

MEDIA MONITORING IN BELARUS:

**“Parliamentary Election 2004 Coverage in the
Belarusian Mass-Media”**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Report summarizes the monitoring results from the Belarusian electronic and printed media coverage of the Parliamentary Election held on October 17, 2004. During the monitored period (*from August 16 to October 16, 2004*) on September the 7th the President of the country proclaimed the National Referendum to allow him to take part at 2006 Presidential election contrary to the Article 81 of the Belarusian Constitution, which says that "One and the same person can be the President no more than two terms".¹ The proclamation of Referendum, which was held on the parliamentary election's day, noticeably influenced the whole of the election coverage in the state-owned electronic and printed media, which ascribed to the Referendum-related topics a prominent significance.

This monitoring Project was implemented by the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) with the consultancy of MEMO98, Slovak NGO based in Bratislava, and International organization Article 19 "Global Campaign for Free Expression", having its headquarters in London.

1.1 Summary of Findings

■ During the Parliamentary election campaign news items or election-related topics were far from being a priority for the State owned electronic media and State owned press. Moreover, just after the proclamation of the National Referendum its issues marginalized election items and topics. And the time allocated to the President increased significantly in the electronic media, where he was treated as the main political subject.

■ Although the interest of the independent newspapers in the election process and its actors was more expressed and versatile, they were far from being the main source of information on the election topics due to the very limited circulation in the country.

■ A well-accentuated phenomenon in most of the Belarusian media was the positive/negative rather than neutral presentation of the election subjects. In particular, this referred to such

¹ According to the Constitution in force before the Referendum the President Lukashenka should have stepped down in 2006. As a result of Referendum the Article 81 was changed to contain no terms' restrictions.

subjects as the *President, government, local authorities, political opposition election blocks* as well as *opposition*.

■ In the latest period of the election campaign there took place a significant increase in the number of negative and hostile portrayals of opposition candidates in all major state owned electronic media and the press. The materials were aimed at creating a negative image of the country's political opposition representatives in the voters' minds. Moreover, the State owned electronic media showed such materials at the prime time. The same media continued to present the President in the positive or extremely positive tone creating a contrastive framework for the perception by voters of *pro-governmental and opposition candidates*.

■ As regards regional state electronic and printed media as well as state-owned evening papers for the most part they just ignored different representatives of the political opposition. Instead the regional media allocated significant time and space to the *local authorities* and its representatives, the *President, pro-governmental youth organization* and *official trade unions*, depicting them in a very positive way. Thus, the regional State owned media were creating a positive background for *pro-governmental candidates*.

■ Formally, those State-owned media, which Central Election Commission entrusted with a task of providing candidates free time and space, complied with their legal obligation. However, the inconvenient broadcasting time of the candidates' presentations meant that few voters were reached through the broadcast media. In addition the State-run electronic media didn't show any debates between the candidates for election as a result of which, the voters were deprived of the opportunity to compare the candidates' messages.

■ The propaganda TV-advertisements created to invite citizens to the referendum and election often appeared to be part of prime time. And some of them urged people to vote yes, either directly or indirectly.

■ The post-election and Referendum period witnessed a number of broadcast and printed materials in State owned media, which served to persuade the population that the election and Referendum results conveyed the overwhelming support of the President and the newly elected Parliament by voters. The new membership of the Parliament included, however, no one opposition candidate elected.

These findings are elaborated in the Chapters 3 and 4.

1.2 Monitoring Objectives

The monitoring Project's objectives were as following:

- *To assess the professional level of election campaign coverage by different broadcast and printed media, their impartiality or partiality while covering the activity of different political actor involved in the election process;*
- *To evaluate media ability to disseminate a variety of political and social opinions and perspectives existing in the Belarusian society;*
- *To define the role of both State and independent media in the voters' education as well as their influence on the voters' choice.*

The proclamation of the National Referendum, which's campaign coincided with that of Parliamentary election, led us to introduce a new monitoring rubric to see how and to what extent Belarusian media represented different people's voices while covering the Referendum-related topics.

1.3 Ethics and Professional Standards

To achieve the determined objectives we were based on the internationally recognized professional standards and principles of journalist ethics. The most important among them were as following:

- Freedom of expression;
- Accuracy and transparency;
- Balanced reporting;
- Impartiality;
- Equal access for candidates to public media;
- Non-biased coverage of candidates messages;
- Right of reply and corrections.

All these principles are elaborated in the section "International standards on media coverage of elections" prepared by the International organization Article 19. (See APPENDIX 2).

2. POLITICAL BACKGROUND AND MEDIA SITUATION IN BELARUS

2.1 Brief Overview of the Political Situation

Belarus is a country with an authoritarian rule. All branches of power are dependent upon the President who has the right to dismiss the Government, all other State officials as well as all court judges including the Chairman of the Constitutional Court, Chairman of the Supreme Court, Prosecutor General or Chairman of the Central Election Commission without any consent. Moreover, the decrees of the President have the force of law. Having no controlling functions on the implementation of law in the country the Parliament actually remains a decorative organ, which legislative initiative is substantially limited².

After the second presidential elections (September 9, 2001), which were not recognised by the international community as fairly and democratically held, Belarus has sunk deeper into social and political stagnation with general conditions for political, NGOs and independent media activity rapidly deteriorating.

Eventually the year 2003 witnessed a massive "cleanup" of Belarusian NGOs. The quantity of warnings officially issued to different NGOs that year was six times higher than in 2002. The campaign resulted in that 51 public associations (NGOs) were closed by courts decisions. Moreover, the ruling bodies of 78 associations took decisions of self-liquidation. In the majority of cases the decisions were taken upon "recommendations" made by justice bodies³. The same was true as regards the conditions for independent media activity.

2.2 Media and Administration

It should be known that the country has no one independent electronic media. The only public FM-station "Radio 101, 2" was closed in August 1996. Since those times the independent press has become the main target of attacks.

The oppression methods used by the authorities are versatile and range from economic discrimination, refusal of access to State owned printing facilities to the closure of independent newspapers and criminal persecution of journalists. 2003, as in

² For more detail, please, see Belarus: Reform Scenarios. Warsaw 2003. PP. 25 – 45.

³ Svedcanni perasledu belaruskich njauradavyh arhanizacyj, Minsk, 2004. p. 83-84.

case of NGOs, witnessed the disappearance of more than 20 independent newspapers, both national and regional ones.

The same year for the first time ever the Ministry of Information used its right to suspend the newspapers' publication for a term of 3 months. In total, the publication of 8 independent newspapers was suspended. And because of serious financial losses the majority of them could not resume their publication by the end of the year⁴. Moreover, the trend of suspensions and closure of independent newspapers strengthened in 2004. Suffice it to say that this year freedom of expression violations group recorded suspension of 19 independent newspapers by the Ministry of Information. (See APPENDIX 4).

The wave of repression against the most influential independent media to eliminate them from the Belarusian media scene should be explained by early preparation of the authorities to the Parliamentary elections and Referendum.

The State owned media, whose role in maintaining the existent system of power is extremely significant, on the contrary, increased their presence before and during the election and Referendum campaigns. This is evident by the augmented broadcasting time of the State owned electronic media at the channels used by Russian TV programs⁵, numerous propaganda TV-advertisements, which could be prepared in advance only, or by a special issue of the presidential daily *Sovetsaja Belorussia* published with a huge print run and distributed for free on the eve of the election and Referendum's day⁶.

Dependent upon the President who appoints the head of the National TV and Radio Company, editor-in-chiefs of the major newspapers or approves their appointments, the State owned media are officially viewed to be an instrument of implementing the State (President's) policy. As a result they are selective while covering Belarusian realities. The dependency of the State owned media as well as oppressions against independent newspapers make freedom of expression violations inevitable and numerous. (Results of freedom of expression violations monitoring are presented in the APPENDIX 4).

⁴ Mass Media in Belarus: 2003. Annual Report prepared by the Belarusian Association of journalists. Minsk, April 2004. P.8 – 11.

⁵ According to some estimate, during the last year and a half the broadcast time of both Russian radio and TV programmes has diminished by 70%. These programmes were substituted by Belarusian ones or were stopped at all.

⁶ The ordinary circulation of this newspaper is 314 274 copies, while the official print run of the special issue was tantamount to 863 125 copies.

2.3 Monitored Media

The choice of monitored media was determined by three basic criteria. First, these had to be the most influential State owned electronic and print media as well as independent newspapers having the largest audiences. Second, this were State owned media, which the Central Election Commission entrusted with a task of providing candidates free time and space (in some cases the choice made upon these two criteria coincided). And finally, these had to be national and regional media outlets. As a result of the selection process 5 broadcast media (plus 4 regional TV programs) and 15 both State owned and independent newspapers were chosen. All electronic media were monitored at prime time. (The list of media outlets monitored is available in APPENDIX 3). And how electronic and print media were monitored is also described in the same APPENDIX.

3. MONITORING RESULTS

Started on August 16th the monitoring followed major phases of the election process, namely, nominating candidates (*from August 8 to September 6, 2004*), candidates' registration (*September 7 - 16, 2004*), election campaign (*from the registration to October 16, 2004*) and also after the election's day period (*till November the 1st*).

As regards all these phases the common peculiarity consisted in a restricted attention given by the State owned media to the election-related topics and its figures. The phenomenon could be explained by the way that the Belarusian parliament does not play a significant political role in the country. Moreover, any wide coverage of the election campaign would create much more opportunities for the opposition candidates to make their electoral messages public.

3.1 News and Current Affairs

The State owned electronic media are the most influential in Belarus. The daily audiences of two major National TV channels monitored (these are State owned *Belarusian TV (1st Channel)* and *All National TV*) constitute around 80% of the Belarusian population. The readership of all State owned press could be roughly estimated to be around 4 million people out of almost 10 million's Belarusian population and that of independent press to

be around 600,000 people. As it has been already mentioned, the country has no one independent TV or radio station.

3.1.1 Electronic Media

News programs of State owned *Belarusian TV (1st Channel)*, *All National TV*, *Capital TV*, *National Radio station (Channel 1)* and *Radio Capital* were monitored at prime time. Unlike the print media, the electronic media were monitored according to different themes, which were "Elections", "Economy", "Industry", "Agriculture", "Domestic Politics", "Foreign Politics", "Culture", "Sport", "Weather", "Advertising", "Announcements", and "Miscellaneous" (lately the "Referendum" was added). The monitoring of both electronic and printed media encompassed 34 political subjects or actor of the election process. (The whole list of subjects that were the same for both electronic and printed media is available in APPENDIX 3).

The cumulative first period (*from August 16 to September 6, 2004*) sheet of monitoring *Panorama* news programme at the *Belarusian TV (1st National Channel)* has shown that "Elections" were given the least time to compare with the other rubrics. The total time allocated to the election related topics was only 1% of the total program time. The other rubrics, as for example, "Sport", "Agriculture" and "Foreign Politics" took 25%, 17% and 16% of the total time respectively. Thus, the topic *Elections* was at the lower level of coverage than even "Miscellaneous" was (5% of the total time).

The regional news programs (in Vitebsk, Hrodna and Mahileu) revealed the same trend.

The National Radio ascribed a bit higher importance to the topic of *Elections* than the *Belarusian TV (1st National Channel)* did. *The Radio-fact* news program, for example, allocated 2% of the total program time during the first phase of monitoring.

At this phase the monitors did not identify any case, where the State electronic media touched the topic of the Parliamentary elections observation.

A favoring attitude towards the representatives of the authorities and a negative one towards the representatives of the political opposition characterized the presentation by the State electronic media of different subjects of the election process.

Moreover, there was no one case, when the criticized opponents could have access to the State owned media to develop their arguments or to refute accusations.

As it was stated the proclamation of the National Referendum significantly influenced the content of the State owned electronic media outlets and its coverage of the election topic.

The cumulative second period *Our News* programme at *All National TV (September 7 – 16)* sheet of monitoring has shown that the referendum was given 12.12% of coverage, while the time allocated to the *Election* amounted only to 0.42% of the total time. The same program allocated 10 times more of its total time to the *Weather* than to the *Election*.

Similar approach demonstrated *24 Hours* news program at *Capital TV* channel and *Naviny Mahileu* news program at *Mahileu regional TV*, which allocated twice more time to the *Referendum* than to the *Election*. *Naviny* news program at *Hrodna regional TV* was the only one to give more extensive coverage to the *Election* (4 min. 45 sec.) than to the *Referendum* (2 min. 2 sec.). The same program allocated, however, 6 min. 40 sec. to *Sport*.

The data make it evident that the minimal coverage of the *Election* comparable with *Weather* or *Miscellaneous* conveys insignificant political importance attached to this event. It is much more evident in view of the fact that no weather cataclysms took place in Belarus at that time.

The main actor at this period was the Belarusian President. Of all 34 political subjects monitored *Our News* programme at *All National TV* allocated 51.25% of its total time to the President and 4.21% to the Central Election Commission. Meanwhile, *Naviny Mahileu* news program at *Mahileu regional TV* gave 46% of its total time to the President. It goes without saying that the President was shown in a positive or extremely positive way.

As in previous period the other representatives of the authorities had a favoring attitude, while the representatives of the political opposition were viewed in a negative or highly negative way. In addition, the percentage of time allocated to the representatives of the opposition and the authorities remained incommensurable. For example, *Our News* programme allocated to the non-personified subject *Opposition* 2.18% of its total time only. And the regional news programs just ignored the opposition and its representatives.

The main subjects in these programs remained *Local authorities, the President, the Government and the Belarusian Youth Union Pro-governmental Organization*.

The election issues as covered in the news programs at *Channel 1 of the National Radio* and *Radio Capital* did not receive any significant attention either. In the first program they took up 3% of the program's total time. And in the second one only 1% of its total time was allocated to the election topics.

During the final period of election campaign (*from the candidates' registration to October 16, 2004*) more attention was dedicated to the candidates. A number of State owned electronic and print media allocated free time and space to the candidates at this phase. And especially on the eve of the election's day both TV and Radio news programs gave more attention to the election and referendum issues.

More time allocated to the *Election* than to the *Referendum* at the final period of the campaign was, however, followed by a significant increase of time given to the main figure of Referendum Mr. Lukashenka.

Thus, the aggregate monitoring form (17th September – 15th October) of *Panorama* news program broadcast at *Belarusian TV (1st National Channel)* shows that 6,5% (1 hour 07 min.) of the program's total broadcasting time was devoted to the topic of *Election*. The President took, however, 64, 24% (3 hours and 4 min.) of the program's time to compare with the other 33 political subjects. And unambiguously positive or highly positive way of President's presentation prevailed.

The *5 Plus* non-registered opposition election alliance candidates were mentioned in that program for 2 minutes and 8 seconds (0,74% of the total program's time allocated to different political subjects) and *The Free Belarus* opposition alliance candidates for election received much less time or 26 seconds only (0,15% of the total program's time). Besides, the opposition candidates were mentioned mostly negatively and indirectly.

Similar trends were found in all other news programs broadcast by the State owned electronic media. Thus, the news programs of all State owned electronic media did not provide an equal and balanced coverage of major election subjects. And the election related topics were also used as a background for the development of the Referendum campaign.

3.1.2 Printed Media

To compare State owned and non-State newspapers, the last ones covered a greater number of the election related topics as well as different opposition representatives than the State ones did.

There is no doubt that the readers of State and non-State newspapers were offered different views on the subjects/actors of the Parliamentary election campaign. The most contrasting presentations as regards the *President, Government, and 5 Plus* coalition were made by the presidential *Sovetskaja Belorussia* and the independent daily *Narodnaja Volia*. And the most balanced approach to all major subjects was demonstrated by the independent weeklies *Belorusskij Rynok* and *Nasa Niva*. In the meantime, both State and non-State print media made mostly a neutral presentation of the Central Election Commission.

If to compare the initial phase of monitoring with the subsequent ones, the President of the country tended to become the principal newsmaker. Thus, in the period of September 7 – September 16, 2004 the space allocated to the President in the daily *Sovetskaja Belorussia* used to increase by almost 450 square cm. per week on the average. Independent newspapers gave the president more space also.

It goes without saying that the *President* was represented differently depending on whether he was represented by the State or non-State media. For example, the State daily *Sovetskaja Belorussia* depicted him in a predominantly positive or highly positive way. And no one time the same newspaper was critical towards this subject. The non-state *Narodnaja Volia*, however, being critical (33 negative references), represented him also in a neutral (36 references) and in a positive (5 references) way.

At this period the regional newspapers also increased space allocated to this subject. For example, the regional State owned *Minskaja Prauda* increased its space allocated to the President by 22% and represented him in a mostly positive manner.

After the proclamation of Referendum the *President* became the major political figure covered by the State owned press. Thus, *Sovietskaja Belorussia* (17th September – 2nd October 2004) gave to the President 54.41% of the newspaper space compared with all other political subjects monitored.

And it represented him in a positive or extremely positive way. At the same time, the non-personified subject *Opposition* got in the same newspaper 1.76% and the *5 Plus* coalition's candidates 0.32% of the newspaper space. The latter were represented negatively or very negatively.

The State owned regional and evening newspapers, in turn, either did not allocate much space to the opposition and its representatives or did not mention the opposition and its representatives at all.

Thus, both national and regional State owned newspapers were selective while covering different subjects of the Parliamentary election. And the information policy conducted by them was actually aimed at marginalizing the election related issues, if to compare them with those of Referendum. No one time these periodicals did provide their pages for just neutral information on opposition political subjects.

The non-governmental periodicals, although attempted to cover the election issues and to represent the election participants in the broadest way possible, couldn't compete with the State owned print media, let alone Radio and TV. And with their relatively small circulations they couldn't withstand also the one-sided information disseminated by the State owned electronic and printed media.

3.2 Direct Access

"Direct access" is a term to describe media coverage of candidates or parties' messages that are not controlled by the editorial boards of media allocating time or space for election messages. This coverage can be free of charge or paid. In Belarusian State owned media the direct access is exclusively free of charge and paid advertising has never been a real practice in both State owned and independent media.

The Resolution #71 of the Central Election and Referendums Commission of the Republic of Belarus dated September 8, 2004 defined the procedure of allocating by State owned media free time and space to the registered candidates for election.

Candidates had the right to include the printed materials in one of the State owned newspaper and to record their electoral speeches at one of the TV channels and one of the Radio stations defined by the Central Commission.

The volume of the text to be published was limited to 3 500 signs and the free broadcast time could not exceed 5 minutes. In view of the fact that the Belarusian law does not allow to buy broadcast time and newspaper's space to disseminate electoral messages it is evident that the candidates had a very limited direct access to both electronic and printed media.

The same Resolution prescribed the broadcasting of electoral speeches to be held on working days only. Moreover, the time for the broadcasting of free slots on the radio was fixed between 5.00 and 6.00 p.m. and that of TV broadcasting between 6.00 and 7.00 p.m. Quite often, however, the TV broadcasting of electoral speeches of candidates took place between 6.00 and 6.15 p.m., when a significant number of people were on their way from working places.

Thus, the inconvenient broadcast time of electoral speeches meant that candidates' presentations through the broadcast media reached few voters.

A significant portion of voters in the capital of the country could not also get acquainted with their candidates' electoral programs through printed media due to the fact that they were published in different national printed media outlets and very few people were subscribers of all the six State owned national newspapers allocated for the publication of candidates' programs. Moreover, the information on those State owned broadcast and printed media, which the Central Commission prescribed the free coverage of candidates' electoral messages, was not widely publicized. During the election campaign it could not be even found on the web site of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Belarus.

3.3 Opinion Materials

The extensiveness of opinion materials (special programs, which in the State owned electronic media are quite often called "analytical programs", editorials, comments and readers' letters) on the election and Referendum-related topics as well as subjects of election differed significantly from one media outlet to another. The most active in producing opinion pieces were the *1st National Channel* and presidential daily *Sovietskaja Belorussia*. The regional State owned media were a bit more discrete. Instead the regional State owned newspapers used to publish opinion materials prepared by the State owned information agency (BELTA).

The independent press while producing opinion materials tried to follow an analytical instead of propaganda approach used by the State owned newspapers.

3.3.1 Electronic Media

As news programs, the opinion materials produced by the State owned electronic media were characterized by a contrastive approach to the *President, Government, pro-governmental organizations, local authorities*, on the one hand, and *opposition alliances, NGOs* and their representatives, on the other hand. The first group of subjects was depicted in a positive or highly positive way and the second one was highlighted negatively or extremely negatively.

The time allocated to the first group was incommensurably much more significant. However, by the end of election campaign the time allocated to opposition alliances and their representatives as well as the number of their negative and extremely negative portraits tended to increase.

Thus, at the concluding phase of the election campaign *1st National Channel* and *Capital TV* aired the election film "Conspirology", which is a quasi-documentary dedicated to the Belarusian political opposition and its some leaders. Unlike candidates' TV-speeches the film was shown during primetime hours.

The film presented the *5 Plus* election alliance candidates and the non-personified subject *Opposition* in an extremely negative way. For instance, during the first two parts of the film in the space of 13 min 20 sec. these two subjects were 38 times characterized either negatively or extremely negatively and were portrayed with neutral tonality on two occasions only. In the following two parts, the opposition took 65.5% of the film time and in 25 cases was depicted in either a negative or in highly negative manner. Essentially, the opposition was represented as a destructive force of the Belarusian society.

The negative attitude towards the opposition and its representatives (A.Liabiedzka, V.Viachorka, V.Fralou) was also vivid in the interview with U. Latypau, Heard of the President's Office, at *All National TV* broadcast on 10 October, 2004. The same interview, which was dedicated to the preparation of Referendum and voting by the authorities, was repeated by the *Capital TV* three days later.

Meantime, the weekly analytical program *V center vnimanja (At the Focus of Attention)* broadcast at the *1st National Channel* continued to extol the President. The cumulative data of this program (26.09. – 10.10. 2004) demonstrates that the President received 79, 69% of the total program's time. During almost 52 min. he was shown 180 times in a positive or highly positive way.

3.3.2 Printed Media

As with electronic media the number of opinion materials in the State owned newspapers varied according to different publications. No one State owned newspaper demonstrated, however, a balanced approach to the issues connected with election or Referendum. No one time alternative views on the same issues were presented either.

Basically all the opinion materials could be divided into three major categories: a) presentation of election and Referendum' subjects; b) special articles and letters published in the State owned newspapers to persuade voters to take part at Referendum and election in favor of the President and pro-governmental candidates and, finally, c) comments on before election and Referendum sociological pools' results made public by both pro-governmental and independent sociological research institutions.

As regards the presentation of major subjects of election campaign and Referendum the monitored State owned newspapers were supportive of the President and pro-governmental candidates. For example, the presidential daily *Sovietskaja Belorussia* in one and the same issue dated *September 9th 2004* published a number of letters of support from the Presidential web site as well as a part from the appeal of 43 pro-governmental parties and organizations to express "an unanimous support to the President Lukashenka... and also to take an active part at Parliamentary election and to support candidates representing patriotic forces". It goes without saying that the context of publication did not allow treating the opposition candidates as patriots.

The State owned regional newspapers followed the same policy. For example, *Vicebski Rabochy* newspaper dated *September 30th 2004* published a similar appeal made by the Vicebsk regional Council of leaders of political parties and public organizations.

Letters of support by the local readers and officials in favor of the President, pro-governmental candidates and organizations were also published on a regular basis in the local press.

The non-State newspapers were mostly critical towards the Referendum. In their criticism they appealed, however, to the Belarusian Constitution and law. At the same time they tried to give a balanced presentation of major subjects of election campaign and Referendum. For example, independent weekly *Bielorusskij Rynok* (October 4th –October 11th 2004) presented the *President* 50 times in a neutral way, 2 times negatively and 1 time positively. And the same newspaper in that same period depicted the *5 Plus* coalition in a neutral way only. Even the critical *Narodnaja Volia* was mostly neutral than critical towards the *President* for that week.

The publication of results of sociological pool as regards the prospective support of the idea of Referendum and opposition candidates by the voters reminded an information war waged by the State owned press against independent sociological institutions such as Russian Analytical Center by Yuri Levada. To neutralize the impact of sociological findings, which did not reveal the favoring of Referendum by the majority⁷, both national and regional State owned newspapers were disseminating the results of sociological pools conducted by the State owned institutions, which said about the overwhelming support of the President by the population. Sometimes these results looked fantastic, as it was the case of a public poll conducted by an unknown analytical center with no professional history.

Thus, on *September 9th, 2004* the two largest state-owned national dailies *Zviazda* and *Sovetskaja Belorussia* both published the material representing the findings of “EKOOM” analytical center. The question the interviewers answered was as follows: “What has the *President* done for the Belarusian people for 10 years?” The overwhelming majority of the interviewers (93%) chose between three answers: 1) Very many useful things, 2) Many useful things and 3) Quite a lot of good things. 6% of the interviewers replied “Few useful thinks” and only 1% answered “Nothing good”. The data published did not correlate even with the results of the *President's* support by the population issued by the State owned sociological institutions.

⁷ According to this pool, 47,5% replied “yes” to the change of Article 81 of the Constitution. 37% replied “no”, 9,7% refrained from answering and 5,8% did not have an answer. At the same time 39% only would vote for Lukashenka, if the Presidential election took place in the nearest future. See: *Narodnaja Volia*, #187 (2000). P.1.

This last case is actually one of the examples of propaganda approach that will be considered in more details in the following section.

4. BIASED INFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA IN STEAD OF VOTERS EDUCATION

While monitoring both electronic and printed media the monitors fixed also the cases of serious deviations from the professional standards and principles of journalist ethics, which as a rule are indicative of a biased coverage of publicly important issues, topics or figures. These cases evaluated on the scale of highly positive or highly negative presentations are called **media effects**. Essentially these are the cases of emotionally-charged critical remarks. The quantity of such cases conveys to what extent media are involved or not involved into the manipulation of public opinion, weather they are propaganda oriented or not.

4.1 Media Effects

Hundreds of media effects were detected in the State owned electronic and printed media. These are just some eloquent examples.

*1st National Channel: **Panorama** evening news programme (September 5, 2004), the item "Oppositionists do not follow the rules of a game":*

A journalist narrates about the procedure of signatures collection. Further on the voice says, "Some activists of opposition are unable of doing even that (to collect voters' signatures): signatures' sheets contain signatures made by one and the same hand in stead of numerous signatures that voters had to make".

One more passage from the same item: a journalist says, "As the press informed, in some apartment houses the apartment's doors boards of those citizens who refused to put their signature for the opposition candidates, turned out to be cut".

State- owned *Capital TV: **24 Hours** evening news programme (August 19, 2004) the item announced the day a day of informing people about the elections. However, the elections were represented in a non-positive or even criminal way. TV channel put its viewers at their guard.*

The voice said, *"Please, manifest not only your civic awareness but also your vigilance, because the future of the country depends upon them (citizen's deliberateness and vigilance) "*.

Vicebskij Rabochij newspaper in the article named "Checked by Labor Collectives" (#107 (21156), 02.09.2004, p.1) contains a hidden propaganda in favor of the prospective candidates supported by the authorities: *"There is no doubt that the most reliable people are candidates put forward by the labor collectives, because they have shown themselves among the people of labor and not at parties' separate group meetings"*.

Zviazda newspaper in the article "Sightseeing of Turau" (#211, 04.09.2004) contains a piece, which is as follows *"The head of the State does not put forward small tasks... The President looks over further on than we do; and his outlook is that for the future; he evaluates better and much more realistically the possibilities of the republic... And if he puts forwards such a high objective... it means that he certainly knows how to reach it"...*

All National TV, Our News programme dated September 11, 2004. The item is about the referendum. An old man says: *"Last year and two years ago we veterans of the Great Patriotic War asked Aliaksandr Hrygorievich Lukashenka to agree to be our president for another term. And we asked him despite any ... protests, which are bullshit... I was in Russia and people there said, 'Give us Aliaksandr Hrygorievich just for a year, so that he can restore order in Russia.' But we will not give him, we need him ourselves"*.

1st National Channel, In the Focus of Attention programme, September 12, 2004. The item is entitled *Russians Are for Lukashenka*. The Deputy of the Russian Duma V. Alksnis states, *'At this moment I see that the President Lukashenka is the only statesman on the post Soviet scene who really cares about his country's good ..."*.

1st National Channel, "Panorama" programme dated September 22, 2004. Episode: "Belarus Welcomes Foreign Observers". A journalist comments: *"It is obvious that Belarus has met the absolute maximum of conditions, suggested by the international legal norms in order to hold the democratic, fair and open election."*

1st National Channel, "In the Focus of Attention" program. September 26, 2004.

Recollecting the NATO bombing in Kosovo, a presenter states: *"The Belarusian opposition still recalls these events with some unhealthy warmth in their voices. They even had a slogan: "Beograd – in spring, Minsk – in autumn".*

1st National Channel and CTV Channel, "Conspirology" film. September 26, 2004. "Bogdanovich...double-crossed the SPS⁸ party activists in Karelia. After the election campaign, she immediately left Pietrozavodsk, having forgotten to pay the signature collectors... The Official Prosecutors of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Karelia are holding an investigation...while Ms. Bogdanovich is preparing for the Parliamentary election in Belarus... Never get mixed up with the United Civil Party – they'll cheat you anyway!"

STV Channel October 3, 2004. "Conspirology" film. "The cynical figures like Pogonyajlo, Liebiedko... involved the close relatives of the kidnapped into this tragic farce." The picture shows someone, wearing dark glasses. The person surveys the activists standing with posters and photos of the kidnapped Belarusian politicians.

All these passages remind in fact the Soviet times' propaganda in the communist media, which were heavily criticizing all kind of opponents or enemies and were extolling the communist chiefs thanks to the leadership of whom the USSR managed to achieve unprecedented success in all spheres of life. The propaganda effect of these and all other cases recorded by the monitors was outlined by the fact that criticized opponents had no opportunity to expose their arguments in the same media. No other alternative views were allowed either.

Some media effects were also detected in few independent newspapers. The number of these cases is, however, incommensurably much smaller and cannot be compared with that revealed in the State owned media. In addition some independent newspapers could not refrain from a populist writing.

This is the example of a highly negative attitude contained in *Birzha informacyji* weekly (#33 (341), August 19, 2004. The article "Portrait of a Hrodna based family in the light of statistics", written in a populist style, says, *"In order to save the region, it is high time for us to become its masters. Favorites have already demonstrated their complete failure"*.

⁸ This is a transliterated Russian abbreviation for the Union of Right Forces headed by B. Nemtsov.

Russian independent newspaper *Komsomolskaja Pravda v Belarusi*" dated *September 16, 2004* published an anecdote as following: "A cabinet meeting is over and everyone is leaving the room. Then all of a sudden the 'Farther' says: "And as for you goats, I want you to stay. All the ministers come back and sit down. And it is only a bit later that they understand that the 'Farther' addressed just one of them, Goats by name".

4.2 Propaganda Advertisements

According to the international standards one of the most important functions of the media before and during an election campaign is voter education. This means explaining to voters how to register to vote, what the vote means and how and where to vote. The media should also stress the fact that vote is secret. While educating voters it is essential that the media should be politically impartial. In no way they should push the electorate towards voting for one or other political party or candidate, promote this or that answer, if the talk is about questions submitted for a referendum. During the Parliamentary election and Referendum campaigns in Belarus the voters' education was, however, far from corresponding to the international standards.

All the State owned TV channels, especially at the final phase of election and Referendum campaigns, used to show a number of "educational" advertisements. Broadcast at the prime time they were meant to "help" voters to make a right choice or to explain how the voters should fill in the Referendum ballot to make it valid.

In themselves the election advertisements shown cannot be qualified as propaganda ones. Made under the heading "We vote for Belarus" they were not promoting any concrete candidate or election coalition. Perceived, however, in the general media context of highly positive presentation of the President and numerous country's achievements as well as hostile portrayals of the opposition representatives these advertisements were no doubt favoring the pro-governmental candidates. In turn, the latter ones never failed to extol the successful in-country policy and its creator in their TV electoral speeches.

As a rule one of the well-known Belarusian figures made the appearance in such an election plug to appeal to vote for Belarus.

In the meantime, no one outstanding Belarusian writer, artist or intellectual with opposition views was given the same opportunity.

The Referendum TV-advertisement in the meantime was much less sophisticated. In a direct style it was teaching the voters how to fill in the ballot in a good way: " *While voting for taking the decision for the question submitted for Referendum... put any sign in the square under the word "for". Ballot, in which a sign is put in two squares, is recognized to be invalid. Ballot, which has no sign in each square is also recognized to be invalid*". However, no word was said that by having put a sign in the square under the word "against" the ballot would be valid also.

Moreover, in other propaganda materials like interviews or appeals while promoting the "yes" answer journalists and officials quite often mixed the question of change of Constitution submitted for the Referendum with that of prolonging Mr. Lukashenka's presidency or election. For example, in the already mentioned interview with Mr. Latypau both a journalist and the official used the same expression "vote for the President" as if the talk was about reelecting him.

The case of propaganda was also a special issue of the daily *Sovetskaja Belorussia* published on October 14th 2004 two days before the election and Referendum's day. Printed with an increased print run the issue was delivered by "Belposta", the State owned distributor, even to those people who were not subscribers of the newspaper.

The first page of the issue contained a big photo of the President with a little girl on his hands as well as appeal of the President to the Belarusian people. And the three remaining pages presented the propaganda materials under the rubric "Say to your President YES" with a message appealing to different categories of the population from the youth to workers and retired people.

Having presented the success of the in-country policy in different spheres the issue formulated a number of threats waiting the population, if the political course conducted by the President will be changed. These are some of them. "Our cities will become targets of attacks by international terrorists". "The growth of salaries will be stopped, the State system of pensions and benefits will be liquidated, the prices for housing and communal services will go up...". "Murders and violence will flood the cities". "Drunkenness and drug addiction will make the youth degenerated".

It goes without saying that in the face of such awful and numerous threats it would be an attempt of suicide to say to the President "no".

4.3 State Owned and Independent Media After the Election and Referendum

After the election and Referendum the State owned both electronic and printed media largely presented those international observers (mostly from the former Soviet republics and Russia) who stressed the democratic character of the Parliamentary election and Referendum. These observers did not record any serious violations. As for OSCE observers no one of them with his or her statement was visible in the State owned media.

The results of the exit poll conducted by Gallup institute were heavily criticized in the State owned media. At the same time both officials and the President expressed their satisfaction with the election and Referendum results.

The independent press alongside with the results of the exit poll published a number of critical materials revealing concrete cases of manipulation and falsification.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Belarusian State owned electronic and printed media, for which services citizens pay, did not serve the interests of all the social groups of the Belarusian society and were actually used by the authorities as an instrument of their own political promotion. Journalists working for them, while widely covering the activities of the President and different State bodies, used to do that in a predominantly positive or highly positive way.

The same media created a distorted picture of the opponents to the current regime depicting them in a predominantly negative or highly negative way. As a result the population was not provided with balanced and non-biased information "on the activities of state bodies, public associations, on political, economic and international life..." as the article 34 of the Belarusian Constitution stipulates it. It should be stressed also that balanced reporting and impartiality are among the key internationally recognized principles of election and its participants' coverage.

The great number of media effects contained in State owned media outlets show that journalists working for them quite often did not comply with the professional standards and principles of journalistic ethics.

In the State owned electronic and printed media the election related topics, especially at its initial phase, received a very limited attention. The Referendum's issues marginalised those of the Parliamentary election. As the focus of the State owned media's attention shifted to the Referendum the importance of the upcoming election dwindled considerably. The effect was strengthened by a noticeable increase in time and space allocated to the President.

No alternative views on the Referendum were presented in the State owned electronic or printed media during the monitored period. In this way the same media produced an impression that the public opinion was unanimous in supporting the Referendum.

Although those State-owned media, which the Central Election and Referendums Commission entrusted with allocating free time and space for all candidates, formally fulfilled their obligation, outside the free time and space, they as well as other State-funded media outlets failed to provide fair and balanced election coverage. By purposefully creating either negative or highly negative image of the opposition and its candidates for election they actually violated the principle of equal election campaigning opportunities. And by doing that, the same media were creating favorable conditions for holding the pro-regime candidates' election campaigns.

In addition, negative portrayals of the opposition and its candidates were aired on prime time on State owned TV channels with the largest audiences in the country. Negative materials were also disseminated by the State run newspapers having the largest circulation in the country. The opposition representatives, in their turn, did not have access to these media to put forward their arguments. Thus, the right of reply and corrections, which is guaranteed by the Belarusian law, was violated.

As for the voters, they didn't have enough possibilities to get information on the concrete candidates for election through other information channels than those, which were prescribed by the Central Election Commission to allocate free time and space for candidates for election. It was due mostly to the fact that candidates' messages were broadcast at inconvenient time or

scattered in different State owned newspapers. As a result, the information on the candidates that the voters got through the main State-run electronic and printed media was either insufficient or biased to make a free and unfettered choice.

Especially at the final phase of the election campaign the State owned media largely functioned in a propaganda regime. Based on one-sided view on the main subjects of the election and Referendum campaigns the same media produced a significant number of opinion materials. And against their background they were actively programming the "yes" answer by means of propaganda advertisements.

The independent press due to its limited circulation was and could not be the main source of information on election and Referendum related topics. It could not withstand also one-sided and propaganda presentations of both opposition and authorities' representatives.

APPENDIX 2

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS ON MEDIA COVERAGE OF ELECTIONS

This document was elaborated by the well –known International organization Article 19 having a worldwide experience in freedom of expression issues and media field.

Legal standards

The role of media during elections is governed mainly by two international human rights:

- 1. The right to free expression*
- 2. The right to political participation*

1. **The right to freedom of expression** is protected in:

- Article 19 of the ***Universal Declaration for Human Rights*** (UDHR)⁹;
- Article 19 of the ***International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*** (ICCPR),¹⁰ (ratified by Belarus on 1973 and legally binding on its government);
- Article 10 of the ***European Convention on Human Rights*** (ECHR) (not ratified by Belarus).¹¹

Freedom of expression is seen as one of the most important rights guaranteed under the ECHR. It is fundamental to democracy. In the context of political processes (such as elections), freedom of expression must be particularly protected.

During elections, the right to free expression is essential so as to promote:

- *the media's right to report on elections freely;*
- *all candidates/parties' right to communicate their message to the voters;*

⁹ UN General Assembly Resolution 217A(III), 10 December 1948. The UDHR, as a UN General Assembly resolution, is not directly binding on States. However, parts of it, including Article 19, are widely regarded as having acquired legal force as customary international law since its adoption in 1948.

¹⁰ UN General Assembly Resolution 2200A(XXI), 16 December 1966, in force 23 March 1976.

¹¹ E.T.S. No. 5, adopted 4 November 1950, in force 3 September 1953.

- *the voters' right to receive information about the candidates/parties and about the electoral process.*

Restrictions to the right to free expression:

In very specific, narrowly-defined circumstances international law allows certain restrictions to the right to free expression. Such restrictions have to:

- (1) be prescribed by law;
- (2) pursue one of the legitimate aims, as listed, and;
- (3) be necessary in a democratic society.

The ECHR lists the following legitimate aims:

- national security or public safety,
- the prevention of disorder or crime,
- the protection of health or morals,
- the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

2. **The right to political participation** and **right to vote** are guaranteed in a number of international documents, for example Article 25 of the ICCPR, which states that:

“[e]very citizen shall have the right and opportunity, without ... distinction [of any kind] ... to vote ... at genuine ... elections.”

People can make an informed choice during elections only if they receive accurate and balanced information, together with a variety of viewpoints, so as to be able to form their own opinions on candidates and parties.

What do human rights mean in practice?

International bodies, such as the European Court of Human Rights or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have provided detailed guidance on what these principles mean in the practice of an electoral process. They have implications for the State, the campaigning parties, and the media itself.

Key guidelines are:

- ***All media must be free to report and comment on elections-related news and there must be no government censorship on election-related programmes or articles.***¹²

¹² Political broadcasts or reports may however be subject to post-publication sanctions, for example, if they are found to have been defamatory or likely to incite violence. Any such measures should,

- *The **State-owned (public) media** have to provide the public with fair and balanced reporting, to enable them to make an informed and unfettered choice in electing representatives. All State-owned and State-controlled media (including the print media) should report campaigns in a fair, balanced and impartial manner.*¹³
- *The State-owned media must provide **voter education**. This means, citizens should be well informed about the registration and voting process.*¹⁴
- *The **private broadcast media** can also be required by law to follow some basic principles of fairness, balance and impartiality. However, according to the Council of Europe, such regulations should be implemented "with due respect for the editorial independence of broadcasters".*¹⁵
- ***Private print and Internet-based media** should be free to express a political preference for one or other candidates.*

*While the State should not make prescriptions on content to the private media, it is strongly recommended that all private media develop and follow **voluntary guidelines** conducive to fair reporting. This serves to fulfil the principles of journalistic ethics and to promote freedom of expression.*

- *It is common to give a certain amount of free air-time to candidates/parties (often but not always on the public broadcaster) so they can communicate their messages to the public. This **free air-time** has to be provided in a **fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory** way.*¹⁶
- *If **paid political advertising** is allowed, this "should be made available to all contending parties **indiscriminately**".*¹⁷ *This rule applies to both the public and private media.*

however, be enforced through the regular judicial processes, in accordance with international human rights standards.

¹³ Recommendation R(99)15 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Measures Concerning Media Coverage of Election Campaigns, Note 2, Appendix, Principle I.2 ([Recommendation R\(99\)15](#)). Also Recommendations on media and election are contained in the 1999 Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Protection and Promotion of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Mr. Abid Hussein, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1999/64, 29 January 1999, Point 17 ([UN 1999 Report](#)).

¹⁴ See 1999 UN Report, Point 17.

¹⁵ Recommendation R(99)15, Note 2, Appendix, Principle II.1.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, Principle II.4 and UN 1999 Report, Point 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, Principle II.5.

- An ***election administration*** (central, regional, local) should be established which is independent of government, as well as of any political, financial or other force that can undermine its independence. The Central Election Commission has to be tasked and enabled to monitor and safeguard all principles of freedom of expression during the election period.

Ethical standards for media and journalists

Why ethics and self-regulation?

There are some important reasons why the media should establish and follow principles of professional ethics. Here are two of them:

- *The media possess (in other places we put media as singular. We should make it consistent – normally I use the singular form, although it's true that medium is actually the singular form...I think that the singular is used increasingly) great power in society because of their capacity to shape public opinion. The media should exercise this power with accountability.*
- *Establishing your own ethical guidelines and the procedures for upholding them, means exercising your freedom of expression – the freedom to make your own decisions in this sphere. It is aimed to protect you from restrictions that are imposed from above, and can protect against illegitimate accusations and attacks.*

What is ethics?

Ethics is the personal capability of and commitment to responsible judgement in each circumstance, even the most challenging and unusual. Guidelines and codes of conduct help in upholding it, but it requires active commitment to ethical standards from each member of the profession and each media outlet.

Key principles of journalistic ethics during elections

Principles for covering elections should be based on general ethical principles for good journalism, as they are outlined in numerous codes of conduct around the world. One of the most authoritative codes is the Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists

of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ Code of Conduct).¹⁸

Most codes hold journalists responsible for:

- Respecting the truth and disseminating accurate information;¹⁹
- Refraining from fabricating information or falsifying documents;
- Using fair methods to obtain information;
- Respecting the confidentiality of sources;
- Avoiding discrimination;
- Avoiding 'malicious representation', defamation and bribery.²⁰

Specific guidelines for election periods include:

- Cover elections **fairly!** This means that on a contentious issue a journalist should seek comments from all sides involved, and give a candidate the opportunity to respond to another candidate's accusation.
- Report news as **accurately** as possible, refraining from deliberately favouring any candidate!
- Always strive to **correct any inaccurate information** you may have disseminated by mistake. This has to be done particularly speedily during an election campaign, where time is vitally important for the campaigning parties and candidates.
- Speedily give the **right of reply** to those who have been harmed by the dissemination of inaccurate or false information through you.²¹ The reply, correction or retraction should be approximately the same length, and should be broadcast in approximately the same time period, as the allegedly defamatory statement.
- Do not attempt to 'interpret' a candidate's words, but instead **faithfully report** what was said.
- Avoid **emotive, inflammatory or discriminatory language** on any grounds, including race, gender and religion.

¹⁸ Available on <http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?Issue=ETHICS&Language=EN>.

¹⁹ Principle 1 of the IFJ Code of Conduct states: "Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist".

²⁰ The IFJ Code of Conduct counts as 'grave professional offenses' malicious misrepresentation; calumny, slander, libel or unfounded accusations; and the acceptance of a bribe (Principle 8).

²¹ There should be an expedited procedure: during the short and intense election period, there is not time to address unfair and incorrect accusations through courts, and these can have a significant effect on the overall outcome.

- In your reporting, make a clear distinction between the reporting of **facts** and the expression of an **opinion or commentary**.
- Provide **voters voices** in your reporting
- Give access to your medium to **all candidates**.
- **Opinion polls** should be reported with due care. You should ensure that, along with the poll, you report essential information such as the date when the poll was carried out, who commissioned and carried it out, and the margin of likely error.²²

What is a **bias**?

A bias can be plain favouritism, but also omission of certain information, portraying of a story from a particular angle or giving it a certain twist.

Deliberate biases may also include more subtle techniques, such as the use of camera angles to make a candidate more or less photogenic, and the location of a candidate's interview (a luxurious office as opposed to decrepit surroundings).

How to cope with **biases**?

Avoiding biases is not an easy task even for the best journalists, and all journalists make mistakes occasionally – not only because of political pressure or to pursue personal gain, but also simply because of work pressure and the need to meet deadlines. Partisanship may be the result of other underlying, internal and invisible processes. As a journalist noted:

The gathering, editing and publishing of news involves decisions by people who inevitable bring their own background, values and prejudices to bear on deciding what to select, emphasise and colour as new.²³

In addition, an increase in news items relating to the incumbent is not necessarily a clear indication of bias, but may simply result from the emergence of circumstances which require the incumbent's particularly frequent public exposure. What the media and the Central Election Commission should ensure is the **elimination of deliberate biases** - and the provision of journalistic training so as to avoid unintentional biases as much as possible.

²² For example, see the BBC rules on this issue, reported in ACE, *op. cit.*, "Voluntary Guidelines on Reporting Opinion Polls – United Kingdom". <http://www.aceproject.org/main/english/me/mey16.htm>

²³ International Federation of Journalists, *Election Reporting Handbook. A Media for Democracy Handbook*, p.8 <http://www.ifj.org/pdfs/electionreporting.pdf>.

As the IFJ reminds us, a journalist is "a link between the event and the reader, listener or viewer ... news coverage should not become a barrier between the candidates and the voters. It should be a bridge connecting them."²⁴

What practical steps can be taken?

Journalists' organisations such as the IFJ recommend a range of measures to improve media performance during election periods. These include the following.

Recommendations for Individual Journalists

- Carefully study the media-related **election rules** before the campaign starts!
- Thoroughly prepare yourself by studying the major candidates and the socio-political context of the elections!
- Respect **issue complexity!** Issues are often more complicated than they might appear at first sight. Journalists should be acute observers and good analysts. One should remember that being impartial does not mean that one should not question or criticise.
- Do your utmost to remain **impartial** vis-à-vis the political process! As the IFJ Election Manual recommends, a journalist should not even take a ride in a politician's car.²⁵ This could impact adversely on his/her credibility.
- In general, follow the guidelines of the **IFJ Code of Conduct** when reporting at all times!

Recommendations for Media Outlets

- Different media outlets should join forces to prepare **general professional guidelines** and codes of conduct for journalists, as well as a mechanism for its implementation.
- Each media outlet should develop **internal guidelines** for the coverage of elections.
- It may be advisable for a media outlet to establish an **internal system** - such a committee responsible for reviewing news items/articles so as to monitor impartiality, and to provide support to journalists.
- An internal **ombudsperson** may be appointed to review complaints from the public.
- So as to protect journalists' editorial freedom, **internal statutes** can be adopted. Some newspapers have

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.9.

²⁵ John Lawrence, Briefing Paper by Training Editor of "The Nation", Kenya, in International Federation of Journalists, *op. cit.*, p.24.

agreements guaranteeing that journalist should not be forced to perform or report in a way that is contrary to their convictions. Committees of nominated representatives can act to safeguard the interest of journalists in case of conflict between them and management.

- The media should invest in building a relationship of **trust with the public**. A media outlet can, for example, set out and communicate to the electorate its rules for the reporting of the campaign, and solicit feedback from the public.
- **Resource persons** should be at hand to provide answers to specific questions. These may include media lawyers, respected political analysts, sociologists and specialists in journalistic codes of conduct and journalistic ethics.
- **Minor parties** should also be given attention in the media.
- **Media and political parties/electoral candidates** could **jointly** develop an agreement to promote ethical behaviour in their interaction and guarantee **mutual respect** during the election campaign. This type of informal agreement can improve the, often problematic, relationship between journalists and politicians, and reduce the common lack of mutual trust.

When violence against journalists was on the increase in **South Africa** in 1992, the South African Union of Journalists convened a meeting with the representatives of major political parties. A "**Declaration of Respect for the Rights of Working Journalists**", was signed by the parties, stated that they undertook to "respect and promote the physical safety of journalists, including news photographers and radio and television crews".²⁶

- After the elections, a media outlet should **assess its performance** and identify possible drawbacks, so as to correct them in future electoral campaigns.

Resources:

- UDHR

<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

- ECHR

<http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/Treaties/Html/005.htm>

²⁶ International Federation of Journalists, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 and 28.

- **ICCPR**

http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ccpr.htm

- **ARTICLE 19 *Guidelines for Election Broadcasting in Transitional Democracies*, London 1994**

In 1994, building on experience gained during the first wave of democratic elections in post-Soviet Central and Eastern Europe, ARTICLE 19 published its *Guidelines for Election Broadcasting in Transitional Democracies*. These guidelines focus on the role of the broadcast media in elections, with a special focus on the obligations of State-owned broadcasters.

<http://www.article19.org/docimages/516.htm>

- **Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe**

In 1999, the Committee of Ministers adopted **Recommendation R(99)15** on Measures Concerning Media Coverage of Election Campaigns,²⁷ which goes beyond the broadcast sector and recommends measures that apply to all media.

[http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/media/5_Documetary_Resources/1_Basic_Texts/2_Committee_of_Ministers'_texts/Rec\(1999\)015%20E%20&_Exp_Mem.asp#ToPage](http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/media/5_Documetary_Resources/1_Basic_Texts/2_Committee_of_Ministers'_texts/Rec(1999)015%20E%20&_Exp_Mem.asp#ToPage)

- ***UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression***

*Recommendations on media and election are contained in the **1999 Report** of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Protection and Promotion of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Mr. Abid Hussein, UN Doc. E/CN.4/1999/64, 29 January 1999, [http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/\(Symbol\)/E.CN.4.1999.64.En?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/(Symbol)/E.CN.4.1999.64.En?Opendocument)*

- **OSCE**

Further recommendations regarding the role of the media in election times can be found in the **'human dimension' agreements** adopted by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

²⁷ Adopted 9 September 1999.

See 'Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE', June 1990, mainly Principle 7.8.

<http://www.osce.org/docs/english/1990-1999/hd/cope90e.htm>

- **Venice Commission**

Further recommendations are also included in the **Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters** adopted by the European Commission for Democracy through Law,²⁸ better known as the Venice Commission, an international organisation established through the Council of Europe.²⁹

[http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2002/CDL-AD\(2002\)023rev-e.asp](http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2002/CDL-AD(2002)023rev-e.asp)

²⁸ European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, Strasbourg, 30 October 2002, CDL-AD (2002) 23.

²⁹ Russia is a member of the OSCE, Council of Europe and the Venice Commission.

APPENDIX 3

MONITORING METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

This methodology was developed by MEMO98, Slovak NGO based in Bratislava. To adapt it to the Belarusian situation some small changes were made. And some methodological tools were further developed.

Key concepts to this methodology are **subjects** of the election process and **rubrics**, according to which the content of electronic media outlets is monitored. Another important concept is an object of monitoring, which is just a media outlet that a team of monitors choose to make quantitative and qualitative analysis of its content based on **professional standards** and principles of **journalist ethics**.

While conducting monitoring it is important to be aware of different stages of the election campaign, which, as it is the case of Belarus, were determined by the Central Election and Referendums Commission. Concerning the role of the media, the Central Election Commission's schedule provided for:

- Publishing the list of constituencies in state-controlled papers;
- The National State Broadcasting Corporation allotting a fixed amount of time for candidates to appear on the state broadcast media (in 10 days since the election day was announced);
- Defining the list of the State owned newspapers entrusted with a task of providing candidates free space;
- Publishing the results of the election for each constituency in the state-run press (by October 22).

2. Quantitative and qualitative approaches

Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches the monitoring methodology aims to produce the most objective evaluation possible of how the election is being covered in the media. Three basic parameters are taken into account to evaluate the character of media election coverage:

- Time (in broadcast media) and space (in print media) given to different subjects, their representatives or actors in the election process;
- The manner in which different subjects, their representatives or actors are presented in different media outlets;
- And instances of unprofessional or unbalanced election coverage, including distorted information, libel and defamation concerning candidates, their programmes, conduct, etc.

The first or quantitative parameter presupposes measuring **time and space** given by the media to different subjects. The second (qualitative) monitoring parameter is the **manner in which the subjects are presented** in the media. It presupposes assessment of news items in the broadcast media and contributions to the print media in terms of favouring particular subjects in each news item or article. And the third parameter, which is also a qualitative one, is based on revealing to what degree news items and articles correspond to **professional standards in journalism** (i.e. separating facts from commentaries, many-sided presentation, impartiality, etc.). It is also based on revealing how news items and articles correlate with **ethics in journalism** (i.e. equal opportunities for opponents, the opponent's right to respond in the same media outlet that has distorted information or presented the subject in a negative light, etc.). It goes without saying that quantitative approach has its peculiarity while monitoring electronic and printed media. The qualitative approach to both cases is however the same.

3. Monitoring Broadcast Media

TV programmes are monitored with a focus on picture and sound information. Radio programmes monitoring is focused on sound information solely. Monitoring centres primarily on the election as its subject matter, then the subjects participating in the election process and the parameters monitored. All other news items that do not refer to either the election or its subjects are not to be covered by the monitors.

The first step in monitoring is to **select** TV or radio news items that cover or refer to the election.

3.1. Measuring Time

The second step is to measure the time given to each of the subjects monitored. **The time is measured in seconds.** All the selected news items are to be monitored; each of them is monitored separately.

The time given to **each subject/actor** is measured, when:

- The subject (actor) is only in the shot;
- The subject is in the shot, speaking directly into the camera or microphone;
- The subject is spoken about by a media representative, which on the radio means that the subject is quoted by a journalist and on TV that the subject appeared in the shot, with a commentary provided by a journalist;
- A third actor, e.g. another political figure, a journalist or a voter speaks about the subject.

An instance when a subject is not given any measurable time but is mentioned is called a reference. Each reference is recorded in the form too and one reference is allocated 1 second.

3.2 Rubrics' Approach

To evaluate the importance ascribed by different media to the election topic the rubrics' approach is used. It means that the content of TV and Radio programs is classified according to different topics. The time allocated to each topic or rubric is measured. Compared with the time allocated to such rubrics as "Sport" or "Weather" it is to conclude whether the election related topics are given a priority or not. This approach turned out to be important in Belarus, where the previous Parliamentary election campaign of 2000 received the limited media coverage.

Eventually the content of TV and Radio programs was classified according to 15 rubrics, which were as following

- Election;
- Referendum;
- Belarusian observers;
- Foreign observers;
- Economics;
- Industry;
- Agriculture;
- Culture;

- Foreign affairs;
- Domestic affairs;
- Sport;
- Weather;
- Advertising;
- Announcements;
- Miscellaneous.

4. Monitoring Printed Media

Printed media monitoring is focused on textual information and pictures (i.e. photos, cartoons, logos, images of party banners, etc.) in each issue of the paper taken separately. Just like in monitoring TV and radio programmes, print media monitoring centres on the election as its subject matter, the subjects participating in the election and the parameters monitored. All other contributions that do not refer to either the election or its subjects are not to be covered by the monitors.

The first step in monitoring media outlets is to **select** articles that cover or refer to the election.

4. 1 Measuring Space

The second step is to measure the space allotted to each subject in the selected contributions. The space is measured in square centimetres. All the selected contributions are to be monitored, each of them taken separately. One checklist is used to assess one paper only. The articles are scanned page by page in the paper, with special attention on the front page, as it is the one that the largest number of people read. An article on the front page is often continued on some other pages. Then the article is analysed as a whole and the continuation pages are recorded. Its whole space and that of each extract on each page are to be measured.

In measuring the space it is important to determine which subject in the story is the main one or if the story presents one main and some auxiliary subjects. If the article brings information on one main subject, this subject is allotted the whole of the article space. If there are any other subjects mentioned, these references are treated as remarks and allotted 1 square centimetre of space. Each of them is assessed in terms of the manner of presentation parameter.

If the article has two subjects (i.e. it gives a more or less professional comparison of two candidates' programmes) and the comparison can eventually favour one of them, the article space is equally divided between the two actors. Each of them gets their evaluation mark in terms of the manner of presentation.

If a neutral factual article has several actors, none of them being a dominant subject, all the actors get a reference with a neutral grade.

5. Assessing the Manner in Which the Subjects Are Presented

The manner of presentation is assessed in the same way both for the broadcast and the print media. Assessment criteria are rooted in professional standards and principles of journalist ethics such as impartiality, balanced approach, fairness, lack of prejudice and others. Deviations from these principles are subject to either positive or negative evaluation of a subject's portrayal.

The manner in which the subjects are presented is evaluated on the scale of **1 to 5**.

1=(+) High y posi tive	2=(+) Posi tive	3=(0) Neu tral	4=(- -) Neg ativ e	5=(- -) High y neg ativ e
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The grade 2 (positive) means that the information on a subject had a character of praise. The grade 1 (highly positive) conveys an extreme praise or admiration connected with some success or rather attribution of success. Expressed in a very emotional way or through an extolled comparison with a well-known historic figure or context such kind of presentation should be qualified as highly positive.

The grade 4 (negative) means that a subject is viewed in a disfavoring way. And the grade 5 conveys an extremely disfavoring or hostile portrayal of a subject. Quite often the effect is strengthened by systematic positive presentation of one and the same actors and by negative presentation of others.

On TV the manner of presentation is determined by the use of picture and sound effects, the anchorman's intonation and the style of the text itself.

In the press the manner of presentation is determined by explicit or implicit judgements about the actor, references to positive or negative contexts, historic figures, the style, etc.

5.1. Media Effects

Media effects should be viewed the cases of serious deviations from the professional standards in covering any publicly important issue, topic or figure. As a result of these deviations the overwhelming majority of highly positive and highly negative presentations of political subjects during the election campaign fall into the category of media effects. The quantity of such cases conveys to what extent media are involved or not involved into the manipulation of public opinion in favour of the Government, this or that political block, party or candidate. At the same time it shows to what degree different media are independent and to what degree the freedom of expression is a respected value in a society.

6. Monitored Subjects

All bodies, their representatives and individuals (they can be called 'actors') immediately involved in the election, organising or influencing the election or its results are subjects of the election. In total 34 subjects of election process were monitored³⁰. These included:

- The Central Election Commission;
- Constituency election commissions;
- Belarusian observers;
- Foreign observers;
- The President;
- Presidential Administration;
- The Parliament;
- Government;
- Local authorities;
- The "Five Plus" Electoral Block;
- 'Free Belarus' European Coalition;
- "Young Belarus" Coalition;
- Independent trade unions;
- Pro-governmental trade unions;

³⁰ Some subjects were subdivided, as it was, for example, the case of "Local authorities".

- NGO;
- Pro-governmental organization;
- Pro-governmental parties;
- Candidates of electoral blocs;
- Independent candidates;
- Pro-governmental candidates;
- Government as a non-personified subject;
- Authorities as a non-personified subject;
- Opposition as a non-personified subject³¹.

6.1 Monitored Objects

Monitoring covers both broadcast and print media. In selecting the objects for monitoring three basic criteria were used. First, these had to be the most influential State owned and independent media. Second, these were State owned media, which the Central Election Commission entrusted with a task of providing candidates free time and space (in some cases the choice made upon these two criteria coincided). And finally, these had to be national and regional media outlets to have the most complete picture of election coverage throughout the country.

Broadcast Media were as following:

- *Belarusian TV, National Channel 1;*
- *All-national TV;*
- *Capital TV;*
- *4 regional programmes of the Belarusian TV;*
- *National Radio, Channel 1;*
- *Radio "Capital".*

Printed Media:

- *Žviazda;*
- *Sovietskaya Belorussia;*
- *Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus;*
- *Narodnaja Volia;*
- *Naša Niva;*
- *Beloruskij Rynok;*
- *Vechernij Minsk;*
- *Minskaya Pravda;*
- *Birzha informacyi;*
- *Veczernij Hrodno;*
- *Grodnenskaja Pravda;*

³¹ This is the peculiarity of Belarusian media to write and talk about opposition or government in a non-personified way.

- *Mahilouskija Viedamasci;*
- *Veczernij Mohilov;*
- *Vicebski Kurjer;*
- *Vicebski Rabocy.*

7. Monitoring Checklists (Forms)

The monitoring results are put into the forms. Paper forms are compulsory. There are three different forms for monitoring **the broadcast media**.

Form 1 is meant to capture the number of news items on the programme in general, the overall time of the programme, the numeric order of relevant news items, a brief description of the relevant news items (i.e. subject-matter, message, time span).

Form 2 captures the time given and the manner in which the subjects monitored are presented in news items selected by the monitor as relevant or on a programme, for example, featuring the opposition.

Form 3 is designed to record instances of distorted information, blocking election-relevant subjects and issues, cases of defamation, libel, etc.

There is **only one form** for monitoring **the print media**, in which the page, the headline, etc. are recorded.

While filling in the forms, the monitors use abbreviations referring to the objects to be monitored and subjects participating in the election. The names of people representing the given subjects are recorded in full. Every monitor enters either his or her name and personal number or the personal number only in the form for monitoring the print media.

The forms filled in are electronically processed. The team of monitors consisted of one analyst-supervisor, one PC specialist working with Excel and 8 monitors.

APPENDIX 4

MONITORING METHODOLOGY FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION VIOLATIONS DURING THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION AND REFERENDUM

The results of the freedom of expression (FOE) monitoring conducted by FOE monitoring group attached to the Belarusian Association of Journalists indicated mass violations within the period of parliamentary elections and referendum (the chronicle of violations may be found at <http://www.baj.ru/Vybar04/choice04.asp>).

The monitoring data brings one to a conclusion that

- ***The violations of speech freedom were most of all made by state agencies and officials of the Republic of Belarus;***
- ***They were systematic;***
- ***They were aimed at minimizing the dissemination of uncensored information among Belarusian citizens.***

“Wiping” the country’s informational space exposed a systematic character of the authorities’ activity on media field. During eight months preceding the announcement of the elections to the Chamber of Representatives, the number of printed media registered in Belarus decreased by 160. It became a direct cause of the policy of legal and economic discrimination of non-governmental mass media. Since the beginning 2004, a number of independent printed media have been forced to print in Russian Federation, because Belarusian printers refused signing the agreements with them. May 1, the state prohibited distributing the newspapers by subscription without having a proper license. Meanwhile, the agency responsible for licensing this activity is the Ministry of Communication having a media distribution monopolist Belposhta a part of its structure. By this time majority of independent companies and printed media distributed by alternative subscription failed to receive the license. Moreover, subscription to this media preceding and during the election campaign got disrupted. During the election campaign, a lot of the editors experienced problems with distributing the newspapers in retail. You may find more information on media distribution problems at http://www.baj.ru/Vybar04/Analytical%20Monitoring-Eng_270904-101004.doc

Electronic media broadcasting in Belarus is being totally controlled by the state. The level of control over both state-owned and commercial TV and radio companies can be illustrated by the fact that Belarusian bands that played at the opposition's rally on July 21, 2004 were denied air.

Step by step, Belarusian authorities used to limit Belarusian citizens' access to independent information. In March 2004 the Ministry of Information published the Regulations "On Distribution of Printed Media Registered in Foreign Countries on the Territory of the Republic of Belarus." According to the regulations, only the authority of the Ministry of Information allows the distribution of foreign printed editions.

At the same time, there took place some attempts to push away Russian electronic media from Belarusian informational space. Within two years the amount of Russian TV channels' broadcasting – not long ago, Russian stations dominated the air – decreased by 70%

Shortly after the elections to the Chamber of Representatives were announced, Belarusian authorities postponed the consideration of the application by Russian State TV and Radio Company, which applied to open its representatives in Belarus, till an indefinite time. The employees of the channel's editing office in Belarus were deprived of accreditation. Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained that the channel "has numerously covered the events in Belarus in a biased way," including the coverage of an unsanctioned rally July 21.

As the election campaign started, the violations of speech freedom gained a mass character. In the media field, the freedom of expression suffered the largest losses due to extrajudicial decisions by Ministry of Information to suspend the activity of some newspapers. During the elections, the ministry suspended the issuing of 12 non-governmental newspapers around all the country regions. These are "Novaya Gazeta Smorgoni" in Smorgon, "Regionalnaya Gazeta" in Molodechno, "Regionalnye Vedomosti" in Gorki, "Narodny Predprinimatel" in Novopolock, "Mestnaya Gazeta" in Volkovysk, all-national editions "Molodyozhny Prospect," "Navinki," "Vremya," "Predprinimatelskaya Gazeta" and "Nedelya," as well as purely commercial editions "Lyuboy Kapriz" in Mogilyov and "Hallo! Kuplyu, prodam, menyayu" in Baranavichy. The editions' total one-time circulation equaled to more than 100.000 copies. January through October, 2004 the Ministry of Information suspended the issuing of 19 editions.

A legal analysis of the orders on suspension of the media's activity may be found at http://www.baj.ru/Vybar04/Analytical%20Monitoring-Eng_080804-070904.doc

August 2004, the publishing of the only independent daily "Narodnaya Volya" appeared under the threat of being about to stop. August 4, under the pretence of executing court decisions, a court officer forbid the director of "Chyrvonaya Zorka" publishers to print the newspaper and arrested the edition's newsprint stored at the publishing house. It was done despite the fact that the cost of the arrested newsprint has numerously exceeded the amount of the fine. In result, the issuing of two "Narodnaya Volya" numbers was disrupted. Only the editors' ability to find proper money and pay off the fine made it possible to resume the newspaper's issuing.

Among other facts, the pressure on independent press through publishing houses is worth mentioning. In few recorded cases, the directors of publishing houses were offering the editors of independent media to remove the articles critical to the authorities or the planned referendum from the newspaper's pages, to replace an article with a photo or to refuse from printing at all. Meanwhile, demanding the editors to adjust the announcements or articles in advance, as well as demanding them to remove some article or announcement from print considered a censorship, which is permitted by Belarusian law.

The monitoring service recorded a lot of cases, when the law-enforcement officers confiscated printed production. They were confiscating not only the leaflets of oppositional deputy candidates, anti-referendum agitation and non-registered editions but also properly registered mass media (such as "Vremya," "Nedelya," and others), as well as a book by Pavel Sheremet and Svetlana Kalinkina "Accidental President" printed in Russia. In most cases, the distributors of printed editions were suspended and called to civil account. This was happening in spite of few resolutions of UN Committee on Human Rights, which considered such decisions and actions of Belarusian authorities illegal.

During the election and referendum campaigns in 2004, Belarusian legal norms on offending the President were used widely. In September, the leader of the republican entrepreneurs' strike Valery Levanewski and his colleague Alexandar Vasilyew were condemned in Grodno for publicly offending the President of the Republic of Belarus and committing a grave crime of power abuse (p.2, art.368 of the Criminal Code). The court considered the leaflet distributed in

Hrodna on the eve of May the 1st offensive. Valery Levanewski and Alexandar Vasilyew were sentenced two years of prison each.

The verdict to Valery Levanewski and Alexandar Vasilyew was announced the same day the President signed the order to hold the referendum and addressed the people asking them to allow him participating in future presidential elections. A negative reference on the referendum, made by the editor-in-chief of Grodno based newspaper "Bircha Informacii" Alena Rawbeckaya on the pages of her newspaper, created the grounds for instituting civil proceedings against her for defaming the President. Alena Rawbeckaya was fined 500 Euro.

On the grounds of being critical to the activity of the country leader and agitating against the question put on the referendum, oppositional parties' deputy candidates were denied registration or deprived of the already issued registration certificates. At the same time, these were the heads of central electoral committees themselves (most of them didn't have a degree in law), who assessed the lawfulness of statements about the country leader and his policy. Central Electoral Committee passed the pre-election articles by Maryna Bahdanovich, Alyaxandar Cynkevich and Aleh Volchak, which became the grounds for canceling the decisions to register their authors as deputy candidates, to the Prosecution. The Prosecution is considering, whether the agitation materials of the former deputy candidates contain the grounds for filing criminal cases on offence of the President of the Republic of Belarus and state officials.

One criminal case was already filed on similar grounds. After a number of oppositional politicians made a statement about the falsification of the referendum and election results being prepared, Minsk Prosecution instituted the proceedings based on the art.188 ("Defamation") and art.367 ("Defaming the President of the Republic of Belarus") to investigate "the distribution of wittingly false conjectures, offensive to the President of the Republic of Belarus and other officials, related... to the republican referendum and elections." The analysis of Belarusian legislature on defaming and offending the president may be found at http://www.baj.ru/Vybar04/Analytical%20Monitoring-Eng_11-171004.doc

Gross violations of freedom of expression continued on the day of elections, October 17. This day, about twelve o'clock the web-sites of "Charter97," "Radio Liberty," Human Rights Center "Spring 96", United Civil Party and Civil Initiative "Partnerstva" were blocked.

The same situation was observed in Belarus on September 9, 2001 – during the last presidential elections. On the night of October 17, the head of Russian Channel 1 special projects Pavel Sheremet was beaten and then arrested. From the special detention center, where the journalist was supposed to stay until the court sitting on his case, the journalist was transported to the ambulance. For more information on provocation against Pavel Sheremet, go to <http://www.baj.ru/2004/Oct/z181004e.asp>

The monitoring of freedom of speech violations and conflicts in mass media field in the period of Parliamentary election and referendum in the Republic of Belarus exposed that within the whole period of these political campaigns the rights of the citizens of the Republic of Belarus for information and free expression of thoughts have been grossly violated. State agencies not only failed to ensure the freedom of thought and the right to receive complete and truthful information, as it is declared in the Constitution, but also often prevented the implementation of these rights.