

Out of 11 compulsory indicators to be provided in reports about public opinion poll in pre-election period, Imedi had only three – the organization that ordered the poll, the organization that conducted the poll and exact formulation of questions, the latter partially though.

### 3.4. Maestro

**About Maestro TV:** Besides the Rustavi 2 TV ownership dispute, a dispute on financial and ownership issues erupted between Maestro’s co-owners and its management in late 2015 and early 2016.<sup>16</sup> In February 2016, configuration of shares was modified in favor of one of the owners, Giorgi Gachechiladze, who became a majority shareholder (55%) after he agreed with two co-owners – Giorgi Ebralidze and Levan Chikvaidze, to buy their shares, 15% from each.

In February, Giorgi Gachechiladze’s brother, Levan Gachechiladze was appointed as new director of the TV channel. The latter ran for presidency in 2008. It was reported during the dispute between the TV channel’s management and owners that the chairman of Imedi TV’s supervisory board tried to buy Maestro’s shares, but the sides failed to reach an agreement on the price. It was made public in January, 2016 that Imedi TV bought Maestro’s and GDS’s commercial airtime.<sup>17</sup> According to TVMR Georgia, Maestro is on the third place in an annual average rating for the year of 2015 with 1,18% AMR and 6, 27% share (SHR).

#### Quantitative Data

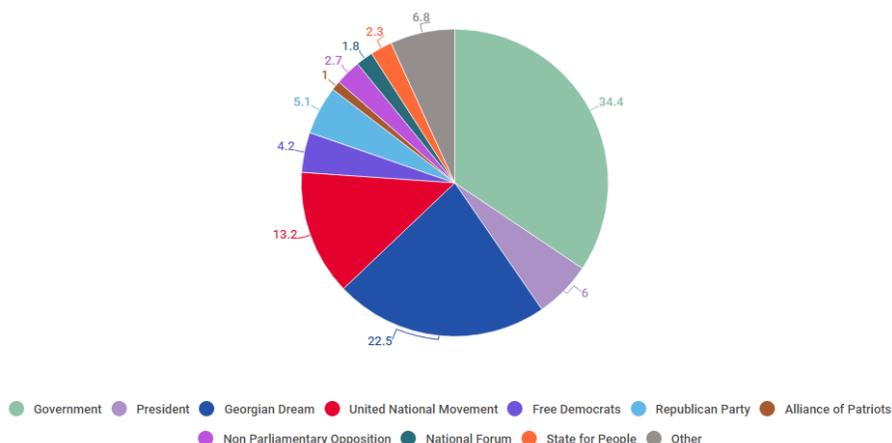
**Total coverage.** The four-month monitoring (April 1 – July 31) has revealed that in terms of total coverage, (1458 stories) the TV channel dedicated a great part of its primetime news programs to the Government (34.4%) and Georgian Dream (22.5%), which totals about 57%. Among other political parties, United National Movement has the largest share – 13.2%, followed by Republican Party (5, 1%), Free Democrats (4.2%) and newly established party State for People (Paata Burchuladze) (2, 3%).

Other qualified subjects fall behind National Forum (1, 8%) and Alliance of Patriots (1%) and their coverage is less than 1%: Democratic Movement – United Georgia (0.9%), Industry will Save Georgia (0.8%), Conservatives (0.7%). Except State for People, the share of other newly established parties is low: Girchi (0.8%), New Georgia (0.6%) and Tamaz Mechiauri – United Georgia (0.5%).

Non-parliamentary opposition received 2, 7% of the total coverage. All of the parties which are united in the category “Other” received 6, 8% in total.

Among institutions, the President’s share of the total coverage amounts to 6%, CEC’s – 0, 4%.

**Chart 3.4.1. Total coverage of political subjects, Maestro**



<sup>16</sup> MediaMeter, MDF, Maestro. <http://mediameter.ge/en/media-profiles/maestro>

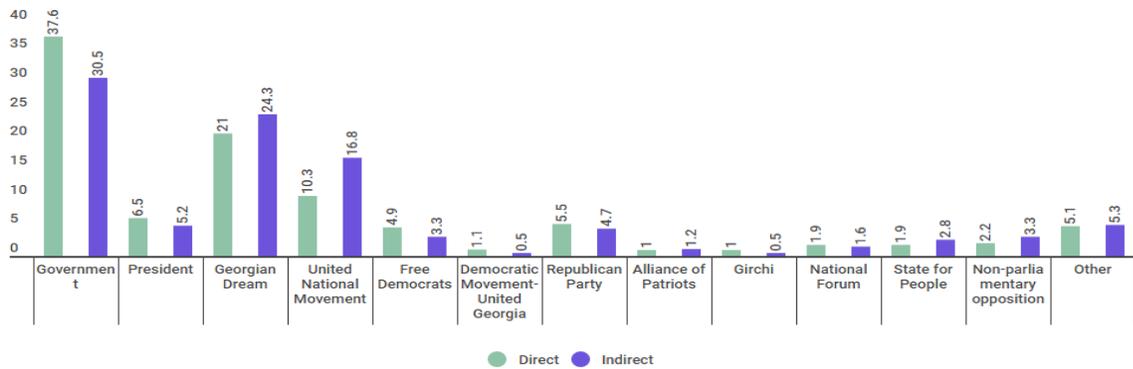
<sup>17</sup> MDF, Media Freedom 2015, Media ownership, Chapter 3. <http://mediameter.ge/en/research/media-freedom-2015>

**Direct and indirect coverage.** In terms of both direct and indirect coverage, Maestro TV dedicates most of its airtime to the Government and Georgian Dream. Herewith, direct coverage of the Government (37, 6%) prevails over indirect coverage (30,5%), while in case of Georgian Dream indirect coverage (24, 3%) is slightly more than direct coverage (21%). In case of United National Movement, the difference between indirect (16, 8%) and direct (10, 3%) coverage is bigger.

Direct coverage prevails over indirect coverage in case of the President (direct 6, 5%, indirect – 5, 2%), Republican Party (direct - 5.5%, indirect - 4.7%), Free Democrats (direct - 4.9%, indirect - 3.3%), Democratic Movement – United Georgia (direct - 1.1%, indirect - 0.5%), National Forum (direct - 1.9%, indirect - 1.6%), Industry will Save Georgia (direct- 0, 8%, indirect 0,7 %) and Conservative Party (direct - 0.9%, indirect - 0.5%).

Out of new political subjects, State for People was covered most intensively. In this case, however, indirect coverage (2, 8 %) prevailed over direct coverage (1, 9 %). As for other parties, the differences are insignificant or do not exist at all.

**Chart 3.4.2. Direct/indirect coverage of political parties, Maestro**



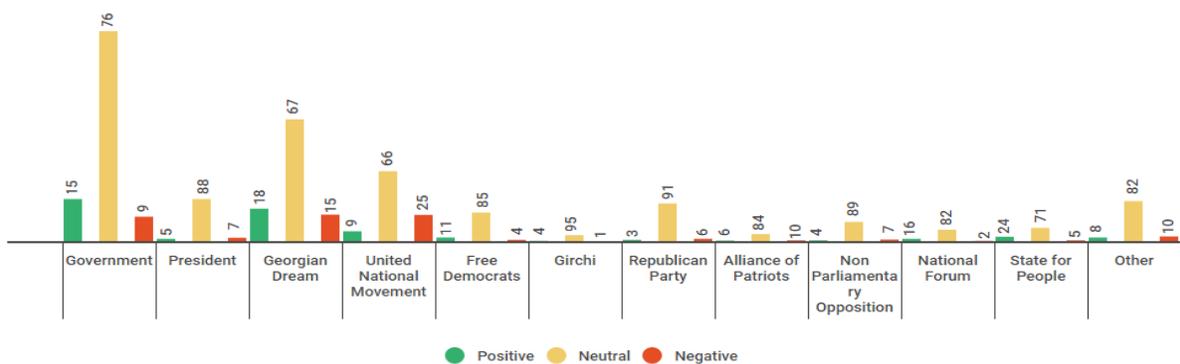
**Tone of content in covering political subjects.** Neutral tone prevails in covering new political subject Girchi (95 %), Republican Party (91 %), Non-parliamentary opposition (89 %), the President (88 %), Free Democrats (85 %) and Alliance of Patriots (84 %) by Maestro TV.

United National Movement was covered most negatively (25%) and this data prevails over its positive share (9%). Negative tone also prevailed over positive in the following cases: Alliance of Patriots (negative 10%, positive 6%), Republican Party (negative 6%, positive 3%).

The positive coverage prevails over negative in the following cases: Georgian Dream (positive 18%; negative 15%); the Government (positive 15%; negative 9%); Free Democrats (positive 11%; negative 4%); National Forum (positive 16%; negative 2%); State for People (positive 24%; negative 5%), Girchi (positive 4%, negative 1%).

As for non-parliamentary opposition, it was mostly covered negatively (7%) rather than positively (4%).

**Chart 3.4.3. Coverage of political subjects – tone of content, Maestro**



*A share of subjects in positive and negative content.* The Government (40.7%) and Georgian Dream (31.2%) have the largest share in Maestro’s positive content, which in sum amounts to 71.9%.

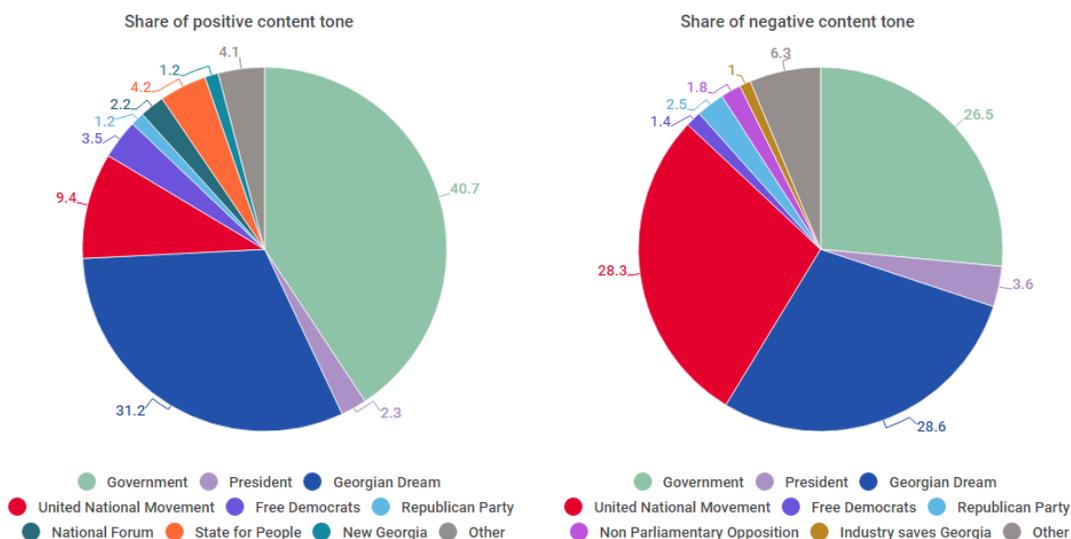
United National Movement’s share in positive content (9, 4 %) significantly falls behind its share in negative content (28, 3%) and is almost identical to Georgian Dream’s negative share (28, 6%). This is the highest result and is 2% lower than the Government’s (26, 5%).

The share of the President in positive coverage (2,3%) is lower than negative (3,6%), as well as in case of Republic Party (Positive - 1,2%, Negative 2,5%). On the contrary, a share of of Free Democrats in positive content (3,5%) is higher than in negative (1,4%).

The share of positive content (4, 2%) of new party State for People (Paata Burchuladze) is also high. As for negative content, the party’s share amounts to 0, 9%.

Other parties’ share in positive content is 4, 1%, in negative – 6, 3% in total.

**Chart 3.4.4 A Share of Covering Political Subjects in Positive and Negative Content, Maestro**



### Qualitative Data

Maestro’s main news program covers a wide spectrum of political subjects. However, separate cases of factual accuracy, balance and bias are still met. In some cases, certain materials against the government’s political opponents with tabloid newspapers used as the source were aired without proper rechecking.

*Factual accuracy/bias.* On May 22, an incident took place outside a polling station in the village of Kortskheli of Zugdidi municipality during local by-elections, when several leaders of opposition United National Movement were beaten by supporters of Georgian Dream<sup>18</sup>. The story “Incident in Kortskheli” aired in the evening news program (20:01) on May 22 starts with the anchor’s introductory remarks, according to which the Interior Ministry launched investigation into the case; speaking about the incident the anchor notes that members of the UNM party, supporters and activists of Georgian Dream confronted each other; controversial allegations are made over the incident and the case has some “victims.” During the story a journalist and a hospital doctor speak about hospitalization of the UNM representatives only; injured activists from Georgian Dream are not featuring in the case either on May 22 or in the following days.

<sup>18</sup> Fair Elections, Assessment of the October 8, 2016 pre-election environment (p.5)

In addition, the same journalist emphasizes that the situation further fueled up after “UNM leaders and athletes confronted each other.” Video footage shows that leaders of the opposition party were physically insulted. The story does not specify how the physical confrontation started. It only provides the comments of the President’s spokesperson, according to which video footage shows that an organized group and athletes were involved in the incident. The President’s spokesperson also focuses on the fact of verbal and physical assault on journalists.

The journalist’s comments are also biased as she tries to justify police inaction and notes that “police officers mobilized on the adjacent area tried to defuse tension. However, due to a small number, they failed to take preventive measures.” The story does not make it clear how many police officers were present on the ground and whether they neglected the opposition’s complaints, as the UNM members say in their remarks.

**Balance/ Featuring.** Two materials prepared by Maestro TV about Paata Burchuladze, leader of a new political subject State for People, are based on tabloids Marshalpress and Prime Time.

The June 2 story “Burchuladze’s Property” (at 8:14pm) cites Marshalpress news agency as its source. The latter, in turn, refers to the Facebook status of Bando Mdzinarishvili, host of Obiektivi TV’s talk show. Although the material published by Marshalpress has not been researched and rechecked by the news agency, the author of the TV story claims that Marshalpress counted Paata Burchuladze’s property, while the publication is based on tens of documents from the public registry. The video footage also highlights the title of the article ran by Marshalpress<sup>19</sup>.

The TV story offers no rechecked data about how real the facts provided in the Facebook status are, according to which Burchuladze owns tens of property assets, or what particular documents from public registry were enclosed. Balance has a formal nature, because the story involves only Paata Burchuladze’s remarks, according to which neither his identification card, nor his name and surname coincide with real ones. The editorial board did not recheck either this statement by Burchuladze, or the documents from the public registry indicated in the materials of Marshalpress, some of which have been uploaded several times. One of the public registry’s documents reflects not the issue of ownership, but the case of leasing from the Tbilisi self-governing unit.

Following the ownership issue, the story develops in a quite different direction and tells about mutual accusations concerning the links with the National Movement.

The second story aired by Maestro TV on July 25 “Iavnana ra hkmna” (The Lullaby, at 8:10pm), which also targets Paata Burchuladze, is mostly built on the article ran by newspaper *Prime Time*. In its turn, the latter refers to an anonymous source. The story notes that according to unspecified reports, out of GEL 9 million transferred to the Iavnana Charity Foundation set up by Paata Burchuladze, only GEL 3 million was spent on charity. The story also involves remarks by a representative of the Iavnana Foundation and a journalist’s editorial text says the following:

“Iavnana confirms that GEL 5 769 406 was donated to the foundation during past year, but only GEL 4 850 343 reached the right addressees.”

The story says nothing about incompliance between the data provided by *Prime Time* (out of GEL 9 million only GEL 3 million was spent on charity) and the figures provided by the journalist. Moreover, it does not explain how the remaining funds were spent. The story does not answer the question asked by the anchor in his introductory remarks - “Did the donated funds reach their addressees?” - that arouses additional doubts.

**Balance/accuracy/bias.** On June 14, Maestro TV dedicated two stories in its main news program to the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) into ex-Prime Minister Vano Merabishvili’s pretrial detention case (at 9:17pm). The first story covered ECHR’s ruling and the second one was about negative aspects of Merabishvili’s activities in the past. In the introductory remarks of the first story, the anchor focuses not on violation of the article, where the European court found the Georgian government guilty, but on those two articles, where no violation was found. In particular, the anchor says in the introductory remarks:

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<sup>19</sup> Marshalpress, June 1, <http://marshalpress.ge/archives/40682>

*“In the press-release disseminated by the European court it is written that the pretrial detention of the former Prime Minister was entirely legal and justified”.*

This assessment is partially correct because while the Strasbourg-based court found no violation in Merabishvili’s initial pretrial detention in May 2013, it ruled that remanding him in custody four months later lacked reasonable grounds, thus constituting violation of Article 5 §3 of the Convention. The story provides incomprehensive information about violation of Article 18 of the European Convention on Human Rights and it only focuses on the investigation into Merabishvili’s alleged removal from his cell. It says nothing about that part of the ruling, where the European court noted that Merabishvili’s pretrial detention was “used not only for the purpose of bringing” him before the relevant legal authorities on “reasonable suspicion” of various offenses, “but was also treated by the prosecuting authorities as an additional opportunity to obtain leverage” over investigations into various cases, including the one against ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili.

Although the journalist notes in the first story that the European court did not discuss the criminal charges against Merabishvili and focused only on the issues of violation of his rights, the second story is fully dedicated to the cases against Merabishvili. The story is dedicated only to the negative aspects of his activities. When introducing the second story, the anchor says:

*“Some politicians say that if Merabishvili is granted a status of a political prisoner under any government, the country may appear on the verge of civil confrontation.”*

The story itself does not contain a relevant comment, where respondents talk about the possibility of civil confrontation. The story, which is fully built on one-sided accusations against Merabishvili and does not provide the position of the other party, ends with the journalist’s remark according to which now it is up to the government whether it fulfills ECHR’s ruling and pays compensation to Vano Merabishvili, or challenges this ruling. This passage is manipulative because ECHR has not discussed either the criminal cases against Merabishvili or the allegations voiced in the story, and only found violation of his rights with respect to two articles.

**Coverage of public opinion poll.** Like Rustavi 2 TV, on April 14 Maestro TV also covered the results of public opinion poll released by GHN news agency (8:17pm), which, according to the news agency, was allegedly commissioned by Georgian Dream. Although the latter denied any links with the poll, Maestro still covered the results of the poll without indicating compulsory requisites established by law. The story contained no evidence that would have confirmed its reality and justified its release.

In addition, “based on its own information” the TV channel unveiled the results of the survey of “another political party”, which are less convincing than GHN’s poll, as it cites an anonymous party and source. The story provided information only about political ratings of Georgian Dream, National Movement and Free Democrats and noted that the results of Georgian Dream and Free Democrats might further improve. According to the law, during a pre-election period a public opinion poll shall be published by a media outlet “after double-checking the credibility of the methodology of the public opinion poll and objectivity of its results.” This provision was violated by Maestro TV.

On June 5 Maestro TV covered the results of another internal public opinion poll allegedly commissioned by Georgian Dream (8:06pm). GHN was again referred to as a source. The story notes that the poll was conducted through the method of phone interviewing. According to the election code, a public opinion poll “shall not be conducted via telephone, mail, and/or internet.”