

**First preliminary report on media coverage of contestants during the election campaign period**

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Media Plan, an independent, non-partisan organization dedicated to freedom of expression and the media, has been systematically monitoring the media coverage of the October general elections. Media Plan seeks to evaluate the monitored media's performance in providing objective and balanced coverage of the contestants and their platforms so the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina can make well-informed choices at the ballot box. The main objective of the project is to inform the public about the conduct of media during the pre-election campaign and to initiate a discussion about the objectivity and quality of the media reporting. The project is supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the UK Government, the Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and the European Union.

The monitoring is intended to offer professional, comprehensive, and objective assessment of political diversity, accuracy, and balance in news and current affairs coverage on nine television channels, three radio stations, six newspapers, and four online media outlets.<sup>1</sup> The project's findings are not intended to support any one candidate or political party, but the integrity of the media environment as a whole during the campaign season. The findings will be compiled in four monitoring reports about the media's behavior during the election campaign and are to be disseminated to the public, media, civil society, political parties, and international community.

The methodology was developed by MEMO 98 which has carried out similar projects in 48 countries in the last 15 years.<sup>2</sup> Given its comprehensive content-oriented approach, the methodology is specially designed to provide in-depth feedback on pluralism and diversity in media reporting, including coverage of chosen subjects and themes. The outcome of the monitoring is not just a set of data, but a detailed analysis and evaluation of the current level of political diversity in media reporting, examined in the proper context, and incorporating concrete comparisons and analysis.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Television: BHTV1, FTV, RTRS, NTV Hayat, OBN, TV Pink BiH, TV BN, TV1, and ATV  
Radio: BH Radio, Radio FBiH, Radio RS  
Newspapers: Dnevni list, Glas Srpske, Nezavisne novine, Oslobođenje, Večernji list, and Dnevni avaz  
Web portals: Frontal, Klix, Radio Sarajevo portal, Bljesak

<sup>2</sup> [www.memo98.sk](http://www.memo98.sk)

<sup>3</sup> The media monitoring includes quantitative analysis of the coverage, which focussed on the amount of time allocated to each subject, as well as the tone of the coverage in which the relevant political subjects are portrayed: positive, neutral or negative. Qualitative analysis assesses the performance of the media against specific principles or benchmarks – such as ethical or professional standards – that cannot be easily quantified. Monitors report on lies, distortions, unbalanced coverage, unfairness, inaccuracy, bias, and anything else that is important to presenting the quality of reporting. This data is reported separately and integrated into the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.

Following is the summary of the main monitoring findings covering one week prior and one week of the official campaign period (1 – 14 September):

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- **The media as a whole have so far provided voters with a diverse range of information about electoral contestants and other relevant political subjects.**
- **Broadcasters have provided contestants with an opportunity to convey their messages to voters in many debates and newspapers and portals launched special election sections.**
- **A significant coverage was devoted to the activities of the authorities, many of whom are candidates in the elections. At the same time, apart from some exceptions, critical and independent opinions on the performance of the authorities have been absent from the coverage.**
- **Data from the first two weeks of monitoring shows wide differences in the way political subjects are portrayed and in the amount of coverage provided to them. Some monitored outlets more or less openly showed their sympathies towards particular political subjects.**
- **Voters would benefit from a more analytical and in-depth coverage that could help them to better analyze and assess the qualities and programs of electoral contestants.**

The preliminary media monitoring results for the period of 1 – 14 September indicate that there have been discernable differences in the way how the media have so far portrayed candidates, parties and other relevant subjects. The media as a whole have so far provided voters with a diverse range of information about different contestants and other political subjects. At the same time, however, most media focused their news coverage on the activities of authorities, outside of the campaign context. Many of them are also candidates in the elections. Moreover, the preliminary monitoring results also indicate that the editorial policy of some monitored media appears to be determined by the interest of owners and not that of viewers and readers.

The most significant events and topics drawing media attention during this monitoring period included the mining accident near Zenica and the detention of the Lijanovic brothers. Since the official start of the campaign on 12 September, a number of media outlets have started broadcasting special election programs (Election Chronicles). In addition, some newspapers and web portals have been publishing special election-focused sections. Moreover, most monitored TV channels have been airing debates between contestants, providing them a good opportunity to convey their messages directly to voters.

### **Television**

While all the media should offer responsible coverage during elections, it is particularly incumbent upon public broadcasters to observe even more rigorous criteria since they are publicly funded. The citizens pay fees and the public media have therefore legal and moral obligation to serve interest of the general public, not partisan or private interests.

#### ***BHTV1, Journal 2 (Dnevnik 2) at 19.00***

During the first two weeks of September, BHTV1 devoted most of its political and election-related prime time news coverage to the activities of the BiH Federation Government (30 per

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cent) which included distribution of aid for people affected by floods, the start of the new school's year and the accident at the *Raspotocje* coalmine. Thirty one per cent of this coverage was positive and fifty seven per cent was neutral. The next most covered subject was the BiH Council of Ministers which received 13 per cent of mainly neutral or negative coverage. As for the coverage of parties, the biggest share of the coverage was devoted to the SNSD and the SDA (respectively 10 per cent). The tone of the coverage for both parties was mainly positive and neutral.<sup>4</sup> The next most covered parties were as follow: the SDP (6 per cent), the NDP (5 per cent) and NSRzB (4 per cent).

### ***FTV, Journal (Dnevnik) at 19.30***

Similar to BHTV1, FTV allocated biggest share of its news coverage to the BiH Federation Government – 27 per cent. However, while the tone of the coverage on BHTV1 was mainly neutral or positive, as much as 52 per cent of FTV's coverage of BiH Federation Government was negative. This was mainly in connection with the Federation Government's work regarding recovery from the damages caused by the floods which was criticized as being very slow. In addition, in connection with the mine accident, the Federation Government was also criticized for the overall deterioration of the mining industry.

As for the coverage of the parties, the SDA and the SDP received comparable coverage – 9 and 8 per cent respectively. The evaluation of the tone revealed that the SDA received more positive coverage than the SDP or any other party. Other parties to receive a more significant coverage were the HDZ, the SDS, and the SNSD.

### ***RTRS, Journal (Dnevnik) at 19.30***

The monitoring revealed bias in favour of the RS authorities on RTRS news programs – the RS government and the president together received 45 per cent of the coverage. This coverage was overwhelmingly positive or neutral in tone, highlighting achievements and successes. Critical and independent opinions on the performance of the authorities have so far been absent from the RTRS main news programs.

In addition, the RS president's party, the SNSD, received as much as 30 per cent of the coverage – which was exclusively positive and neutral. By comparison, the main party in opposition - the SDS - received only 6 per cent of such coverage which was mainly neutral and positive. For example, on 7 September, RTRS broadcast a lengthy news item about an SNSD meeting in Bijeljina which pointed out that the victory of the SNSD was expected on all levels.

### **Private TV channels**

All Sarajevo-based private broadcasters allocated the bulk of their political and election-related prime time news coverage to the activities of the Federation Government. As for the RS-based TV BN, it provided its viewers with a different coverage to the one presented on RTRS. Another RS-based ATV offered a more balanced coverage of the main parties in RS.

**TV1** gave 38 per cent of its coverage to the Federation Government. This coverage was mainly positive or neutral in tone.<sup>5</sup> The NDP received the biggest portion of the channel's news

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<sup>4</sup> This was mainly in connection of the start of their campaigns (1 and 6 September).

<sup>5</sup> The positive coverage for the Federation Government was *inter alia* thanks to interviews with Ministers Damir Masic (1 September) and Erdal Trhulj (2 September), where it is possible to

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coverage (9 per cent) and it was overwhelmingly neutral in tone (this was when NDP representatives had an opportunity to directly criticize the RS authorities). By comparison, the SNSD received 5 per cent of such coverage that was mainly negative in tone. **NTV Hayat**, **TV OBN** and **TV Pink** adopted a similar approach and devoted the bulk of their political and election-related prime time news coverage to the activities of the Federation Government.

The coverage of the Federation Government on NTV Hayat is mainly linked with the appearances of the Federation Prime Minister Nermin Niksic and Minister Erdal Trhulj.<sup>6</sup> As for the coverage of political parties, **NTV Hayat** gave most of its coverage to the SDA (10 per cent) of mainly neutral and negative coverage, while TV OBN devoted 16 per cent to the SDA (mainly neutral and positive coverage).<sup>7</sup> For example, on 1 September, one of the items presented the SDA election platform. The item lasted for almost two minutes, with Bakir Izetbegovic and Ramiz Salkic speaking directly about the party's election platform.

Unlike the above-mentioned channels, **TV Pink** allocated a more significant coverage also to the RS government (14 per cent) which was mainly neutral or positive. The channel devoted a comparable coverage to the SDS, the SNSD, the SDA and the PDP. However, while the coverage of the SDA and the PDP was mainly neutral, the coverage of the SDS and the SNSD was mainly neutral and positive.<sup>8</sup>

**TV BN** is RS-based and focuses primarily on the political scene in RS. In the first two weeks of September, the channel devoted 31 per cent of its political and election-related coverage to the SDS. This coverage was mainly positive and neutral.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, the SNSD, which received some 18 per cent of the coverage, was portrayed mainly in a negative and neutral way. In addition, the RS president, who obtained some 10 per cent of the coverage, was also mainly criticized.<sup>10</sup>

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see, along with positive evaluations of their work, also some direct support for their views by TV1 journalists. Minister Trhulj had sufficient time to answer journalist's questions in any way, not confronted by the interviewing journalist. Although this is a primetime news program, the journalists even asked the following question: "Mr. Trhulj, you were declared 'top minister of the region' for two years in a row. How does that affect you?" The answer was self-promotion.

<sup>6</sup> While NTV Hayat's news generally treated incumbent government institutions in a positive or neutral context, there was one occasion (7 September), when they made the following comment about the Federation Government: "The Federation Government is buying trains with air-conditioning, while miners are dying at work without safety being provided".

<sup>7</sup> While OBN provided mainly positive and neutral coverage about the activities of the Federation Government, it featured heavy criticism of the Federal Minister of Labor and Social Policy, calling the ministry "a ministry for laundering money" alleging that the money won by the state lottery was not being invested into new work places, but instead awarded to companies close to the government and the minister.

<sup>8</sup> News items evaluated as positive were mostly those in which politicians directly talked either about themselves or about their respective political parties and in which they offered various promises. For example, TV Pink broadcast an item on 1 September in which Bakir Izetbegovic promised in the election platform to open 1,000 jobs in one month or an item on 10 September in which Milorad Dodik stated that he wanted to see the veteran population as an organization that would additionally build their status and that the issue of employment was one of the most serious issues.

<sup>9</sup> For example, the SDS candidate for the RS presidency Ognan Tadić, who is often shown on TV BN, received almost 4 minutes of direct time on 5 September – much more than any other candidate until so far.

<sup>10</sup> TV BN also gave opportunity to ordinary people to express their negative opinions about President Dodik. On 8 September, a worker demanding Prime Minister Cvijanovic's resignation said: "President, I have nothing to give my children to eat... These are all private institutions of the big boss sitting in the glass building in Banja Luka...". On 9 September, there was another

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Another RS-based private channel **ATV** also devoted the biggest portion of its coverage to the SDS and the SNSD - respectively 19 and 18 per cent. This coverage was mainly positive and neutral. ATV also focused on the activities of the RS Government and the RS President – while the latter received also some critical coverage<sup>11</sup> the former was presented mainly in a neutral and positive way.

## Radio

While the Radio RS news programs almost exclusively dealt with events from RS or related to the RS, the Radio FBiH and BH Radio both do have some coverage on events in RS. The coverage of the contestants and other relevant subjects on the three monitored public radio channels to some extent resemble the coverage by the public TV channels, with some differences. In particular, **Radio FBiH** provided the bulk of their coverage to the Federation Government (29 per cent). However, unlike FTV, which was mostly critical towards the Federation authorities, as much as 38 per cent of the radio coverage was positive and only 24 per cent was negative.<sup>12</sup> As for the coverage of contestants, the SDA and the SDP received respectively 9 per cent of the coverage. While the coverage of the SDA was mainly positive and neutral, the coverage of SDP was overwhelmingly neutral. The HDZ BiH received 11 per cent of mainly neutral coverage.

Similar to RTRS, the **RS radio** devoted the bulk of its news coverage to the RS Government (31 per cent), the SNSD (18 per cent) and the RS President (20 per cent). This coverage was mainly positive or neutral. For example, on 1 September, the RS radio broadcast an item marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bena shoe factory. The report featured Milorad Dodik who said: “The shoe factory is a leader in the region. The factory’s employment trend will continue, for which a certain amount of material resources will be invested in the future. By next year, it is possible to employ another 500 workers. RS Prime Minister Zeljka Cvijanovic and I are also ready to provide additional resources for support.” No other views or opinions were broadcast. The SDS received only 8 per cent of such coverage which was mainly neutral and positive.

**BH radio** gave 18 per cent of its coverage to the BiH Council of Ministers. This coverage was mainly neutral. In this respect, considerable time was given to Vjekoslav Bevanda, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, who criticized his cabinet ministers’ failure to reach the quorum and the general inefficiency of the Council. The Federation Government and the RS Government

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item showing a poster put up by an unidentified person in Banja Luka. TV BN journalist read the text on the posters which said: “People, all of you who intend to go into the SNSD’s pre-election tents, remember, everything you eat and drink you have already paid for several thousand times and if you vote again for the SNSD thieves your children and grandchildren will be paying off that dinner for you.”

<sup>11</sup> On 3 September, ATV aired a statement by Vukota Govedarica (SDS): “God forbid that anyone ever from RS or Serbia behaves the way Dodik behaved when elections took place in 2012”. In an item on Dodik’s meeting with Vladimir Putin, two statements were taken from SDS representatives who consider the meeting unnecessary.

<sup>12</sup> The state official with the biggest presence in this period was Federal Prime Minister Nermin Niksic, followed by the BiH Federation President Zivko Budimir and the Council of Ministers Chairman Vjekoslav Bevanda. Most items about these subjects were featured on 10 September. They were mostly related to the arrest of Minister Lijanovic and other associates. Many political representatives were asked to comment on the situation, while the arrested Minister Lijanovic said the arrest was motivated by the election campaign of his opponents who do not want him to win votes.

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received 13 and 6 per cent respectively – their time consisted of roughly equal proportions of positive and negative coverage. As for the coverage of political parties, the SDA and the SDP received 10 and 7 per cent respectively. While the coverage of SDP was mainly positive and neutral, the coverage of SDA was mostly neutral.

## Newspapers

Private print media are generally entitled to a larger degree of partisanship than the broadcast media. It is generally accepted, therefore, that the press may explicitly express a political opinion. As for the Internet, it is a pluralistic and unlimited marketplace of ideas, in principle accessible to everyone, remaining largely unregulated.

The monitored print media have so far provided a wide range of views, often showing bias in favour or against particular political options. However, voters would benefit from a more analytical and in-depth coverage that could help them to better analyze and assess the qualities and platforms of electoral contestants. The online media provided voters with a wide array of portrayals of political opinions and generally also more substantial information of the campaign than other monitored media outlets.

**Glas Srpske** mainly covers the events from the area of RS. During the first monitoring period, the newspaper allocated 17 per cent of its political and election-related coverage to the activities of the BiH Council of Ministers. This coverage was mainly neutral. The political parties from the Federation of BiH were given little or no coverage at all (SDA 1 %, HDZ less than 1 %). When reporting on the state level, it was mostly related to some “problematic” questions on the state level, such as the appointment of the director of CRA (during the first ten days of monitoring, some four texts were published on that topic with strong indication that the SDP is behind the bad functioning of CRA).<sup>13</sup> The RS Government received 14 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral and positive. As for the coverage of political parties, the biggest share was given to the SNSD – 29 per cent. The coverage was also overwhelmingly neutral and positive. Regarding the opposition parties, they were rarely mentioned (SDS 6%, PDP 1%) and if so then they were portrayed as parties not working in the interest of RS and Serbian people. In addition, Glas Srpske published an article about how the citizens of the Federation of BiH perceive Mladen Ivanic as the best solution for RS. The newspaper showed its support to the SNSD, with little interest to publish information on voting process, as well as political scene countrywide.

**Dnevni list** allocated the biggest portion of its coverage to the Federation Government (20 per cent). This coverage contained more positive than negative way of presentation. As for the coverage of political parties, the SDP received 13 per cent of mainly positive and neutral coverage. For example, on 1 September, the paper published a lengthy interview with the SDP presidential candidate Bakir Hadziomerovic. The next most covered parties were HDZ1990 (9 per cent), the SDA (9 per cent) and HDZ (7 per cent). The tone of their coverage was also mainly positive and neutral. Dnevni list published some articles suggesting that parties in general are manipulating the voters.<sup>14</sup> This, in part, could be understood as an attempt of forming the public

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<sup>13</sup> For example: “the Council of Ministers breached the deadline for the appointment because of the ministers from the SDP” or “SDP creates obstructions to keep Huseinovic in his position”.

<sup>14</sup> For example, in its edition on 3 September, Dnevni List featured an article suggesting that “it is not the programme that wins the election but the money”, i.e. it claims that the party programs are mostly similar and unimportant”, and that “in order to win, the most important thing is that you have the money for representation and for winning affection of the voters, but also paying for that which cannot be seen and should not be seen or known.”

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opinion about the elections, but also as fierce criticism of the current office holders and those in the opposition.<sup>15</sup> Criticism of political arena is also visible from the journalists' question in interviews with political candidates. Such example is present in the interview with Bakir Hadziomerovic. The question states that "the political arena in BiH is filled with thievery, nepotism and corruption", and that it is a fertile ground for numerous "nasty businesses".

**Nezavisne novine** provided the biggest share of its coverage to the RS Government (25 per cent) and the SNSD (10 per cent). While the tone of the RS Government was overwhelmingly positive, the tone of the SNSD was either positive or neutral.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, the Coalition Domovina received some 2 per cent of the coverage which was exclusively negative. The other parties to receive some more significant coverage were the SDA (4 per cent) and the SDS (6 per cent).

**Dnevni Avaz** published the majority of its articles on the SBB which was devoted as much as 30 per cent of the newspaper's political and election-related coverage. The next most covered party was the SDA with 17 per cent of the coverage. While the tone of the SBB was overwhelmingly positive, the tone of the SDA coverage was very negative. In addition, the negative tone was also directed towards the Bosniak member of the Presidency Bakir Izetbegovic, as well as towards the SDP and the Federation Government.

**Večernji list** provided almost half of its coverage to the HDZ which was predominantly positive. By comparison, the HDZ 1990 received only 1 per cent of such coverage which was mainly neutral. The SDP received only 3 per cent of the coverage which was very negative. In a few articles, the SDP was portrayed as a party working against the interests of Croats, by imposing upon Croats political representatives that are only Croats by declaration.

**Oslobodjenje** devoted the biggest portion of its coverage to the SDA (24 per cent). This coverage was mainly positive. The next most presented parties were the SNSD (10 per cent), the HDZ BiH (7 per cent), the HDZ1990 (6 per cent) and the SDP (6 per cent). In general, the tone towards these parties was either positive or neutral.

## Internet

**Radio Sarajevo** allocated the biggest portion of its political and election-related coverage to the Federation Government (25 per cent). This coverage was mainly positive. On 3 September, Radio Sarajevo introduced a special section called "elections". Prior to this, the portal reported mostly on public office holders and their activities without mentioning their political affiliation (for example about Nermin Niksic, the prime minister of the Federation of BiH or Vjekoslav Bevanda, Chairman of the Council of Ministers). Radio Sarajevo also covered activities of the Central Election Commission, thus providing citizens with information on the election process. In a positive development, the portal also offers a special section called *Infografike* which features detailed information about candidates.

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<sup>15</sup> Another article from 5 September (page 11) states that "the citizens don't vote because there is no one to vote for", and that "the reason because 45% of registered voters in BiH don't vote is because they see no alternative on BiH political scene".

<sup>16</sup> Nezavisne novine followed SNSD officials (who are also candidates in the elections) in sections like "kultura" (opening of the season in theatre), "scene" or section "nezavisne novine medju poznatima", which normally publishes photos of actors, singers and sportsmen, but not the politicians.

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**Frontal.rs** is oriented towards reporting about RS. During the first monitoring period it focused mainly on the activities of the RS government (15 per cent) and the RS president (18 per cent). This coverage was mainly neutral or positive. The biggest portion of the portal's coverage went to the SDS (20 per cent) of mainly neutral or positive tone. By comparison, the SNSD received 14 per cent of the coverage which was mainly neutral and negative.

**Klix** reported regularly on the activities of the authorities, allocating 11 per cent to the Federation Government, 5 per cent to the BiH Council of Ministers and 3 per cent to RS Government. Forty seven per cent of the coverage about the Federation Government was positive and ten per cent was negative. By comparison, only eight per cent of the RS Government was positive and thirty two was negative.<sup>17</sup> Since 9 September, Klix has started publishing interviews with candidates. To date, interviews with three candidates have been published: Mladen Ivanic (candidate of the coalition For Changes for a Serbian member of the Presidency of BiH), Zivko Budimir (candidate of the coalition Together for Changes for the Croatian member of the Presidency of BiH), Sefer Halilovic (candidate for a Bosniak member of the Presidency of BiH). Of the monitored media outlets, Klix has so far covered the biggest number of political subjects.

Similar to Klix, **Bljesak** has also covered a number of political subjects. The most covered political entity was the Federation Government with 14 per cent of mainly positive and neutral coverage. Other subjects to receive more significant coverage included the HSP (11 per cent), the HDZ (9 per cent), the SDP (11 per cent) and the SDA (11 per cent). Their coverage was mainly positive or neutral.

## Conclusion

Data from the first monitoring period reveals wide differences in the way political subjects are portrayed and in the amount of coverage provided to different political subjects. Two weeks of monitoring indicate that not all media follow the same standards of balance and fairness. Some monitored outlets more or less openly showed their sympathies towards particular political parties. The qualitative analysis also indicates that some media neglect to offer voters opposing views on particular stories. Media Plan will analyse data throughout the pre-election period and beyond to determine if this is a consistent trend. News reports were mainly driven by activities of politicians - journalists themselves usually did not try to dwell on problems, single them out. There was an apparent lack of investigative approach, and conversely reports were sometimes limited to superficial coverage.

Voters would benefit from a more analytical and in-depth coverage that could help them to better analyze and assess the qualities and platforms of electoral contestants. The media need to be more proactive in setting the formats of their election-related reporting and their general coverage of elections to better facilitate the exchange of opinions, public debate, investigation and commentary that would offer the public fully informed, analyzed and assessed views of persons seeking elected office. The next report will be issued two weeks from today and will contain cumulative data for a full four weeks of monitoring.

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<sup>17</sup> More specifically, this coverage included appearances by Bakir Izetbegovic (as a member of the Presidency of BiH), Nermin Niksic as the Prime minister of the Federation of BiH and topics related to the mining accident in Mine Raspotocje, and Damir Masic (as a minister in the Government of the Federation of BiH) mostly in connection with education and the start of the new school year.

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