

Study and Research on Election Media Coverage of Georgian Parliamentary Elections 2020

Interim Report

On Media Perceptions of Foreign Influence on Georgian Electoral Processes

July 15 – August 31, 2020



This report has been prepared and published by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers – Georgia with the assistance of the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The content of this report is the sole responsibility of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics and its content can in no way be perceived to reflect the opinion of the EU and the UNDP.

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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 thematic monitoring of TV media coverage of the electoral process from the perspective of assessment of media reflecting statements, declarations, and attitudes of third parties, including international observer missions, international and regional organisations, international and regional political alliances, groups, as well as political parties, politicians, and various state and non-state institutions of foreign countries with regards to Parliamentary Elections 2020.

On the initial stage, television media monitoring covers main evening news programs and political talk-shows on seven TV channels: Georgian Public Broadcaster Channel 1, Adjara TV, Rustavi 2, Imedi, Mtavari, TV Pirveli, Obieqtivi. The monitoring period starts with programs of July 16th 2020. Monitoring of news programs includes quantitative and qualitative components. All the individuals, organizations and various state and non-state institutions of foreign countries are regarded as subjects of monitoring, included their abstract mentioning. Quantitative component of the monitoring counts time of their coverage, specifying whether they commented on something themselves, in person, tone of their coverage, what is the aim of covering them in a particular news story. Qualitative monitoring includes any signs of support or discreditation of the electoral process or elections subjects in Georgia by foreign actors, and any cases of non-neutral language of journalists or manipulation with regards to the foreign actors.

This report summarizes television news monitoring results from July 16th to August 27th 2020.¹ In terms of events related to foreign actors’ involvement in Georgian elections, there were several larger topics covered by television channels: discussion of the Defense Act at the US Congress, and the report claiming that Russia funds the Patriots’ Alliance of Georgia.

Presented results include quantitative and qualitative findings, which are grouped by channel.

Methodology

Television media monitoring of outside influence includes main evening news programs on seven television channels: Georgian Public Broadcaster Channel 1, Adjara TV, Rustavi 2, Imedi, Mtavari, TV Pirveli, Obieqtivi and political talk-shows.² Monitoring started on July 16th and will continue until mid-December 2020.

This is a thematic monitoring, which studies the coverage of foreign actors with regards to the Parliamentary Elections 2020 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 to the upcoming Parliamentary Elections of Georgia.

¹ Results of the talk-show monitoring are not included in this report due to lack of material on the subject during the summer season.

² The channels were selected based on the July 2020 Omnibus survey of CRRC-Georgia. These were the top television channels (with the exception of Adjara TV, which was selected because it is a public broadcaster) that adult people in Georgia watch and trust the most. The dataset of the Omnibus survey is available for download on: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/downloads/>

Monitoring of news: Quantitative component

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 when 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 presented with voice over translation)
- Tone of coverage, whether it is positive, neutral or negative (evaluation of tone looks at the content of text as well as the context and visual cues)
- Function of subjects or the aim of including them in the news story.

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 journalist conclusions 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.
- Language of journalists with regards to the monitoring subjects – whether introductions or conclusions made by journalists.
- 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

Thematic monitoring of media perceptions of outside influence on elections in Georgia in the period between July 16th and August 27th revealed the following trends in the main evening news programs on seven channels (Imedi, Rustavi 2, Mtavari Channel, GPB Channel 1, Adjara TV, TV Pirveli, and Obieqtivi):

- The monitoring period included several important events with regards to foreign actors: letters of US congressmen to the State Department about Georgia, discussion of the defense draft bill at the Congress, telephone conversation between US State Secretary Pompeo and Prime Minister Gakharia, President of Georgia not pardoning Giorgi Rurua and statements of EU parliament members about it, pre-election poll results by IRI, NDI and other research organizations, and in the end of August the Dossier Center report on Russia funding the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia. Coverage of these issues showed differences in editorial policies of channels.
- While Imedi interpreted western officials' messages as reinstatement of support towards the Georgian government and built stories along these lines, TV Pirveli and Mtavari Channel emphasized strictness of warnings from the messages and criticized the ruling party for neglect. The Dossier Center story was extensively covered by oppositional channels to criticize the Patriots'

Alliance and the Georgian Dream for their inaction about Russian meddling in Georgian elections. Obieqtivi tried to give floor to the Patriots' Alliance to refute the allegations and gave a twist to the story saying the attack was planned by the United National Movement and European Georgia. Imedi picked up the topic late (not within the reporting period).

- Overall, coverage of foreign actors in the context of elections seemed to be in line with foreign policy priorities of political forces that channels are mostly supportive of. Political polarization of channels could be traced through this theme.
- Political position of some of the channels was felt in news stories covering foreign actors in the election context while observing topics they chose to cover, balance of information in each news source and texts of journalists, which in some channel's cases were very subjective.
- The largest share of time allocated to foreign actors in election stories was given to the United States related actors. And the second most discussed foreign actor was Russia. The trend was common all through the channels, except Obieqtivi where Russia was given more time than the United States. A common trend was also covering Russia in a negative tone.
- Overall, foreign actors were used in news stories to add credit or discredit a Georgian political subject. Political party representatives referred to western actors, for example, to highlight their foreign policy orientation, whereas Russia was always used as a discrediting factor, connection with which meant lack of progress if not state treason.
- As for how media covered any kind of involvement of foreign actors in Georgian elections, most of the channels (except Obieqtivi) covered statements, calls, recommendations of western actors as a positive gesture from strategic partners who are interested in holding democratic elections in the country. Following the Dossier Center report, Russia was mostly discussed as an actor trying to fund a political party, channel its interests through it and use propaganda tools.

The findings are summarized in more detail below grouped by channels in the following order: Imedi, Rustavi 2, Mtavari Channel, Georgian Public Broadcaster's Channel 1, Adjara TV, TV Pirveli and Obieqtivi.

Imedi

During the reporting period, Imedi main evening news covered foreign actors in several contexts. In the end of July, it largely discussed the topic of US-Georgia relations with news stories about the letter of six congressmen to the State Department, telephone conversation between Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, discussion of the Budget Act in the US Congress and while talking about these issues tried to prove that US-Georgia relations are strong and US considers Georgia as its strategic partner. It reflected on quantitative data as well, US related actors were covered during more than 60% of time allocated to foreign actors with regards to Parliamentary Elections 2020. In the news stories, foreign actors mostly had the role of an information source or they were referred to by journalists and other respondents to strengthen their arguments, add credibility to their statements or emphasize foreign policy orientation. Generally, there was noticeable tilt of balance on Imedi news in favour of pro-governmental and pro-Georgian Dream sources. And journalists' texts, summaries, introductory and transitional sentences in news stories were often subjective or evaluative. During the reporting period,

*Imedi did not cover the story about the Dossier Center report on Russian funding of the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia, which was largely discussed on other channels.*³

During the reporting period (July 16th-August 27th), the coverage of election-related topics in main evening news programs took up to 11 hours (10 hours and 37 minutes). And about 12% (77 min) of that time was allocated to the coverage of foreign actors. The stories, in which foreign actors were mentioned, presented or discussed, touched upon the following issues: possible return of Mikheil Saakashvili, election initiatives of the Georgian Dream, social assistance during the pandemic, confrontation and competition of opposition parties, support messages from Washington, IRI polls, kick-off of the Georgian Dream pre-election campaign and presentation of Georgian Dream majoritarian candidates (presentation of Georgian Dream majoritarian candidates was given excessive time, and the rhetoric was quite similar across presentations of different candidates), amnesty of political prisoners, budget act and documents discussed in U.S. Congress, letters of U.S. Congressmen on democratic development and elections in Georgia, international elections observers, telephone conversation between PM Giorgi Gakharia and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, interview with Speaker of the Georgian Parliament Archil Talakvadze, Edison Research polls, Bidzina Ivanishvili's pre-election address, Adam Kinzinger's statement.⁴ Foreign actors were mostly mentioned, presented or discussed in top 5 stories of the news program (35 of 50 news items).

Timewise, the largest coverage was of US related actors: US congressmen and politicians, US state department, US embassy, USAID, NDI and IRI. Overall, it made 61% (about 47 min) of all foreign actor coverage. (See Chart 1) Russia (mentioned or discussed as occupier, Russian disinformation, Putin) took only 8% of all time dedicated to foreign actors in the main evening news of Imedi. International observers were given the same time. Other foreign actors were discussed less, among them Europe (European Union, Council of Europe, European Council, EU Parliament and EU MPs combined), which was covered during 4% of the total time of foreign actor coverage.

Foreign actors were mostly talked about by journalists or other respondents, there were a few direct commentaries (17% of the time allocated to the US actors) from the US embassy, State Department and Congress representatives, foreign research organizations and the Ambassador of Germany to Georgia (74% of the time allocated to Germany, which was less than a minute overall).⁵

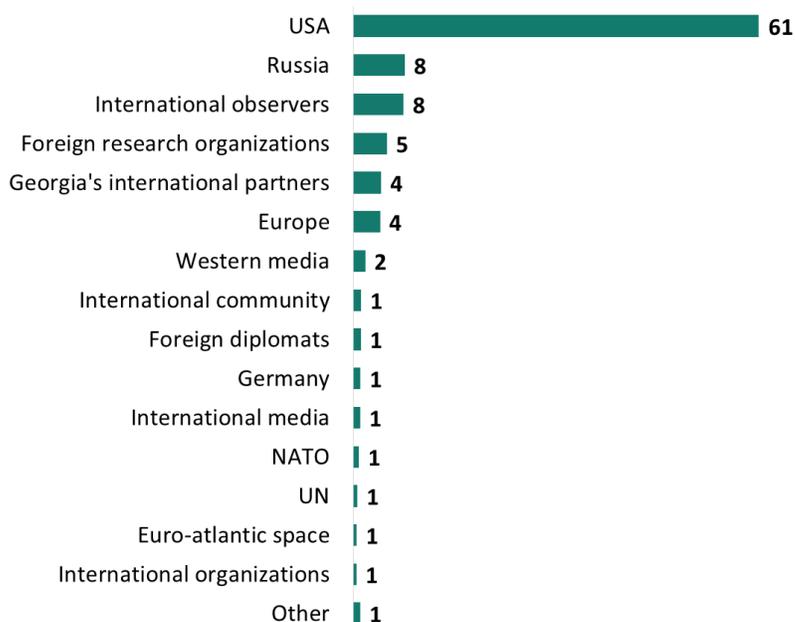
Chart 1: Time allocated to foreign actors on Imedi

³ The topic emerged in the end of August and only part of it went into the reporting period of this first report.

⁴ During the monitoring period included in this report, Imedi main evening news program did not cover the report of the Dossier Center claiming that Russia funds the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia.

⁵ Since respondents were non-Georgian speakers, they were presented with voiceover translation. However, this monitoring effort considers such cases as direct speech.

Time allocated to foreign actors on Imedi (Total time: 1 hr 37 min 48 sec)

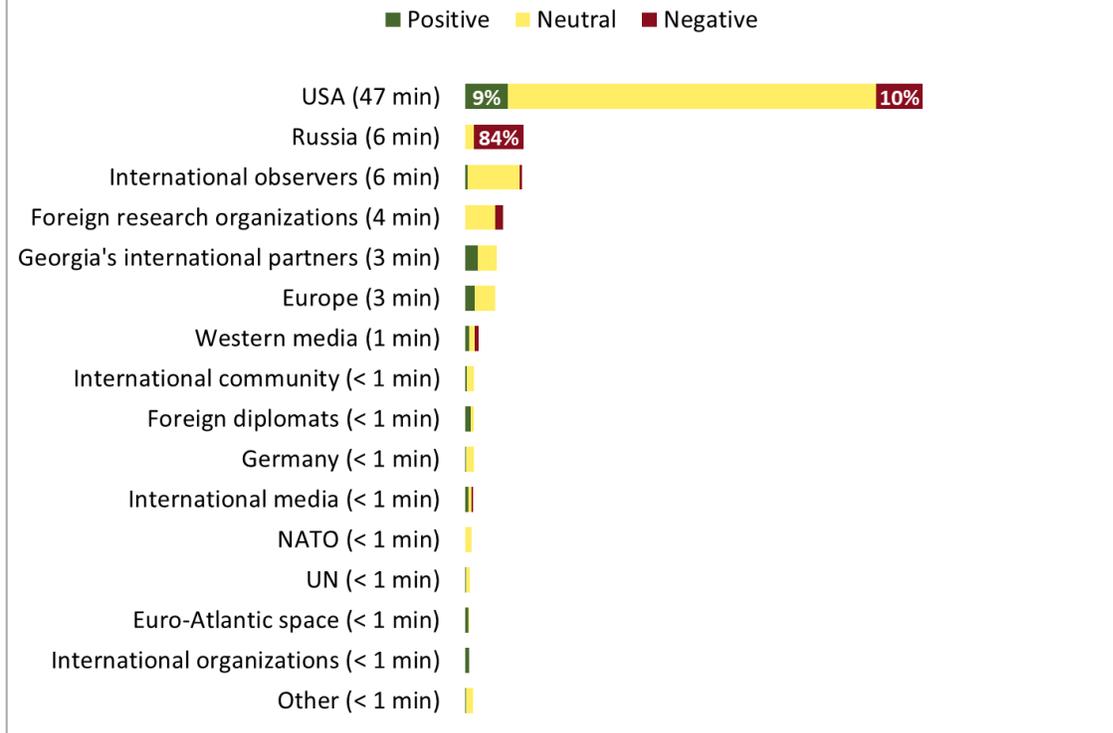


In terms of the tone of coverage, in case of foreign actors that were allocated more than a minute on the main evening news of Imedi, the majority were presented in a neutral tone. In case of US actors, which were given the largest share of coverage out of foreign actors, 9% of the coverage was positive and 10% negative. Positive coverage was mostly related to news stories about US-Georgia relations – reinstatement of support from the US side proven by statements of US politicians and the telephone conversation between Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia and US State Secretary Mike Pompeo.⁶ As for the negative coverage, it was related to the criticism of IRI (International Republican Institute) poll results and American lobbyist companies that, as the coverage claimed, were paid by the United National Movement to get anti-Georgian Dream government media coverage internationally. (See Chart 2)

Chart 2: Tone of coverage of foreign actors on Imedi

⁶ The same topic was covered differently with foreign actors used for criticism of the Georgian Dream government.

Tone of coverage of foreign actors on Imedi



Russia had the largest share of negative coverage, which was related to the coverage of the topic of August 8 war and the Council of Europe resolution about it, as well as the issue of Russian occupation as a result of the war. Georgia's international partners and Europe had 40% and 33% of positive coverage. Imedi evening news aired news stories emphasizing that Georgia is not losing support from the international partners. For example, that no sanctions were to be expected from the United States, which the opposition in Georgia tried to prove. Interview with Adam Kinzinger was used as a way to refute the opposition's arguments. Europe was also discussed positively in the stories about pre-election campaign of the Georgian Dream where Europe and European structures were discussed as political orienteer of the party.

In terms of qualitative assessment of news stories covering foreign actors with regards to the Parliamentary Elections 2020 in Georgia, as well as perceptions of foreign actors' meddling with the elections, several aspects will be discussed here: (1) balanced coverage focusing on information sources in a news story whether viewers have a chance to learn about the subject from different angles, (2) journalist language whether it includes any bias with regards to foreign actors, and (3) any signs of the coverage of foreign actors supporting or criticizing political actors and political processes in Georgia.

News stories on the main evening news on Imedi are sometimes well balanced and sometimes not so much. Importantly, cases of no balance stories coincide with topics that represent material for criticism of the government (at least by the opposition). For example, July 19 story on the uncovering of the UNM scheme of paying lobbyists to have anti-Georgian Dream government stories published in international media outlets. All the sources presented in the story support the argument. No opposing view is presented. The August 25 story comparing government social assistance in response to the Covid-19

pandemic in the United States and in Georgia claiming that if Donald Trump's decision to financially support halted businesses and people was not considered as an act of buying voters, why should a similar action by the Georgian government be treated as buying voters, since it is election year in both countries. There are several Georgian experts and Georgians living in the United States used as respondents for this story and they all support the main line of the story – that Georgian government's social assistance should not be considered as an act of buying voters. There were stories that seemed to require no alternative source, such as presentation of Georgian Dream's majoritarian candidates, which seemed to be given special attention due to the time allocated to the story and the comments of respondents in the stories, which were similar to each other.

Lack of balance in news items was also tracked in stories about the budget act discussions in the US Congress, which Imedi covered as confirmation of partnership with Georgia and tried to refute the opposition's claims that US was giving signs of warning to Georgia pressuring it to hold transparent, fair and democratic elections.

There are cases when news stories present views of opposing sides suggesting coverage of the diversity of opinions, however, sometimes it is noticeable that even in this case time allocated to commentary of the government representatives exceeds time allocated to the comments of opposition representatives, which shatters the impression of a well-balanced news story. An example of that is the July 31 story discussing views of Senator Jim Risch and EU Parliament member Andrius Kubilius on the President of Georgia not pardoning Giorgi Rurua.

Another example is the July 30 story about the letter of 6 US Congressmen to the State Department. All the respondents in the story represent government or the ruling party and try to prove that the content of the letter is misinterpreted by the opposition and there is a factual mistake there. They also claim that one of the signatories of the letter is closely associated with the lobbyist, which is paid by the United National Movement to spread anti-Georgian Dream government rhetoric. There is only one opposition candidate in the story who is presented by the journalist before showing his comment the following way: "Opposition, which is occupied by popularizing only those letters that aim to do harm to the country, was trying to convince public today that there is no factual mismatch in the document compiled by the six congressmen." It indicates lack of balance.

The same story (July 30) presents the case of biased statement by the host in the introductory part of the story trying to cast shadow on credibility of one of the authors of the letter saying that "One of the authors of the letter is Markwayne Mullin, who is famous as a Frontera lobbyist and whose message fit well with the plan funded by the Saakashvili party to convince senators, congressmen and large companies that Georgia is developing in a non-democratic way". Another example of a biased text by the journalist occurred in a news story on July 28th about the telephone conversation between Prime Minister Gakharia and US State Secretary Mike Pompeo. The story was balanced and informative; however, at some point the journalist used a transition sentence like this: "The opposition is still trying to present discussed issues as problematic and continue speculations on interpretation of the content of the conversation." Similar example is from the July 22nd story proving that nothing threatens US-Georgia relations, a news story with 9 sources representing different parties; however, journalists evaluator texts in between comments create the feeling of misbalance and bias: "Even this clear statement of a congressman is not enough for the opposition", "Despite this sharp message from Washington, the opposition is still translating this message dramatically".

In the news stories, foreign actors mostly had the role of an information source or they were referred to by journalists and other respondents to strengthen their arguments, add credibility to their statements or emphasize foreign policy orientation. Foreign actors, especially Russia was used by political subjects in news stories to discredit other political party representatives. Sometimes political party members highlighted their connection with western (US and EU) countries and institutions to add credit to their portfolio, e.g. Gia Volski in the August 11th program tries to praise himself by saying “I opened the first embassy in Washington” or “I was the first envoy to the United Nations, special envoy”. Otherwise, there were not many cases of the coverage of foreign actors participating in political processes in Georgia with regards to elections during the reporting period, several stories on US and European actors highlighting the importance of democratic elections in Georgia, such as the July 28th story about telephone conversation of Mike Pompeo and Giorgi Gakharia, which included Pompeo’s Twitter post that they spoke about the importance of democratic elections and US Ambassador’s comment supporting the same idea.⁷ Also, a story from the July 30th program with EU Parliament Member Ana Fotyga’s Twitter post saying that pardoning of Giorgi Rurua would improve the pre-election climate. In line with showcasing the strength of US-Georgia relations, on July 21st there was exclusive interview with US politician Adam Kinzinger who praised Georgia saying that “In the lines of US partner countries Georgia clearly exceeds its weight category”, confirmed that US-Georgia relations are now as strong as ever and made a supportive statement about elections saying “What US would like to see in Georgia, it is fair elections”.

Rustavi 2

During the second half of July and August, Rustavi 2 broadly covered several topics involving foreign actors in the context of Georgian elections. These were stories on western actors calling for the President of Georgia to pardon Giorgi Rurua; on discussions in the US Congress and Mike Pompeo’s report describing political situation in Georgia; and threats and traces of Russian involvement in Georgian elections. Apart from these topics, in other election related news foreign actors were used to add credit or discredit political parties and figures, in a way that affiliation with US and Europe was associated with progress and any connection with Russia – with treason. In terms of time allocation, US related actors had the largest coverage, 45% of all time given to foreign actors, Russia and foreign research organizations coming next (14%). While most of the actors were covered mostly in a neutral tone, Russia’s coverage was highly negative.

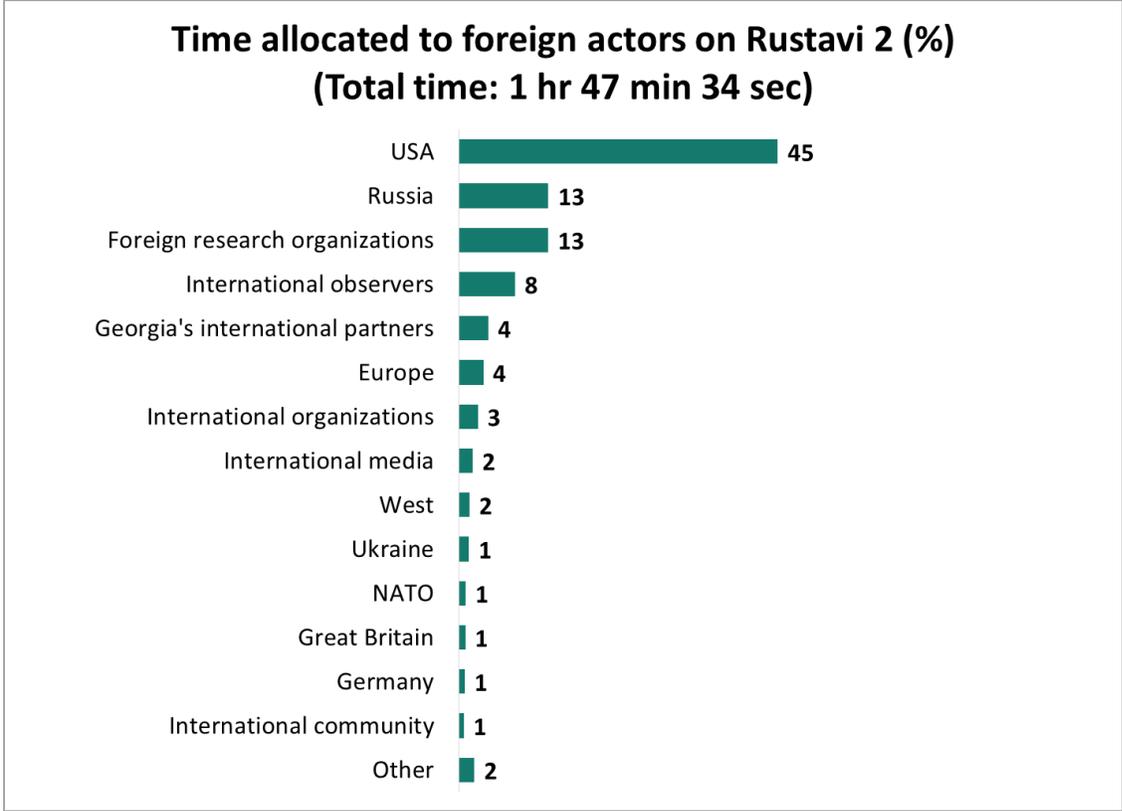
During the reporting period (July 16th-August 27th), the coverage of election-related topics in main evening news programs took up to 8 hours (7 hours and 58 minutes). And about 22% (1 hr 47 min) of that time was allocated to the coverage of foreign actors. The news stories covering foreign actors touched upon the following topics: pre-election campaign and possible return of Saakashvili, research and exit polls commissioned by Rustavi 2, NDI’s pre-election report release, political party activities – presentation of majoritarian MPs, political party member migration, coalition and confrontation of the opposition, IRI polls, Russian money in Georgian politics, criticism of the Georgian government by US congressmen,

⁷ Interestingly, the same story was covered with a radically different twist on TV Pirveli where telephone conversation between Giorgi Gakharia and Mike Pompeo was covered as a strict warning from the United States, which Gakharia and the ministers could not understand and, therefore, US Ambassador had to repeat Pompeo’s warning with regards to elections.

telephone conversation between Prime Minister Gakharia and US State Secretary Pompeo, pardoning of political prisoner Giorgi Rurua, disinformation threats from Russia, elections in times of Covid-19. Most stories covering foreign actors in the context of Georgian elections were in the top 5 stories of the news program (33 out of 55).

In terms of time allocated to foreign actors, US related actors were covered the most (45% of all time dedicated to foreign actors). These actors included US congress and State Department representatives, US Ambassador to Georgia, US politicians as well as NDI and IRI representatives. Russia (13%), foreign research organizations (13%), international observers (8%), Georgia’s international partners (4%) and Europe related actors (4%) were foreign actors with over 3 minutes of coverage in Rustavi 2’s main evening news programs with regards to elections. (Chart 3)

Chart 3: Time allocated to foreign actors on Rustavi 2

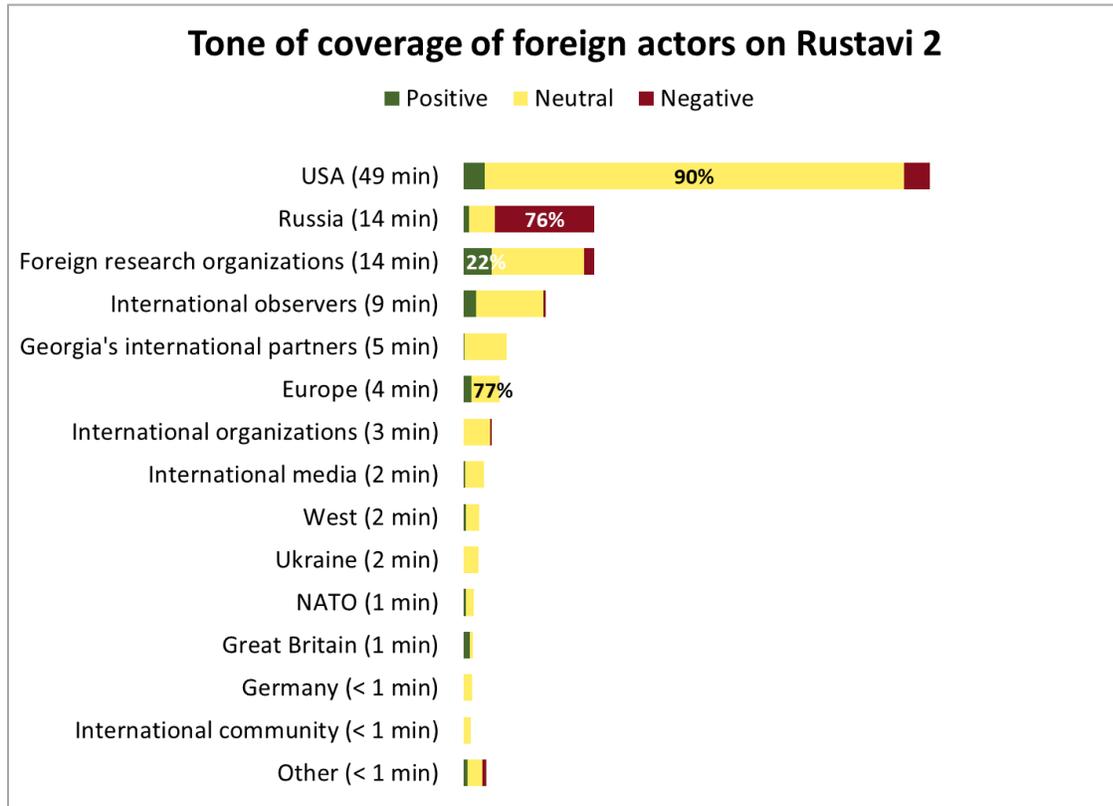


Among foreign actors who received the largest coverage on Rustavi 2, US ambassador and state department representatives, as well as representatives of NDI appeared commenting for the news program (16% of the time allocated to USA). Russia was only discussed by others: respondents and journalists. Representatives of foreign research organizations spoke themselves during 26% of the time allocated to them, international observers – 3% and Europe-related actors (EU parliament members and politicians) – 10% of the time allocated to them.

Quantitative data confirmed the overall impression that Rustavi 2 highlighted several issues related to Russia and its potential involvement in Georgian political processes through the coverage of possible threat on one of the Georgian Dream majoritarian candidates to leave politics and his brother’s car blast

as a proof of it; the Dossier Center report on the Patriots’ Alliance of Georgia having Russian funding and suspicions of it being a Russian spy, questioning the real reason behind their visit to Abkhazia, Russian disinformation threats in the pre-election period, statement of Sergey Lavrov on restoring flights and diplomatic relations with Georgia. Large share of this coverage presented Russia and Russia related actors in a negative light (Russia had the largest share of coverage in a negative tone, 76%). (Chart 4)

Chart 4: Tone of coverage of foreign actors on Rustavi 2



The US related actors were the most frequently covered foreign actors, with the total of 49 minutes during the reporting period. Most of this coverage (90%) was neutral. There were about 5%-5% of positive and negative tone coverage for USA. Some of the share of US related actors’ negative coverage is criticism of the ruling party representatives of NDI and the report it released on pre-election environment in Georgia; as well as criticism of the IRI political poll results. Apart from that, Rustavi 2 allocated quite a large share of time to introduction of the foreign research company that Rustavi 2 commissioned to conduct exit polls. About one fifth of the coverage was positive presenting the company as a highly credible foreign institution.

Foreign actors were often used to underline foreign policy priorities of political parties. For example, in the August 17th story on compiling the next government (multi-party v. single party), Gigi Ugulava’s social media post highlights adherence of its party to European values and uses it as a sign of progress. In a similar line, affiliation with Russia is used as a discrediting factor for political parties in Georgia. For example, in the August 21st story about Lavrov’s statement on resuming flights between Moscow and Tbilisi and restoring diplomatic relations, an opposition representative comments: “Russian diplomacy got

active before elections. And for clearly understandable reasons, to support implementer of Putin's plan, Georgian Dream".

Most of the stories on Rustavi 2's main evening news program were balanced in terms of information sources. There were often respondents from government and opposition sources, including diversity of opposition parties. Language of journalists was also not exceeding the paraphrase of news story respondents.

As for any cases of foreign actors showing support or discrediting Georgian election system, political process or election subjects, the biggest emphasis was on Russia's potential meddling in elections. Even before the release of the Dossier Center report on Russia funding the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia, there were a few news stories about threats of Russian involvement in elections. For example, the August 8th story about EU parliament members calling on Georgia to hold democratic elections and beware of Russia's attempts to meddle with it.

Afterwards, in the end of August, Rustavi 2 largely covered the topic of involvement of Russian money in Georgian politics. Following the release of the Dossier Center report highlighting that the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia is getting Russian funding, Rustavi 2 covered the story several times, including evaluations of Georgian government and ruling party representatives as well as other opposition leaders. The visit of Patriots' Alliance of Georgia leaders to Abkhazia, which they publicized as a religious visit, taking an icon there was questioned in Rustavi 2 news items and opposition party representatives were covered expressing suspicions over the Patriots' Alliance being Russian spies, demanding investigation. The issue was covered quite extensively and with clear attempts of maintaining balance of sources, almost always having Patriots' Alliance representatives in news stories to defend their position, government/ruling party representatives, opposition representatives. Overall, the issue was presented in the context that, if this connection would be proved (and there was a need to investigate), it would mean Russia's clear meddling with the Georgian political processes, showing particular sympathy for the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia.

The US and European actors were mostly presented in stories calling for democratic and fair elections. Coverage of the NDI report highlighted the content of the report that in order to improve the pre-election environment it is necessary to ensure unbiased work of institutions, overcoming of polarization, unhindered work of civil society organizations and media, and eradication of disinformation. This type of coverage can be considered as a calling on the side of a US related actor on improving the pre-election process. Rustavi 2 also largely covered the topic of Defense Act discussions in the US Congress, presenting views of the ruling party and opposition representatives as well as the US Ambassador. In those stories, both sides refer to and use US Congress and Senate representatives to strengthen their arguments and highlight their foreign policy orientation. The US Ambassador is presented as a figure of high authority who speaks about the importance of US-Georgia partnership.

Covering the issue of not pardoning Giorgi Rurua also involved foreign actors. In the July 31th news story, which presented views of both non-Georgian and Georgian actors (ruling party, opposition, government), impression of certain involvement in the processes by foreign actors is made by showing Twitter comments of Senator Jim Risch saying that the court system should never be used for political purposes and with the elections approaching in order to decrease polarization of the political climate, Salome Zurbashvili should pardon Giorgi Rurua, just like she did in case of Okruashvili and Ugulava. Similarly, in the comment of EU parliament member Andrius Kubilius, Rurua is called an investor of opposition TV channel who remains imprisoned. Kubilius reminds Mike Pompeo's warning to the Georgian side about

politicization of the court and election process. In the same story there is a much more diplomatic statement by the US Ambassador who said that pardoning is a sole prerogative of the President; however, she praised Zurabishvili for her bravery when pardoning Ugulava and Okruashvili. Coverage of Giorgi Rurua's pardoning involved other actors as well, such as Polish politician and EU parliament member Anna Fotyga calling for the president of Georgia to pardon him.

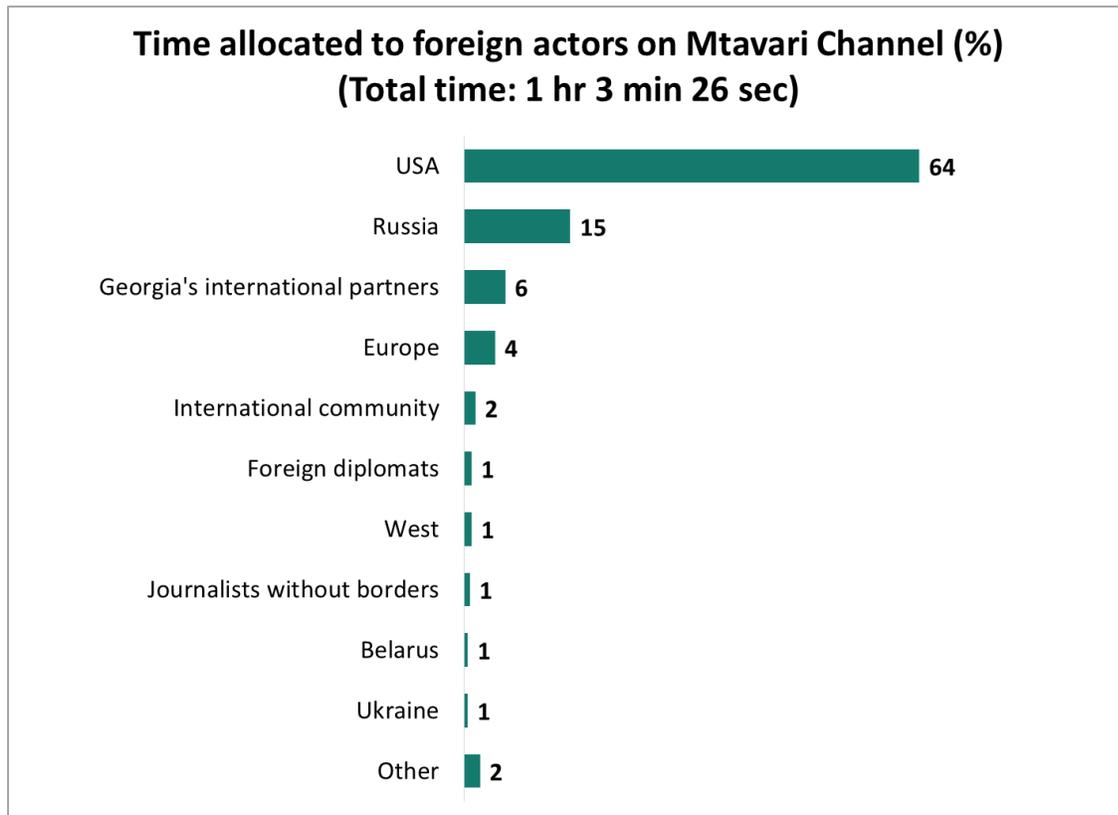
Mtavari

During the reporting period, Mtavari Channel aired 42 news items covering foreign actors in the election context. The subtopics of the stories were quite diverse as the channel showed the tendency of connecting news on all topics to elections. Topics and titles of news items suggest fiercely oppositional editorial policy of the channel, which is constantly discrediting the ruling party. Our monitoring effort focused only on cases when this discreditation was made using foreign actors. Both western actors (US officials, EU officials) and Russia were used to cast shadow on the Georgian Dream, in the first case by emphasizing strictness of statements by US officials and threats to the partnership with the United States, which the ruling party did not take seriously; and in the second case by outlining connection of the ruling party with Russia. News stories on Mtavari Channel usually had many respondents talking from different perspectives; however, the opposition views, which usually coincided with the journalists' lines in the story, significantly outnumbered alternative opinions. Journalists often used evaluative language and sounded like opposition members rather than independent journalists.

During the reporting period (July 16th-August 27th), the coverage of election-related topics in main evening news programs took more than 10 hours (10 hours and 23 minutes). And about 10% (73 min) of that time was allocated to the coverage of foreign actors. There were 42 news items and 17 of them were in the top five news of the program. The topics of news items containing foreign actors in the context of elections varied a lot. Generally, the Mtavari Channel showed the tendency of covering different issues in connection with elections. During the reporting period, Mtavari's main evening news program covered the following: US General linking Belarus events with Georgia, election law amendments adopted speedily, Patriots' Alliance's secret visit to Abkhazia, Patriots' Alliance's Russian funds, opposition agreement on defending each other's votes, NDI's pre-election message, political statement of Bishop Jacob during his preach, possible return of Mikheil Saakashvili and assessment of it, warning from the United States – conditions to maintain partnership, IRI poll results, draft bill at Congress and possible sanctions for Georgia, the ruling party preparations for elections, response of the west on not pardoning Giorgi Rurua, letter of six congressmen to Mike Pompeo about Ivanishvili, campaign against the Mtavari Channel, majoritarian candidates of the ruling party and opposition's assessments, pre-election pressure on the opposition media.

In terms of time allocated to foreign actors in the election context, US related actors had the largest share of coverage (64%), Russia came next with 15% of coverage, then Georgia's international partners (6%), which mostly meant either US or European actors and Europe (4%) – combining EU, Europe per se, EU parliament and EU parliament members. (Chart 5) Not surprisingly for non-Georgian actors, most of their coverage was discussions and mentions by journalists and other respondents. Direct commentary was heard from US Ambassador, US Congressmen and NDI representatives (10% of the time allocated to US related actors).

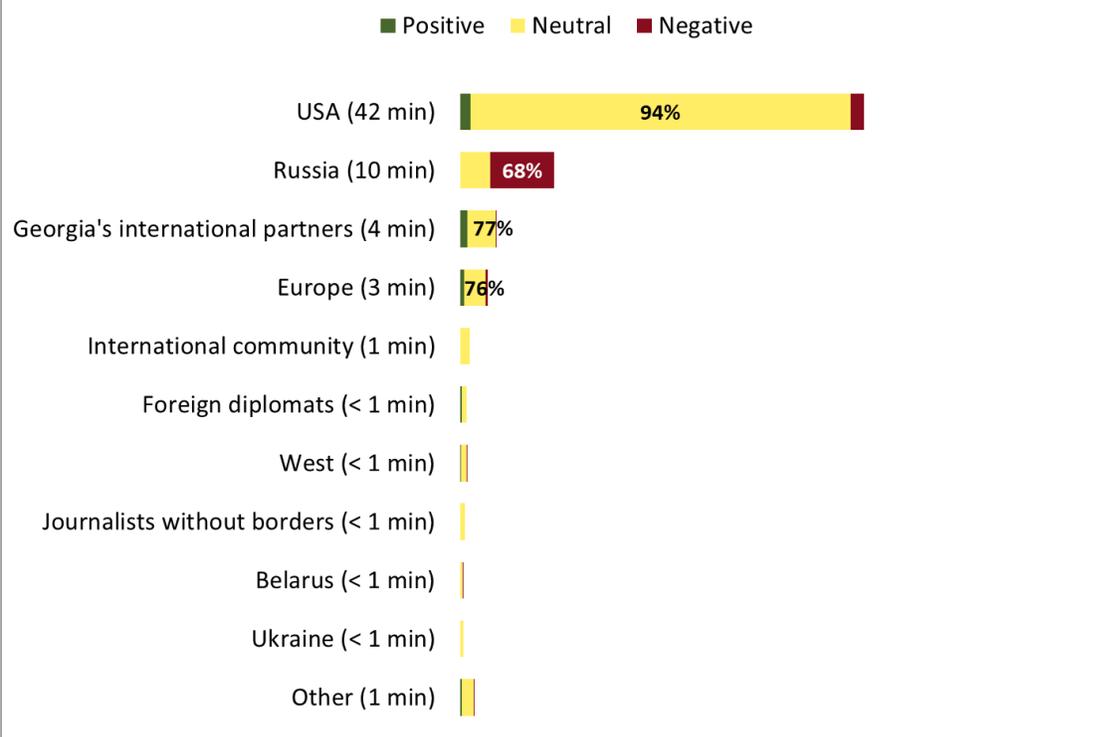
Chart 5: Time allocated to foreign actors on Mtavari Channel



The tone of coverage did not suggest variations in case of actors that were mostly discussed in news stories. (Chart 6) Russia had the largest share (68%) of negative coverage, which is due to the extensive coverage of stories around Russian funding of the Patriots' Alliance, and mentioning Russia as an occupier and aggressor in other election stories, including presentation of majoritarian candidates or messages from the US officials.

Chart 6: Tone of coverage of foreign actors on Mtavari Channel

Tone of coverage of foreign actors on Mtavari Channel



In the reporting period, Mtavari Channel demonstrated highly anti-Georgian Dream views and foreign actors were used in order to discredit the ruling party by showing western actors (mostly US officials and also EU officials) warning the ruling party and setting conditions for further partnership, or by showing how Russia is meddling in Georgian elections by funding a political party and also linking the ruling party with Russia to discredit it. It could be felt in many news stories with foreign actors in the context of elections; however, several topics can be highlighted with the coverage along these lines: US officials sending warning messages to the Georgian government and calling for ensuring democratic pre-election environment and fair and transparent elections; Patriots' Alliance funded by Russia and paying suspicious visits to Abkhazia.

The stories about messages from US officials and the telephone conversation between US State Secretary and Georgia's Prime Minister were presented as strict warnings to the ruling party and setting of preconditions for further cooperation. In the July 28th story, for example, journalist set the tone in the headline: "Warning call from Washington. The US State Secretary personally explained to the Georgian Dream government how important is holding the upcoming elections in the free and fair environment in relations with the strategic partner. What did [Pompeo] say and how the oligarch's team understand Mike Pompeo's messages? Why did the head of the US diplomatic mission need to repeat the warning of the State Secretary once again?" And in the story following that the line was continued by saying that critical letters were replaced with the warning telephone call from the Washington, that the Georgian Dream again took the "position of a political ostrich" (saying that Pompeo was interested in Georgia's Covid-19 response) and interpreted messages differently, which forced the US Ambassador to repeat the messages again. Interestingly, in that very news item, journalist mentioned important information: "Three days

before, lower chamber of Congress set a sanction to Georgia and froze about 20 million US dollar air”; however, the information was not supported by showing any document or comment about it.

Discreditation of the ruling party using foreign actors was often voiced in news stories by opposition leaders. For example, in the August 26th story about the article of US General about Georgia, Salome Samadashvili, an opposition leader said: “Today Washington is very seriously concerned that Georgia is ruled by the regime, which is on the one hand non-democratic and on the other hand directly opposes strategic interests of the United States in the county, for example the Anaklia port. This publication means that political establishment of Washington expects changes through elections.”

Discreditation of the ruling party occurred using western actors as well as Russia. For example, in the August 26th story titled “Patriots’ Alliance and recognition of Abkhazia”, the aim of the story is to “uncover” the Patriots’ Alliance in connection with Russia saying that its visit to Abkhazia was fulfillment of the Russian order and that Patriots’ Alliance is recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. The story is quite balanced in terms of showing different views. The conclusion of the story reinstates the party’s connection with Russia by saying: “The Patriots’ Alliance denies fulfilling the Kremlin’s order, denies the plan to recognize Abkhazia and says the aim of their visit was desire to pray at the Ilori Church. However, Abkhaz partners of the Alliance publicly repeat Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi’s quotes in front of cameras and do not hide that they are expecting the recognition of Abkhazia and they mention Moscow’s consent for the secret visit [of the party to Abkhazia]”. In the same story, opposition member Khatia Dekanoidze spoke about Russia using it to discredit the ruling party and the Patriots’ Alliance: “Now it is clear what a dangerous power it is and how dangerous it is to strengthen Putin’s and Kremlin’s propaganda in this country with the support of the Georgian Dream and the Patriots’ Alliance”.

Stories on Mtavari Arkhi usually had multiple respondents that represent different political powers and non-political actors. However, it was also quite often that oppositional views outnumbered the rest. Texts of journalists were also often evaluative and subjective, mostly concerning the ruling party but also in terms of foreign actors as well. For example, the July 28th story about the telephone conversation between Mike Pompeo and Giorgi Gakharia, in which journalist says: “The first telephone communication from the White House to the government of the country, which was assessed as an oligarchic rule by the Congress”. In the August 11th story summarizing achievements and failures of the ruling party, the host made evaluative statement discrediting the government and sounded much like an opposition member than an independent journalist: “Georgian Dream leaders prove their incapability and harmfulness once again. Interior and Defense Ministers made astonishing statements today and practically proved that the Georgian government is pursuing the policy desired by the Kremlin. It becomes clear that Vakhtang Gomelauri has conciliatory attitude towards crime and Irakli Gharibashvili – towards the Kremlin and they are ready to live in the space, which criminals and occupiers create for them”.

GPB 1

During the reporting period, GPB Channel 1’s main evening news program covered foreign actors in 41 news items, which made 18% of the time allocated to election-related news. Most of the time (56%) was

allocated to US related actors, then Russia (15%) and Georgia's international partners⁸ (12%). The coverage of foreign actors is mostly indirect (with a few exceptions), i.e. they are mentioned or discussed by journalists and news story respondents. The most negatively covered foreign actor is Russia, 50% of the time allocated to it is negative coverage, which is connected with the topics of the August war, Sergey Lavrov's pre-election statements on warming relations with Georgia and the Dossier Center report on Russian funding of a political party in Georgia. Russia is used as a discrediting instrument by political party representatives and US and EU actors – as institutions affiliation with which is giving advantage to them. Overall, in terms of covering any cases of foreign involvement in Georgian politics, the most vivid example for that was the Dossier Center's report stories and news about US politicians calling for democratic election processes in Georgia. In both cases, GPB Channel 1 presented issues from alternative angles (as perceived by the ruling party/government and the opposition in Georgia).

During the reporting period (July 16th-August 27th), the coverage of election-related topics in main evening news programs of Channel 1 took about 5 hours (5 hours and 17 minutes). And about 18% (58 min) of that time was allocated to the coverage of foreign actors. Topics with the coverage of foreign actors included the following: election-related activities of political parties such as the memorandum of opposition parties, presentation of the Georgian Dream candidates, Shalva Natelashvili's meeting with the Israeli Ambassador, US Ambassador's visit to Kutaisi, Central Election Commission's meeting with US Ambassador and USAID representatives, NDI's report on pre-election environment. Topics such as pardoning of Giorgi Rurua, letter of six US Congressmen, discussions of the Defense Authorization Act draft at the US Congress, telephone conversation between Prime Minister Gakharia and US State Secretary Mike Pompeo, as well as the Dossier Center report on possible Russian funding of the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia, Sergey Lavrov's statement on restoring flights and diplomatic relations, and discussion over Saakashvili's possible return in Georgian politics were covered in evening news stories of the Channel 1 of the Georgian Public Broadcaster.

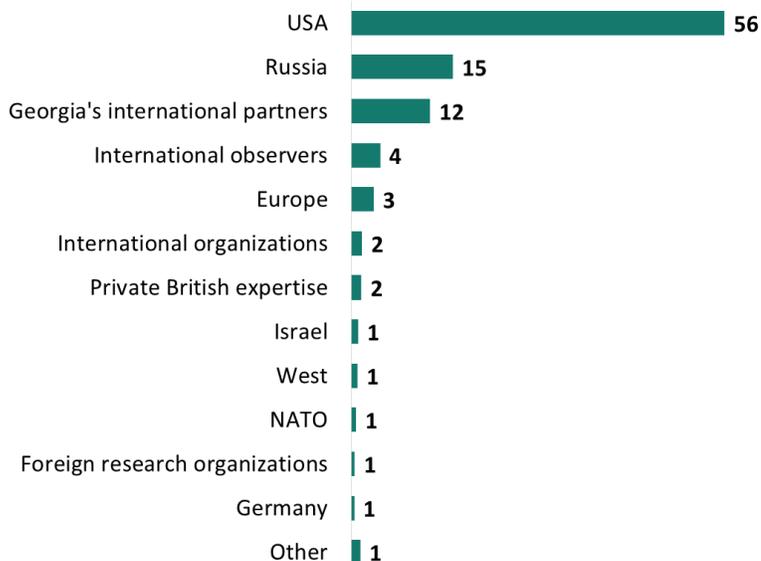
News stories covering foreign actors did not always appear in the top 5 stories of the news program (only 16 out of 41 news items). Some of the news ended up as #19 or #24 in the program, such as US Ambassador's visit to Kutaisi or her meeting at the Ombudsman's Office.

As in almost all channels under this monitoring effort, GPB Channel 1 main evening news program allocated the largest share of time (56%) to the US related actors: US State Department and Congress representatives, US Ambassador, NDI representatives, USAID. Russia represented with Russian politicians, Foreign Ministry representatives, mentions of Russian president and Russian government was covered during 15% of all time allocated to foreign actors; Georgia's international partners – 12% of the time. (Chart 7)

Chart 7: Time allocated to foreign actors on GPB Channel 1

⁸ This is a general term that is often used by journalists and respondents in news stories. Mostly, western (US and European) actors are meant under this actor based on the content of the news stories. However, since it is still a general term, it is not grouped with other actors in this report.

Time allocated to foreign actors on Channel 1 of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (%)
(Total time: 58 min 23 sec)

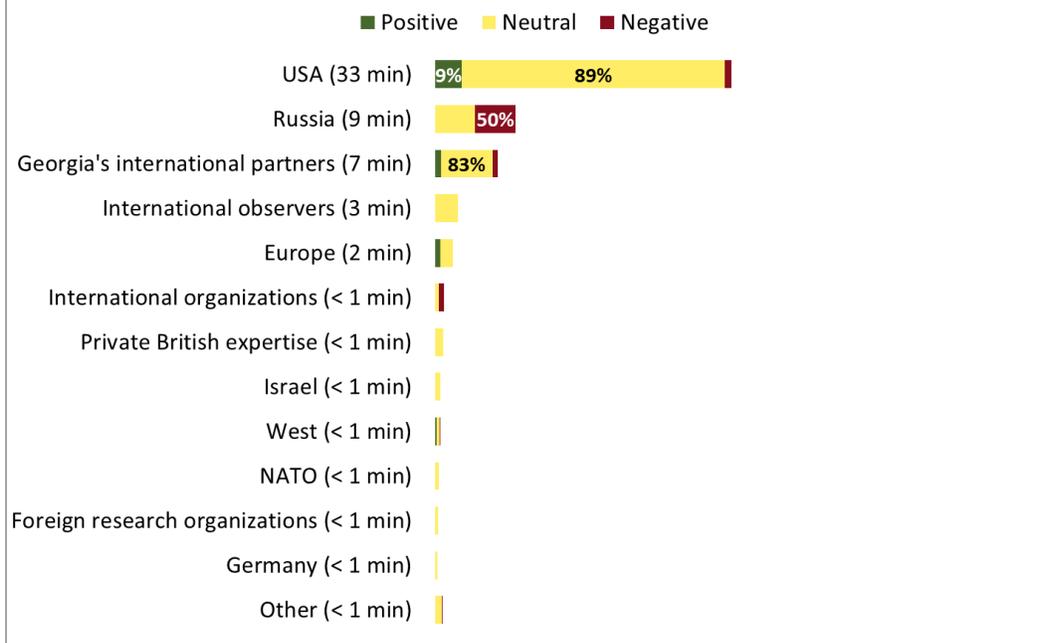


All foreign actors were covered by journalists or respondents. Only some of the US representatives (US Ambassador and US State Department representatives) had a share of direct speech on the screen (with voiceover translation) and it makes 18% of the time allocated to the US-related actors.

As for the tone of coverage, the most noticeable is the negative coverage of Russia-related actors half of the time. (Chart 8) It was mostly related to the stories about the Dossier Center and allegations that Russia is funding the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia; also the online conference "Georgia and Its Neighborhood", during which the August 2008 war was discussed as well as Russia's obligation that it is not fulfilling. Some share of Russia's negative coverage can be ascribed to the news story about Lavrov's statement that Russia would like to restore diplomatic relations with Georgia.

Chart 8: Tone of coverage of foreign actors on GPB Channel 1

Tone of coverage of foreign actors on Channel 1 of the Georgian Public Broadcaster



Some negative coverage occurred with regards to the international organizations, in particular “Journalists without Borders”, which released an article saying that in the pre-election period Georgia adopted a law significantly limiting media freedom. In the July 22nd news story about the issue, Georgia’s Communication Commission appears criticizing the international organization for misinforming the international community.

News stories on the main evening news on GPB Channel 1 were mostly informative and balanced in terms of information sources. And they were supported with facts. There were a few built on one source, like the August 24th story giving Irma Inashvili, leader of the Patriots’ Alliance of Georgia (the only respondent in the news item) floor to oppose to discrediting allegations that their party is funded by Russia, as written in the report released by the Dossier Center. That news item left the impression that the Dossier Center is not a reliable source. The topic was covered in more stories like the one on the next day, August 25th, in which there are two respondents: Irma Inashvili and one of the opposition leaders Elene Khoshtaria. In this case, news story represents the Dossier Center as a trustworthy source of information. As the story shows two different contestants, it is more balanced. Russian financial support for Georgian political party is the discretisation instrument in both cases.

There are several foreign actors that are often mentioned in stories. Sometimes political party members highlight their connection with western (US and EU) countries and institutions. Also, western institutions and politicians are often used as an authoritative body that can add weight to arguments used by politicians in news stories. On the other hand, as in the two instances above, connection with Russia is used as a discrediting instrument against opponents by both: leading opposition and ruling parties. For example, in the August 17th story, Justice Minister Thea Tsouloukiani criticized the opposition party European Georgia leader Davit Bakradze and accused him of compromising with Russian stakeholders: “It was philosophy of the previous government to compromise with Russia at the expense of national

interests. Most probably, that will receive relevant response at the ballot boxes once again.” Furthermore, in the July 29th news story, another opposition leader Roman Gotsiridze reported that Bidzina Ivanishvili was mentioned as a pro-Russian in a document of the Republican Party of the US congress.

The topic of US politicians and State Department representative’s messages towards the government of Georgia was covered on GBP Channel 1 representing both views – opposition’s perception that these are strict messages for the government as western strategic partners emphasize the importance of October elections in further partnerships; and the ruling party perception that these messages reinstate support towards Georgia.

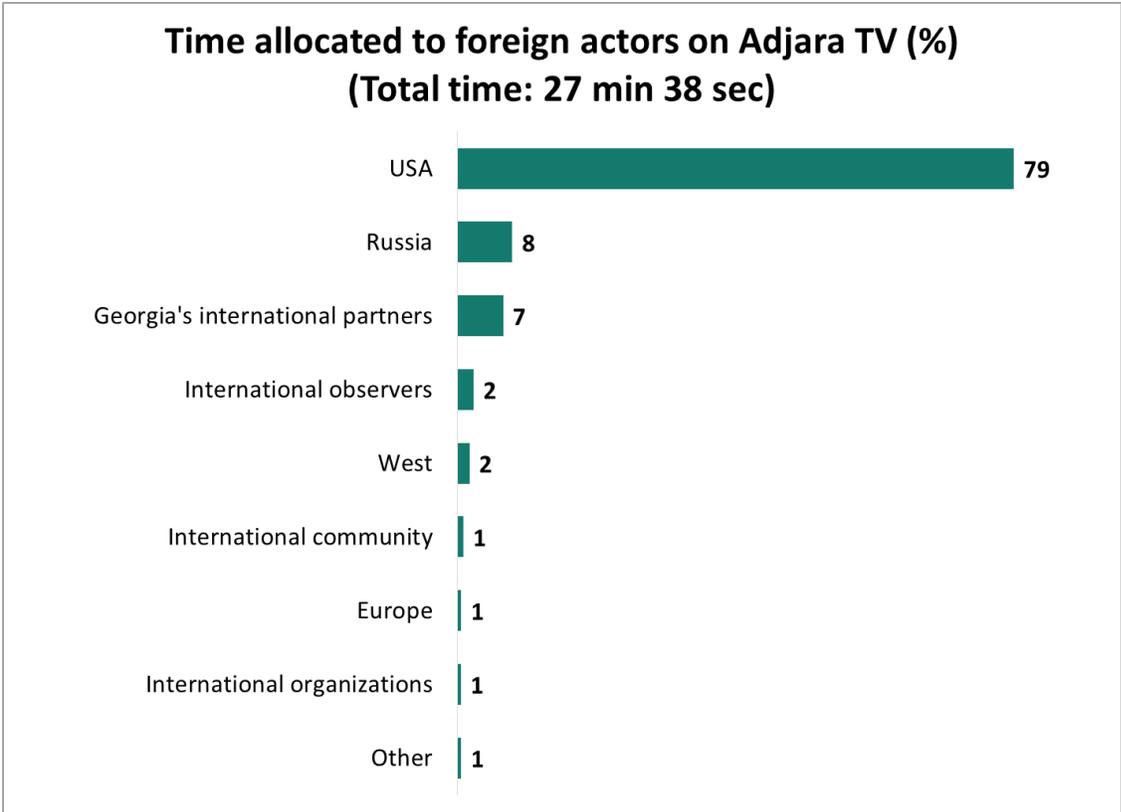
GPB Adjara TV

Adjara TV presented news covering foreign actors in mostly balanced stories and with no subjective and evaluative language from journalists. There were 20 news items during the reporting period that included foreign actors and touched upon several main topics: Russian funding of the Patriots’ Alliance, US officials making statements and comments about Georgia’s democratic development and pre-election environment, and election poll results. US and Russia related actors were most frequently covered in those stories. Besides, coverage was Russia was largely in a negative tone, due to the news about its potential meddling in Georgian elections, funding a political party. Some of the foreign actors, mostly US and EU affiliated were covered in news stories as actors of high authority, while Russia was mentioned as a discrediting factor for political subjects in Georgia.

During the reporting period (July 16th-August 27th), the coverage of election-related topics in main evening news programs took slightly more than 4 hours (4 hours and 9 minutes). And 11% (28 min) of that time was allocated to the coverage of foreign actors. The number of news items was also relatively less (20) than on other channels and slightly more than half of it (11) were among top five items in the news programs. The topics of news items covering foreign actors were as follows: pre-election poll of IRI, its results and evaluations by political party representatives, evaluations of the government and opposition on US officials’ messages, telephone conversation between Pompeo and Gakharia, sources of Patriots’ Alliance’s funding, pardoning of political prisoners, changes in the constitution of Adjara.

The largest share of time was allocated to the US related actors (79% of all time of coverage of foreign actors). Russia (8%) and Georgia’s international partners (7%) came next. (Chart 9) On Adjara TV, foreign actors were mostly discussed or mentioned by journalists and respondents. Direct commentary was heard from the US ambassador and US State Department representatives, which made 6% of the total time allocated to the US-related subjects.

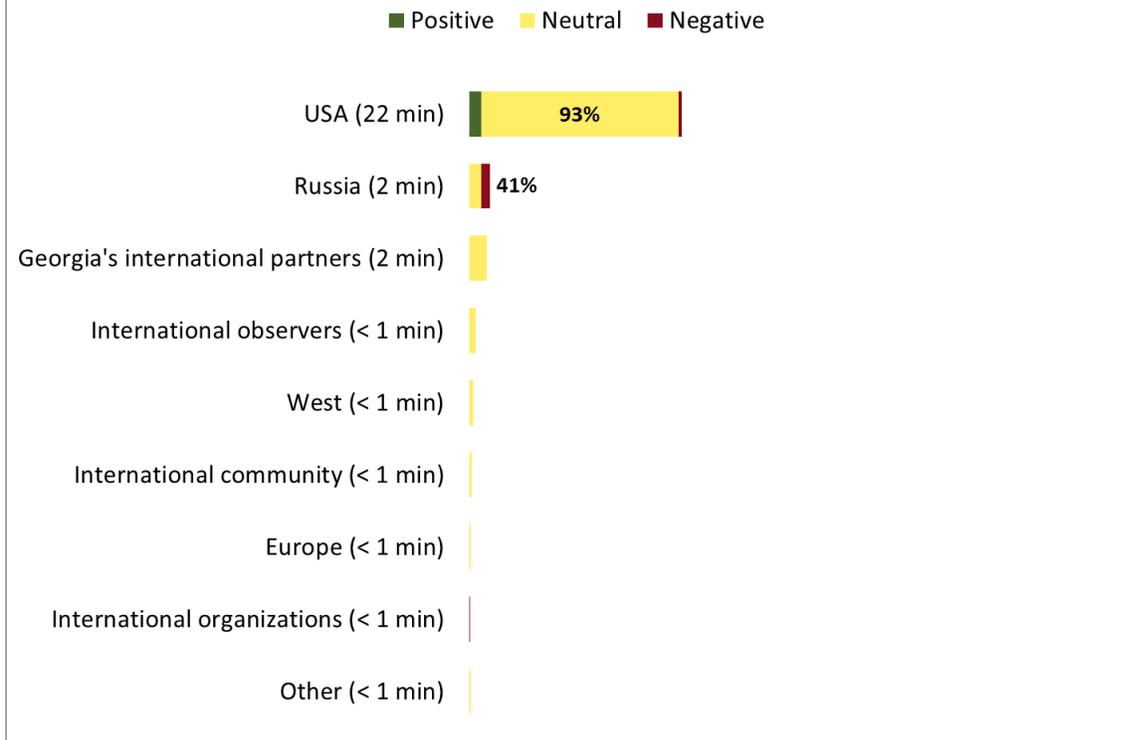
Chart 9: Time allocated to foreign actors on Adjara TV



As for the tone of coverage, all foreign actors except Russia were mostly covered in a neutral tone. (Chart 10) In Russia’s case, 41% of its total coverage was negative, which was mostly related to the story about Russian funding of the Patriots’ Alliance. In some cases, there were stories with political party representatives as respondents and they mentioned Russia in a negative tone, such as a comment by an opposition member: “All our efforts will be directed at ending the absolute and absolutely unlimited rule of Bidzina Ivanishvili who is leading Georgia to the orbit of Russian influence”.

Chart 10: Tone of coverage of foreign actors on Adjara TV

Tone of coverage of foreign actors on Adjara TV



News stories on Adjara TV were mostly balanced in terms of representing different positions and not subjective in terms of the language of journalists. Besides different political party representatives, some stories also included opinions of independent experts. The main topics for news stories during second half of July and August were Russian funding of the Patriots' Alliance, US stakeholders' statements about Georgian parliamentary elections and their expectations, and IRI poll results. Unlike other TV channels, Adjara TV covered local news with local government representatives.

News stories on Adjara TV presented US congress representatives, Red Cross, IRI, and the Dossier Center as institutions of high authority. Even though stories were more or less balanced in terms of showing opposite positions, news were not always supported by proof of facts. For example, the Dossier Center's article was not represented itself, while in news items about the topic Russia was mentioned in connection with the Patriots' Alliance and was reported as a discrediting factor for the party.

While some channels interpreted US officials' messages as either warning for the ruling party or reinstatement of support, Adjara TV presented coverage of both. For example, the August 13th story covered the note by Assistant Secretary of State Stephen Biegun about the upcoming elections in Georgia saying that he hopes Georgia will not disappoint the United States with regard to parliamentary elections and it will be conducted in a free and equal environment. Opposition parties in the same story consider the statement as indirect discreditation of the ruling party as, according to them, it means that they do not trust the Georgian government to conduct fair elections. Another story from the July 28th program, discussed telephone conversation between Mike Pompeo and Giorgi Gakharia. It presented a diversity of respondents including opposition representatives, ruling party representatives and civil society. Opposition traced signs of warning in Pompeo's comment, Georgian Dream representatives spoke about

US support, since they were ready for holding democratic elections and the civil society representatives mentioned US positively saying that it will not allow rigging of elections, will observe elections, etc. This kind of involvement is presented in a positive light, holding US at high esteem as a strategic partner of Georgia.

The United States was presented as a partner willing to help in the August 17th story about potential cyber-attack of Russia on the Central Election Commission of Georgia and Ambassador Kelly Degnan offering support of the United States in terms of cyber security. In her comment she mentioned that it is a challenge to tackle cyber-attacks from Russia in all countries where elections are held this year.

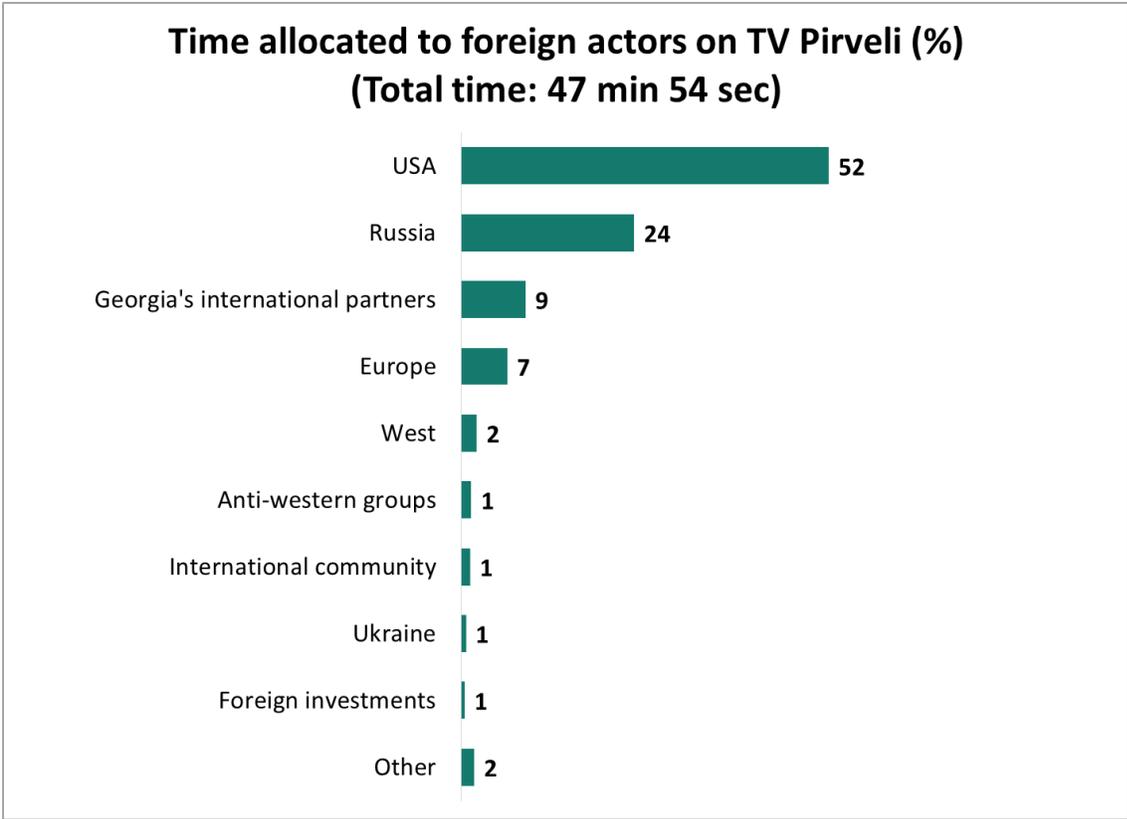
TV Pirveli

During the reporting period, TV Pirveli's coverage of foreign actors in the context of elections was linked with its line of criticism of the ruling party. The topics that included foreign actors ranged from US actors' criticizing the electoral process in Georgia or giving recommendations to the government, political prisoners in Georgia, to the Russian funding of a political party in Georgia and Russian disinformation activities here. Foreign actors were usually used to discredit the ruling party, whether it was US officials sending "strict warnings" to the government and the ruling party, which the latter disregarded, or whether it was Russia meddling with Georgian elections through funding the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia. Quantitative data reflected this trend and the largest share of the time allocated to foreign actors came on US related actors (52%) and Russia (24%), plus, coverage of Russia was mostly (70% of it) negative. It was quite common for news stories to lack balance of sources – even if respondents of the story represented government and opposition sides, the share of respondents who voiced a view different from the storyline of the news item (whether government/ruling party representative, or Patriots' Alliance member, for example), was minimal.

During the reporting period (July 16th-August 27th), the coverage of election-related topics in main evening news programs took up to 8 hours (7 hours and 59 minutes). And 10% (48 min) of that time was allocated to the coverage of foreign actors. Coverage of foreign actors appeared in news items on the following topics: Saakashvili's announcement on return to Georgian politics, Russian money in Georgian politics and Elene Khoshtaria addressing the Prosecutor's Office to investigate the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia's case in that regard, opposition party agreement on defending each other's votes and joint candidates, NDI's assessment of the pre-election environment and evaluations of the opposition, messages of US officials and congressmen on court independence and elections, US General's critical letter about Georgia, President not pardoning Giorgi Rurua, Okruashvili summoned for questioning, Bidzina Ivanishvili enrolling in pre-election campaign with old methods, connection of criminal authorities and the government. There were 31 such stories, topics of which suggested highly oppositional coverage of events. About half (15) of the news items were covered among top 5 news of the program.

In terms of time allocated to foreign actors, the largest share of coverage fell on US related actors (52%) of all time allocated for foreign actors. Russia came next with 24% of coverage, Georgia's international partners (9%) and Europe related actors (7%). (Chart 11) Other actors were covered much less in the evening news of TV Pirveli.

Chart 11: Time allocated to foreign actors on TV Pirveli

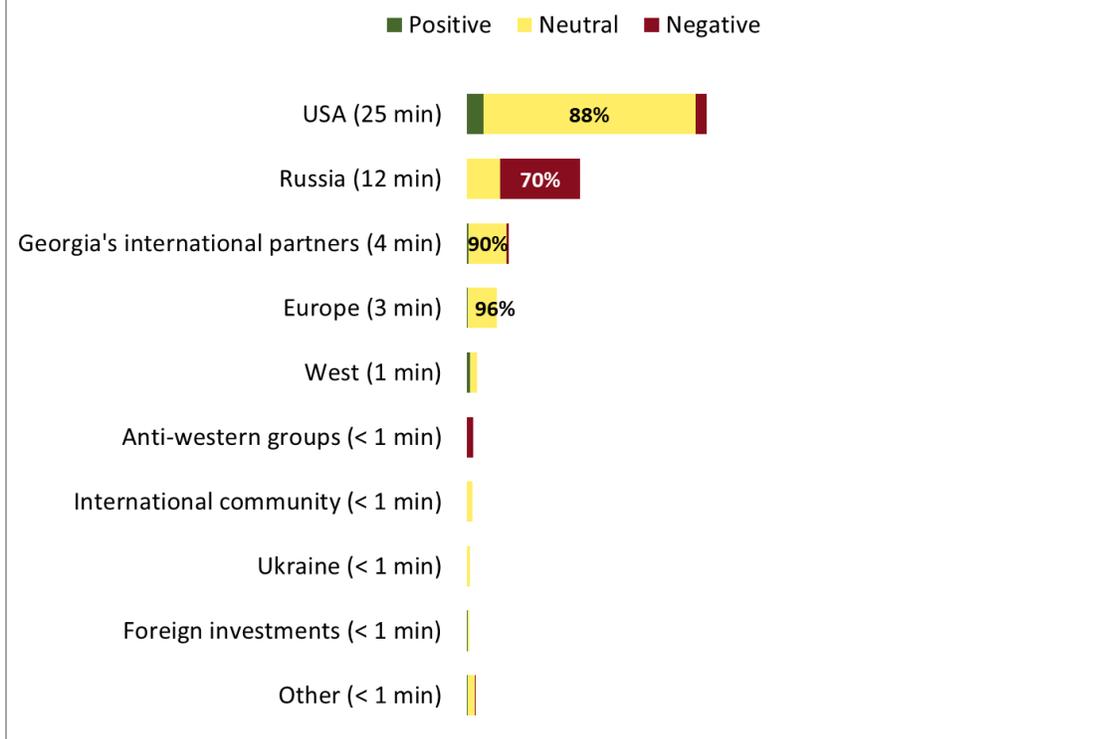


TV Pirveli’s evening news programs discussed foreign actors mostly without broadcasting their direct commentary. Only US and Russia related actors, in the first case, US Ambassador and State Department and Congress representatives were heard commenting and in the second case, Russian political scientists and intelligence representatives in the story about Russia funding the Patriots’ Alliance of Georgia.

The tone of coverage of the foreign actors who were given more than 1 minute is mostly neutral except for Russia, for which the coverage is negative during almost two thirds of the time (70%). Russia’s negative coverage is related to the stories on the Russian money in Georgian politics (the Dossier Center report), also Patriots’ Alliance of Georgia spending 1700 USD on Facebook advertising and possible Russian traces of this cost, Russian disinformation and Georgian government’s inaction in that regard.

Chart 12: Tone of coverage of foreign actors on TV Pirveli

Tone of coverage of foreign actors on TV Pirveli



In terms of qualitative assessment of coverage of foreign actors, there were three large topics that represented perceptions of foreign actors' involvement in Georgian Parliamentary Election processes and while covering these topics it was clear that foreign actors were used to discredit certain political subjects (mostly the ruling party). The three topics were: political prisoners and Giorgi Rurua's case, messages on Georgia's democratic elections from the United States, and Russia meddling in the Georgian elections.

TV Pirveli covered court processes of opposition party members in the context of elections. Stories about political prisoners emphasized the importance of court independence that would ensure democratic election environment. Coverage of these issues presented foreign actors as subjects of high authority, fulfillment of whose recommendations was important while the ruling party did not take them into consideration. The foreign actors were mentioned as: Georgia's friends, strategic partners, important and influential actors.

During the coverage of political prisoner issues, there was no coverage of direct interference of foreign actors in elections. However, opposition parties and journalists were referring to them to discredit the election process and the Georgian Dream. An example of that was the July 16th story on Irakli Okruashvili's case, which narrates that bringing up court processes of opposition members before elections is used to pressure political opponents and that western partners and international community support release of political prisoners and call for the government to set them free.

Stories about political prisoners with elections as a background topic were mostly lacking balance as they either presented only opposition party representatives' evaluations or there was misbalance in terms of the time allocated to the ruling party or independent expert comments, which overall created negative tone for the Georgian Dream.

Foreign actors in news stories were used by opposition party members and journalists to voice certain warnings that if their recommendations were not fulfilled, then international partners would criticize the country and it would have negative effect on its development. For example, in the July 31st news story “Zurabishvili: I will not pardon Rurua!” both journalist and host underlined rejection of western partners’ calls by the government: “With this decision Zurabishvili put the west in an embarrassing position. Partners were making statements one after another for 24 hours and calling for the President to pardon Giorgi Rurua. It appears that Zurabishvili did not take into consideration statements of either congressmen, senators or the US diplomat” (host). Also, “Giorgi Rurua was sentenced to 4 years in prison. As soon as the court decision was made, another wave of criticism started from the west and after Zurabishvili’s denial it is likely that messages will get stricter” (journalist).

In news stories, foreign actors were used by opposition members to strengthen their position. For example, in the July 30th story “4 years in prison to Rurua”, Elene Khoshtaria (European Georgia leader) said: “When Pompeo is calling the Prime Minister and telling him that court should not be used politically, it means that whatever was happening here today, this judge, who was everything but the judge, meant fulfillment of an order. This should not be happening.”

The reporting period saw stories on TV Pirveli covering US actors. Again, the coverage did not imply direct interference into the electoral process, open support or discreditation of any party. It only presented diplomatic calls and recommendations by the Ambassador, senators and State Secretary. For example, in the July 24th story titled “Warning from the United States”, US Ambassador said: “It is important to read the draft bill fully and every time we receive a message from Senator Risch, Senator Shaheen, Congress representatives who care about Georgia’s success, it is important that we treat it seriously”.

Both political party representatives and journalists were trying to interpret messages from the United States in accordance with their own interests, which was usually reflected in story titles. For example, “Warning from the United States”, “Warning from Washington”, “Criticism from the West”. At the same time journalists were trying to underline importance of foreign actors: “If we look back at the recent events, usually pressure from the United States and their strict tone is bringing Georgia back to the democratic track.” (July 24th issue)

TV Pirveli was distinguished with special criticism towards the ruling party. Therefore, journalists mostly covered US recommendations as strict warnings. In stories, more time was allocated to opposition party representatives who were using foreign actors’ comments, Twitter posts, documents of Senate and Congress in order to strengthen their arguments. The host, journalist and respondents of the story were trying to discredit the Georgian Dream using foreign actors. For example, the July 28th story “Washington’s Warning” was an attempt to show that the government of Georgia was receiving strict warnings from the United States before elections and government representatives were not taking them seriously. The story was built on statements following the telephone conversation between State Secretary Mike Pompeo and Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia. Focus was on Pompeo’s Tweet, which was a strict warning and then the entire story trying to prove it. The host: “Telephone call from the United States and strictest warning several months before crucial elections, US State Secretary is calling Prime Minister Gakharia and telling him that parliamentary elections should be held in a fair and transparent way... Pompeo warned Gakharia that court and the election process should not be polarized.” Pompeo’s Twitter post read that he spoke with Gakharia about the importance of free, fair and transparent elections;

however, televisions covered this talk differently. Imedi presented it as firm support from the strategic partner.

Discreditation of the Georgian Dream using foreign actors is traced in the July 30th story “Russian oligarch Ivanishvili”, which discussed the letter of six congressmen to the State Secretary where Ivanishvili was mentioned as a Russian oligarch and Georgia as a country that started regressing after the Georgian Dream came to power.

One more topic largely discussed on TV Pirveli about foreign actors’ involvement in Georgian elections is related to Russia – Russia funding the Patriots’ Alliance of Georgia. Additionally, TV Pirveli seemed to be trying to connect the Georgian Dream with the issue. Examples of this can be found in stories of August 24th, 25th and 27th.

The August 24th story was almost fully built on the materials published by the Dossier Center, according to which, the Patriots’ Alliance of Georgia was funded by Russia and received assignments and recommendations from them on how to act in the election process. Opposing view was only voiced by Irma Inashvili in a several second-long comment.

Journalists and opposition representatives were using the issue to discredit the ruling party. The Patriots’ Alliance of Georgia and the Georgian Dream were presented as parties channeling Russian interests. For example, in the August 27th story “Funding of the Patriots’ Alliance”, respondents were directly indicating to the channeling of the Kremlin policy and spreading disinformation: “This organization (Patriots’ Alliance) was directly linked with the occupier country and represented the soft power of the occupier in Georgia, by channeling the Kremlin’s policy and backing the Georgian Dream with its radical pro-Russian actions” (Giorgi Baramidze, United National Movement). Also, “The main thing is that the Georgian Dream’s direct partner is the Patriots’ Alliance and Georgian Dream does not confront the disinformation and propaganda that is flourishing in Georgia” (Teona Akubardia, opposition party representative).

There were other news stories that present Georgian Dream as a party challenging Russian interests. For example, in the story “April 9 Memorial” from July 20th, a civil activist said: “Today the Georgian Dream rulers and Putin’s Russia’s regime rulers act with the same tactics. This is the worst that they want to legalize stifling of freedom of speech and expression and by creating a different reality show a different picture to the society”.

With regards to Russian interference in Georgian elections, journalists’ language was not always neutral. They clearly criticize the Patriots’ Alliance and the Georgian Dream. For example, in the August 25th story “Suit against the Patriots’ Alliance” journalist said: “The Georgian Dream does not trust these documents (the Dossier Center documents). Today Ivanishvili’s party members tried to protect the Patriots’ Alliance”.

Obieqtivi

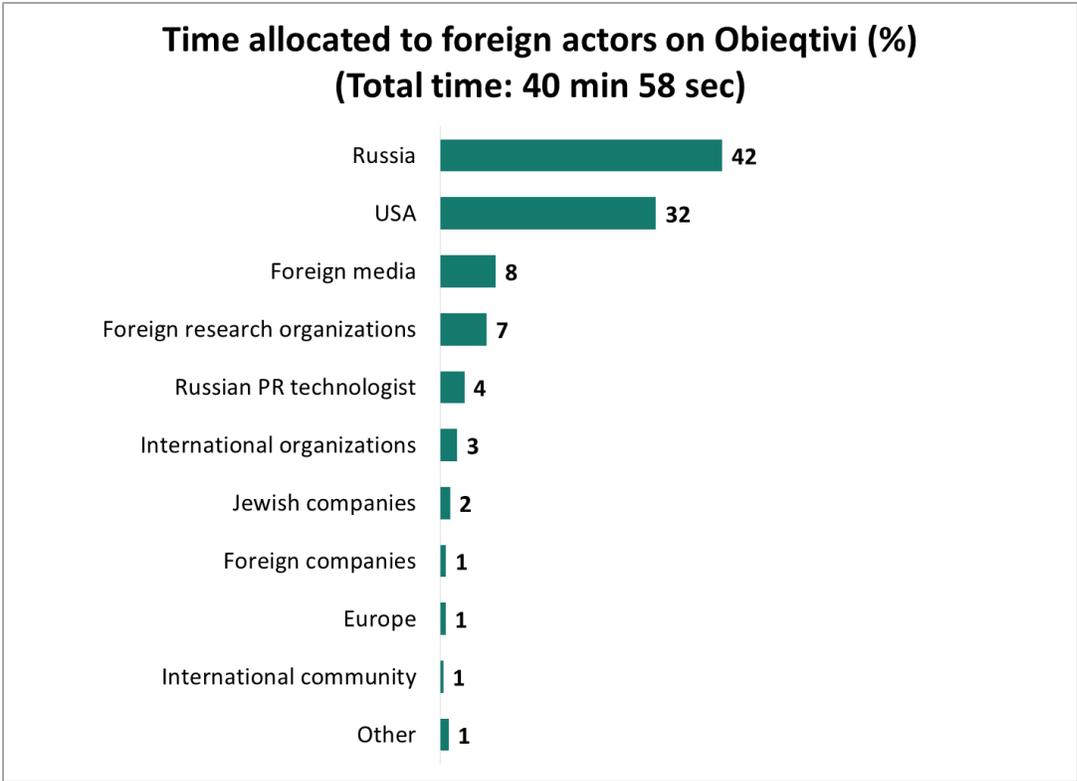
Obieqtivi is linked with one of the opposition parties, the Patriots’ Alliance of Georgia. Therefore, not surprisingly, the coverage, including coverage of foreign actors is following the line of the party interests. During the reporting period Obieqtivi allocated up to seven hours to the coverage of election related news and only 10% of it included foreign actors. In terms of news item number, there were only 15 news items on that. Obieqtivi was the only monitored channel, on which Russia had the largest share of time allocated to it of all foreign actors (42%), the next one was the United States (32%). Topics of news items on Obieqtivi

that included foreign actors in the context of Georgian elections did not vary much and focused on US congressmen and State Department representatives comments and recommendations to the Georgian government, including the telephone conversation of Pompeo and Gakharia; research results claiming that Patriots' Alliance's research was the only credible one and international organizations' election poll results were not to be trusted. The channel tried to justify the Patriots' Alliance in the Dossier Center's allegations that it was funded by Russia and spoke about attack on this party and case of slander. Foreign actors covered in news items were used to discredit the United National Movement and European Georgia (uncovering their links with the Dossier Center authorities and plotting attack on the Patriots' Alliance) and partly discrediting the Georgian Dream by showing that US is giving it alarm signals, which the ruling party is ignoring. Generally, balance was lacking in news items on Obieqtivi and cases of subjective and evaluative language from journalists were frequent.

During the reporting period (July 16th-August 27th), the coverage of election-related topics in main evening news programs took up to 7 hours (6 hours and 44 minutes). And 10% (41 min) of that time was allocated to the coverage of foreign actors. Compared to other channels, the number of news items was much less than on other television channels. There were only 15 news stories that included foreign actors. These stories came mostly in the beginning of the news program (11 out of 15 items were among top three stories of the program). The topics of news items covering foreign actors were as follows: presentation of the Georgian Dream majoritarian candidates, election research – distrusting the election polls commissioned by international organizations and presenting the poll conducted by the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia, Patriots' Alliance of Georgia refuting accusations of Russian funding and calling it slander, Justice Minister Thea Tsouloukiani criticizing NDI poll results, US Ambassador meeting with the governor of Imereti and ombudsman of Georgia, congressmen's letters on democratic development of Georgia and holding fair and transparent elections, telephone conversation between Mike Pompeo and Giorgi Gakharia.

In terms of the time allocated to foreign actors, Obieqtivi was the only channel (of the seven monitored channels), which allocated the largest share of the time to Russia related actors. Forty-five percent of all time allocated to foreign actors came on Russia (Russia per se, Russian political scientist, Russian PR technologist, Russian foreign ministry representative, Russian companies). US related actors received the next largest share of coverage time (32%), then came foreign media, specifically the Dossier Center (8%), and foreign research organizations (7%) (Chart 13)

Chart 13: Time allocated to foreign actors on Obieqtivi



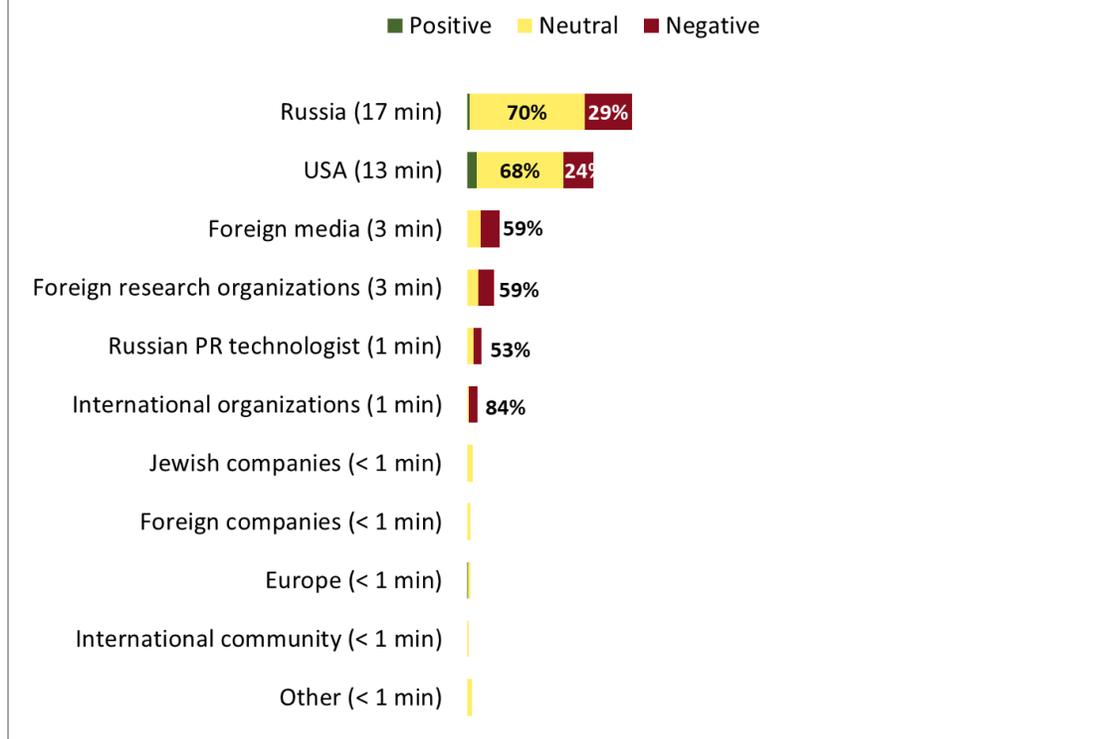
In case of the most frequently covered actors (or groups of actors), some share of direct speech was observed in the main evening news of Obieqtivi. Russia and US related actors commented during 6% and 13% of the time allocated to them, respectively. In case of Russia, these were Russian political scientist speaking directly. In case of USA, these were the US State Department representatives and the US Ambassador.

As for the tone of coverage, negative coverage of Russia was related to stories about the attack on the Patriots’ Alliance with regards to their financial connection with Russia. USA’s negative tone coverage was state department, IRI, NDI (criticizing and not trusting poll results) and congressman (letter of six congressmen to the government of Georgia on holding free and fair elections in Georgia in 2020). In a news story from August 26th, journalist refers the following way to David Kramer from the State Department: “I remind you that this is the David Kramer who last year attacked vice speaker of the Parliament of Georgia Irma Inashvili on an event organized by Giga Bokeria followers, and who showed aggression towards the MP. Before that, on the same conference, people participating in the event were spreading lies and slander about Irma Inashvili and the opposition party Patriots’ Alliance under the name of democracy”.

Foreign media, which received highly negative coverage, is the Dossier Center, which, according to Obieqtivi, attempted to spread disinformation about the Patriots’ Alliance of Georgia. Edison Research polls were covered on Obieqtivi with high distrust towards the methodology and results. Hence, the negative tone of coverage.

Chart 14: Tone of coverage of foreign actors on Obieqtivi

Tone of coverage of foreign actors on Obieqtivi



During the reporting period, Obieqtivi aired two news items about possible connection of the Patriots’ Alliance with Russia. News programs of other monitored channels discussed the issue bringing arguments from several sides, saying that Patriots’ Alliance was channeling Russian policy and was funded from the Kremlin. Obieqtivi’s news programs covered the issue as a false accusation and attack on the Patriots’ Alliance. Arguments of the Dossier Center and people whose commentary was used by other channels to discredit the Patriots’ Alliance and the Georgian Dream was used on Obieqtivi for the discreditation of the United National Movement and European Georgia.

For example, in the August 24th story titled “Targeted attack on the Patriots’ Alliance”, Igor Kuroptev who spoke about Russia funding the Patriots’ Alliance, was presented as closely linked with the United National Movement and European Georgia and follows their orders. In the August 26th story titled “Anatomy of disinformation”, journalist expressed subjective attitude and tried to discredit foreign actors to justify the Patriots’ Alliance: “I remind you that this unreliable agency published lies about the funding of the Patriots’ Alliance”.

The mentioned news items indicate that information about Russia funding the Patriots’ Alliance is spread upon the commission of the Saakashvili-Bokeria grouping. The stories lack balance as there are no comments from either the ruling party or other opposition party representatives.

Another foreign actor who was often covered on Obieqtivi was the United States and related institutions. The channel did not cover that actor as directly participating in the election process. US representatives covered in news items were only highlighting the importance of holding free and fair elections in Georgia. For example, in the July 29th story titled “US Ambassador in Georgia”, Ambassador Kelly Degnan noted the importance of holding fair and transparent parliamentary elections in Georgia. Similar stories on Obieqtivi

are mostly informative and short. As for stories about diplomatic statements and recommendations of the US State Secretary, congressmen and the US Ambassador, they were used to discredit the ruling party. An example of that is the July 28th story on the telephone conversation between the US State Secretary and the Prime Minister of Georgia, in which Executive Secretary of the Patriots' Alliance discusses the telephone conversation as a strict warning from the United States: "All the statements made by international friends should be alarming for the government. The government should listen to the warning and indication and string demand about holding elections in a democratic, transparent and fair way". In the same story, independent MP Davit Chichinadze refers to a foreign actor to discredit the Georgian Dream. He assesses the messages from the United States the following way: "Warning call that time of the Georgian Dream is up". He said that the world was tired and needed changes as so much emphasis was made on the rule of the oligarch. Comments of the ruling party representatives in the same story focused on strategic partnership with the United States, which according to them is beyond any threat.

Stories on Obieqtivi mostly lacked balance. For example, when Obieqtivi spoke about the main opposition power, it meant Patriots' Alliance and only members of that party commented on issues.

One more topic relatively broadly discussed on Obieqtivi during the reporting period was election research results. News items were aired, in which Patriots' Alliance accused international research organizations of lying to people. For example, the August 13 story titled "Results of the large-scale research of the Patriots' Alliance are known – the party disclosed lies of international research organizations again"; a similar title on August 14th "Results of the Patriots' Alliance research – the opposition party uncovers lies of international research organizations". The stories included Irma Inashvili's comment that directly accused NDI, IRI and other research organizations, Edison Research, of being liar organizations".