

MEDIA COVERAGE OF 7 NOVEMBER 2010 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN AZERBAIJAN

FIRST REPORT

7-21 October 2010

Prepared by Media Monitoring Institute (MMI)

Project Overview

The Media Monitoring Institute, a non-governmental organization, has been conducting systematic monitoring of media coverage of the 7 November parliamentary elections. MMI launched this investigation to assess how the media implemented their duty to disseminate objective and balanced information about election issues and the positions of registered and rejected candidates, in conformity with the relevant Council of Europe standards. This investigation will continue until the elections.

The monitoring started on 7 October, a week before the official start of election campaign (15 October) and the results of the first week of the campaign have been analyzed in this report. A further report will cover the period from 22 October to 8 November, which will include the day of voting. MMI is monitoring eight nationwide TV channels¹ and six daily newspapers².

The project's goal is not to support or oppose any registered or non-registered candidates, but rather to characterize the whole media environment during the election period. This project is carried out with support from Council of Europe.

Methodology

The monitoring was conducted in accordance with Guidelines on Media Analysis During Election Observation Missions (Adopted by the Council for Democratic Elections at its 29th meeting and the Venice Commission at its 79th plenary session).

All coverage relating to the election is monitored, including news items, advertisements and special election coverage. The amount of direct and indirect coverage of identified political figures is measured, as well as the coverage of other political and social actors (Annex 1). All coverage of political figures is coded as positive, negative or neutral, depending upon both the overt content of the item and its context.

The theme (Annex 2) of each item is also coded, permitting analysis of the topics favoured by the media in its election coverage.

¹ ANS, ATV, AzTV, Khazar, Public Television, Idman-Azerbaijan, Lider, Space

² Azadlig, Azerbaijan, Bizim Yol, Yeni Azerbaijan, Yeni Musavat, Zerkalo

Summary of Findings

TV channels

MMI's main conclusion is that TV channels allotted too little airtime for election issues before the official start of election campaign. There was an increase in coverage of election issues after the official start of the campaign; however, in general, election issues were still not covered sufficiently. Television channels did not broadcast discussion programs or public debates, which could help the voters to make their choice. Ahead of the election campaign, only one educational program on elections – "Xalq secir (People are electing)" - had been aired.

In accordance with the legislation, Public TV allocated free airtime³ for candidates. Public TV allocated paid airtime as well; however, only three candidates used paid airtime. Despite the fact that free airtime is only allocated for candidates, Public TV allowed a representative of an independent candidate with no party affiliation Madar Musayev (MP at present), to make a speech on 15 October. On 22 October, APFP-Musavat bloc's shared candidate Hasan Karimov was deprived of 18 seconds of his four-minute airtime without any reason.

TV channels aired voter informations however, some TV channels allocated very little airtime for such informations, while some aired no voter informations at all. For example, during the monitoring period, eight voter informations were aired in AzTV, while ANS aired no voter information.

All nationwide TV channels allotted much more airtime to the ruling YAP chairman, President Ilham Aliyev, rather than election issues and activities of registered candidates. AzTV leads the list in this regard. All of the TV channels aired Ilham Aliyev in a positive manner and rarely in neutral way. The largest part of "Khabarlar" news editions and "Hafta (Week)" program in AzTV was devoted to Ilham Aliyev's activities, including visits to foreign countries and orders and decrees signed by him. News items regarding Ilham Aliyev were always run first, regardless of the importance of the news. Multiple news reports about the successful development of the country created disproportionate coverage of Ilham Aliyev's activities the head of state.

ANS tried to cover the activities of various political forces. A news report about a YAP event on elections, lasted more than 3 minutes in ANS. On 12 October, ANS also aired a news item about the event of APFP-Musavat bloc, which includes major oppositional forces. On 8 October, ANS aired part of the speech of the National Party representative Panah Huseyn in the Parliament, who commented on rejection of Musavat candidate for CEC membership. Nonetheless, when comparing, it became clear that coverage of YAP amounted to 19.69%, while coverage of oppositional forces was less than 1% of covered subjects in total. During the monitoring period, ANS aired two programs that made an ironical approach to the election process. On October 17, "Gulp" program, despite being devoted to elections, was of humorous, ironical and slightly abusive nature (For example, the imaginary candidates represented imaginary 'Party of Cattle-Breeders', and 'Party of Somersault Performers'). The opposition's

³ According to the Election Code, the political parties and blocs of political parties, that have over 60 registered candidates gain the right for free airtime. Central Election Commission (CEC) has made a decision to allocate 4 minutes of free airtime for every candidate on Public TV.

method to walk door-to-door and visit each family was criticized in a humorous way. In the “Kokalti” program, aired on 16 October, the candidates were compared to animals.

The other private TV channels did not follow the principles of balance and comprehensiveness. The private TV channels covered the YAP events, rather than the oppositional political forces. In the news bulletin aired on 13 October in Space TV, a press conference held by YAP Executive Secretary Ali Ahmadov on parliamentary elections was covered. Here Ahmadov condemned the candidates of APFP-Musavat bloc for their being unemployed, and thus claimed that they were not eligible to be parliamentarians. Commenting on a declaration signed by Musavat leader Isa Gambar in Germany, Ahmadov claimed that he betrayed his motherland. Ahmadov also praised YAP candidates saying they are quite eligible for serving in the parliament, as most of them are scientists working in Azerbaijan National Sciences Academy. The channel did not seek APFP-Musavat bloc’s comments or response on this claims. Moreover, the press-conference held by this bloc a day before (12 October) was not aired in Space. On 21 October, ATV aired a news item on a report released by Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe special committee. After speaking about the positive statements included in the report, the TV presenter said that the report also included negative comments and that they would be aired in the next clip. However, the next clip also focused on positive aspects and no criticisms were reported.

Newspapers

Unlike the newspapers covered the election issues much more comprehensively and there was diversity in the coverage of issues. This coverage did not only cover the CEC meetings, but also included other themes (election complaints, registration problems, positions of registered candidates and those who wanted to be a candidate, and so on). *Azadlig* newspaper allocated 89.593% of its content to coverage of elections (coverage of election issues), *Bizim Yol* – 83.78%, *Yeni Musavat* newspaper 79.39%, *Azerbaijan* – 52.39%, *Yeni Azerbaijan* - 50.08% and *Zerkalo* - 41.07%. However, it should be noted that the great part of this figure in Azerbaijan newspaper is owed to the publication of CEC decisions in the newspaper. The newspaper also published an article campaigning for a parliamentary candidate, before the official start of the election campaign. In the 7 October edition of the newspaper, the article entitled “Seminar held in Mardakan for the youth participating in the parliamentary elections for the first time”, reported on YAP candidate Mehriban Aliyeva’s activities.

Azadlig and *Yeni Musavat* newspapers published articles on the pre-election situation, registration of candidates and their problems and fabricated obstacles for candidates. Though there was not an explicit smear campaign, the position of the opposite sides was not published. In other words, the principle of balance was not followed. For instance, though a candidate’s comments on illegal activities of Constituency Election Commissions and fabricated obstacles were published in an article, the position of the opposite side was not published.

There was no voter informations in any of the newspapers.

The monitoring of the newspapers revealed that the political forces to which these newspapers belong were covered much more than other sides. For instance, the official newspaper of New Azerbaijani Party (YAP), *Yeni Azerbaijan*, allotted much more content to YAP representatives, including its chairman (52% of covered subjects in

total). At the same time *Azadlig* and *Yeni Musavat* newspapers devoted much of their content to oppositional representatives. For example, the figure who is most covered in *Yeni Musavat* newspaper is its editor-in-chief and parliamentary candidate Rauf Arifoglu (12,78% of covered subjects). Compared to *Azadlig* and *Yeni Musavat* newspapers, *Bizim Yol* newspaper somewhat tried to keep a balance. Along with the comments and interviews with oppositional candidates, the newspaper sometimes also allocated space for the comments of YAP candidates. The figures, who were mostly covered in the newspaper, were the officials of election administration: 13,08% of covered subjects.

Unlike TV channels, the newspapers allowed articles criticizing ruling forces. This kind of material was observed in *Zerkalo* and *Bizim Yol* newspapers, which somewhat kept balance. For example, the ruling party and its representatives were criticized in the article titled "Elections lost from mathematical point of view" published in the 20 October edition of *Zerkalo*.

ANNEX 1

Political parties
 Independent candidates
 President
 Ministers
 Government officials
 Local government officials
 Election officials
 Police/military
 Foreign diplomats, officials and observers
 Ordinary people
 Civil society
 Trade unions
 Experts
 Business
 Media
 Judges and lawyers
 Religious leaders

ANNEX 2

Electoral issues
 Politics
 Local government
 Human rights
 Gender
 Minorities
 Economy
 Environment
 Health
 Education
 Corruption
 Crime

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Police, security, military

Media

Foreign relations

Nagorno Karabakh

Culture and entertainment

Law and constitution

Sport

Social issues