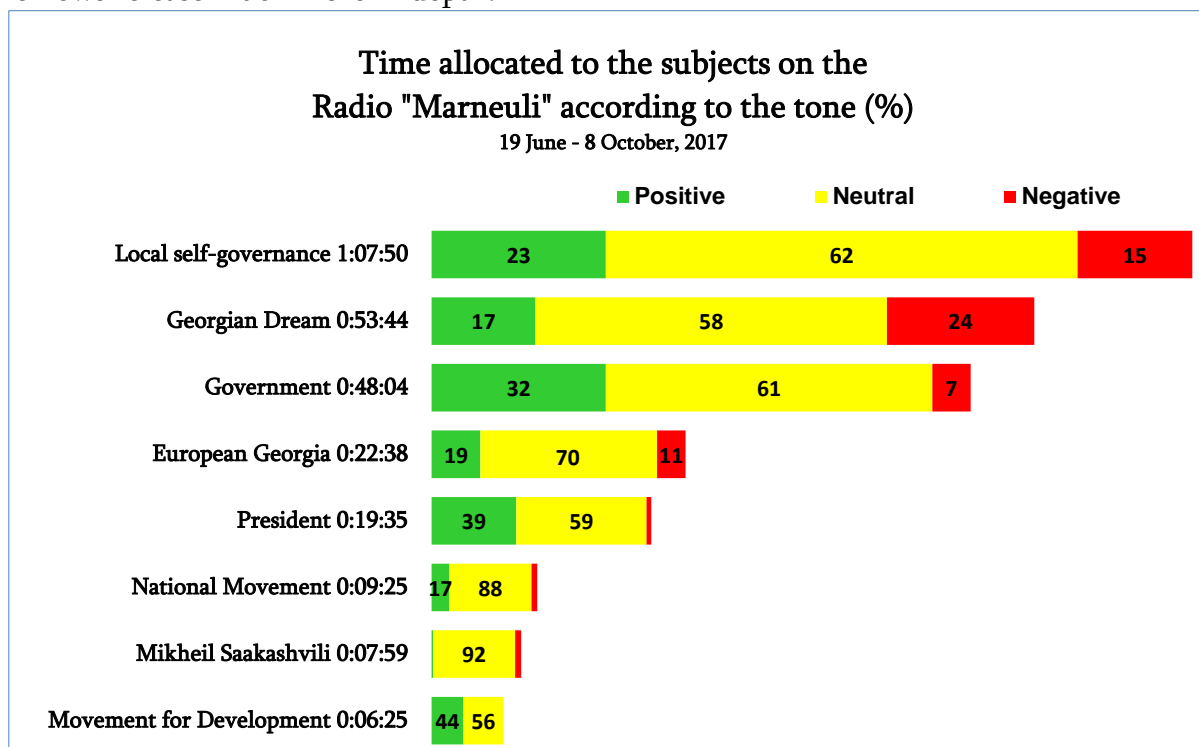
*Radio Marneuli had been focused on the ongoing events in the Kvemo Kartli region and had been covering the main news referring to different media outlets at the end of the program. The journalists worked impartially, though the radio channel is still working in a kind of pilot mode. This was reflected by frequent changes of the reporting format, mechanical mistakes of the journalists and the technical malfunctions of the broadcaster. Such shortcomings would prevent the audience from perceiving the information. However, it should be clearly stated that the radio broadcaster had made a big progress since the beginning of the monitoring and continued to improve day by day the quality of the broadcasted content.*

The monitoring subjects were allocated 4 hours and 14 minutes of coverage. The local government had received most of the coverage time (27%), followed by the Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia (21%) and the government (19%). An average one quarter of the coverage time was given to the direct speeches of the respondents. The journalists dedicated much coverage time to the pre-election developments in Marneuli. Unlike most of the other radio broadcasters, the coverage was not limited only to the meetings of the candidates with



the population and tried to report on experiences and concrete views of the subjects taking part in the elections.

The journalists often referred to such important issues as premature marriage, women's involvement in politics and rights of the minorities. It is obvious that the desire of the journalists to cover the events impartially and prepare the balanced reports are the major prerequisite for the quality of radio broadcasting. However, the radio broadcaster has a lot of work to eliminate the technical problems, to compile the final format of the program and make the news release much more in depth.



### Radio Adjara (Batumi)

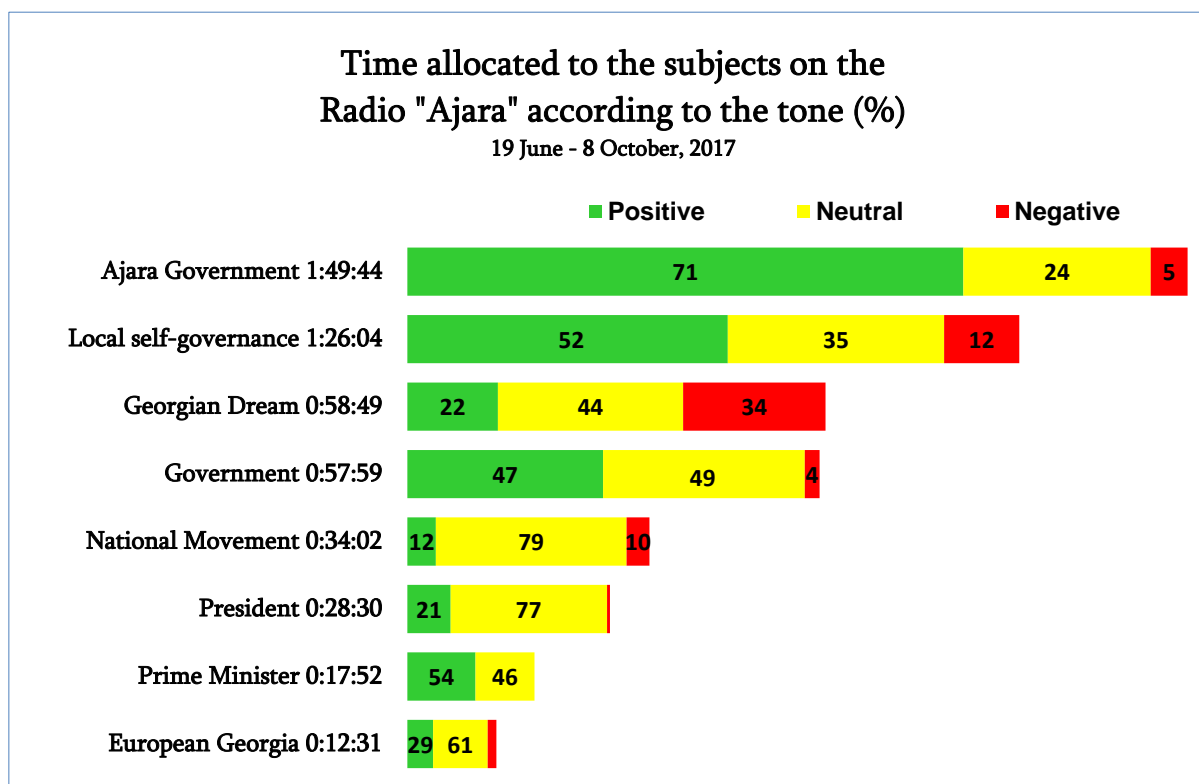
*Radio Adjara prepared extensive chain of news however, the stories were not much informative. A lot of coverage time was dedicated to the activities of the government, though the journalists did not ask critical questions and a part of the news was conducted in a form of the press releases of the governmental agencies. Accordingly, the ruling party team was covered in a particularly positive context.*

The monitoring subjects were allocated 7 hours and 18 minutes of coverage. 71% of the coverage time was dedicated to the coverage of the government and the ruling party, while the opposition had been allocated a short period of coverage time. The non-parliamentary opposition parties were also out of focus and were allotted only 10 minutes.

The Adjara government and the local self-governments were particularly positively covered. The journalists focused on successful implementation of various government projects; The statements of the members of the government were frequently heard even while covering the

cultural and sport events. The radio reports where the voices of not satisfied population was heard, had been largely ending with the promising comments of a government representative and usually not followed by the critical questions of the journalists. The situation was slightly improved after the official announcement of the date of elections, though not in a way that it made any influence on the existing general picture.

If journalists do not pursue coverage of the reported issues in depth and do not ask critical questions on the statements of responsible persons, the doubts on being unbiased would be further strengthened. In addition, the existing practice of improper presentation of the respondents has been still remaining a problem for years already, and this is the reason why sometimes it is unclear whose voice has been heard on-air.



## Conclusion

The radio broadcasters were actively covering the political events during the monitoring period, though their attention was less focused on the pre-election campaign. Most of the coverage time was dedicated to the government, the local governments and to the Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia. Out of all the Tbilisi mayoral candidates, Kakha Kaladze, Zaal Udumashvili, Elene Khoshtaria and Aleksandre Elisashvili were covered most frequently. The mayoral candidates of other self-governing cities were given an insignificant coverage time, the pre-election campaign was superficially covered and was limited to quotes on the statements of the politicians like in the past years.

Compared to the previous years, the improvement of the balance in the news reporting was observed, as the different positions of the parties were presented in the stories. However, most

of the radio broadcasters did not try to verify the compliance of the respondents' statements with the real facts. Consequently, the contradictory comments of politicians were heard and the role of journalists to help the audiences in finding the truth was not noticeable. Journalists lacked proactivity to find those topics for discussions on which politicians usually do not talk. They did not ask neither tough and critical questions, nor could they use possibility to enrich the content with the public information, the statistics, or with the various research data; Radio Liberty and Radio Hereti were the exceptions.

Most of the radio broadcasters were unbiased towards any political party, journalists did not make subjective assessments and no cases of manipulating with voice/music had been observed.

These are the crucial factors for coverage of the pre-election campaign, but they are not quite enough to fully satisfy the high professional standards.