

# **Online Media Monitoring in the Election Campaign for 2020 Presidential Elections**

Report no. 3  
11 – 17 October 2020

(general conclusions)



National Endowment *for* Democracy  
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The monitoring takes place within a project implemented by the Association of Independent Press (API) and funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (USA). The opinions expressed therein belong to the authors and do not necessarily reflect the point of view of the donor.

## I. GENERAL DATA

**1.1 Objective of the project:** monitor and inform the public about the editorial behaviour of (online) media in the pre-election period and during the campaign for the 2020 presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova.

**1.2 Monitoring period:** 15 September 2020 – 14 November 2020.

**1.3 Criteria for selecting the media outlets to be monitored:**

The portals were selected based on the following criteria: a) relevance; b) fame/audience; c) broadcasting language; d) geography. We are thus monitoring national portals and one regional portal, in Romanian and Russian, known and indicated as sources of information by different groups of consumers, with some present in the top positions of online audience measurement surveys.

**1.4 Portals monitored (in alphabetical order):**

Actualitati.md<sup>1</sup> (Russian), Agora.md<sup>2</sup> (Romanian), Aif.md<sup>3</sup> (Russian), Gagauzinfo.md<sup>4</sup> (Russian), Kp.md<sup>5</sup> (Russian), Newsmaker.md<sup>6</sup> (Russian language version), Noi.md<sup>7</sup> (Romanian language version), Realitatea.md<sup>8</sup> (Romanian), Sputnik.md<sup>9</sup> (Romanian), Timpul.md<sup>10</sup> (Romanian), Unimedia.info<sup>11</sup> (Romanian), Vedomosti.md<sup>12</sup> (Russian).

For Aif.md, Kp.md and Vedomosti.md, the editorial content of the portals is compared with the content of the newspapers *Argumentî i faktî Moldova*, *Komsomolskaia pravda v Moldove* and *Moldavskie vedomosti*, accordingly, published by the same companies, to identify eventual editorial differences.

**1.5 Subject-matter of monitoring**

The entire editorial content, without the publicity marked accordingly.

**1.6. The team**

The project is implemented by the Association of Independent Press (API) within the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections.

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<sup>1</sup> Founded by **Iuri Vitneanski**, PSRM member, currently vice praetor of Botanica district of Chişinău

<sup>2</sup> Founded by Interakt Media SRL (administrator – **Irina Ghelbur**)

<sup>3</sup> Electronic page of the newspaper *Argumentî i Faktî Moldova*, published by Exclusiv Media SRL, company founded by the MP from PSRM **Corneliu Furculiţă**

<sup>4</sup> Founded by Iusivmedia SRL (administrator – **Iulia Cîlcic**)

<sup>5</sup> Electronic page of the newspaper *Komsomolskaia Pravda v Moldove*, published by “Komsomoliskaya Pravda-Basarabia” SRL (administrator – **Serghei Ciuricov**), company’s founder – Exclusiv Media SRL, a company founded by the MP from PSRM **Corneliu Furculiţă**

<sup>6</sup> Founded by NEWSMAKER SRL, a company founded by **Vladimir Soloviov** (administrator – **Olga Cenuşa**)

<sup>7</sup> Founded by MLD Media SRL, a company with six shareholders, including companies of the businessman **Vasile Chirtoca**, PSRM councilor in Chişinău Municipal Council

<sup>8</sup> Founded by HB MEDIA SRL (administrator – **Dumitru Țira**)

<sup>9</sup> Branch of Sputnik International Press and Radio Agency, founded by the Russian state company Rossia Segodnea (Sputnik Moldova director – **Vladimir Novosadiuc**)

<sup>10</sup> Founded by the Periodical Publication *TIMPUL de dimineaţă*, founded by **Constantin Tănase** (administrator – **Silviu Tănase**)

<sup>11</sup> Founded by Miraza SRL (administrator – **Olesea Banari**)

<sup>12</sup> Electronic page of the newspaper *Moldavskie vedomosti*, founded by “Moldavskie vedomosti” SRL (administrator – **Victor Ciobu**)

### **1.7 Methodological framework**

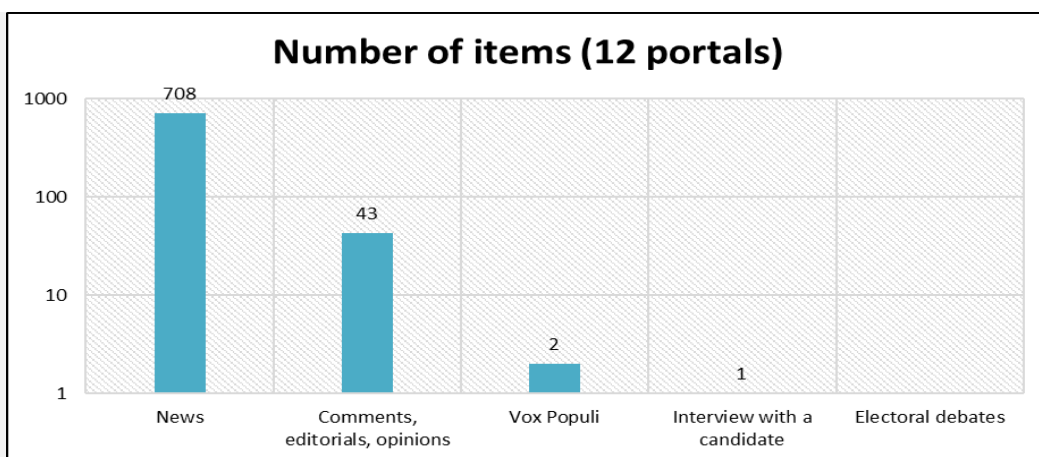
The monitoring is based on the methodology developed by Oxford Media Research Centre for the monitoring projects of the international organization Article 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression. The same methodology was used for monitoring media outlets in the election period and campaign for the 2016 presidential elections.

The methodology provides for measuring and review of the following indicators: 1) *quantitative*, including type, duration, topic of coverage, protagonists and news sources, frequency and duration of live appearance of election candidates, and 2) *qualitative*, establishing the context of presentation of the candidates in the media reports. Each news item or opinion is subject to a content and context evaluation, to determine if it favours or disfavors one or another election candidate. A positive or negative news content and/or context does not necessarily show bias or partisanship of the media outlet that airs the news. It is possible for the news to favour or disfavour one of the subjects and, yet, be professionally unbiased and correct. **When assessing the context, only the frequency of items that directly or indirectly favour or disfavour the election subjects is measured.**

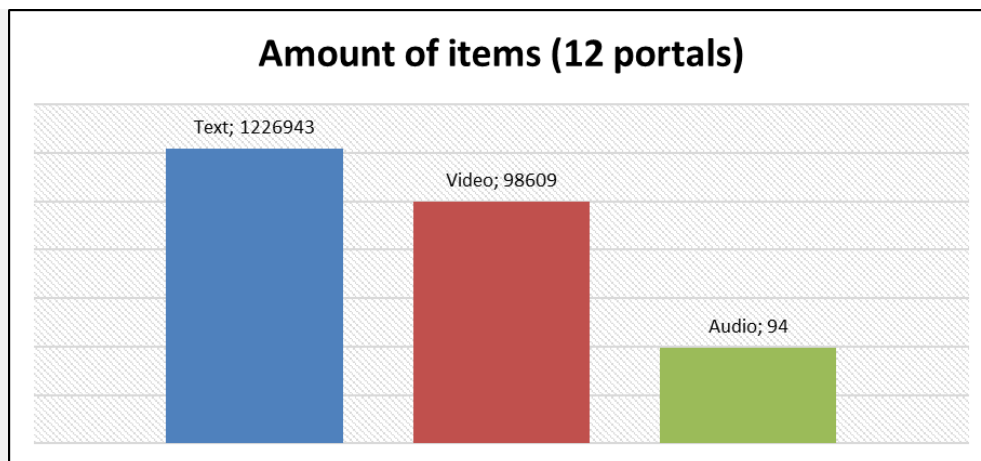
## II. DATA ANALYSIS

### 2.1 General trends

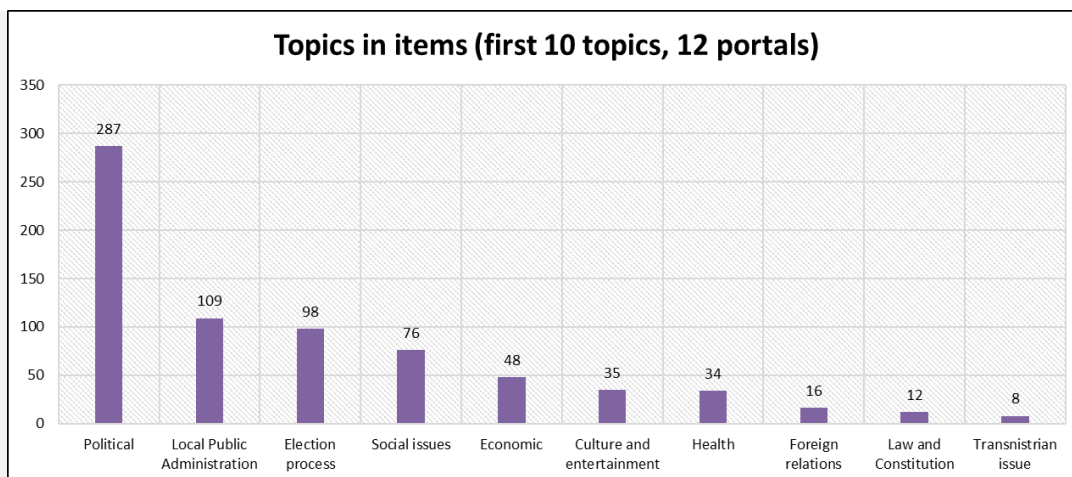
Between 11 and 17 October 2020, the twelve online media outlets monitored overall published 754 items that directly or indirectly targeted the election campaign. Most of them were news stories (708 or nearly 94%) with varying degrees of complexity, which targeted the male/female candidates for the position of president, the political entities they represented, the work of CEC, election actions etc. Other 43 items, or 5.7% of the total number were published in the form of comments, editorials or other opinions, and two items were Vox Populi polls (both published by **Noi.md**). At the same time, an interview with a candidate could be accessed during the reference period on **Vedomosti.md**.



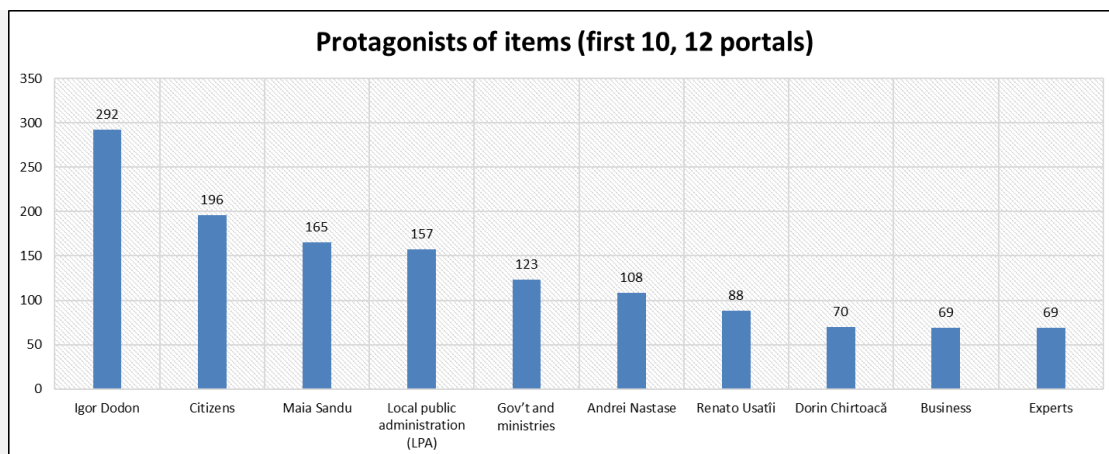
As in the previous reporting periods, **Noi.md** published the highest number of media products of political and election character (115) and **Gagauzinfo.md** – the lowest number (9). At the same time, **Actualitati.md** had 106 relevant items, **Aif.md** – 103, **Agora.md** - 79, **Kp.md** – 73, **Unimedia.info** – 59, **Realitatea.md** – 51, **Vedomosti.md** – 50, **Sputnik.md** – 46, **Newsmaker.md** – 43, and **Timpul.md** – 20 items. At the same time, **Noi.md** published the most news items of election character (107) and **Actualitati.md** – the most comments (12). Most of the items were in text format (751 cases). In some cases, the text was either accompanied by videos (74 items) or audios (one case) or multimedia elements were placed without text. The volume of the items monitored was thus quantified in characters (text) and seconds (video and audio), as follows:



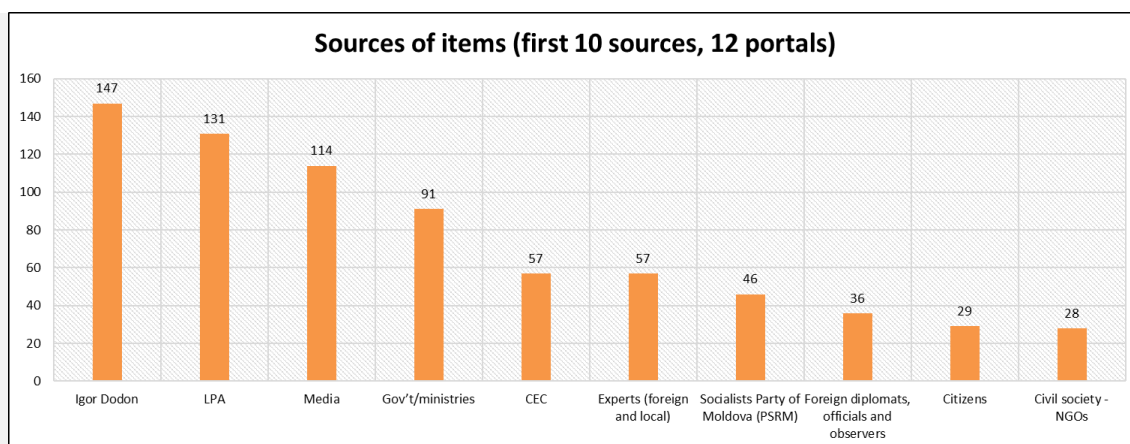
In terms of the topics addressed, most often the texts published focused on the political area, on the work of local public administration, with a strong emphasis on Chişinău City Hall and the capital's mayor, presented only in a positive context, but also on the election process as a whole. Other media reports published during this period by the twelve online media outlets monitored also referred to social, economic, cultural, health or foreign relations issues in an electoral context. Items related to the law or the Constitution, or referring to the Transnistrian issue appeared more rarely in the texts relevant for this monitoring.



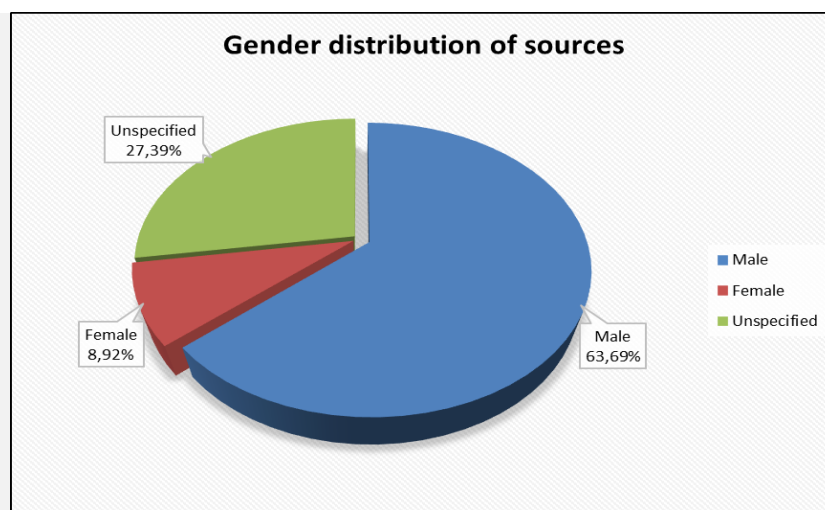
At the same time, in the reference period, all six male candidates and the two female candidates registered in the race for the presidential elections appeared in the media reports as protagonists but in different proportions. More specifically, the independent candidate supported by the Socialists Party (PSRM) Igor Dodon was most often the protagonist in media products with an election character (292 cases), being the first both among the male/female candidates and among all categories of male/female protagonists targeted in general. The candidate of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) Maia Sandu followed as protagonist with 165 appearances after male/female citizens (196 cases). The candidate of the Political Party "Platform of Justice and Truth" (PPDA) Andrei Năstase (108 appearances), of the Political Party "Our Party" (PN) Renato Usatii (88 appearances), and that of the Liberal Party (PL) Dorin Chirtoaca (70 appearances), in their turn, were outrun by the male/female representatives of the local public administration (especially by the Chişinău Mayor Ion Ceban) as well as by those of the Government. More rarely as female protagonist was the candidate of "Şor" Political Party Violeta Ivanov (66 times) and as male protagonists - the candidate of the Political Party "National Unity Party" (PUN) Octavian Țîcu (49 times) and that of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM) Tudor Deliu - 42 times.



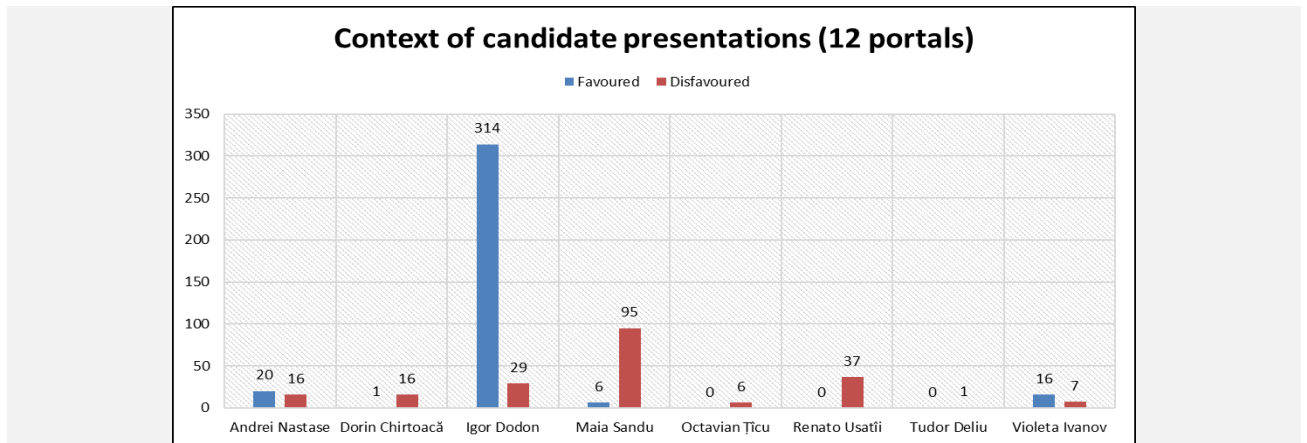
The twelve online publications together quoted 931 sources, with the candidate Igor Dodon being again on the first position, with 147 cases in which he appeared in such capacity, being the only candidate for the position of president who was in the top 10 most quoted sources by the targeted media. The independent candidate supported by PSRM was followed in this category by the representatives of the local public administration (dominated by Ion Ceban), by media sources other than those monitored (114 times) or by the male/female representatives of the Government (quoted 91 times). The CEC members, other male/female election officers and foreign and local male/female experts (in 57 cases each), male/female citizens (in 29 cases) or male/female representatives of the civil society (in 28 cases) were quoted less. Among the parties, the PSRM stood out in this context, with 46 quotations as a source. Other four male candidates and the two female candidates for the supreme position appeared much less frequently as sources, and Octavian Țîcu – never.



Furthermore, the media items were unbalanced in terms of gender, with nearly 64% of the sources quoted being men and almost 9% - women, and other over 27% being unspecified.



As in previous monitoring periods, cumulatively, the candidate Igor Dodon had the highest visibility in the online press, also being presented massively in a positive context, with 314 favourable appearances in the twelve media sources. At the same time, the candidates Octavian Țîcu, Renato Usatii and Tudor Deliu never appeared in a context that would favour them. On the other hand, the candidate Maia Sandu appeared most often in negative contexts that disadvantaged her (95 times), and the candidate Tudor Deliu was disfavoured by just one media item.



In conclusion, following the monitoring of the editorial behaviour of the twelve online media outlets between 11 and 17 October 2020, the following trends can be established:

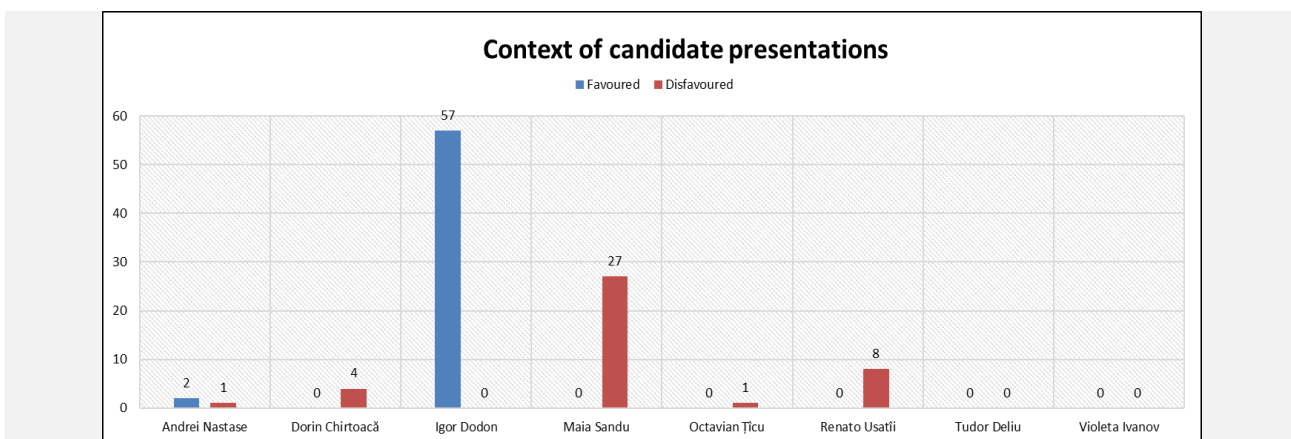
- **Actualitati.md**, **Aif.md** and **Kp.md** had a similar editorial behaviour in this reporting period as well, with pronounced elements of bias and violation of ethics rules in journalism. The three publications massively favoured and openly promoted the independent candidate supported by PSRM Igor Dodon and obviously disadvantaged the PAS candidate Maia Sandu. The other male/female candidates appeared quantitatively unbalanced in the items of the three publications and, in most cases, were disadvantaged and mocked by frequent use of qualifications and criticism, without being offered the right of reply.
- **Noi.md**, **Sputnik.md** and **Vedomosti.md** further favoured Igor Dodon through the tone of reflection and presentation in a positive context. At the same time, the PAS candidate Maia Sandu was most often disadvantaged in the items of the three publications.
- **Gagauzinfo.md** further paid little attention to the election campaign and its news, in most cases, referred to the election process as a whole, with a focus on the organization of the elections in TAU Gagauz Yeri.
- **Unimedia.info** covered the election process and the activities of the male/female candidates by most often placing Igor Dodon and Andrei Năstase, as well as the candidate Violeta Ivanov in favourable contexts.
- **Agora.md** and **Newsmaker.md** had a relatively balanced editorial policy, the authors of the items being generally impartial in relation to the sources and protagonists, and the male and female candidates for the position of president were most of the time presented in neutral, and also in positive or negative, contexts, but without a clear tendency to favour or disfavour them. **Agora.md** stood out during this period through the most balanced approach to electoral actions, with just one candidate being slightly disadvantaged in several items, and the others covered in a neutral manner.
- **Realitatea.md** covered all male candidates and the two female candidates for the position of president both neutrally and positively or negatively. The candidate Igor Dodon most of the times appeared in unfavourable contexts.
- The items published by **Timpul.md** selectively presented the male and female candidates, most often disfavouring Igor Dodon and favouring Maia Sandu.

## 2.2 Editorial behaviour of the publications



[Actualitati.md](http://Actualitati.md)

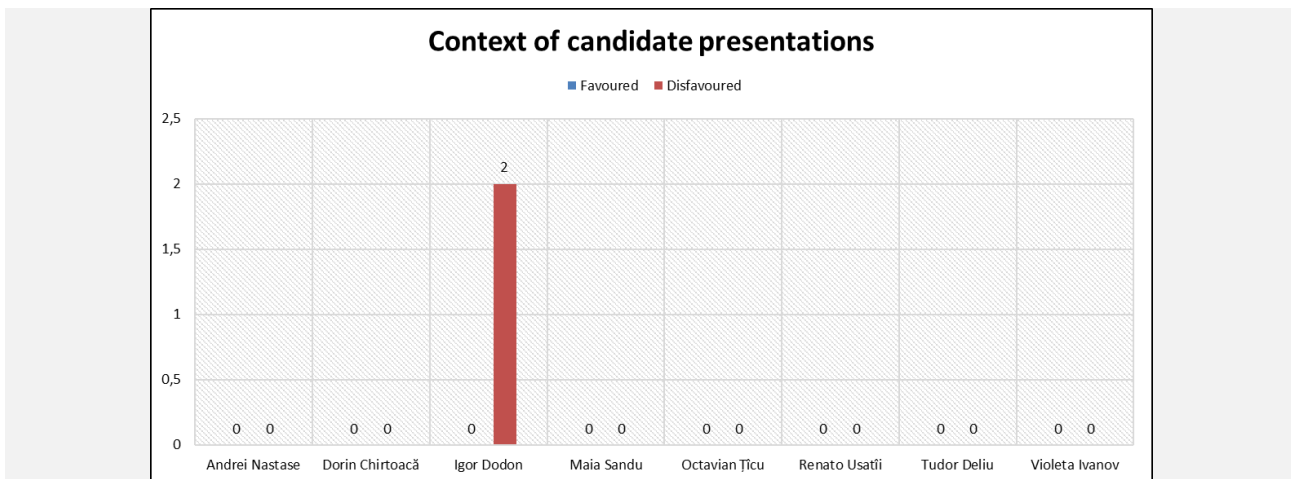
As in previous monitoring periods, most items on political and/or election topics published by **Actualitati.md** had a single source of information and a biased character, favouring Igor Dodon through the wording of its texts. He was further presented only in favourable light (57 times), being covered both in the context of its electoral actions (meetings with citizens, promises and statements, etc.), and in contrast to the other male/female candidates. Another candidate who appeared in a rather favourable context was Andrei Năstase (twice), this appearance being balanced by one in an unfavourable context. Maia Sandu (27 times out of 28 in which she was the protagonist), Dorin Chirtoacă (4 times), Renato Usatii (8 times) and Octavian Țicu (once) were also disadvantaged during this period. Tudor Deliu and Violeta Ivanov were mentioned in neutral contexts. **Actualitati.md** further put certain candidates in negative light, especially the candidate Maia Sandu, through the opinions or statements of third parties about them, without providing the right of reply to the latter. In addition, the candidate Dorin Chirtoaca, for example, was disadvantaged through the transfer of a negative image from Ion Antonescu's personality as well as through the photo that accompanied the item.



[Agora.md](http://Agora.md)

The editorial policy of the online publication **Agora.md** during the report period was balanced, the items with an election character in most cases being impartial in relation to the sources and the male/female protagonists. Five male candidates and the two female candidates for the position of president of the Republic of Moldova were presented in a neutral manner in its media stories. Candidate Igor Dodon appeared twice in a rather unfavourable context for the lack of a second source. In this connection, a number of news published by **Agora.md** are based on a single source.

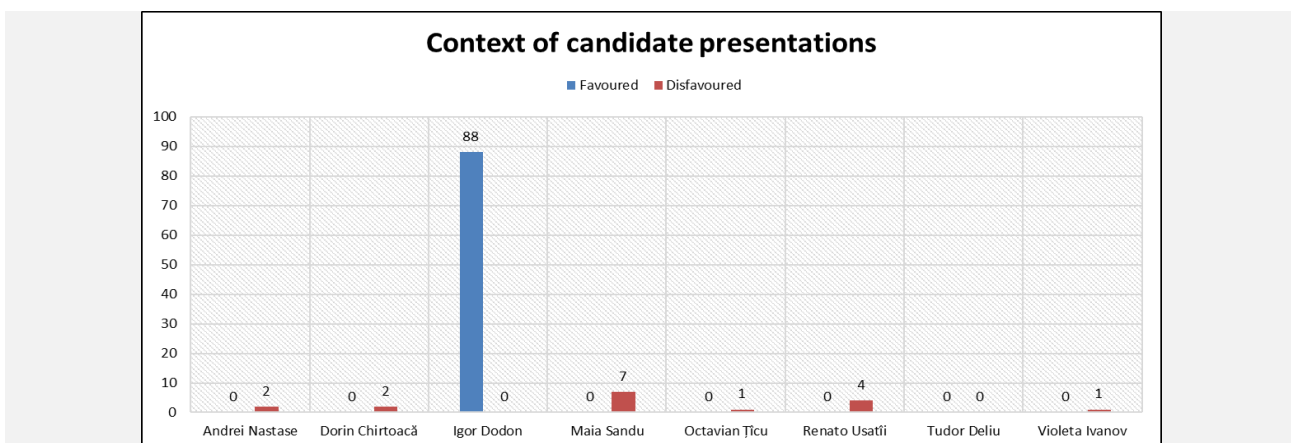




**АРГУМЕНТЫ  
И ФАКТЫ** В МОЛДОВЕ

[Aif.md](http://Aif.md)

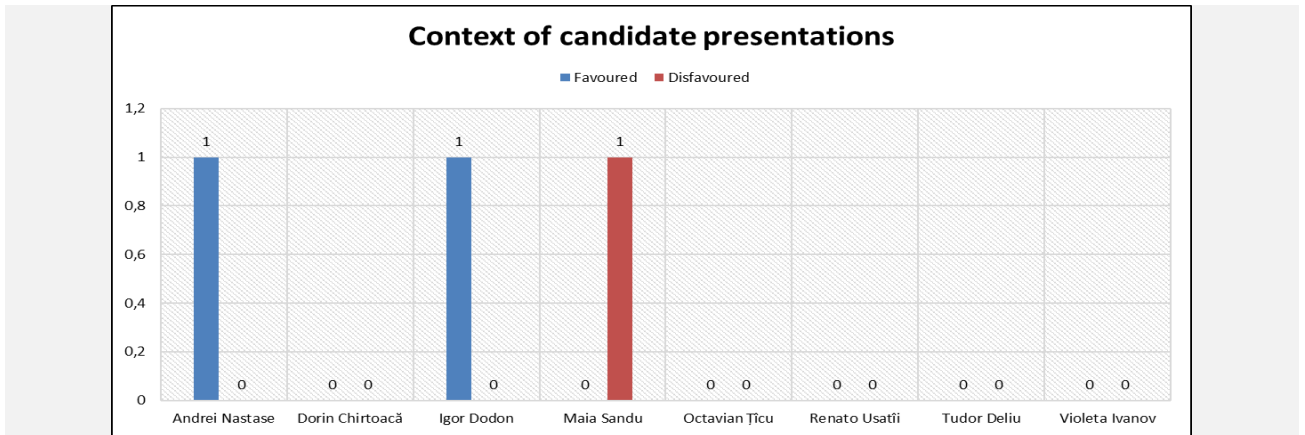
Between 11 and 17 October 2020, **Aif.md** further openly promoted Igor Dodon, both by massively publishing information about his election activities, statements and posts, and indirectly, through the eminently positive media coverage of the actions of the Chișinău Mayor, sometimes with the participation of the candidate Igor Dodon, or through the critical comments of the opinion authors towards Igor Dodon's opponents and his placement, by contrast, in a favourable light. Igor Dodon was thus favoured 88 times in this publication's stories and is the only candidate who appeared in a positive context in **Aif.md** items. Maia Sandu, on the other hand, was most often disadvantaged (in 7 cases, being mentioned especially in opinions, without ever being offered the right of reply), followed by Renato Usatîi (4 times), Andrei Năstase and Dorin Chirtoacă (twice), as well as Octavian Țicu and Violeta Ivanov (once). Tudor Deliu is the only candidate who was mentioned in a neutral manner in the only item in which he was the protagonist.



**Gagauzinfo.MD**

[Gagauzinfo.md](http://Gagauzinfo.md)

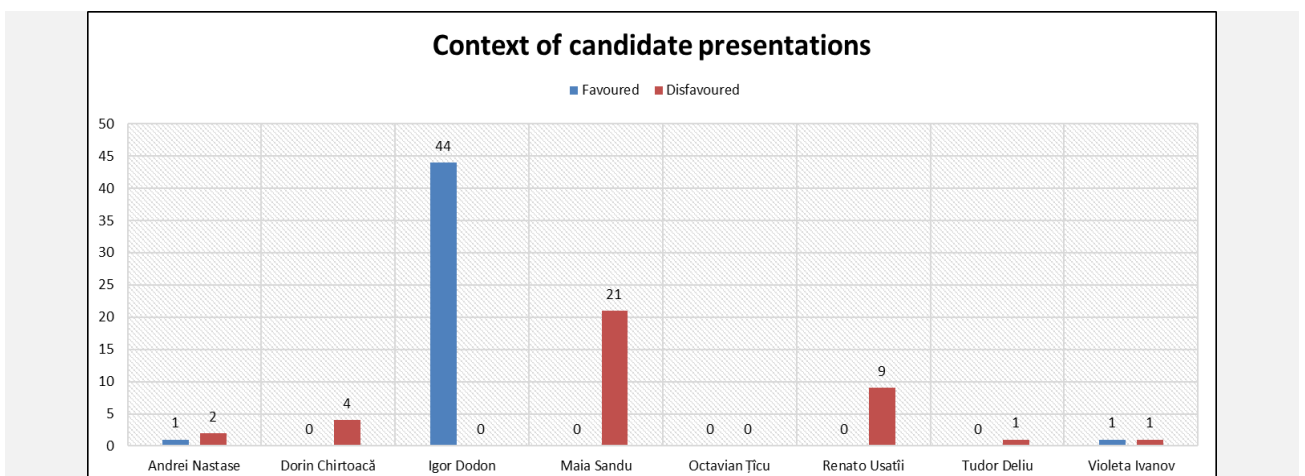
The publication **Gagauzinfo.md** in the reference period ignored the election actions of the male candidates Dorin Chirtoaca, Octavian Țicu, Renato Usatî, Tudor Deliu and of the female candidate Violeta Ivanov. At the same time, Igor Dodon and Andrei Năstase appeared once each in contexts that rather favoured them, and Maia Sandu – once in an unfavourable context, by not being granted the right of reply.



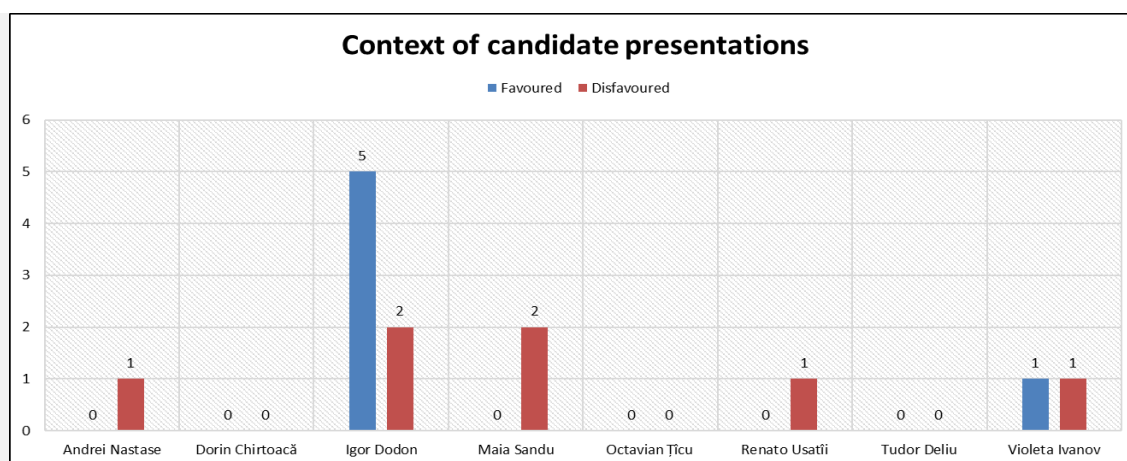
МОЛДОВА ▾

[Kp.md](http://Kp.md)

In the third reporting period, too, **Kp.md** continued to favour Igor Dodon massively and obviously, and to disfavour the other male/female candidates in a pronounced manner in its news but especially in the comments by different authors, without granting the right of reply to those attacked, ridiculed and/or discredited. More precisely, the candidate Igor Dodon was the only one further presented exclusively in a positive context (44 cases), Violeta Ivanov being once favoured in an advertising material, unmarked properly as such, but also Andrei Năstase being rather favoured in one case. The last two appeared at the same time and in unfavourable contexts once and twice, accordingly. The other male/female candidates were disadvantaged by presentations in negative contexts each time, through allegations without the right of reply, comments and acid attacks, both in news stories and especially in opinions. Most often in this context was targeted Maia Sandu (21 times), followed by Renato Usatî (9 times) and Dorin Chirtoacă (4 times). In addition, Tudor Deliu was rather disadvantaged once, and Octavian Țicu was mentioned in neutral contexts.

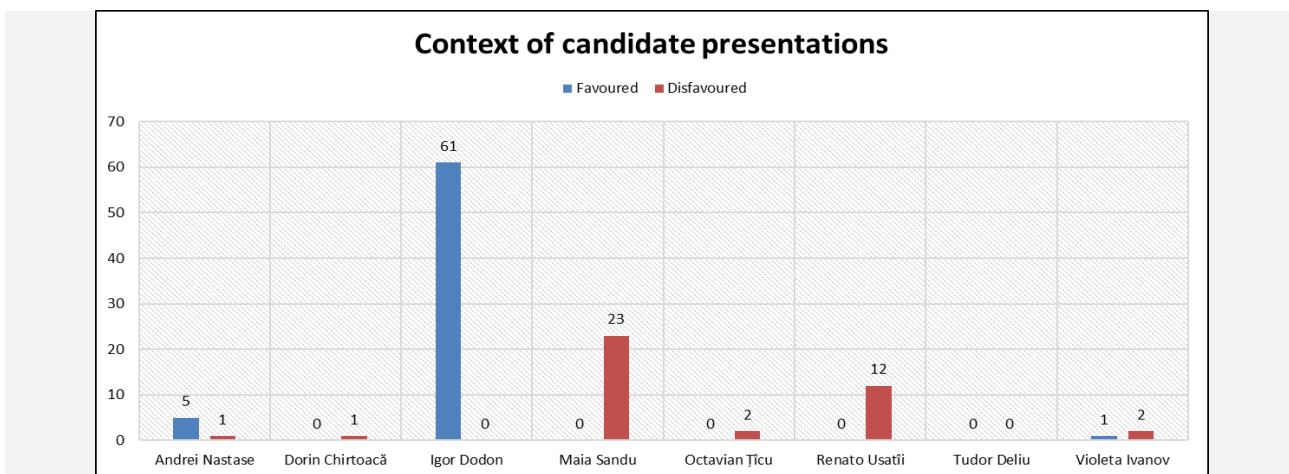


Between 11 and 17 October 2020, **Newsmaker.md** generally presented the male and female candidates for the position of president of the Republic of Moldova in a balanced manner. Three candidates - Dorin Chirtoacă, Tudor Deliu and Octavian Țicu – enjoyed neutral media coverage in the few items that concerned them. At the same time, Andrei Năstase, Renato Usatîi and Maia Sandu appeared once and twice, accordingly, in contexts that rather disfavoured them, these in particular being cases when other male/female candidates or politicians targeted them, without a presentation of their opinions. In their turn, Igor Dodon and Violeta Ivanov were placed both in rather favourable and unfavourable contexts. No obvious tendency to promote someone in a positive or negative manner was found.



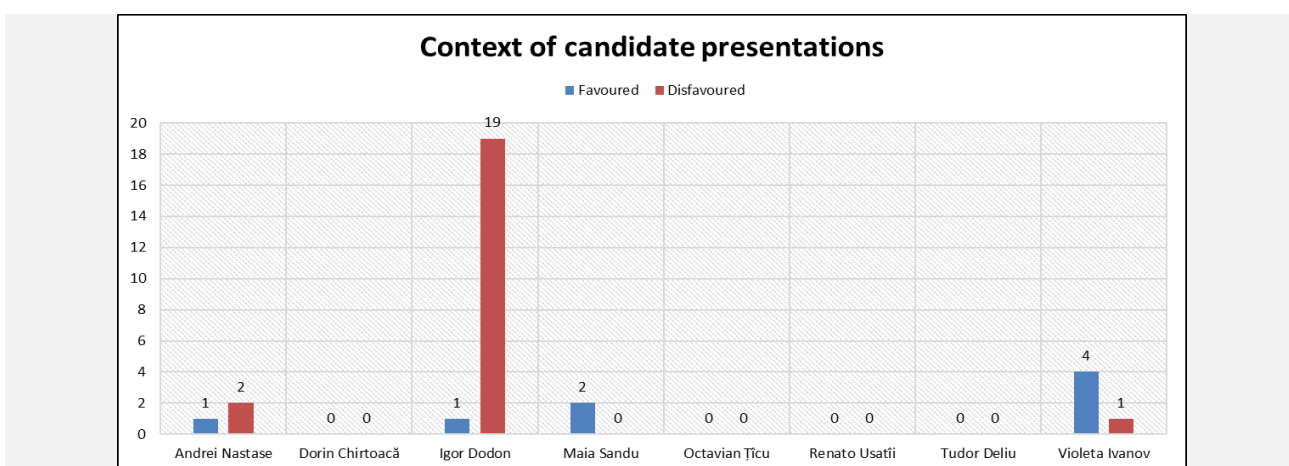
Between 11 and 17 October 2020, the online publication **Noi.md** clearly favoured the candidate Igor Dodon, both in its news and comments. The independent candidate supported by PSRM was placed 61 times only in positives contexts, being the only candidate who appeared only in favourable light. In this connection, it is also noteworthy that Igor Dodon's name appears in many items published by **Noi.md** with an active link leading to a page on moldovenii.md, which publishes a detailed biography of the candidate. In addition, Violeta Ivanov and Andrei Năstase appeared in rather favourable contexts during this period (once and 5 times, accordingly) as well as in unfavourable contexts. In his turn, Tudor Deliu was neither favoured nor disadvantaged in the few items that concerned him. For the rest, Dorin Chirtoacă, Renato Usatîi, Maia Sandu and Octavian Țicu were disadvantaged in the items published by **Noi.md**, Maia Sandu appearing in such a context most often (23 times), including in news stories, in opinions and in some photos. In order to disadvantage certain male/female candidates, news stories were produced from the comments made by some PSRM affiliated commentators on the social networks. This publication also covered the mutual attacks among the male/female candidates or their representatives. The allegations brought against

some male/female candidates were not balanced with the opinion/position of the person concerned.



[Realitatea.md](http://Realitatea.md)

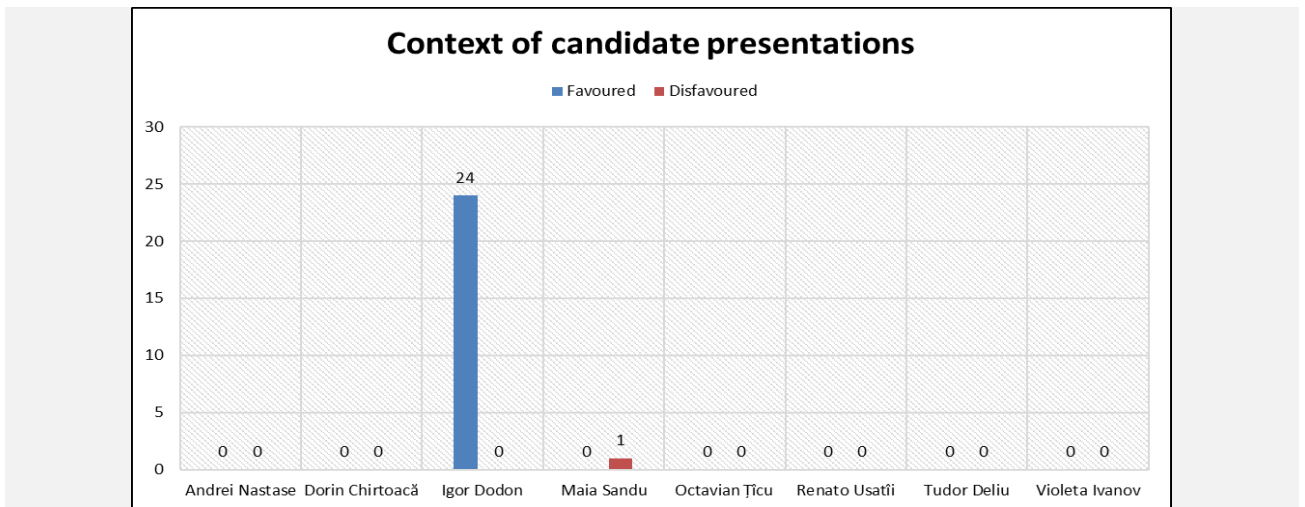
During the reporting period, four candidates – Dorin Chirtoacă, Octavian Țicu, Renato Usatîi and Tudor Deliu – were presented in a neutral manner in the items that concerned them, published by **Realitatea.md**. Maia Sandu was rather favoured in two cases by the news context, and Andrei Năstase, Violeta Ivanov and Igor Dodon appeared both in favourable and unfavourable contexts. In this sense, Igor Dodon was most often placed in a negative context, being associated with controversial characters (19 times).



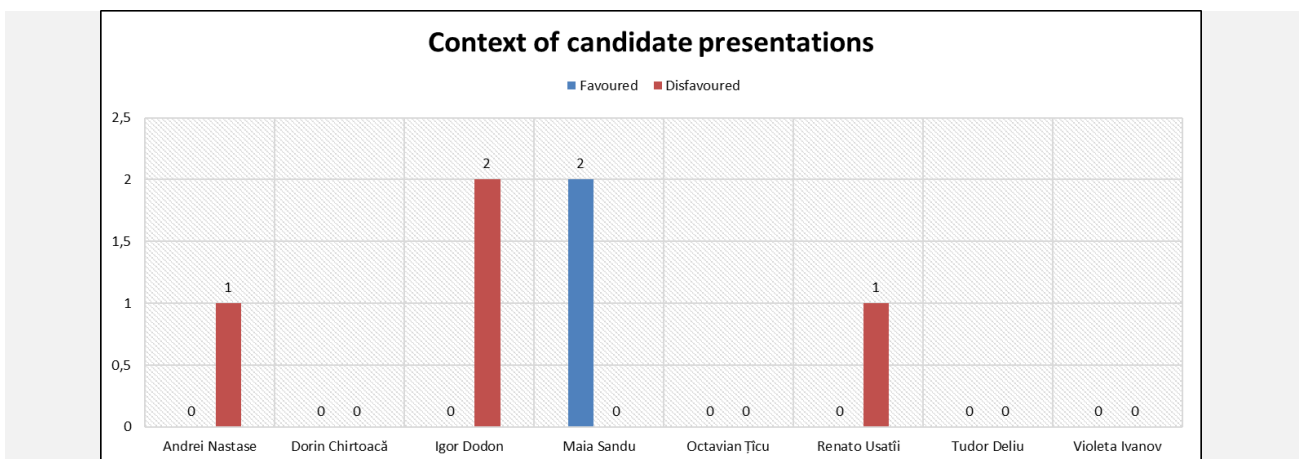
[Sputnik.md](http://Sputnik.md)

In the report period, the male candidates Andrei Năstase, Dorin Chirtoacă, Octavian Țicu, Renato Usatîi, Tudor Deliu as well as the female candidate Violeta Ivanov appeared in neutral

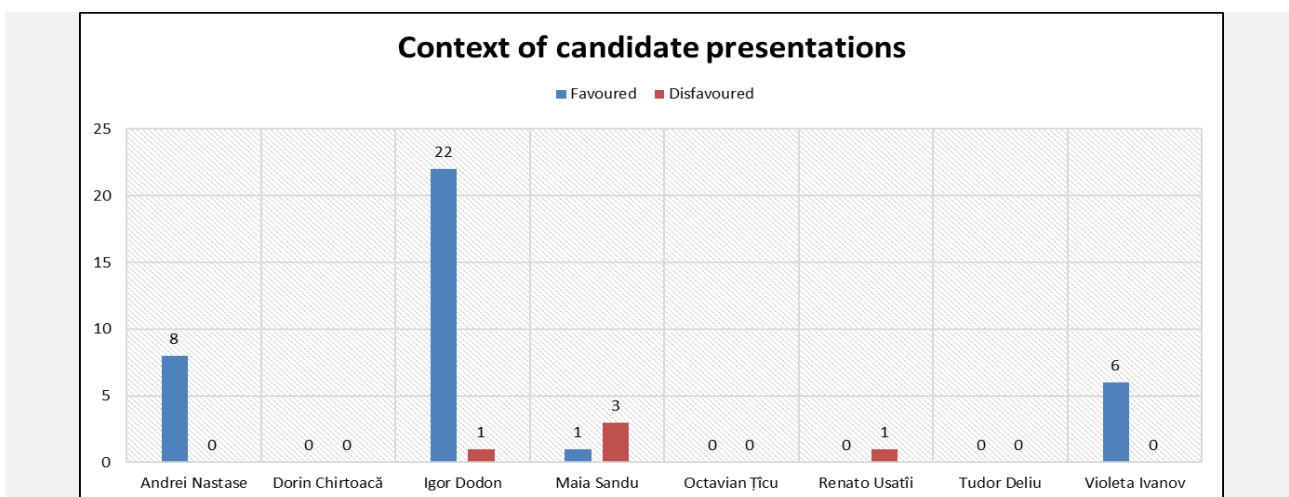
contexts on **Sputnik.md**, without being favoured, or disadvantaged in the stories that targeted them. At the same time, Maia Sandu was once placed in a context that rather disadvantaged her, and Igor Dodon, in his turn, was the only candidate with appearances in only positive contexts (24) that favoured him.



In the period from 11 to 17 October 2020, the male candidates Dorin Chirtoacă, Octavian Țicu and Tudor Deliu as well as the female candidate Violeta Ivanov were ignored in the media coverage of the publication **Timpul.md** in the context of their run for the position of president. At the same time, Maia Sandu appeared twice in rather favourable contexts, and Igor Dodon, Andrei Năstase and Renato Usatîi were rather placed in positions that disadvantaged them (twice for Igor Dodon and once for the other two candidates).



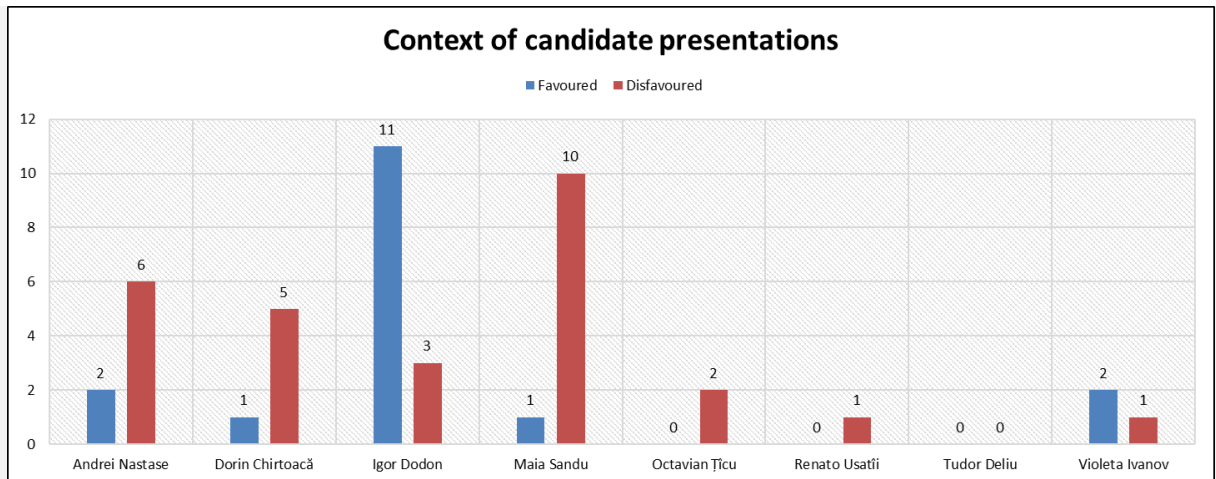
Between 11 to 17 October 2020, the candidates Dorin Chirtoacă, Octavian Țicu and Tudor Deliu appeared in neutral contexts, without being favoured or disadvantaged in the **Unimedia.info** items. At the same time, Andrei Năstase and Violeta Ivanov appeared in both neutral and positive contexts, which favoured him/her. Candidate Renato Usatîi, in his turn, appeared once in a context that rather favoured him; Maia Sandu, in addition to neutral media coverage, was rather favoured in one case as well as disadvantaged in other three cases; and Igor Dodon appeared most often in positive contexts that favoured him directly or indirectly (22 times). At the same time, the independent candidate supported by PSRM also had a disadvantageous appearance. To note that some texts with election advertising character appear on the **Unimedia.info** portal under the heading entitled “Analyses and Press Releases” (in the reference period, items were published here about the male candidate Andrei Năstase and about the female candidate Violeta Ivanov, obviously in an election context, and which presented them in a positive light), without being marked as such. Hence, the following can be read in the description of this section: *This category contains press releases and analyses of parties, organizations and institutions that have UNIMEDIA subscriptions. UNIMEDIA is not responsible for the content of these items.* Such a situation may mislead the reader who must be clearly informed about the advertising nature of the texts published and must not confuse them with actual media reports.



МОЛДАВСКІЕ ВЕДОМОСТИ

[Vedomosti.md](http://Vedomosti.md)

In the period monitored, the candidate Tudor Deliu appeared in a neutral context in the only item that targeted him on **Vedomosti.md**. At the same time, the independent candidate supported by PSRM Igor Dodon was most often favoured both by the tone of the items and by the frequency of his appearances (11 times), while the candidate Maia Sandu was the most disadvantaged by the media contexts in which she was placed (10 times). Andrei Năstase, Dorin Chirtoacă, Igor Dodon, Octavian Țicu, Renato Usatîi and Violeta Ivanov were also disadvantaged in several stories, with Andrei Năstase, Dorin Chirtoacă, Maia Sandu and Violeta Ivanov appearing in contexts that rather favoured them. It is just that the latter cases were singular and incomparable in effect as compared to those that put them in a bad light.



### 2.3. General conclusions:

- In the period from 11 to 17 October 2020, the twelve online publications monitored covered the campaign for the presidential elections mainly through news.
- **Noi.md** published the highest number of items relevant to the election context, and **Gagauzinfo.md** - the lowest number.
- Most of the items were published in text format but there were also video and audio items, in a smaller proportion.
- Most relevant items referred to the political area, the work of the local public administration, with emphasis on the Chișinău City Hall and Mayor Ion Ceban, as well as to the election process.
- All six male candidates and the two female candidates for the supreme position in the state appeared as protagonists of the election stories.
- The independent candidate supported by PSRM Igor Dodon appeared most often as the protagonist, and the PLDM candidate Tudor Deliu appeared the least as such.
- Five male candidates and the two female candidates for the supreme position in the state appeared as sources in the election items. One candidate – Octavian Țicu (PUN) – never appeared in such capacity.
- The candidate Igor Dodon appeared most often as a source.
- The items published by all twelve media outlets monitored were strongly disproportionate in terms of gender, in favour of men.
- Candidate Igor Dodon had the highest media visibility in the twelve publications.
- Candidate Igor Dodon was most often placed in positive contexts that favoured him.
- Candidate Maia Sandu was most often placed in negative contexts that disadvantaged her.

[Full report in Romanian](#)