

## **MEDIA MONITORING METHODOLOGY OF POLITICAL PLURALISM**

### **OBJECTIVES AND TASKS**

On October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, the CRTA observation mission officially started monitoring the work of televisions with national coverage.

The main objective of the media monitoring team of the CRTA observation mission is to provide insight into the level of media pluralism and professional approach of the media to all actors on the political scene. Having in mind the influence of the media on the public opinion during the election campaign, CRTA aims to determine the extent to which citizens of Serbia are informed about the electoral offer, and whether candidates have access to the media under equal conditions.

The main tasks of the CRTA observation mission observers are to establish:

- whether there is equal representation of all political actors in programmes of television stations with national coverage;
- what the tone of reporting on political actors is;
- whether there is equal representation of all political actors in active or passive role;
- what is the capacity in which the political actors were represented;
- whether there are examples of hate speech in programmes of television stations with national coverage.

### **SAMPLE**

The observation sample includes all televisions with national coverage: RTS 1, TV Pink, TV Prva, TV Happy and TV B92. According to the Nielsen Audience Measurement<sup>1</sup>, these televisions account for almost 2/3 of the share (63.33 percent) of the total television audience<sup>2</sup>. According to the data of this agency, other televisions have far lower ratings and therefore did not enter the observation sample.

On all five televisions in the sample, the entire prime-time programmes are observed (extended prime time from 17:30 to 24:00) in which political actors were guests, speakers or in which they were mentioned, regardless of the content of the show.

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<sup>1</sup> Nielsen Audience Measurement, <https://link.crt.rs/3a>

<sup>2</sup> Media Ownership Monitor Serbia, <https://link.crt.rs/3b>

Political actors are all individuals who are members of political parties, regardless of the way they are represented in television programmes. Bearing in mind that the CRTA observation mission started media monitoring in the period before the official announcement of the campaign, the definition of political actors in the period of the election campaign is extended to those individuals who are on the electoral lists for any level of elections. Political actors are not groups of citizens who are not part of local assemblies and who do not participate in the election campaign for the upcoming elections.

## **DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY**

Six observers trained according to the highest international standards for media observation in the election process participated in the monitoring. For monitoring purposes, the CRTA observation mission has developed a database in which observers record all necessary data defined by the data collection methodology.

Observers' training takes place before the start of the monitoring process, then the observer's trial work is evaluated and after that, the observers start regular observation. In order to avoid the factors of fatigue, monotony, and data entering by automatism, our observers take weekly turns in observing TV programmes. Since television programmes with national coverage are monitored all seven days a week, one free week was introduced in the rotations, in order to avoid oversaturation of observers, as well as to ensure that observers have regular breaks from monitoring.

The CRTA observers communicate on a daily basis with the observers' coordinator who is in charge of data validation and providing support to observers in their work. The CRTA observation mission validates entries on a daily, weekly and periodic basis. On a daily basis, a random sample of entries is checked for each of the television stations. If an input error is found, an additional number of entries is checked in order to determine whether there is a system error or it is just an individual, accidental error. In communication with observers, the coordinator eliminates random errors, while in the case of system errors, he additionally informs and trains the observer on the methodology of data collection, while system errors in input are corrected in accordance with the observation methodology.

On a weekly basis, a random sample of entries is checked further, but a logical check of all entries is also carried out in order to additionally determine the accuracy of the entered data. Finally, at the periodic level, which coincides with the reporting periods, another logical control of all entries is performed.

Whenever necessary, the CRTA observation mission organises meetings with observers to discuss potential ambiguities and to clarify them. As an additional support in the work of observers, the CRTA made a detailed guide and a code list for observers which explain the

objectives and tasks of observation, gives detailed instructions for interpreting and recording all individual variables, and provides technical instructions on how to enter data into the database that the CRTA developed for monitoring purposes.

### *The main variables and methods of their measuring*

- 1) **Representation of political actors** is measured by recording the basic unit of measurement, a second, which is dedicated to each political actor by each of the observed televisions. Political actors can appear in two roles, in an active role or in a passive role, which will be explained in detail later. The political actor is measured by the seconds in an active role from the moment they begin to speak until the moment when their speech ends. When in a passive role, the political actor is measured by the seconds from the moment when the interlocutor, guest in the studio, or news presenter mentions them by name until the end of speech that refers to them.
- 2) **The tonality attached to political actors** is determined on a three-point scale from negative to positive:
  - a) a negative tone reflects an attack or unfavourable reporting on political actors,
  - b) a neutral tone is the presentation of facts without offensive or assertive reporting,
  - c) a positive tone reflects affirmative and supportive reporting on political actors.

The tonality attached to a political actor is determined regardless of the role in which they are represented, i.e. both in an active and a passive role, as explained below.

The tonality attached to a political actor in an active role is determined in relation to the entire speech of a political actor, but if one or more political actors are mentioned in the speech of a political actor, then the speech and the tonality are divided into as many parts as the political actor in a passive role mentioned other political actors.

The tonality cannot be fully operationalised; it is determined in relation to the tonality classified under these three presented above that dominate in one address or mention of a political actor.

- 3) Seconds are measured by political actors **in active and passive roles**.
  - a) The active role implies that the political actor is measured by the seconds while addressing the audience directly in the first person, in the television programme.
  - b) The passive role implies that the political actor is measured by the seconds while they are being talked about, i.e., while other interlocutors or guests in the studio or news

presenters are talking about them. In a situation where the statement of a political actor is read or paraphrased, the political actor is in a passive role.

- 4) ***The manner of presenting a political actor*** is measured when the political actor is in an active role, i.e. when they have the opportunity to address the audience directly through four possible categories:
  - a) Representation in the role of a public / state official, which includes politicians who speak in the capacity of an official of any level and type of public office;
  - b) Representation in the role of a party official / candidate, which includes subjects who speak from the position of a member of a party, and their speeches refer to the programmes and ideas of the parties on various topics;
  - c) Representation in both roles, the one of a public / state official and a party official, in situations where these two roles interfere and intertwine;
  - d) Neither of these two representations. This category includes political actors who act as analysts, experts or representatives of the professions in which they are engaged.
- 5) ***The use of hate speech*** by political actors in television programmes with national coverage is recorded and immediately reported to the CRTA observation mission. The CRTA's legal team immediately takes over such cases and analyses them further. Hate speech is the expression of ideas, information and opinions of political actors that incite discrimination, hatred or violence against a person or a group of persons based on race, nationality or ethnicity, religion, language, gender, sexual orientation, political and other opinions and beliefs, and social origin. Other cases of hate speech that may occur in the observed period of the programme, but in which there are no political actors, remain outside the scope of our observation.

#### *Additional variables and methods of their measuring*

- 6) ***The topic*** of the political actor's representation implies recording up to three dominant topics during one speech. The CRTA observation mission currently casts up 40 different topics but the list is not exhaustive. Whenever a burning topic emerges and takes over the current ones, such as the war in Ukraine, the CRTA observation mission introduces such a topic into its observation.
- 7) ***The message*** sent by the political actor is divided into five categories. Messages are recorded in such a way that only the main message of the subject can be recorded. Messages sent by the subject can be the following:
  - a) A message in which the subject presents parts of the election programme, i.e. gives election promises;

- b) A message in which the subject refers to the successes achieved so far, which can be personal, party or successes of the state / city / public company;
  - c) A message containing an invitation to vote for a particular list, party or candidate;
  - d) A message by which the subject attacks or insults other parties, lists or candidates;
  - e) Messages that cannot be classified in any of the previous categories are filed under "other".
- 8) **The political actor's<sup>3</sup>** ability to provide **answers**. If the political actor was in a passive role, then it is also noted whether they were given the opportunity to respond to the presented arguments. The object's response does not necessarily imply the appearance of a political actor in the show, it can be offered in the form of giving or reading the actor's statement.

## *Recording of basic information about the show*

- 9) **Basic information about each show** within the observed time frame are also recorded, such as the name, time and date of the broadcast, and the duration of the show.
- 10) **The format of the show** observed within the extended prime time may be one of the following:
- a) Report from the meeting / event that is part of the regular reporting of the central information programme or news (within the regular information part of the programme). This applies to features in central news programmes regardless of their duration.
  - b) The election block refers to the segment within the news programme that recounts the activities of political parties and candidates and includes features on election activities and rallies of political parties or candidates, as well as party announcements. The election block is clearly separated from the rest of the news programmes by the opening and closing themes, and during the full length of the programme, it should be clearly marked with a crawler that it is an election block.
  - c) Political marketing or political advertising block. Commercial breaks can be broadcast in any type of programme, not necessarily in news programmes. They can be broadcast during, but also in between two shows. Commercial breaks are clearly marked with the opening and closing themes.
  - d) Covert advertising indicates those situations when advertisements, most often of public or state-owned enterprises, contain elements, symbols or markings of one of the political parties.
  - e) Debates are the shows that include more than one interlocutor in the studio.
  - f) Socio-political shows include all shows that have socio-political content or deal with the analysis of socio-political events.

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<sup>3</sup> \*While being talked about, i.e., while other interlocutors or guests in the studio or news presenters are talking about him/her

- g) Interview is a show with one guest, the interlocutor.
- h) Presentation of the political programme of the list / party / candidate means a show intended for the presentation of the political programme, ideas and plans of the list / party / candidate in the upcoming elections. These shows may feature one or more representatives of a political party, but parties may also use their term to broadcast election rallies or other videos.
- i) Entertainment includes all shows in the area of culture, sports, quizzes, music shows in which political actors appear.
- j) Live coverage and / or broadcast of rallies includes reports on contents from party rallies and meetings.
- k) Direct addresses of public officials are extraordinary addresses / press conferences of political actors which imply interruption of the ongoing programme.
- l) Other – shows that cannot be filed under any of the above categories.