

WatchDog.MD Community



Report

Reflection of the main
geopolitical actors in Moldovan
TV news in November 2022

CONTENT

Summary	2
Introduction	3
Methodology	3
Television news space about foreign leaders and states in November 2022	5
Conclusions on reflecting the "Russian World" - Russia, Belarus, Eurasian Union and CSTO	8
Conclusions on Ukraine's coverage	13
Conclusions on the reflection of the West (Romania, EU, USA, UK, NATO)	13
Romania and Klaus Iohannis	14
European Union and Ursula von der Leyen	16
EU countries: Germany and Olaf Scholz, France and Emmanuel Macron, Lithuania, Czech Republic	19
United Kingdom and Liz Truss/Rishi Sunak	20
USA and Joe Biden	21
NATO	23
The West in TV news	25
Conclusions on China and Turkey's coverage	27
Conclusions on the coverage of foreign topics on First in Moldova, NTV Moldova and RTR Moldova	28
EU in negative context at RTR Moldova and First in Moldova	32
General conclusions	35

Summary

The study looked at how 12 countries, 4 international organisations and 11 foreign leaders from Europe, North America and Asia were covered in the news of 8 of the most popular TV channels. Each of the monitored subjects was given one point for each mention in the news. As reference news bulletins, evening prime-time news was selected. We assessed not only the frequency of appearances but also their impact in terms of TV popularity. And to understand what image is formed within the news bulletins we also analysed the negative, positive or neutral context in which the monitored subjects were reflected.

We overlaid the results with the degree of trust in leaders and organizations, obtained by the Institute for Public Policy in the Public Opinion Barometer survey conducted in the same period (November 2022). This serves as a baseline for future surveys in which we will assess changes in public perceptions of countries and their leaders. Perceptions will be measured in surveys commissioned by the WatchDog.MD Community.

Of the eight TV channels monitored, the news of independent TV channels Jurnal TV, Pro TV and TV8 have the greatest impact, accounting for 56.8% of the public space, while the TV group RTR Moldova, First in Moldova and NTV Moldova¹ accounted for 19.2%.

The largest percentage of mentions in TV news was given to Russia, which in most cases was covered in a negative context. A natural situation given the military aggression. In second and third place were news about Ukraine and the European Union respectively. Both are mentioned mostly in positive or neutral contexts.

In this study we found that against the background of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the number and impact of negative news about Russia and Vladimir Putin is significantly higher:

- than positive or neutral mentions;
- compared to any other country and leader monitored.

However, the level of confidence in Vladimir Putin remains quite high at over 35%. On the other hand, even though the percentage of positive news about Joe Biden and the US is 10 times higher than negative news, the US president is the leader in terms of Moldovans' distrust.

Most negative news about the West (US, EU, NATO) and Ukraine was generated by RTR Moldova, First in Moldova and NTV Moldova. These, for example, were the only stations that placed the European Union and Ursula von der Leyen in a negative context. Negative mentions of Ukraine and Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the news on these stations were more numerous than positive ones. Russia and Vladimir Putin were mentioned in a positive context on First in Moldova and RTR Moldova in 20% of cases and on NTV Moldova in only 5% of cases. However, the impact that these three TV channels had on the general public could not be decisive for the considerable change in the perception of citizens - compared to any other country and leader monitored.

In conclusion, we can say that, compared to 2018, the percentage of TV news in shaping geo-political perceptions and preferences is limited. Although the role of independent TV channels in reporting on international issues has strongly increased, the strong influence of Kremlin propaganda narratives remains on the prejudices built over the years, as well as their continued spread online. We will continue to monitor developments and the way TV channels reflect international news.

¹ TV channel licenses were suspended during the state of emergency by decision of the Commission for Exceptional Situations of 16.12.2011
https://gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/dispozitia_cse_a_rm_nr.54_din_16.12.2022_r_0.pdf

Introduction

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the role of media in covering international events has become crucial. The way leaders from Vladimir Putin to Joe Biden and their actions and the countries they lead influence Moldovans' geopolitical preferences. The latter impact on domestic political preferences as each of the main parties in Moldova has a clear external vector.

Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine has led to a dramatic drop in trust in the Russian president, even so Putin is the highest rated foreign leader in Moldova after Klaus Iohannis. According to the Public Opinion Barometer of November 2022, 35.4% of Moldovans trust Klaus Iohannis and 35.2% trust Vladimir Putin.

On the other hand, the biggest drop in confidence was recorded by US President Joe Biden, followed by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and German leader Olaf Scholz.

In order to understand how perceptions of foreign leaders and countries are formed, we set out in this study to analyse what people see about them in the daily TV news bulletins; to determine the impact of the news according to the popularity of the channel; and to see in what context the most important world leaders and the countries they lead are mentioned. In this way, we aimed to understand what image of the outside world is formed by television. Their impact is presumed to be important, considering that for more than half of the citizens, namely news and TV programmes are the main source of information about events at home and abroad.

A first effort of this kind, but on a much smaller scale, was made by the WatchDog.MD Community back in 2018,² in the framework of the study "The content of the televised information space in the Republic of Moldova and how it shapes electoral behaviour." At that time, it was found that the Russian Federation dominated the information space in terms of international politics, and as a result the trust in Vladimir Putin was over 60%.

Methodology

In order to understand how the opinions of Moldovan citizens towards international political leaders were formed, we will correlate the results obtained with the data of the Public Opinion Barometer (BOP) conducted on behalf of the Institute for Public Policy in November 2022. The period during which the WatchDog.MD Community conducted the monitoring of the reflection of foreign leaders and countries on Moldovan TV is similar to the period during which the IPP conducted the survey.

According to BOP, the main source of information for the country's inhabitants is the internet (45%), followed by television (41%). However, as a source of information about events in the country and abroad, news and television programmes are the most popular, accounting for 55.8% of respondents.

² https://watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Studiu-WATCHDOG_propaganda-rusa-la-TV-2018.pdf

On the basis of the BOP, we selected for monitoring the news bulletins of eight of the TV channels that respondents mentioned among the three TV channels from which they get their news most often. These are Jurnal TV, Moldova 1, Pro TV, Prime TV, TV8, NTV Moldova, First in Moldova and RTR Moldova. The content of the news bulletins broadcast in prime-time (18:00-23:00) on Sundays - Thursdays was systematized, only one news bulletin per day per TV channel.

In order to understand how perceptions of international leaders, states and foreign organisations are formed, we have systematised the number and context in which 12 states and 11 foreign leaders were mentioned as follows: Ukraine and V. Zelensky, Russia and Vladimir Putin, Belarus and Alexander Lukashenka, USA and Joe Biden, Romania and Klaus Iohannis, France and Emmanuel Macron, Germany and Olaf Scholz, Czech Republic, Lithuania, UK and Lizz Truss/Rishi Sunak, Turkey and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, China and Xi Jinping. Mentions of the European Union (EU) and Ursula Von der Leyen, North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO), Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) were also monitored.

Monitored subjects received one point for each news item in which they were mentioned. If more than one appeared in the same news item, each of them received one point.

In order to determine the impact of the news item, we gave each item a score based on the weighting (popularity) of the TV station that broadcast it. The weights are shown in Chart 1. If a TV station has a 40% weighting, it is an important source of information for 40% of the citizens. Each news item of interest to us on this TV station will be given a score of 0.4 points. In this way we will be able to assess the impact of the news on viewers.

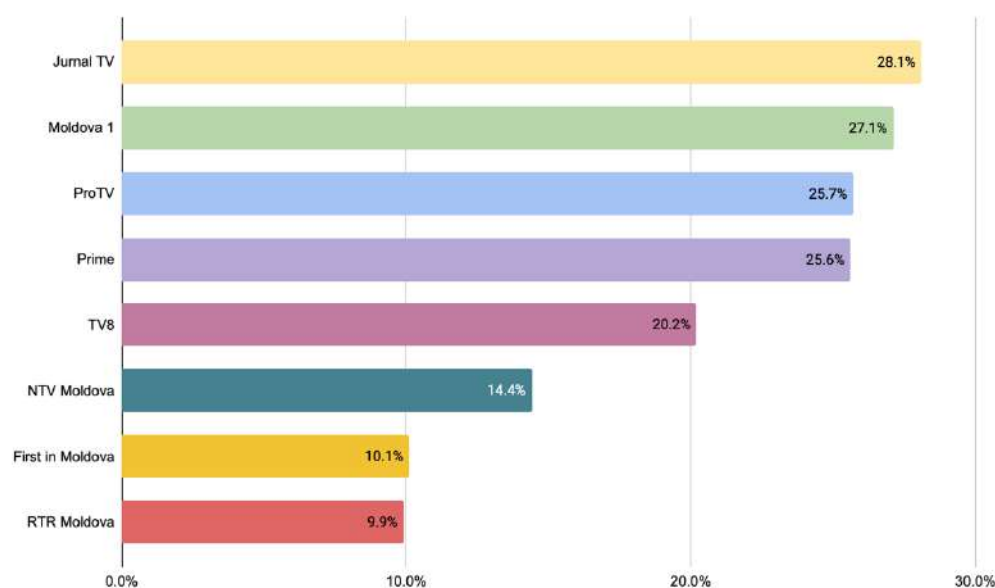


Chart no.1. Percentage of each TV channel - the percentage of respondents who indicated the TV channel among the three from which they get information most often (according to BOP³)

³ <https://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Sondajul-BOP-noiembrie-2022.pdf>

We will also systematise the context in which each monitored topic is presented. Depending on the way the news is written, edited, presented, depending on the emphasis and theme of the news, it may present the monitored subject in a positive, negative or neutral light. On the basis of the information presented and the way the subjects are portrayed, viewers form an opinion about them.

To reiterate - we monitored the presence of foreign states and leaders as well as international organizations in the main news bulletins of the Republic of Moldova, scoring and context for each appearance depending on the weight of the TV station in question and how the news influences the opinion about the topic.

To understand what influence the news has in shaping opinions about foreign leaders and countries, we compare monthly data in the dynamics with the results of polls on trust in several key foreign leaders. In the first survey we will determine the status quo based on BOP results on trust in foreign leaders, and then track its evolution in monthly surveys conducted by the WatchDog.MD Community.

Televised news space about foreign leaders and states in November 2022.

Between 23.10.2022 and 01.12.2022 the 8 monitored TV channels accumulated 4391 mentions of the monitored subjects in the news broadcasts. The highest number of mentions of foreign leaders and states were identified on RTR Moldova (916).

We systematized how each of the monitored subjects was covered (positively, negatively or neutrally), according to the weight of the TV channels, in order to understand what image they formed in society about each leader, country or organization.

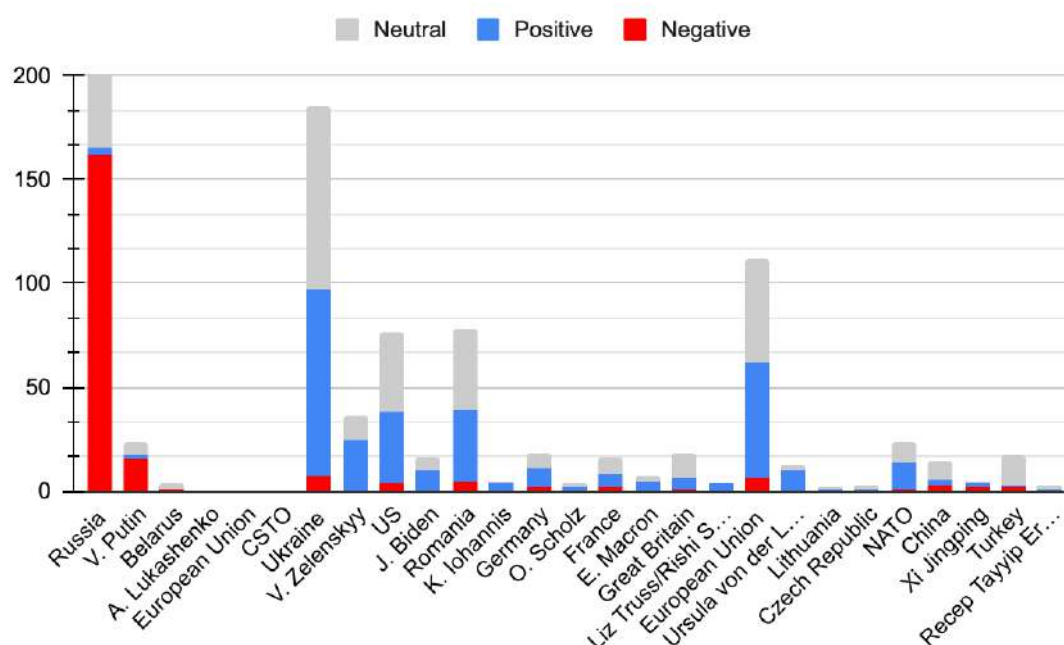


Chart no.2. Reflection of monitored subjects according to the share of TV channels (total)

The largest weight of mentions in TV news was Russia, which in most cases was covered in a negative context. In second and third place are the news delivered about Ukraine and the European Union respectively. Both were mentioned predominantly in positive or neutral contexts.

For the most part, Pro TV, Jurnal TV and Prime TV contributed to the formation of opinion on political and social events abroad. At the opposite pole are the pro-Kremlin channels RTR, NTV Moldova and First in Moldova. They had less impact on informing the general public about international developments.

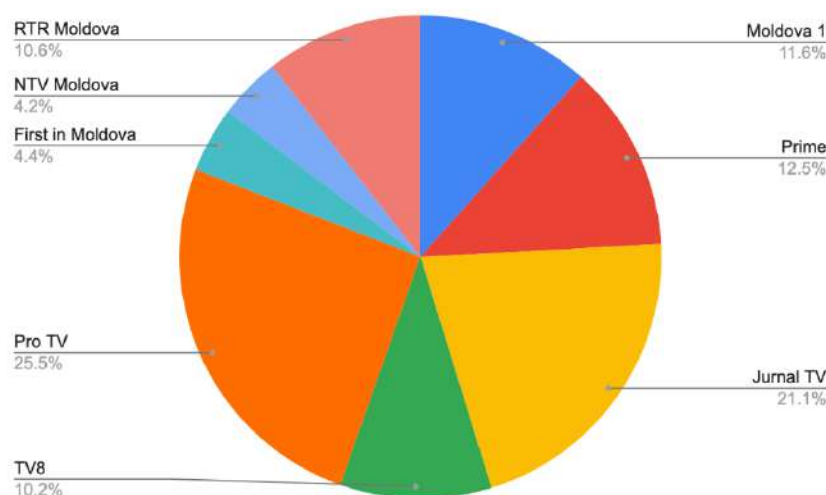


Chart no.3. Total news weight.

Based on these results we can conclude that during November the general public perception of the President of Russia would be substantially influenced in a negative direction. And the degree of positive appreciation of the leaders of Ukraine and the USA to increase slightly. See graphical representation below.

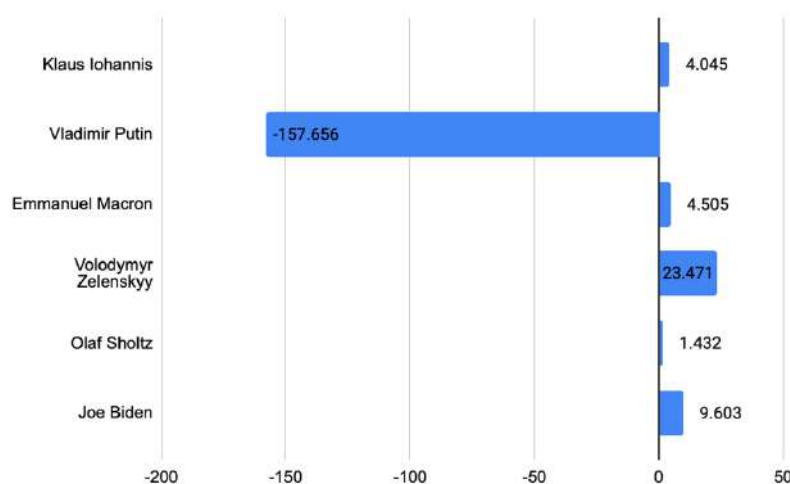
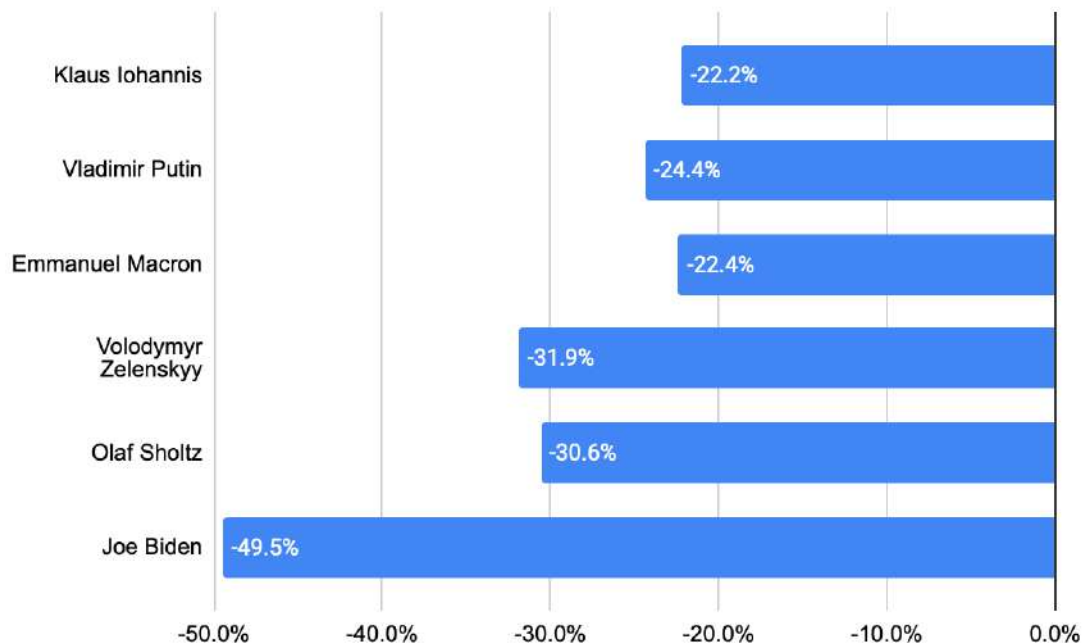


Chart no.4. Ratio between the percentage of positive and negative news about foreign political leaders in the Moldovan TV news in November 2022

However, according to the BOP (Chart 5), the biggest loser in terms of trust is not Vladimir Putin, but the US leader - Joe Biden, with a negative weight twice that of the Russian president. This is despite the fact that the news mention ratio in November slightly favoured Biden and strongly disfavoured Putin.



Grafic Chart no.5. Trust in political personalities according to the BOP, November 2022 (ratio of trust and distrust).

Biden is followed in terms of distrust by Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the leader in Kiev. He, too, was favoured in most of the news reports in which he was mentioned. But this has not been enough to bring about a substantial change in the perception of the two countries, which has been built up for years by Kremlin propaganda.

Despite the majority of Moldovan respondents' distrust of Putin, the main theses of Russian propaganda - that the US is responsible for the outbreak of war in Ukraine⁴ or that Ukraine is to blame for the war - have gained public trust. Why? For years Vladimir Putin was the most popular foreign leader in Moldova. As late as 2020, Vladimir Putin had more than half the trust of Moldovans. In other words, he had considerable influence over public opinion on a wide range of issues. And in recent years the main thrust of Russian propaganda has been directed against the US and Ukraine. The Kremlin's propaganda has the same favourite targets after the outbreak of full-scale war.

4

https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/journalism/_pdf/paper_mapping%20of%20Russian%20Narratives-2.pdf?fbclid=IwAR11Bd-zCEvAyt1Xoyt7NH7M62mEJgoU6xux4-VIzqPFHerF23fn5A2Fuz0

Conclusions on the reflection of the "Russian World" - Russia, Belarus, the Eurasian Union and the CSTO

From 23 October to 1 December 2022, 1064 mentions of Vladimir Putin, Alexander Lukashenko, Russia, Belarus were broadcast on the eight monitored TV channels. Most of them went to Russia and Vladimir Putin - 1044.

In 72% of all news items about the generic "Russian World"⁵, Russia, Belarus and the leaders of the two countries are mentioned in a negative context. No news items in which the Eurasian Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation were mentioned during the period under review were identified.

Topic ↓	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Total news	Positive /negative report
Russia	215	697	28	940	-669
V. Putin	33	62	9	104	-53
GENERAL RUSSIA	248	759	37	1044	-722
Belarus	15	3	0	18	-3
A. Lukashenko	0	2	0	2	-2
Eurasian Union	0	0	0	0	0
CSTO	0	0	0	0	0
GENERAL "RUSSIAN WORLD"	263	764	37	1064	-727

Thus, Russia was mentioned in a negative context in almost 30 times more news reports than in a positive context. However, for Vladimir Putin, this ratio is significant, with one positive news item for every seven negative ones. The number of news items in which Putin was specifically targeted is 9 times less than those in which Russia was mentioned. **This depersonalises both the decisions taken by Vladimir Putin in the context of the war in Ukraine and the responsibility he bears for the consequences of the invasion.**

The table below shows the total share of news about the "Russian world" by TV channel and the ratio of negative to positive news. The data confirm that not only the number of negative news stories about Russia and Vladimir Putin was significantly higher than the positive ones, but also their weight.

⁵ Russian world - term used in this study for Russia, Belarus, Vladimir Putin, Alexander Lukashenko, Eurasian Union, Collective Security Treaty Organisation.

Topic ↓	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Positive vs negative report	Total news weight
Russia	36.032	161.397	3.741	-157.656	201.17
V. Putin	6.169	15.923	1.233	-14.69	23.325
GENERAL RUSSIA	42.201	177.32	4.974	-172.346	224.495
Belarus	3.347	0.715	0	-0.715	4.062
A. Lukashenko	0	0.514	0	-0.514	0.514
Eurasian Union	0	0	0	0	0
OTSC	0	0	0	0	0
GENERAL "RUSSIAN WORLD"	45.548	178.549	4.974	-173.575	229.071

The weight of mentions of Russia and its President Vladimir Putin by context and TV channel has been systematised in the chart below.

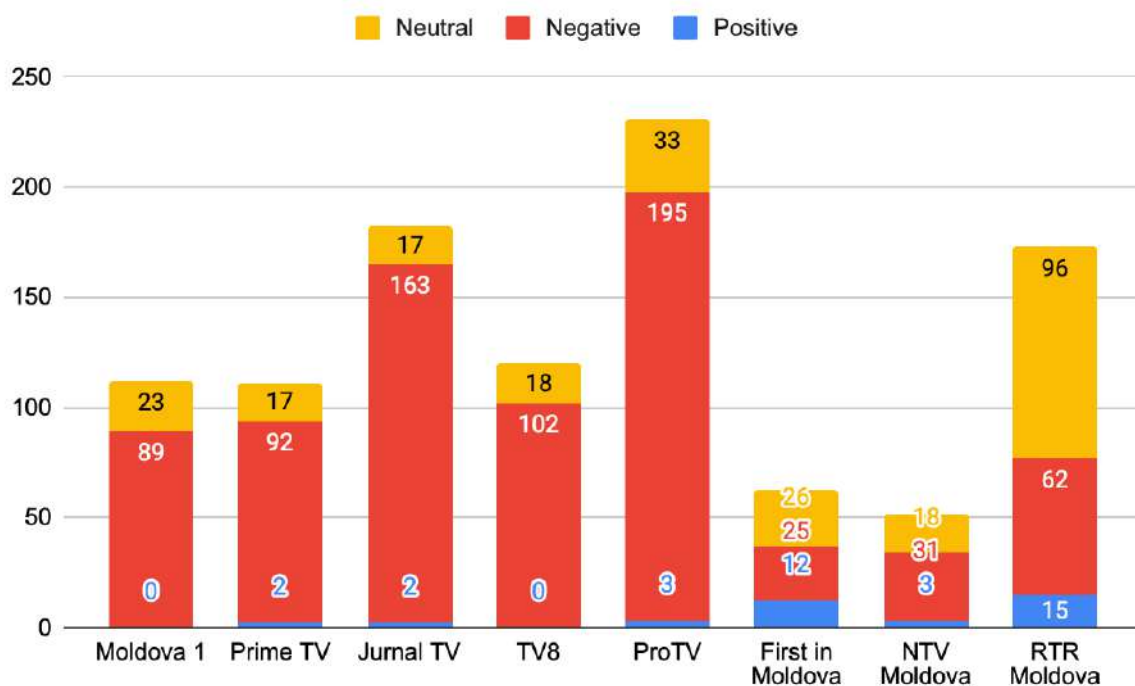


Chart no.6. Mentions of Russia and Vladimir Putin in TV news (total)

The monitoring results show that Pro TV and Jurnal TV have the highest weight of news in which Russia and Vladimir Putin have been portrayed in a negative context. These two channels provided more than half of the negative impact about Russia and its leader. The pro-Russian channels RTR Moldova, NTV Moldova and First in Moldova had a combined weight of only 7.4%.

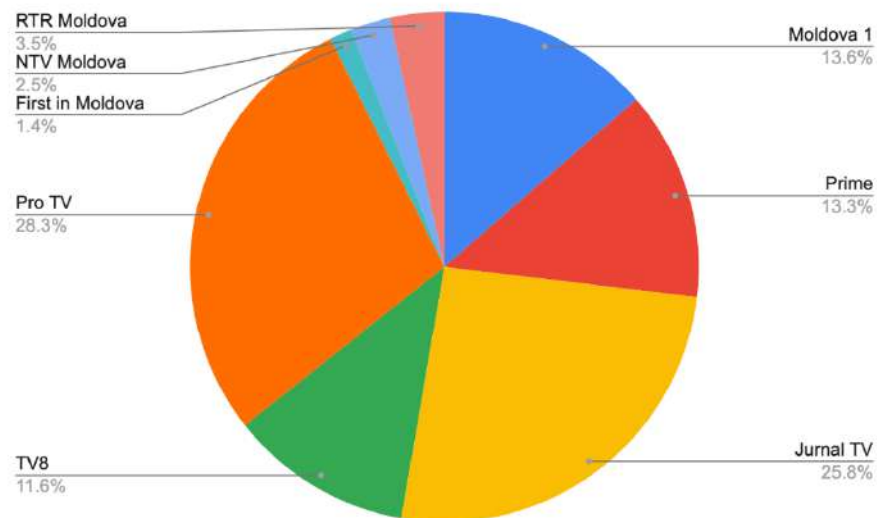


Chart no.7. Russia and Vladimir Putin in negative context in TV news (percentage)

As for the mentions in a positive context, although they totalled only 4,974 compared to 177,32 negative ones, more than half of them were made by pro-Kremlin TV channels - RTR Moldova, NTV Moldova and First in Moldova. We conclude a deliberate editorial policy, given the objective circumstances. However, given the objective context created by Russia's military aggression in Ukraine, these TV stations (especially RTR and First in Moldova) avoided making indiscreet pro-Kremlin propaganda.

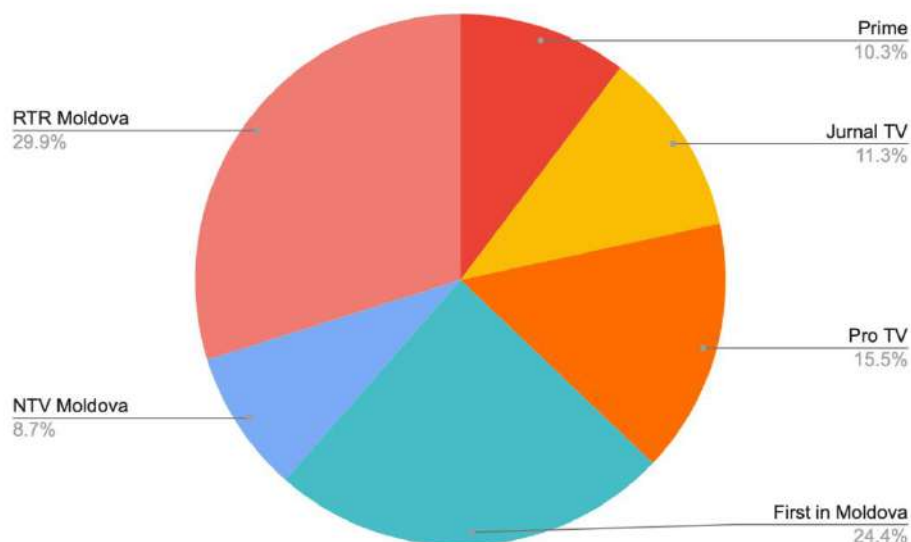


Chart no.8. Russia and Vladimir Putin in a positive context in TV news (percentage)

The number of news items in which Russia or Vladimir Putin was mentioned and the contexts in which they were made can be seen in the tables⁶ below.

TV channel:	Moldova 1				PrimeTV				Jurnal TV				TV8			
Topic ↓	+	-	=	Total	+	-	=	Total	+	-	=	Total	+	-	=	Total
Russia	0	87	19	106	2	89	15	106	1	135	16	152	0	92	16	108
V. Putin	0	2	4	6	0	3	2	5	1	28	1	30	0	10	2	12
GENERAL RUSSIA	0	89	23	112	2	92	17	111	2	163	17	182	0	102	18	120
Belarus	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	3	3	0	1	3	4
A. Lukashenko	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eurasian Union	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OTSC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
GENERAL "RUSSIAN WORLD"	0	89	24	113	2	93	17	112	2	163	20	185	0	103	21	124

TV channel:	Pro TV				First in Moldova				NTV				RTR			
Topic ↓	+	-	=	Total	+	-	=	Total	+	-	=	Total	+	-	=	Total
Russia	2	177	24	203	11	25	26	62	3	31	16	50	9	61	83	153
V. Putin	1	18	9	28	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	2	6	1	13	20
GENERAL RUSSIA	3	195	33	231	12	25	26	63	3	31	18	52	15	62	96	173
Belarus	0	1	5	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	2
A. Lukashenko	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eurasian Union	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OTSC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
GENERAL "RUSSIAN WORLD"	3	198	38	239	12	25	26	63	3	31	19	53	15	62	98	175

⁶ Positive news is marked with "+", negative with "-" and neutral with "="

Basically, the news in which the Kremlin and Russia are mentioned negatively on RTR and First in Moldova are about the war going on, where Putin could not appear positive. Otherwise, this news would be interpreted as war propaganda and would be charged by the authorities. If it were not for these constraints, we can assume that there would have been more positive news for Putin and Russia.

Conclusions on Ukraine's coverage.

Between 23 October and 1 December, the number of mentions of Ukraine and Volodymyr Zelenskyy was 1037. That is practically equal to those targeting Russia and Vladimir Putin. However, the ratio of positive to negative mentions is inversely proportional. Ukraine and Zelenskyy were mentioned in a negative context in 73 news items and in a positive context in 452 news items. The number of neutral appearances on Ukraine is significantly higher than on Russia, 512 compared to 248.

Topic ↓	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Total news	Positive vs negative report
Ukraine	456	69	358	883	289
V. Zelensky	56	4	94	154	90
GENERAL UKRAINE	512	73	452	1037	379

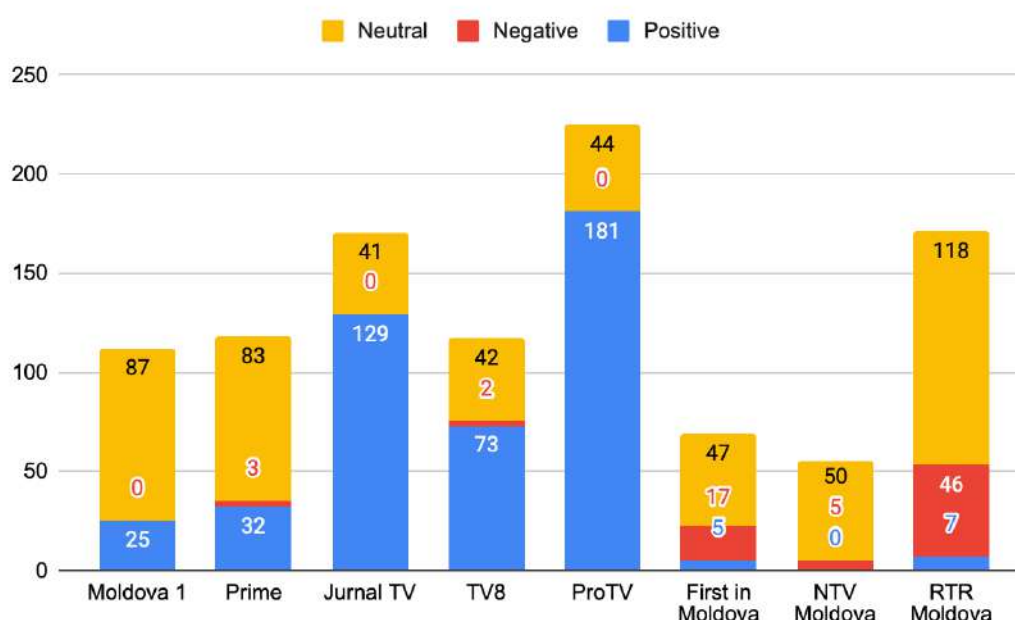


Chart no.9. Mentions of Ukraine and Volodymyr Zelenskyy in TV news (total)

As can be seen from the chart, Ukraine appeared in a negative context most often in RTR Moldova news, followed by First in Moldova. But RTR Moldova also gets the most mentions in a neutral context, followed by Moldova 1 and Prime TV. On the other hand, PRO TV and

Jurnal TV mentioned Ukraine and its leader mostly in a positive context. It is symptomatic that pro-Kremlin TV channels identified opportunities to produce more negative than positive news about Ukraine.

However, most viewers' opinion of Ukraine and Volodymyr Zelenskyy was largely influenced by positive (51.3%) and neutral (45%) news.

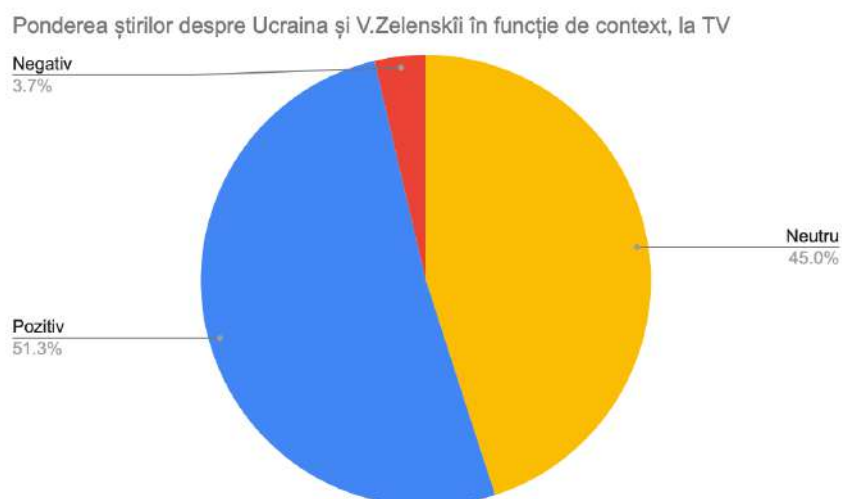


Chart no. 10. Percentage of mentions of Ukraine and Volodymyr Zelenskyy by context

The largest percentage of positive news was reported by Pro TV and Jurnal TV , and neutral news by Moldova 1 and Prime TV.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy was mentioned in a negative context in the news by only one TV channel - RTR Moldova, being targeted in this respect in 4 news items. This number of news items could not be decisive in influencing the opinion of the majority of viewers about Zelenskyy in a negative way.

Ukraine, on the other hand, has been placed in a negative context by several TV channels. However, RTR Moldova is by far the leader with 42 news items. The station is followed by First in Moldova with 17 news, NTV Moldova (5), Prime TV (3), TV8 (2). But considering the weighting, even taken all together these channels could not have a significant negative influence on the general opinion about Ukraine.

Conclusions on the reflection of the West (Romania, EU, USA, UK, NATO)

Romania and Klaus Iohannis

During the monitoring period, Romania was mentioned in 400 news items broadcast by the TV stations analysed in this report, ranking fourth among the subjects mentioned in TV news (Chart 2). Klaus Iohannis was mentioned in 19 news items.

Topic ↓	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Total news	Positive vs negative report
Romania	208	37	155	400	118
K. Iohannis	2	0	17	19	17

In half of the news broadcasts, Romania was mentioned in a neutral context, in 38% in a positive context and in 9.5% in a negative context. Klaus Iohannis, on the other hand, was predominantly placed in a positive context - 89.5% of the time, with 0 negative mentions and 10.5% neutral mentions.

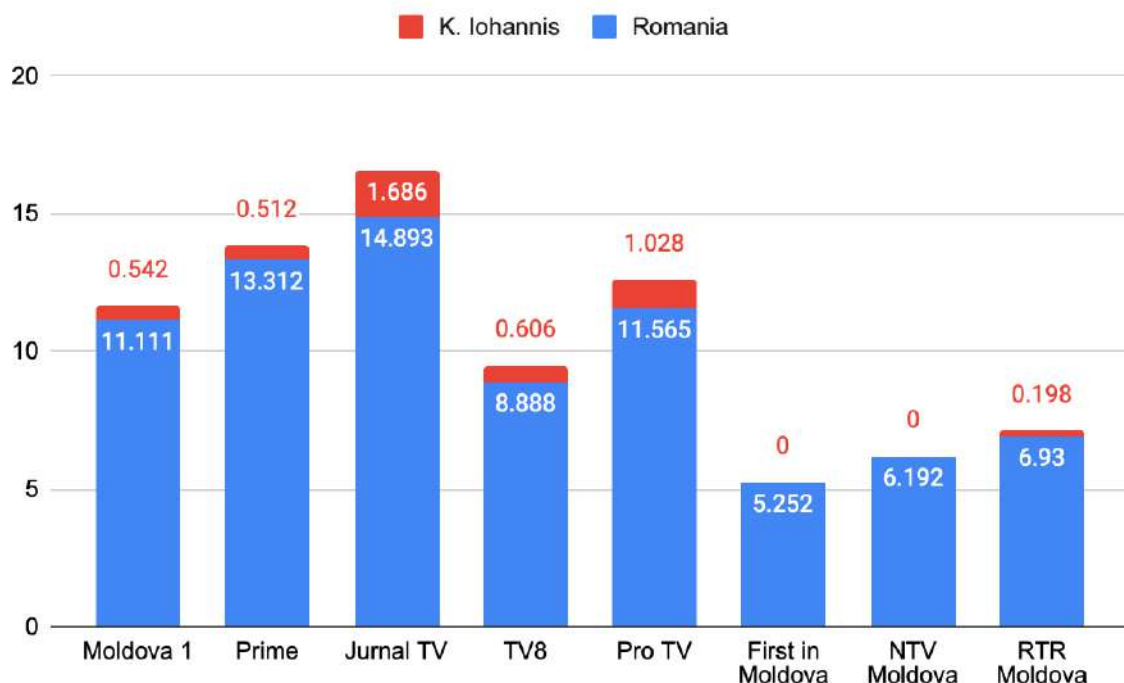


Chart no.11. Mentions of Romania and Klaus Iohannis in TV news (total)

Jurnal TV , Prime TV and Pro TV made the biggest contribution to forming an opinion about Romania and Iohannis. The lowest - First in Moldova, NTV Moldova and RTR Moldova. Again, we note that the weights reflect not only the number of mentions, but also the popularity of the TV channels. Thus, the weight of a TV channel may be higher because of its popularity, even if it had less news on the subject.

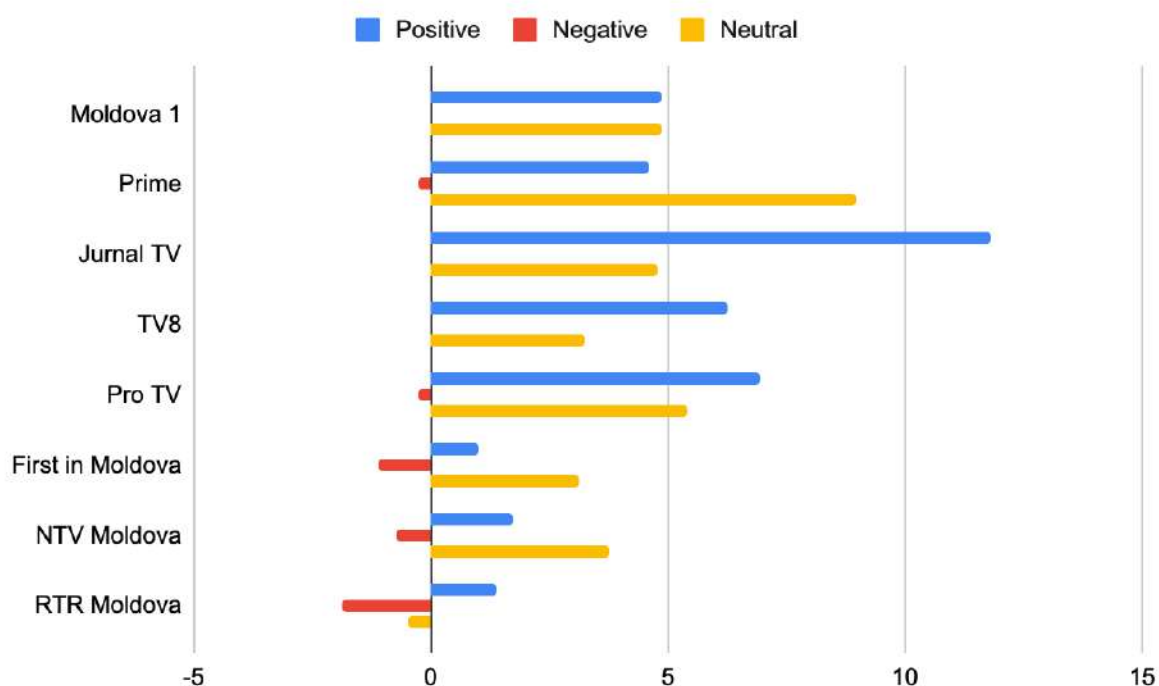


Chart no.12. Percentage of mentions of Romania and Klaus Iohannis according to the context

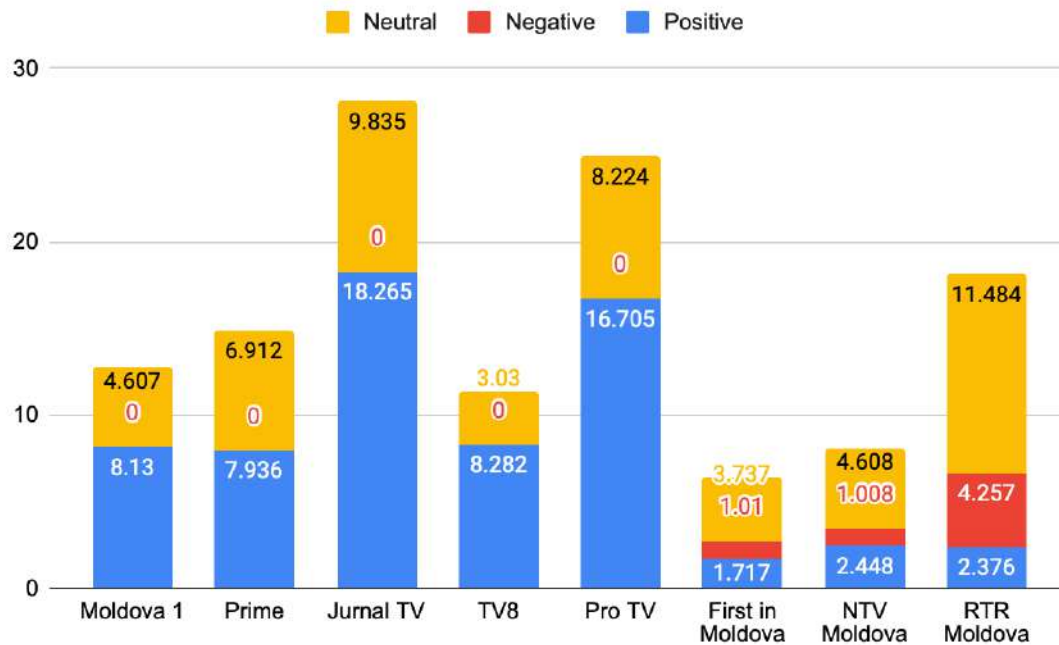
The TV channels with the greatest weight and influence on the general public opinion, respectively, provided mostly positive or neutral content about Romania and Iohannis. The exceptions were RTR Moldova, First in Moldova and NTV Moldova. The opinion of viewers of these channels, especially First in Moldova and RTR Moldova about Romania was negatively influenced.

European Union and Ursula von der Leyen

The European Union was mentioned in 598 news stories during the monitored period, ranking third in terms of number of appearances after Russia and Ukraine.

Topic ↓	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Total news	Positive vs negative report
EU	294	57	247	598	190
Ursula von der Leyen	17	3	43	63	40

Both the European Union and the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, were presented mainly in a positive and neutral context.



Chart

no.13. Percentage of EU and Ursula von der Leyen mentions by context

As in other situations analysed, the only TV channels that placed the European Union or the President of the European Commission in a negative context were RTR Moldova, NTV Moldova and First in Moldova. Their impact on the general public is low. At least half of the news broadcasted by these 3 channels is neutral or positive. However, as can be seen from the chart above, these three channels have formed the opinion of more than a quarter of the general audience.

According to BOP, the opinion of citizens about the EU is rather positive. 48% of respondents said they would rather vote for membership of the European Union, compared to 31.7% who said they would vote for membership of the Eurasian Union.

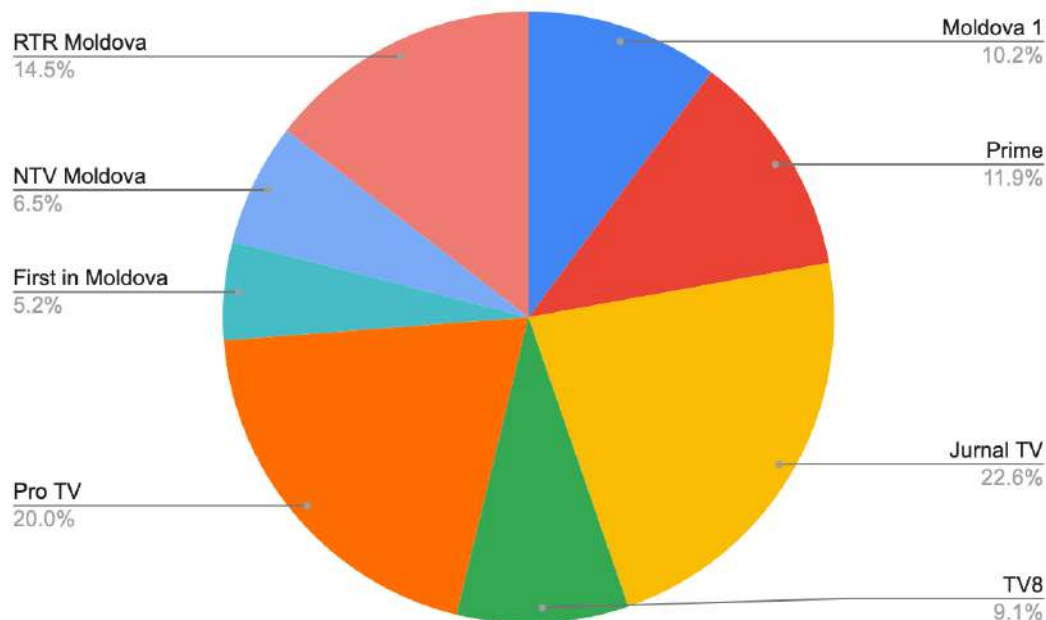


Chart no.14. Percentage of news items mentioning the EU and Ursula von der Leyen

Dacă ar trebui să alegeți, în cadrul unui referendum, între aderarea Republicii Moldova la Uniunea Europeană și aderarea Republicii Moldova la Uniunea Vamală Euroasiatică (Rusia-Belarus-Kazahstan), pentru ce ați opta?
 Perioada: 04.2017, 11.2017, 05.2018, 11.2018, 01.2019, 12.2019, 06.2020, 10.2020, 02.2021, 06.2021, 11.2022

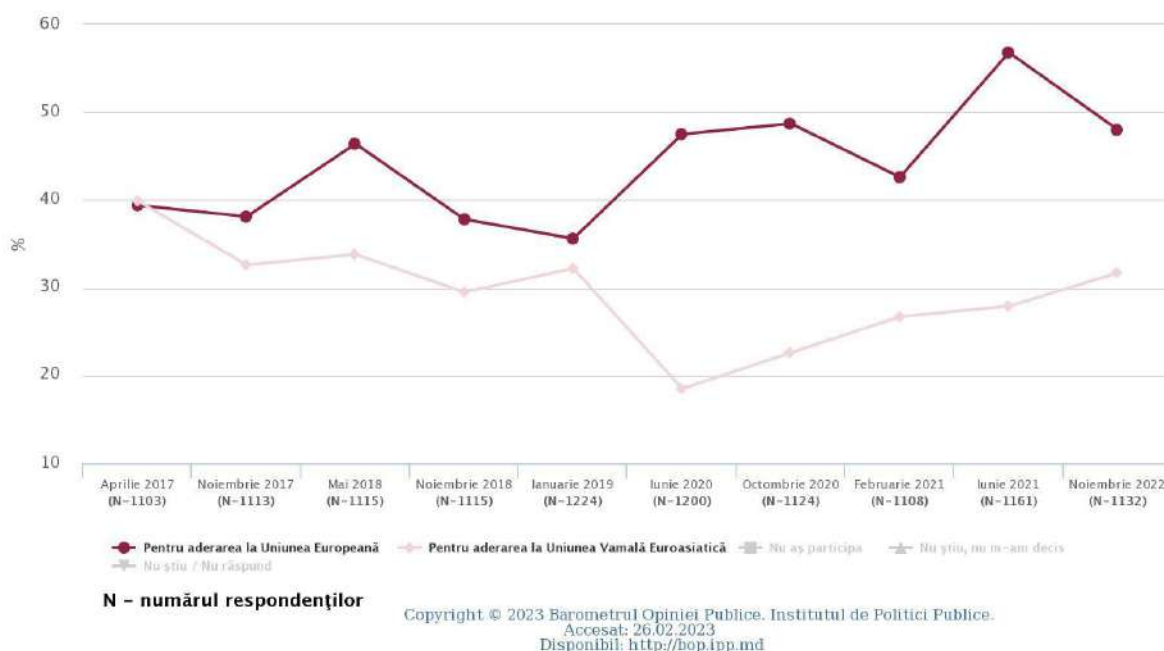


Chart no.15. Pro-EU membership BOP respondents

The large amount of news favourable to the perception of the EU still does not guarantee an increase in the number of supporters of the integration course. These preferences are strongly influenced by the impact of the multi-year propaganda through TV channels, but also by the current propaganda, which still finds sufficient ways to the Moldovan information space.

EU countries: Germany and Olaf Scholz, France and Emmanuel Macron, Lithuania, Czech Republic,

The weight of news about Germany, France and the leaders of these countries only accounted for 5.1% of the total appearances of all countries and their leaders in TV news during the period under review.

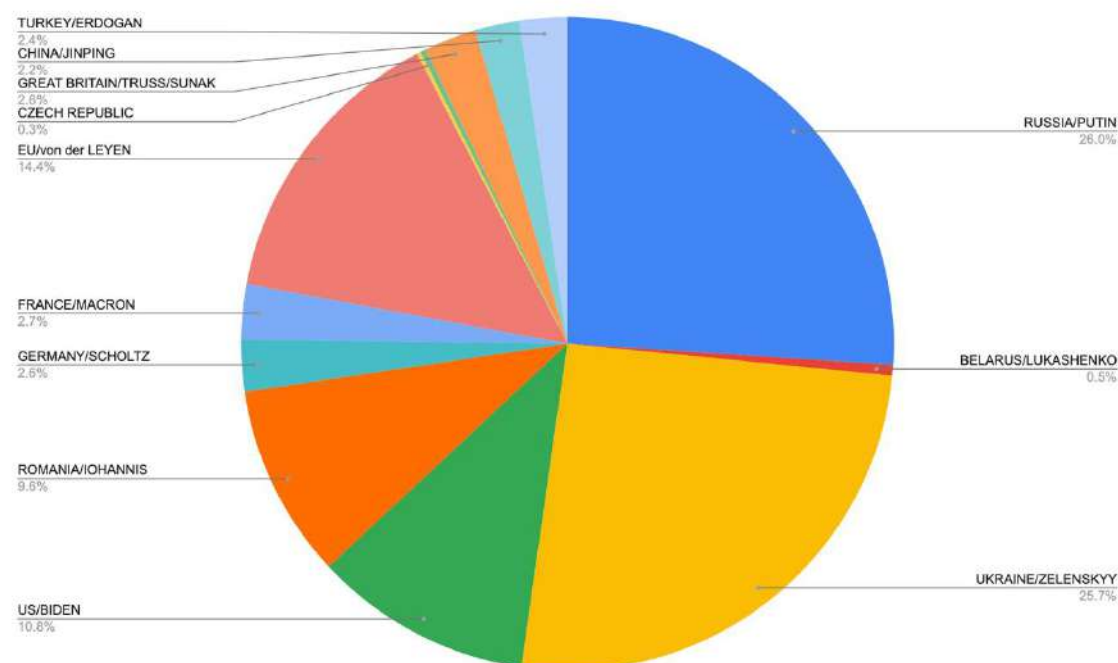


Chart no.16. The weight of TV news about countries and their leaders

Most of the news contributed to a predominantly positive view of these countries. In the case of Lithuania and the Czech Republic, a neutral opinion. Germany and France were placed in a negative context in 12-15% of all news items.

Topic ↓	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Total news	Positive vs negative ratio
Germany	44	15	51	110	36
O. Scholz	11	2	8	21	6
France	49	13	39	101	26
E. Macron	11	2	23	36	21
Lithuania	3	3	3	9	0
Czech Republic	6	2	3	11	1

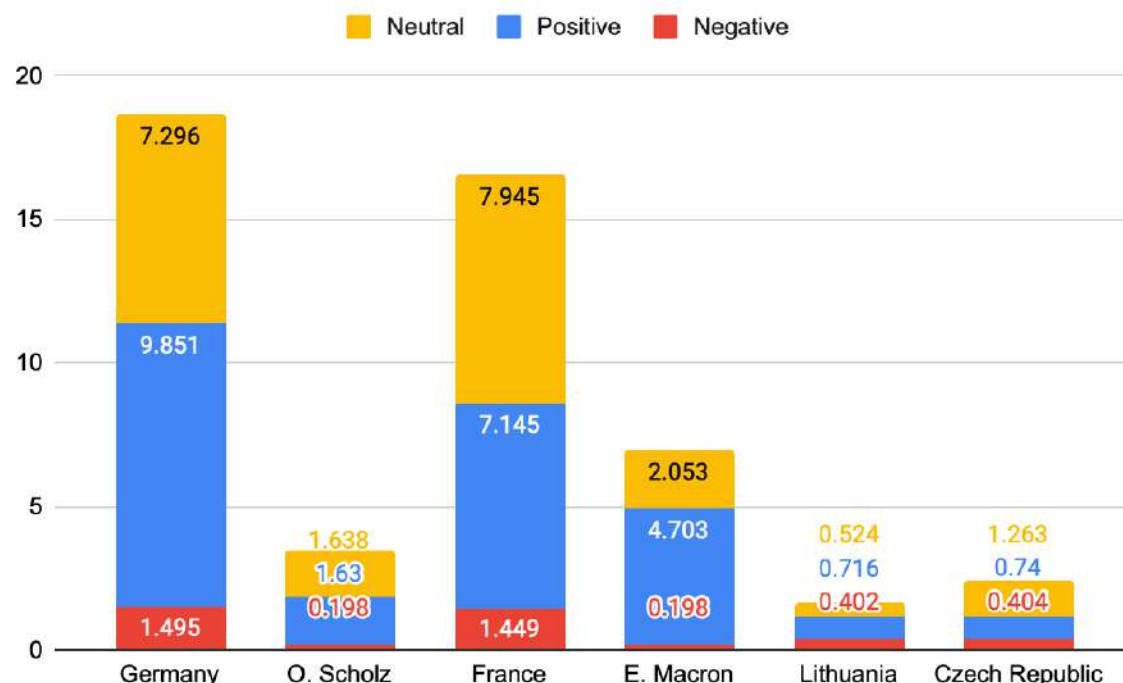


Chart no.17. The weight of news about Germany, France, Czech Republic, Lithuania, O. Scholtz and E. Macron according to context

United Kingdom and Liz Truss/Rishi Sunak

The percentage of news about the UK and the two Prime Ministers Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak is equivalent to that of news about Germany and Olaf Scholz. Although the UK was not significantly involved in the period under review in dealing with the situation created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it found itself with a similar weight to Germany because of news about the change of prime minister that took place during this period.

Most news about the UK delivered to viewers by Pro TV (26) and RTR Moldova (23). RTR presented the UK as the state involved in the Nord Stream explosion. The station broadcast the same number of neutral news stories as Pro TV but 8 negative stories about the UK and its leaders, compared to one negative story on Pro TV. Pro TV broadcast 14 news items in which the monitored subjects were portrayed in a positive light, RTR Moldova broadcast 4.

However, the weight of news stories about the UK: neither positive nor negative, did not make a significant contribution to changing opinion for or against the state and its leaders, as the weight of neutral stories was much higher.

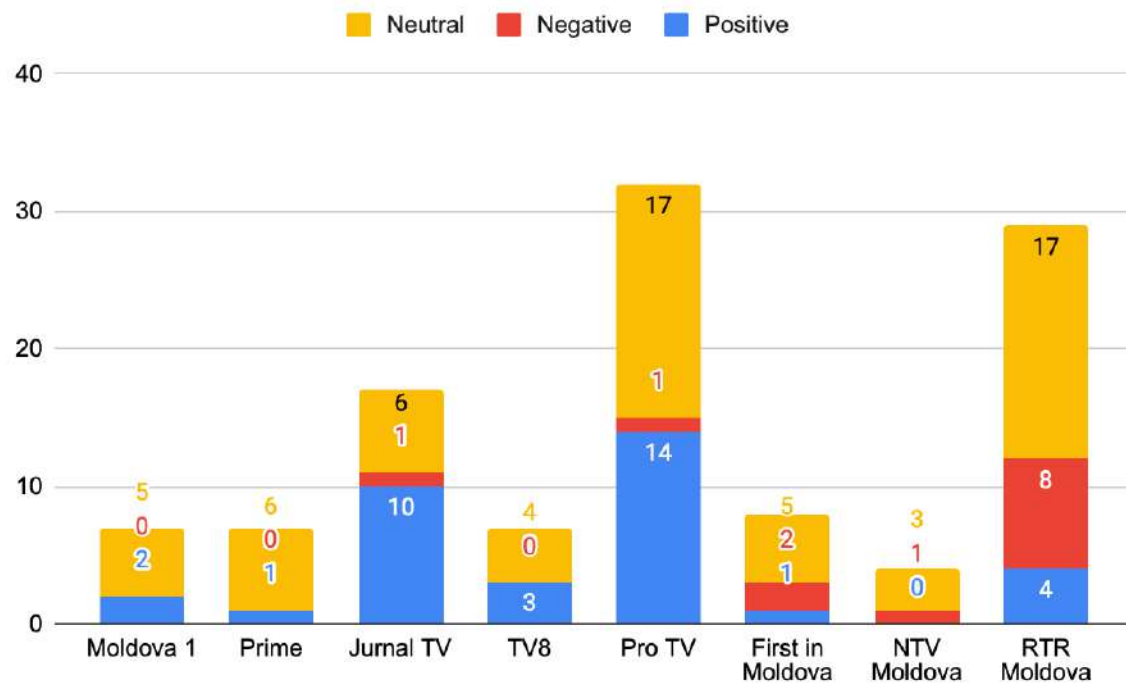


Chart no.18. UK mentions of Liz Truss/Rishi Sunak by context (total)

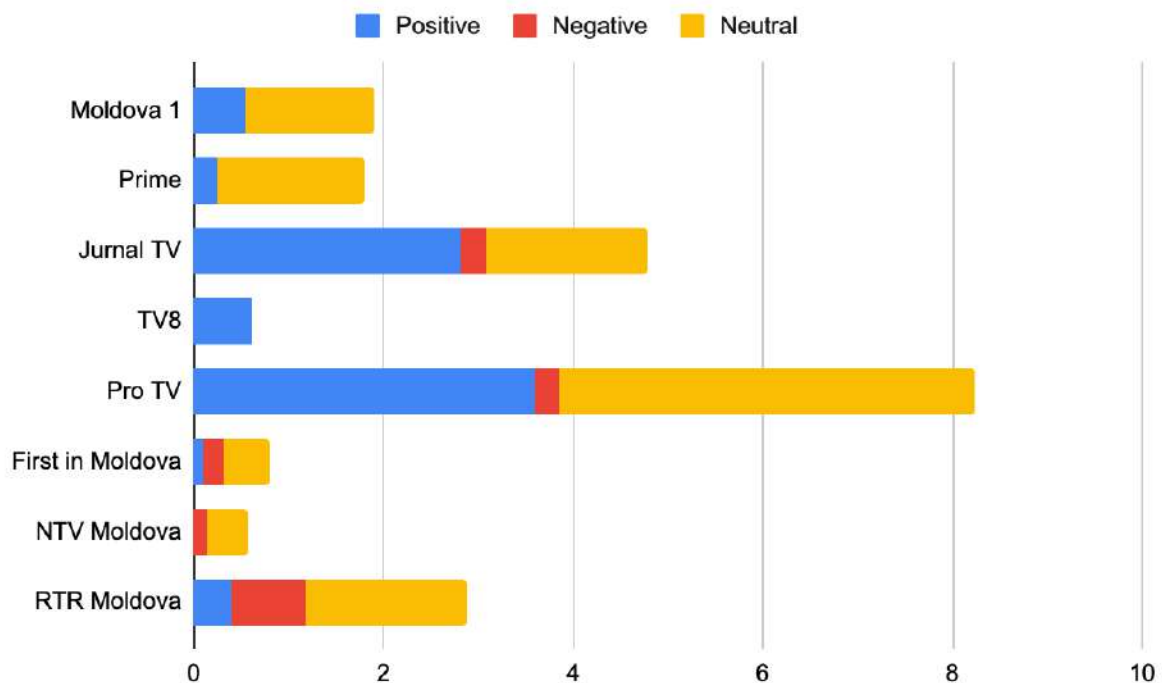


Chart no.19. The weight of mentions of Great Britain, Liz Truss/Rishi Sunak by context

USA and Joe Biden

The United States of America and Joe Biden have a combined 482 mentions. The US is the fifth most mentioned topic during the monitored period.

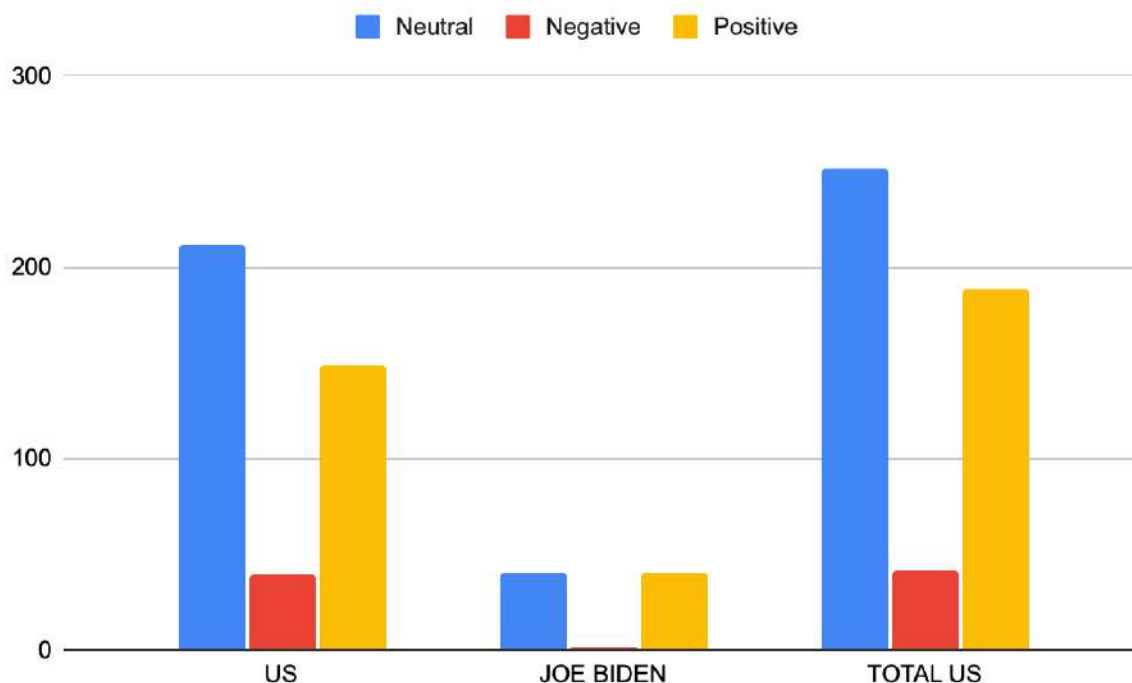


Chart no.20. Context of US and Joe Biden mentions on TV news (total)

In the chart above we have systematised the mentions of the US and Joe Biden according to the context in which they were represented in the news. Both subjects were predominantly mentioned in positive, or neutral contexts. The same is true if we analyse the appearances according to the share of TV channels that broadcast them.

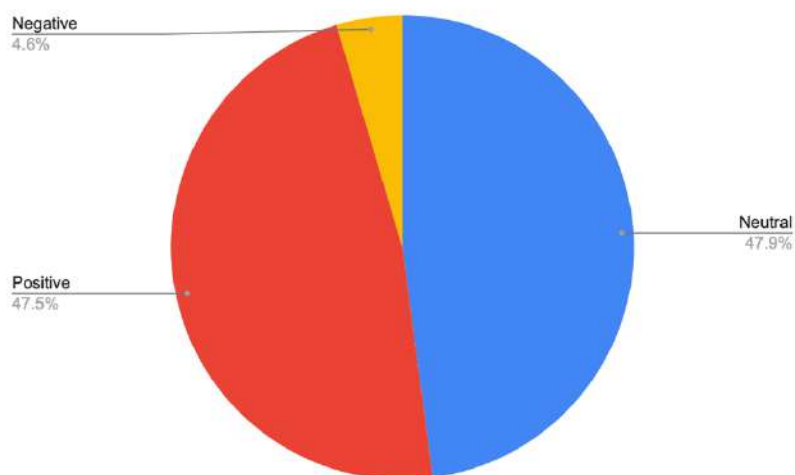


Chart no.21. The weight of US and Joe Biden mentions in TV news

Most often in the news the US and Joe Biden were mentioned in RTR Moldova news. The station is followed by Pro TV . These two TV channels account for more than half of the US and Biden mentions from the eight stations monitored.

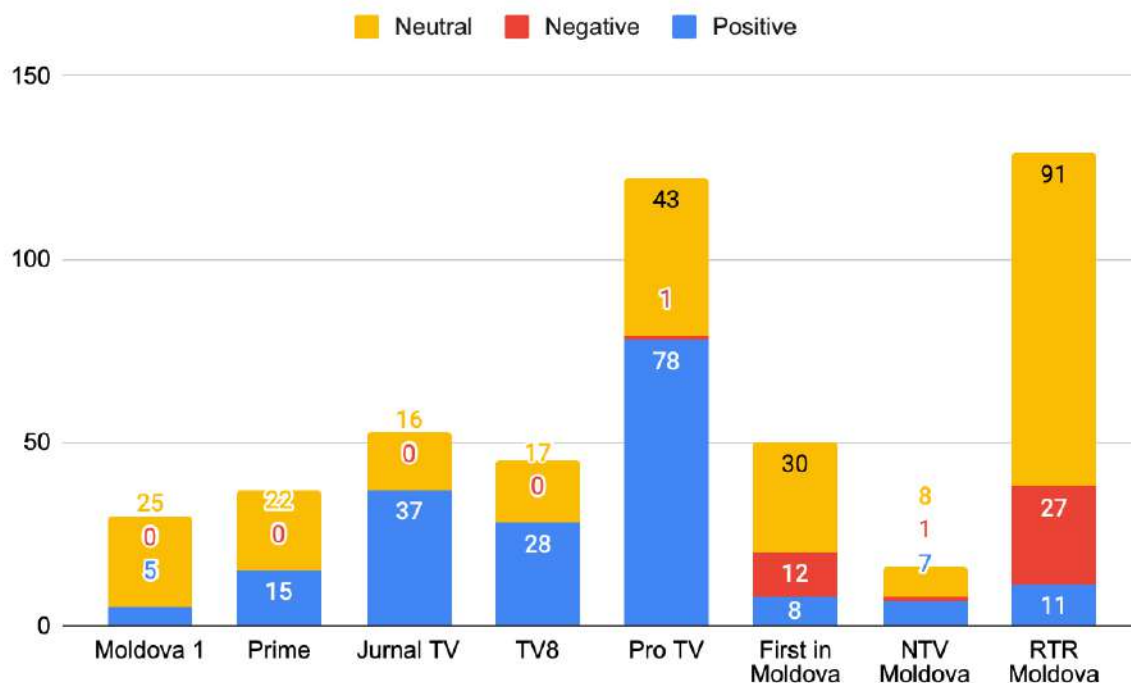


Chart 22. Mentions of the US and Joe Biden by TV channel and context (total)

RTR Moldova stands out with most neutral and negative mentions. Thus, the general opinion of the viewers of this station was slightly negatively influenced. Similar was the case with the channel First in Moldova where out of the total mentions of the US and Joe Biden, 24% were in a negative context, compared to 16% mentions in a positive context.

Pro TV on the other hand provided the highest number of mentions in a positive context compared to other stations, followed by mentions in a neutral context. In 63% of mentions the US and Biden were covered positively, compared to 0.8% of news stories in a negative context. Pro TV is followed by Jurnal TV and TV8 in the number of positive mentions.

However, considering the substantially lower share of pro-Russian channels, the news they broadcast has only a small influence on general public opinion.

NATO

During the period under review, the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) Treaty was mentioned in 114 TV news stories, a number comparable to that of the UK and its leaders. In 90% of these news items NATO was placed in a positive or neutral context. One negative news item was followed by four positive ones.

Topic ↓	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Total news	Positive vs negative ratio
NATO	53	11	50	114	39

The impact of negative news in terms of audience of TV channels is much lower in terms of overall audience, since, as we will explain below, all negative news was generated by TV channels affiliated to the Russian Federation.

Topic ↓	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Total news	Positive vs negative ratio
NATO	10.229	1.093	12.663	23.985	11.57

Most news items mentioning NATO were broadcast by Pro TV and RTR Moldova, followed by Jurnal TV. The first two stations broadcast 24 news items each mentioning the alliance.

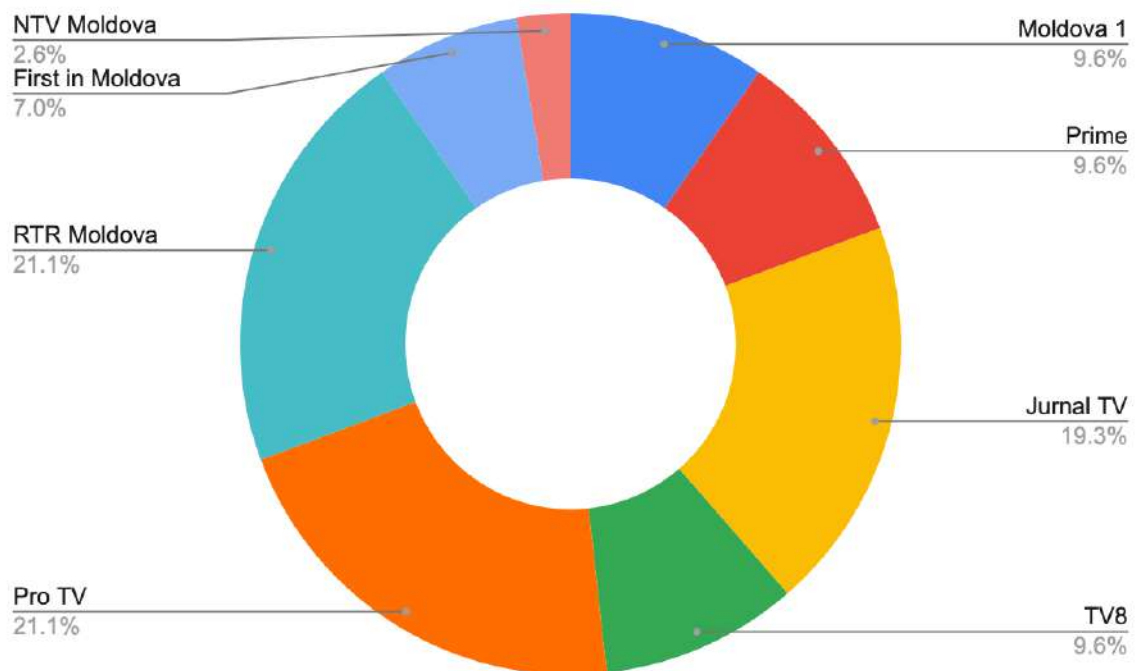


Chart 23. NATO mentions in news by TV channel (total)

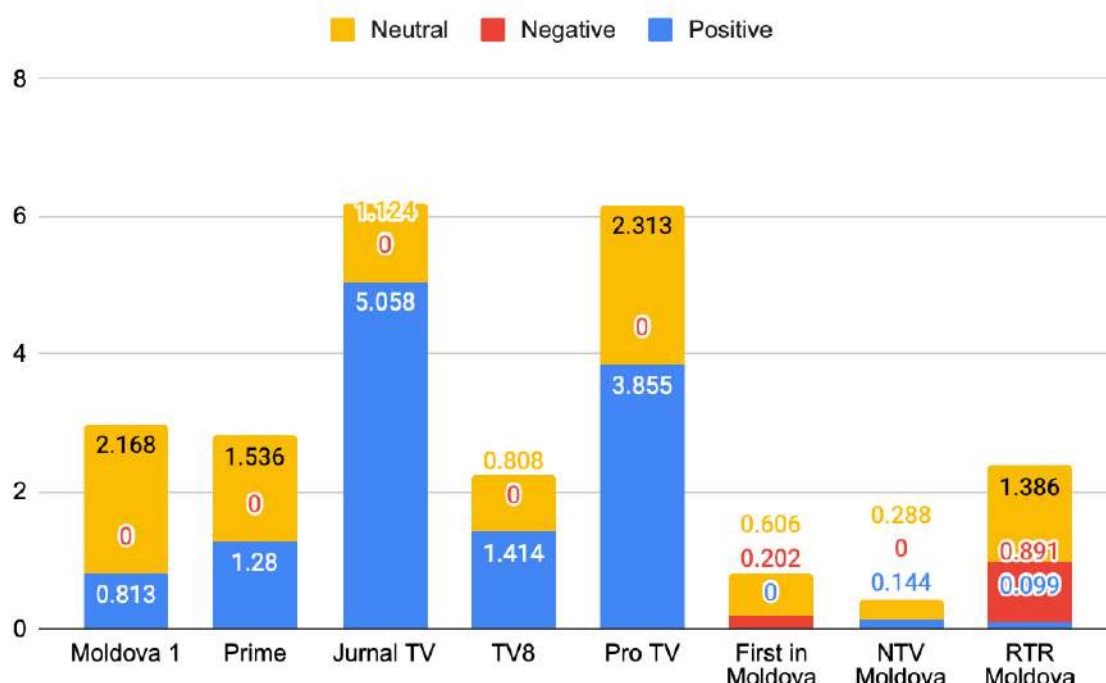


Chart 24 The weight of NATO mentions by context and TV channel

However, due to the difference in audience, the impact of Pro TV news on the general public is 2.6 times higher than that of RTR Moldova. Prime TV, Moldova 1 and independent TV stations⁷, including Pro TV presented NATO mostly neutrally or in a positive light. RTR Moldova, on the other hand, broadcast the most negative news about NATO. One positive mention was followed by 9 negative and 14 neutral. First in Moldova aired two negative news items about NATO, the remaining six were neutral. NTV Moldova broadcast the fewest news items mentioning the North Atlantic alliance, with 1 positive and 2 neutral.

Overall, the TV channels with the greatest impact on audiences broadcast neutral and positive news, significantly outweighing the amount and impact of negative news. Thus, public opinion on NATO could be slightly positively influenced at the level of the general public.

The West in TV news

The West, i.e. the countries of the European Union, the US, the UK and their leaders monitored during this period, as well as NATO, were mostly neutral and positive.

Topic ↓	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Total news	Positive vs negative ratio
GENERAL WEST	950	186	828	2075	642

The impact on the general public of positive news about the West was nine times greater than negative news.

⁷ Jurnal TV , Pro TV , TV8

Topic ↓	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Total news	Positive vs negative ratio
GENERAL WEST	167.841	20.025	186.119	396.344	166.094

The biggest contribution to shaping public opinion about the West was made by news stories mentioning the European Union and Ursula von der Leyen, news stories about the US and Joe Biden, followed by news stories mentioning Romania and Klaus Iohannis. According to the data analysed above in the chapters for each entity, all were predominantly positive and neutral. Thus, the overall opinion of the viewers of these channels was slightly positively influenced.

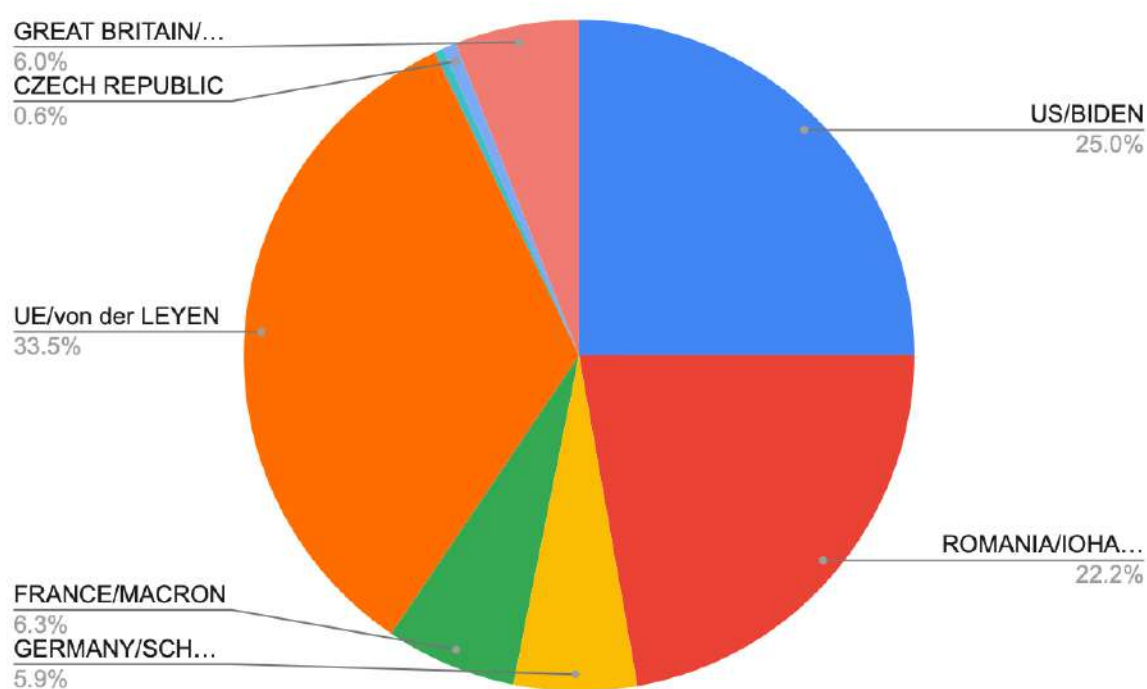


Chart no.25. The weight of Western countries and leaders in TV news

However, there is a difference depending on which TVs people watched. Thus, viewers of TV8, Jurnal TV and Pro TV saw mostly positive news about the West, outweighing both neutral news and the tiny impact of negative news. Viewers of Moldova 1 and Prime TV saw the West in predominantly neutral news, which had the greatest impact, followed by positive news, which may have favoured people's opinion of Western countries and their leaders. On the other hand, the impact of negative news broadcast by RTR Moldova on its audience was twice as high as the positive ones. In other words, the opinion of these people was negatively influenced. The impact of negative and positive news on the audience of NTV Moldova is approximately similar, it is supplemented by neutral news, so the opinion of the audience of this channel was not significantly influenced in any direction. First in Moldova placed Western states and their leaders in a predominantly neutral context, this was slightly positively influenced, as the impact of positive mentions outweighed that of negative mentions by three times. However, it is important to mention that a large part of the positive context mentions on

RTR, NTV and First in Moldova channels concern domestic and bilateral issues (such as EU-supported projects, for example) and do not necessarily strongly influence the creation of opinions about geopolitical processes, values, etc... Under these circumstances, one cannot help but notice a predilection of channels broadcasting media content from Russia for an anti-Western editorial policy. Sometimes these news opportunities were dictated by disinformation agendas.

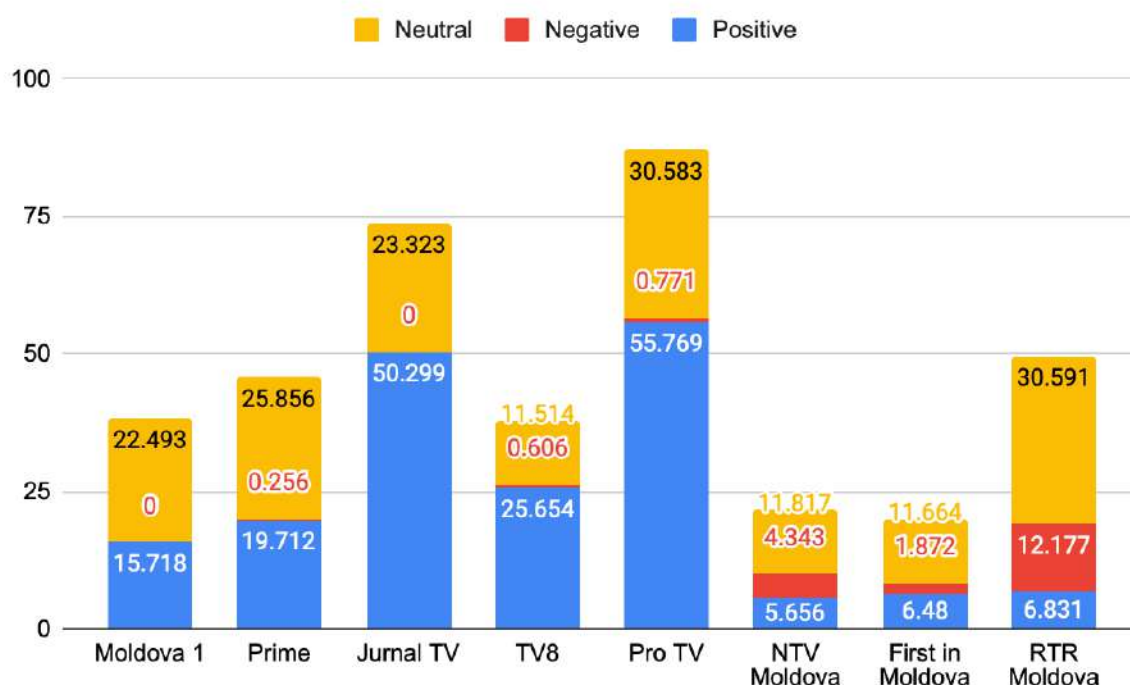


Chart no.26. Context of the reflection of the West by TV channel

Conclusions on China and Turkey coverage

Most mentions of China and Turkey were made in a neutral context. And the ratio of negative to positive mentions is against both countries. Xi Jinping was mentioned more often in the news than his Turkish counterpart, despite Erdogan's role as mediator in Russia's war against Ukraine. However, the number of news stories in which the two were portrayed in a positive light is slightly higher than the number of negative ones. Most often in a positive light Xi Jinping was presented by RTR Moldova, where a mention in a negative context was matched by 4 positive ones. The impact of news about China, Turkey and the leaders of these countries was limited compared to the other monitored subjects.

Topic	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Total	Positive vs negative ratio
China	50	22	12	84	-10
Xi Jinping	8	8	9	25	1

Turkey	69	14	8	91	-6
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	12	1	2	15	1

Conclusions on the coverage of foreign topics on First in Moldova, NTV Moldova and RTR Moldova.

In this chapter we will look at the number of news items in which the monitored subjects were mentioned, and less at their weight, as we want to see what opinion is formed by the TV channels only at the level of their own audience and not the general one.

The main news bulletins of the mentioned TV stations were analyzed, two of which were broadcast in Romanian (First in Moldova and NTV Moldova) and one in Russian (RTR Moldova).

18.3% of all BOP respondents said they watch at least one of RTR Moldova, NTV Moldova and First in Moldova.

Opinion about the so-called Russian World was shaped by news stories mentioning Russia and Vladimir Putin. Mentions of Alexander Lukashenka, the CSTO and the Eurasian Union during this period were absent, and Belarus was mentioned in one news item by NTV Moldova and two by RTR Moldova both stations reflecting them neutrally.

Of these three TV channels RTR Moldova is by far the channel that mentioned Russia and Vladimir Putin the most in its news. During the period under review, 173 news items were identified in which the state, the president or both were mentioned. In comparison, First in Moldova mentioned Russia and/or V.Putin in 63 news items and NTV Moldova in 52 news items.

NTV Moldova and First in Moldova broadcast the least amount of news mentioning Russia and Vladimir Putin compared to all other monitored channels. In the news bulletins of these two TV channels, Vladimir Putin was mentioned only 3 times during the whole monitored period. First in Moldova placed him once in a positive context and NTV Moldova twice in a neutral context. On RTR Moldova, although the Russian president appeared more often than on the other two channels, accumulating 20 mentions out of 173 including Russia, the leader in Moscow was placed in a positive context 6 times, in a negative context once, and in a neutral context 13 times, thus tilting the balance of public perception towards a positive view of Putin. And this weighting takes place in the context of military aggression against Ukraine.

Russia and Vladimir Putin were mentioned in a positive context on First in Moldova and RTR Moldova in 20% of cases and on NTV Moldova in 5% of cases. RTR Moldova and First in Moldova are the channels that broadcast the most news in which Russia was covered in a positive context, compared to all the other TV channels monitored.

Viewers of First in Moldova saw an approximately equal number of mentions of Russia and its leader in neutral (40%) and negative (40%) contexts. Viewers of NTV Moldova saw Russia and Vladimir Putin predominantly in negative contexts (60%) and those of RTR Moldova in neutral contexts in half of the news items where they were mentioned and 35% in negative contexts. Viewers' opinion was negatively biased towards Russia, not Vladimir Putin.

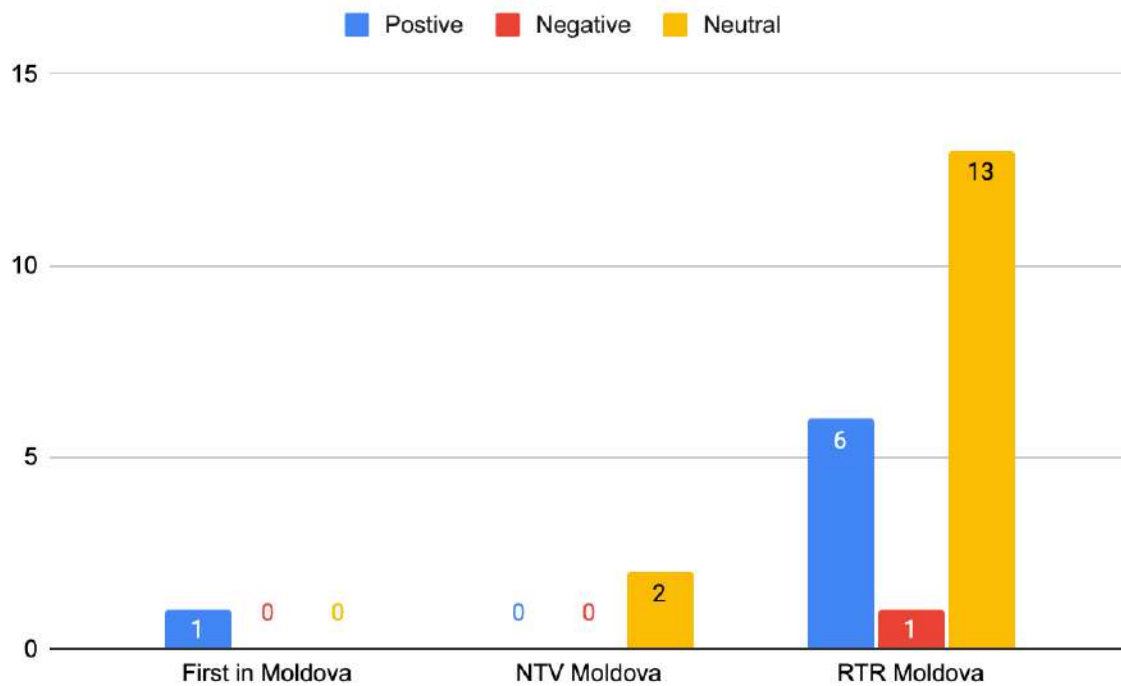


Chart no.27. Vladimir Putin in the news bulletins First in Moldova, NTV Moldova and RTR Moldova

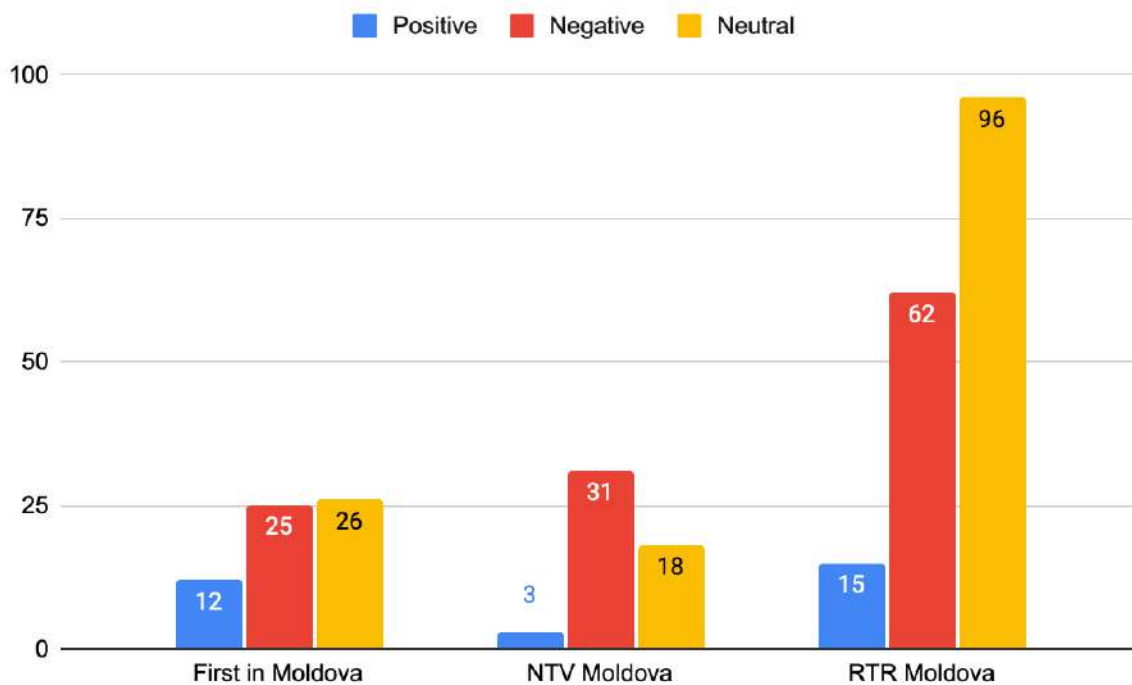


Chart no.28. Context in which Russia and Vladimir Putin were mentioned

On the other hand, Ukraine and Volodymyr Zelenskyy were presented mostly neutrally or in a negative light. The number of negative news stories substantially outnumbered the positive ones. Thus, First in Moldova broadcast three times more news in which Ukraine and Zelenskyy were placed in a negative context than in a positive one, NTV Moldova never mentioned

Ukraine or its president in a positive context, but 5 times mentioned them in a negative context. On RTR Moldova people saw Ukraine and Zelenskyy in a negative light more than 6 times more often than in a positive one. The majority of mentions on all three stations were neutral, First in Moldova (68%), NTV Moldova (90%), RTR Moldova (69%).

Viewers' opinion of Ukraine and Volodymyr Zelenskyy was slightly negatively influenced by these TV channels.

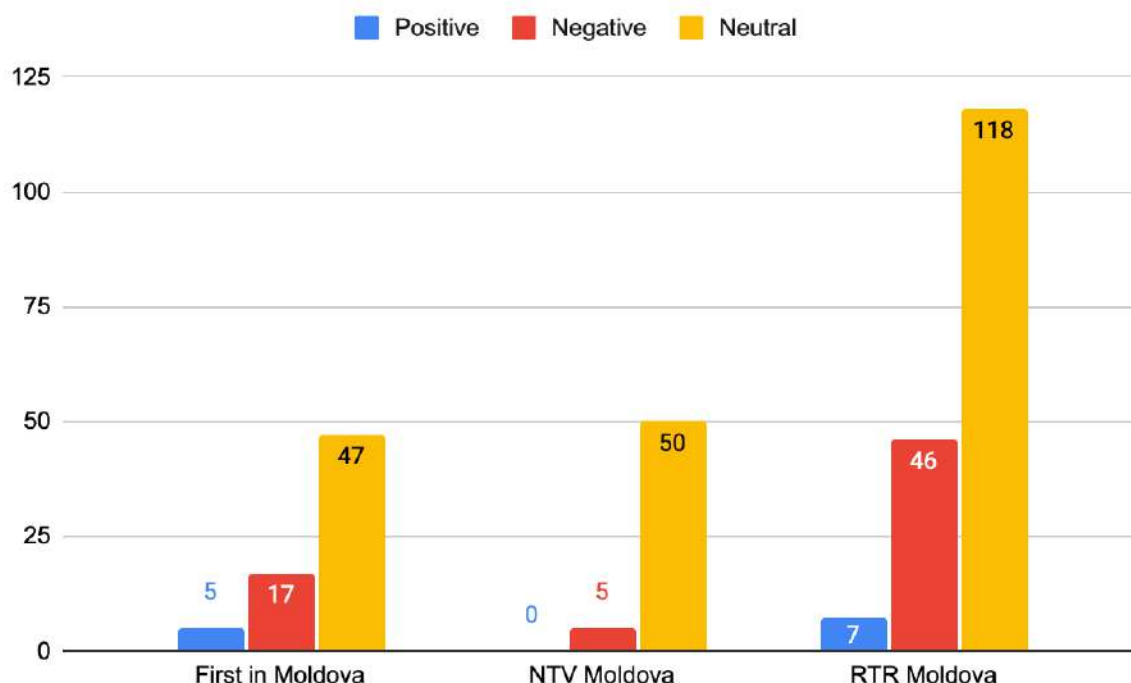


Chart no.29. Context in which Ukraine and Volodymyr Zelenskyy were mentioned.

The three TV channels did not broadcast any news about the war in Ukraine itself, only about its consequences such as shells falling on the territory of Moldova and Poland, the energy crisis, inflation, decisions taken at national, European or international level in connection with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. About the actual events on the battlefield there was only one news broadcast by RTR Moldova about the mutual accusations Russia and Ukraine made about the bombing of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station⁸.

By omitting to report on the fighting on the ground in Ukraine, the viewer was deprived of the opportunity to form his own opinion about the war in the neighboring country. In the absolute majority of news stories in which Russia was portrayed in a negative light, this happened in political statements made by various actors including those from Moldova. But the viewers did not see vox, sound on tape of people suffering from the Russian invasion. Thus, the three TV channels, although they dealt with the war in Ukraine, did so exclusively by presenting the opinions and reactions of third parties, or the consequences of the war.

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=414702907396084>

The chart below systematises data on the ratio of positive to negative news about the countries and organisations monitored by these three TV channels. All channels contributed to a negative image of all countries except France and Germany. RTR Moldova had a major impact, contributing 67% to the negative view of Ukraine and 55% to the negative view of Russia. RTR Moldova influenced the opinion of its viewers negatively especially about the USA, Romania, the European Union and NATO. Most of the news in a negative context is about the USA. The USA and Ukraine are the main targets of Russian propaganda and disinformation campaigns. The Kremlin's aim is to create and cultivate a deep anti-Western sentiment and to create as much confusion around Ukraine as possible, inducing the feeling that Ukraine is to blame for the war unleashed by Russia.

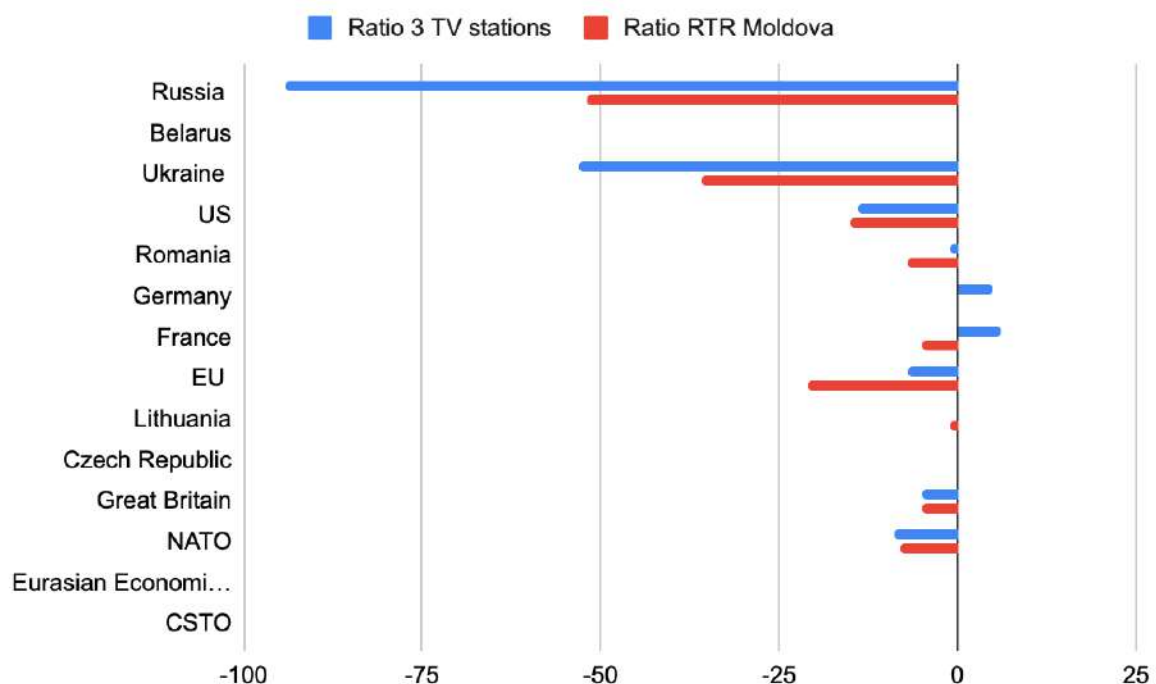


Chart no.30. Ratio of positive to negative news by country

Unlike the countries, most of their leaders have been reflected predominantly in a positive light. Vladimir Putin topped the list by the ratio of positive to negative appearances. Only one leader was portrayed in a negative light by the three TV channels - Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

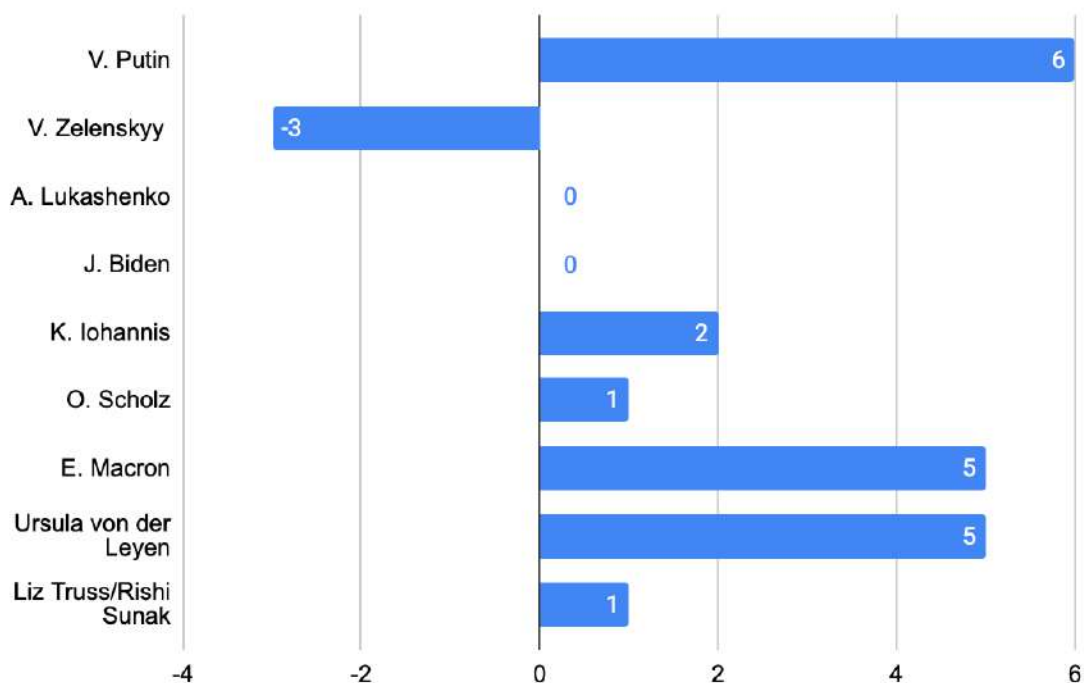


Chart 31. Ratio of positive to negative news (political leaders)

From the data presented above, we can conclude that the TV stations RTR, First in Moldova and NTV continued to have an editorial policy affiliated to the Kremlin propaganda narratives. There is a deliberate choice to emphasize negative sentiments against Ukraine and Western countries. At the same time, the favourable image of Vladimir Putin is protected and promoted. The predominantly negative presentation of Russia is due to the objective situation generated by the war, and the personal responsibility of the Russian president is evaded. The lack of constant and detailed information about the course and impact of the war, its victims, is also a form of influencing viewers' opinion.

EU in negative context at RTR Moldova and First in Moldova

Take the European Union's reflection as an example. Only RTR Moldova, First in Moldova and NTV Moldova mentioned the EU in a negative context. On RTR Moldova 25% of EU mentions were in a negative context, i.e. every fourth mention. The number of mentions in a negative context is twice as high as those in a positive context. Therefore, RTR Moldova viewers' opinion of the EU was more negatively influenced.

At the same time, in the mentioned period, in the news bulletins of other TV channels - Moldova 1, Prime TV, Pro TV, Jurnal TV and TV8 - the European Union was reflected either in a positive or neutral context.

On 2 November RTR Moldova mentioned the EU in a negative context 4 times. In three news items the European Union was presented in a negative light in terms of the social-economic situation. One of the [news items](#) was about record inflation in the Eurozone, which has passed 10%, [another](#) about the drought in Central Europe, and in [the third news item](#) MEP Maria Grapini insinuated that Europe is leaving its own people hungry, following the decision to

sanction Russia for the invasion of Ukraine. In [the fourth news item](#) it is mentioned that electricity tariffs have increased because Moldova is buying electricity from Romania at European prices, due to the lack of a contract with the Cuciurgan power plant.

The negative image of the EU was formed in RTR Moldova news bulletins in three ways. Through the reflection of social-economic problems faced by EU countries, through political news about the internal situation in the EU and actions towards Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and through internal news about the challenges faced by Moldova.

Most of the EU's negative mentions were made in the context of the energy crisis. Thus, Maria Grapini's sound on tape comparing the EU to a mother leaving her children hungry was repeated the next day in a domestic [news](#) story about views on rising electricity prices. In the same news, the European Union is also present in a negative context in the speeches of Moldovan politicians. This discourse can be found in the news broadcast by RTR Moldova. Thus, in the same news, opposition politician Ion Chicu quotes European partners who anticipate a difficult winter in terms of energy, asking rhetorically what will then remain of Moldova. And PSRM leader Igor Dodon says that Moldova has become the country with the most expensive energy in Europe, whereas until recently it was the country with cheapest electricity.

Another news item in the same news bulletin says that one of the reasons for the rise in electricity prices is that purchases on the *European* market have fallen by 80%.

While the EU is mentioned in a negative context with reference to the effects on electricity prices in Moldova, Maria Grapini's discourse on indifference towards her own EU members is cultivated in the same news bulletin of 03.11.2022. In the background of an external [news item](#) on the measures taken by Germany to help its citizens pay their energy bills, the "furious" reaction of the European Union to this decision is mentioned, the subject being discussed at the meeting of finance ministers.

The chain of problems facing the EU is continued by the news item that gas prices [in the EU have already risen](#) amid the return of cold weather. And the picture of insecurity is compounded by the [news](#) that EU countries are slow to build up gas reserves, and according to Gazprom even full tanks do not guarantee a successful passage through the autumn-winter season.

On 30.11.2022 viewers saw [a news item about Serbia](#) - Moscow's ally - buying gas at 4.5 times lower price than the rest of European countries. This while due to the increase in gas prices, fertilizers in Europe have become 1.5 times more expensive, announced another [news item](#) in the same news bulletin, and a deficit is expected.

On this background [the statement](#) of the spokeswoman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Maria Zakharova broadcast on 1.12.2022. She states that the path towards European integration leads to impoverishment of the population of the Republic of Moldova. But also, that the country is drawn into an anti-Russian campaign following the example of Ukraine. Such statements certainly form a negative opinion of the EU, and are regularly cemented by news reports in which the European Union is presented in a bad light.

The EU is associated not only with energy and economic problems but also with other negative situations such as [prison overcrowding in France](#) and [an ageing population](#).

Politically, the EU is mentioned in a negative context when reference is made to the lack of unity leading to delays in the €9 billion in financial assistance [promised to Ukraine](#) or to [dissention between France and Germany](#), the EU's two major powers, who cannot reach a common position on Ukraine and the relationship with China.

Another topic exploited in RTR Moldova news is the alleged [inevitable trade war](#) between the EU and the USA. In one of the news stories, *Politico publication* reports that the trade fight between America and Europe is inevitable because of the subsidies offered by the USA to companies for the use of green energy. Or [that](#) "French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to Washington will be Europe's last chance to persuade Biden to change the U.S. inflation-reduction law and avoid a U.S. - European trade war."

The news bulletins highlight EU failures, such as the failure to resolve [the issue of car license plates](#) between Kosovo and Serbia, or Ursula von der Leyen's retraction of [statements about the number of Ukrainian servicemen](#) killed as a result of the Russian invasion.

Unlike RTR Moldova, the European Union is mentioned in a negative context in First in Moldova news, mostly in domestic news.

First in Moldova mentioned the EU in a negative context 10 times compared to 16 positive mentions.

Thus, on 2.11.2022, the spokeswoman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Maria Zakharova, is quoted in the news as saying that Chisinau's decision to declare a Russian diplomat of the Russian Federation persona non-grata was taken "under the influence of European and American partners".

On the same day, in another [news item](#), the EU market is presented as being unfilled for Moldovan agricultural products, an alternative market being the Russian one. The European Union is presented as a potential danger for local producers in the news item "EU will not accept"⁹, because the provisions of the draft law promoted by farmers, according to which half of the shelves are allocated to local products, contradict European practices and may "prejudice the path of European integration".

As in RTR Moldova's news, the EU is portrayed in a negative light in the news story¹⁰ about the risk of temporary electricity disconnections due to power shortages, but also in the story about record inflation in both Moldova and the EU.

The only mention of the EU in a negative context in foreign news is the statement by the Portuguese Prime Minister accusing the European Union of deliberately giving false hopes to

9

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuLCXuyonYE&ab_channel=Primul%C3%AEnMoldovaTranslation
§ 9:50-12:48

10

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuLCXuyonYE&ab_channel=Primul%C3%AEnMoldovaTranslation
§ 0:58- 3:43

the candidate countries for European membership, as the EU "cannot accept Ukraine under the current circumstances".

The three stations analysed, in particular RTR Moldova, promoted a manifestly negative editorial policy towards the EU. The reporting targeted topical issues and opportunities to convince its audience that the EU is a bankrupt and insecure project. At the same time, similar topics (inflation, the social situation, not even the tens of thousands of deaths) targeting Russia were not presented.

General conclusions.

This analysis reflects a fundamental structural change in the weight of sources of information about international realities for Moldovan citizens. If in the analysis conducted in 2018¹¹ we found a total dominance of Russian state media in forming opinion on international issues (66%), then after 5 years, it is simply missing in the licensed audiovisual space. Some influence was preserved during the monitored period through TV channels indirectly affiliated with Russia, which, as we can see from the text, continued to subtly promote the Kremlin's propaganda narratives. But their cumulative influence is not so great - around 19%. But the omission of information about external events, particularly Russian aggression in Ukraine, has helped to preserve the effects of multi-year propaganda and disinformation among viewers of these channels.

In the period under review, in terms of quantity and popularity of TV channels (according to BOP), the largest role in informing Moldovan viewers was played by independent TV channels (57%). We note an increase of almost 6 times. And this is due not only and not so much to the increase in popularity of these sources of information, but to the increase in the amount of external news on these channels. We welcome this approach and encourage continued attention to international news. From the point of view of Moldova's information security this is a good trend. However, there is still a need to improve capacities and access to sources for TV stations in the Republic of Moldova, including when we talk about the public channel.

TV channels whose licenses were recently suspended have also been monitored. We cannot say that they had a deliberate editorial policy aimed at justifying Russia's military aggression in Ukraine. However, they have clearly favoured Vladimir Putin's personal image. Thus, they manipulated his viewers and did not objectively inform them about the culprit and perpetrator of the aggression. Likewise, many important topics for forming an objective opinion were simply missing. At the same time, we found a deliberate and manipulative editorial policy to denigrate the image of the EU in the Republic of Moldova, especially on RTR Moldova.

However, the structural change in the audiovisual space is not yet equally reflected in public opinion trends. The causes could be multiple - including the long-lasting effect of disinformation, its continued presence online, but also the lack of strategic media approaches to eradicate the multi-year effects of Kremlin propaganda. However, it is the Kremlin's narratives that have held a dominant position in shaping the image of international reality in Moldova for decades.

¹¹ https://watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Studiu-WATCHDOG_propaganda-rusa-la-TV-2018.pdf

The WatchDog.MD Community will continue to monitor the coverage of international issues in TV news and will produce new reports.



the WatchDog.MD Community and does not necessarily reflect the views of the donor.

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