

# **Media Monitoring Report**

1 October – 30 November 2016

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IRFS | IMS | MEMO 98

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Institute for Reporters` Freedom and Safety (IRFS), an independent, non-partisan Azerbaijani NGO dedicated to freedom of expression and the media, and a Slovak watchdog organisation MEMO 98, have jointly monitored the coverage of the Azerbaijani political scene in the selected media in the framework of the '*Change in the Air: Monitoring and Promoting Media Pluralism in Azerbaijan*' project.

The project is implemented in cooperation with the International Media Support (IMS) and provides a comprehensive monitoring to assess the current level of political diversity in Azerbaijani's media reporting. The project seeks to assess the current level of political diversity in media reporting, including concrete comparisons and analysis.

The methodology that measures the total amount of time and space devoted to monitored subjects as well as the manner in which the monitored subjects have been portrayed (positive, neutral or negative), was developed by MEMO 98 which has carried out similar projects in more than 50 countries in the last 19 years, including in Azerbaijan.<sup>1</sup> Given its comprehensive content-oriented approach, the methodology is specially designed to provide in-depth feedback on pluralism and diversity in media reporting, including coverage of chosen subjects and themes.<sup>2</sup>

The monitoring aims to offer professional, comprehensive, and objective assessment of political diversity, accuracy, and balance in the news programmes and politics-related materials on five television channels, and ten online media outlets.<sup>3</sup> The project's findings are not intended to support any one political party but the integrity of the media environment as a whole during and beyond the campaign season. The findings will be compiled into three monitoring reports about the media's behavior during the whole period and disseminated to the public, media, civil society, political parties, and international community.

This is the second report which covers the period from 1 October to 30 November 2016. Following is the summary of the main findings:

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<sup>1</sup> More information about MEMO 98 is available at: <http://www.memo98.sk>

<sup>2</sup> The media monitoring includes quantitative analysis of the coverage which focussed on the amount of time allocated to each subject, as well as the tone of the coverage in which the relevant political subjects are portrayed: positive, neutral or negative. Qualitative analysis assesses the performance of the media against specific principles or benchmarks – such as ethical or professional standards – that cannot be easily quantified. Monitors report on distortions, unbalanced coverage, unfairness, inaccuracy, bias, and anything else that is important to good quality reporting.

<sup>3</sup> Television: *AzTV, İTV, Lider, ATV, and Space*  
Web portals: Musavat.com, Azadliq.info, Azadliq.org, Contact.az, Meydan TV, Kanal13, Voice of America, BBC, Turan TV's Azerbaijan Saati (Azerbaijani Hour) and Xural.com's Qaynar Qazan (Hot Pot) programs.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **The monitoring of selected media revealed exceptionally limited political diversity in reporting by the main TV channels. The only alternative sources of information in the country are some online media which face various obstacles for providing different points of view.**
- **Similar as during the first monitoring period, the state media demonstrated clear bias in favour of the authorities, portraying their activities in a very positive way. In particular, monitoring TV channels focus on the president and his family members, giving them the bulk of their coverage.**
- **In their news reporting, the monitored broadcasters positively reflected on the work of the president and other state officials, highlighting only achievements and successes and largely ignoring any problems or critical views on the incumbents' performance.**
- **Only the online media provided their readers with more diverse information about various political opinions.**

### Television Channels

#### AzTV

February 14, 2016, marked the 60th anniversary of the launch of Azerbaijan's State Television AzTV.<sup>4</sup> Various state awards were conferred on a group of AzTV staff by President Ilham Aliyev's decree. AzTV's 60-year history can be divided into two parts: 35-year Soviet period and 25-year independence period. Despite the change of the socio-political structure in the country and the period of independence reaching a quarter of a century, many people believe that AzTV has not changed its nature. Similar to their functioning according to the Communist Party's orders for 35 years, the television station has now been serving the interests of the New Azerbaijan Party for 24 years. It continues advocating and propagandising in line with the interests and wishes of the authorities of Azerbaijan. It is impossible to see an ordinary Azerbaijani citizen's problems on AzTV. The government has a monopoly on the television channel. The television is funded from the state budget, which is formed by inter alia the tax money of the citizens. This year, 31 million 600 thousand manat was allocated for AzTV from the state budget. However, AzTV carries out the mission of not people's but the government's television.

On October 18 Independence Day and November 9 Flag Day, which coincided with the monitoring period, Heydar Aliyev's picture was displayed on the screen. This tradition has been continuing since the first anniversary of Heydar Aliyev's death, i.e. 2004. All state-run and private television channels put Heydar Aliyev's picture on the screen on public holidays. During the New Year and Novruz Holiday celebrations, Heydar Aliyev's picture remains on-

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<sup>4</sup> AzTV's 60th anniversary was on 14 February whereas the Azerbaijan Radio's 90th anniversary was celebrated on November 6.

screen for 5 days to a week. Considering that Heydar Aliyev's son Ilham Aliyev has been in power for the past 13 years, this fact can be regarded as a personality cult in the reality of Azerbaijan. In this light, AzTV's broadcasting policy is not impartial, balanced or accurate, in violation of the law and international standards. The news items about the President and his family usually have a positive tone.

During the prime time, AzTV airs the following news programs: Novosti (in the Russian language) at 6 pm, Region Khabarlari (Regional News) at 7 pm and Khabarlar (News) at 8 pm (both in Azerbaijani language). Only on one day throughout the monitoring period, an additional news program was aired at 11 pm; i.e. on November 1, four editions of news programs were aired at 6 pm, 7 pm, 8 pm and 11 pm. Some news items were rerun four times a day. News programs took up 2 hours 37 minutes or slightly less than half of the 6-hour primetime. It remains unclear why they added a news program consisting of news items, which were repetitions of those broadcasted during the day.

On an average day, Novosti lasts for about 30 minutes, Region Khabarlari for 30 minutes, and Khabarlar for more than one hour. But when there are items on Ilham Aliyev's trips and events attended by him, their airtime prolongs and special broadcasts are aired. The current events of the day (current events are not chosen based on public interest but on the instructions of the authorities) are discussed on the daily program Gunun Nabzi (Pulse of the Day). No alternative opinions are voiced on this program. On Gunun Nabzi, the issues touched upon by the President are discussed with officials, government spokespersons and heads of state agencies, and the President is praised. The news programs are entirely based on pro-government propaganda with President Ilham Aliyev receiving the largest coverage. This means that AzTV lacks political diversity and balance. Elements of political diversity are created by briefly showing heads of political parties represented in Milli Meclis (Parliament) and sporadic presentation of their speeches. There is no criticism of the government on any topics on AzTV. Economic crisis, devaluation, numerous arrests, court proceedings, and appeals by citizens unhappy with the government are taboo topics for AzTV. The authorities are praised in the person of Ilham Aliyev. No critical opinion is voiced about any minister or committee chairperson. In November, the 90th jubilee of the Azerbaijan Radio was marked with a solemn ceremony. Among the deputies congratulating the TV channel, deputy chairman of Milli Meclis Ziyafet Asgarov calls AzTV a "propaganda machine" (Nov 5),.

AzTV and ITV constantly exchange news items or texts. AzTV's Region Khabarlari and ITV's Jarchi-Region (Herald-Region) contain news items on the same subject. Sometimes, AzTV and ITV present the same items, e.g. "The day Ilham Aliyev was elected the president" (Oct 15). On Hafta (Week) and Haftanin Yekunu (Summary of the Week) programs, items are on the same topics and in the same sequence, as if these programs are produced by one and the same editorial staff.

On Saturdays, Novosti lasts usually more than one hour and most of this time is devoted to news about Ilham Aliyev. For instance, on October 1, Novosti lasted 1 hour 17 minutes, and 1 hour of the program was dedicated to Ilham Aliyev. On October 20, out of a total of 11 items, 9 items were about Ilham Aliyev, 2 items about Leyla Aliyeva and one item about Armenian occupation of Zangilan region. There is no political or thematic diversity on this program. The same holds true for the Hafta program that goes on air on Sundays. News items aired on

Sundays and Saturdays are only political. Sometimes, the narrations of the items are so long and pompous that timing is extended, and meaningless footages go on and on, e.g. on October 6, Ilham Aliyev and his family took part in the opening of parks in Khatai and Nizami districts and wandered around the park aimlessly for about 3 minutes, and the footage did not stop. News programs do not reflect the principles of accuracy, brevity and concreteness, which the news genre is supposed to meet. News service should be distinct in its quickness and brevity. AzTV never refers to the source of the news.

The main source of the topic for AzTV's news service is Ilham Aliyev's decrees, orders and instructions. The issues focused on by the President are extensively covered regardless of their public importance. Decrees on hazelnut, tobacco and cotton farming are followed by interviews with villagers, and expressions of gratitude to the president are included. Such an approach is, by nature, equivalent to campaigning. After some time, it loses topicality and the spotlight is changed. On ordinary daily news items such as "Village is provided with water and gas supply, asphalt roads and a school building", citizens are definitely shown thanking the President. Such expressions of gratitude are welcome on the air. By contrast, the events that widely resonated in the country during the monitoring period, had serious political importance and highlighted corruption and embezzlement, e.g. the trials like "Nardaran events", "Communications case" and "Ministry of National Security case" flew under AzTV's radar.

There are no critical items on AzTV, hence, no topic tracking, investigation, coming back to a subject, achieving a solution to any issue, or helping someone. By comparison, Space and ATV demonstrate such traits.

A minister received citizens in a region, and a citizen thanked Ilham Aliyev instead of the minister who listened to him and promised to solve his problem (Oct 14). AzTV operates just like the Soviet propaganda machine. Comparative analysis of periodically and consistently conducted monitoring sessions show that the same text is used for the materials about notable historical events of national importance, e.g. the days Heydar Aliyev and Ilham Aliyev came to power (both happened in October). For instance, every year the same item is presented about Aida Imanguliyeva, the mother of the first lady (Oct 10). On the Independence Day, the same views are voiced.

On October 18 Independence Day, all items started with Heydar Aliyev and ended with Ilham Aliyev. The items included their images because their pictures are all over the country. On that day, events organised in 15 regions were covered, and the texts of all items were similar and repetitive. AzTV is the only one among the national television channels that would air 15 items on the same subject in a row. This fact shows that there is little respect for any real newsworthiness when it comes to considerations what should be aired on the television. On the same day, Region Khabarlari presented 25 items which of all monitored subjects featured only Heydar and Ilham Aliyev, with only one 8-second scene showing Vasif Talibov, the Chairman of the Naxchivan semi autonomous exclave. Monotony is a characteristic feature of the state television. On October 23, Hafta program presented an item dedicated to the anniversary of Ilham Aliyev's taking office as president and criticized the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF) and Musavat parties that were in power for a period of just one year in 1992 by saying "this grouping seized the power illegally and has a role in the occupation of Shusha

and Lachin”. AzTV shows partiality, and accuses and incriminates the leading opposition parties in the country. This program was aired for 2 hours, and 1 hour 40 minutes of this airtime was about Ilham Aliyev. In an item about the discussion of the fake internet profiles in Milli Meclis, opposition was accused; MPs made speeches and blamed the opposition, mainly Ali Karimli for the creation of fake profiles (Nov 16). These stories were onesided as the criticised parties did not get an opportunity to react.

During the period of monitoring, the Croatian, Venezuelan and Belarusian presidents’ visits to Azerbaijan were covered and rerun for several hours throughout the week on news programs and offshoots. Seven separate items totalling 35 minutes were presented about Alexander Lukashenko on news programs. Even separate footage was aired about the Gobustan tour of Croatian president’s husband (Oct 24), and was rerun on the main news program despite being of no socio-political relevance; it is just a guest in our country going to ancient human settlement Gobustan for sightseeing. However, a discontented, unhappy and troubled Azerbaijani citizen is not given any airtime.

Political diversity on AzTV is only noticeable in the context of Milli Meclis, as AzTV tries as much as it can to cover everyone represented in Milli Meclis.

Sometimes news items are presented belatedly, thus the timely requirement typical of the news genre is violated. For example, the Serbian and Hungarian presidents’ congratulations to Ilham Aliyev were read 6 days after the Independence Day, on October 24. Congratulations are covered even 12 days after the Independence Day, on October 30, merely for propagandistic purposes. On November 1, AzTV aired footage of an event held in Kazakhstan and dedicated to Azerbaijan’s Independence. It appears that for AzTV, it is not necessary whether a topic has lost its topicality, but it is necessary to produce news in favour of the authorities. For instance, on November 6, the President’s consultation meeting held in September was reminded, despite it having no bearing on the current issues and covered themes.

An item on the topic of culture, a theatre festival, starts with the sentence “National leader of our people, architect and founder of Azerbaijani state Heydar Aliyev”. On November 9 Flag Day, Region Xhabarlari presented items from 9 regions and the subjects covered were Heydar and Ilham Aliyev. Throughout November, the events attended by Heydar Aliyev Foundation vice-president Leyla Aliyeva were more extensively covered. The grandchild Heydar Aliyev and Arzu Aliyeva receive more coverage compared to the previous years.

The “Let’s Know Our Country” project developed to increase schoolchildren’s knowledge about Azerbaijan’s regions is purely propagandistic by nature. Pupils are seen off in front of Heydar Aliyev’s monument, in the regions they visit Heydar Aliyev monuments, parks, museum, and centres, and the excursion finishes again in front of Heydar Aliyev’s monument. AzTV presented a series of items on a routine theme. One of such items lasted 21 minutes. The texts were repetitive with minor changes. After each trip, the children thank Ilham Aliyev. A new generation is growing thinking it is an honour to praise the President (Nov 12, 16, 17).

The President’s visits are allocated significant airtime, e.g. Ilham Aliyev’s visits to Fuzuli and Beylagan regions received 1 hour 54 minutes of coverage. If we add to this the 15-minute

item presented on Khabarlar at 8 pm, one visit took up 2 hours 10 minutes, about one-third of the primetime. On November 13, Hafta analysed this visit once again. The items on Region Khabarlari begin like this “on the instructions of President Ilham Aliyev”, or “by the order of Ilham Aliyev” (Nov 15), e.g. “On Ilham Aliyev’s instructions, ministers receive the citizens”, “By Ilham Aliyev’s order, an exhibition is held, water pipeline is built for the village”, etc.

National Revival Day (November 17) is described as Heydar Aliyev’s contribution. Facts and history are perverted, which creates confusion. It is claimed that the process of revival began in the 1960s and later became irreversible thanks to Heydar Aliyev’s policy. No one else is mentioned. Revival Day is the day of unity of Azerbaijani people and its history goes back to November 17, 1988, when Heydar Aliyev was not working anywhere. On November 17, Ilham Aliyev received the heads of news agencies from around the world and told them that the internet is not restricted in Azerbaijan, freedom of speech is protected, and the opposition is unable to attract as many people to their rallies as those attending this conference.

The results of the monitoring showed that AzTV’s news policy is built exclusively on pro-government propaganda. It does not refer to the source and lacks transparency. The principles of conformity, relevance and consistency are violated. AzTV does not provide diversity. It does not cover problems or work for their solution. There is not investigative journalism on AzTV. The television station does not comply with the principle of objective and comprehensive reporting.

Quantitative results of top five most covered subjects are as follows: President 44.02%, government 14.27%, New Azerbaijan Party 14.04%, Heydar Aliyev 11.31%, and Presidential Administration 4.97%.

### **Ichtimai (Public) Television**

As an organisation consistently monitoring the Azerbaijani media over the past few years, IRFS observed that Ichtimai TV’s broadcasting policy came closer to that of AzTV after 2011, when it was assigned a new director. The ideological line pursued and styles and forms used by AzTV are repeated by ITV. Comparison with monitoring reports from previous years shows that ITV has moved away from the public, people and their problems. Since the day of its establishment, the channel has been financed from the state budget. This year, its funding amounted to 11 million 400 thousand manat.

During prime-time, Ichtimai TV airs three news programs, Jarchi (Herald) news program at 6.30 pm (in Russian) and at 8.30 pm (in Azerbaijan), and Jarchi Region at 9 pm. On Sundays, Haftanin Yekunu analytical news program goes on the air and provides a summary and analysis of the events covered over the week. On all news programs, placement of items does not depend on their importance or topicality, but on Ilham Aliyev’s decrees, receptions and visits. The 6.30 pm edition of the news program lasts for 10 to 15 minutes, 8.30 pm edition for 30 to 45 minutes, 9 pm edition for 15 minutes, and Haftanin Yekunu for 1 hour 15 minutes. The longest items are those about Ilham Aliyev. Heydar Aliyev’s and Ilham Aliyev’s pictures are always shown. Jarchi Region periodically shows citizens and businessmen thanking Ilham Aliyev. News items from regions have an exclusively positive tone. ITV does

not adhere to the principles of public broadcasting in its news programs. It is not balanced. It does not cover social problems and does not allocate airtime to the discontented segment of society. Relevance and consistency are not ensured. Political diversity is lacking.

ITV's news programs do not present or cover critical opinions or problems. Alternative views are lacking. Balance is not maintained. President Ilham Aliyev visited two regions and the largest news items presented were about these visits. Allocation of millions of manat for road construction and repair of city buildings were specifically underlined.

On October 18 Independence Day and November 9 Flag Day, Heydar Aliyev's image was displayed on the screen.<sup>5</sup> ITV covers this event by presenting a shortened version of an item run on AzTV. Sometimes, items are picked up from AzTV as is, with the only corporate logo being obliterated. On October 19, three such items were shown. The item on the 60th anniversary of AzTV was also copied from the state television in unedited form (Nov 5).

The item on October 17 Independence Day was based on pro-government propaganda and criticism of the opposition. Musavat Party was criticised and its activities were described as "useless and treacherous", without any opportunity for the party to react to these allegations. Independence and all accomplishments are attributed to Heydar Aliyev (Oct 18). Azerbaijan's independence is a recent history, which is misrepresented by ITV. The principle of impartiality is violated. The Aliyev's images are a must for items on independence, and texts are similar to one another. On October 18, the 11-minute edition of Jarchi Region consisted of 15 items, and the subjects covered are Heydar and Ilham Aliyev, except a 4-second segment about New Azerbaijan Party (NAP) and a 38-second segment about Vasif Talibov. On October 23, Yekun and Hafta had the same structure and topic sequence. Even the views expressed were the same. On this program also, it was stated that "APF regime seized the power illegally". While claiming that everything was going well in Azerbaijan's political management, the channel shapes an opinion about the US Presidential Elections before they even took place by saying "Elections are falsified in the US" (Oct 25 and 30).

Significant airtime is devoted to political news of the same nature, e.g. 6 items on the Croatian president's visit (Oct 30). Moreover, the items had technical problems, the translator's voiceover was not proportionate to the original speech (Oct 30).

Several other errors were also registered during the monitoring period. A harvest festival in Balakan was shown, but the subtitles read "Pomegranate festival in Goychay" (Nov 5). ITV says Hijran Huseynova but shows Elmira Akhundova, says Ali Huseynli but shows Azay Guliyev, says Samad Seyidov but shows Javanshir Feyziyev. On November 12, 4 news editions went on the air during primetime (at 6.30pm, 8.30pm, 9.10pm and 11 pm).

The trips organised as part of the "Let's Know Our Country" project are presented as very important events, and the schoolchildren thank Ilham Aliyev (Nov 12). The channel makes such false allegations as "No violations have been observed during the privatisation auction. The president has a great role in such a transparent conduct of the auction" (Nov 15).

ITV continues to show ads between items, e.g. Savilla pomegranate juice ad between items on ICT and Environment exhibitions (Nov 7).

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<sup>5</sup> October 5 is the day Ilham Aliyev was elected the president.

Quantitative results are as follows: President 39.17%, government 17.88%, New Azerbaijan Party 14.24%, Heydar Aliyev 12.95%, and unaffiliated MPs 5.41%.

## **ATV**

ATV aired one primetime news edition (at 9 pm) in October and two editions (at 6 pm and 9 pm) in November. The news programs usually started with the president's visits, and extensively covered his decrees, political meetings, etc. The current government is portrayed as very useful for the country. First news items cover the president's trips to regions, his familiarisation with renovated school buildings, and his participation in the opening of factories and plants. However, these items are concise. On October 18 and November 9, ex-president Heydar Aliyev's picture was displayed on the screen the whole day. An item presented on November 22 targeted Italian journalist Milena Gabanelli, author of the Report TV program, who accused Azerbaijan after her visit to Armenia and spoke about human rights being not protected in Azerbaijan. ATV presented an item in response to this, which was accompanied by such parentheses like "Human rights commissioner Strasser sits on an Italian TV program and cares about Azerbaijan. Strasser's Azerbaijani cronies Ali Karimli and Khadija Ismayilova are not worth talking about. The likes of Ismayilova and Karimli have turned into cheap tools of Armenian propaganda".

Quantitative results are as follows: President 31.66%, government 24.12%, New Azerbaijan Party 14.59%, Heydar Aliyev 13.07%, and unaffiliated MPs 6.91%.

## **Space TV**

During primetime, Space TV airs one edition of Har Gun (Daily) news program at 8.15pm and Har Hafta (Weekly) analytical program on Sundays. The programs last for 40 to 45 minutes and cover official news and social issues. More focus is given to news of not much public importance and they are repeatedly previewed throughout the program.

On October 18 and November 9, Heydar Aliyev's image remained on screen all the day. The opener of Har Hafta contains on-duty images of Ilham Aliyev. Space TV widely covers social problems and presents critical materials. It takes steps for the resolution of the problem.

News programs usually present detailed coverage of the president's weekly foreign visits, decrees, political meetings, etc. and the current government is portrayed as very useful and necessary for the country. Space TV normally skips over politically sensitive topics. The news programs' placement of items has, generally, the same sequence day to day: official news, business, crime, sports, etc. Compared to other channels, Space TV cursorily touches on some political topics.

Space TV presents news offshoot editions titled Olanlar (Events) and Operativ Hissa (Operating Unit). Olanlar shows interesting events taking place across the world or in Azerbaijan. Operativ Hissa presents crime news. It is alleged that Space TV is under the wing of President Ilham Aliyev's sister Sevil Aliyeva.

Quantitative results are as follows: President 31.75%, government 26.20%, New Azerbaijan Party 20.52%, Heydar Aliyev 13.4%, and unaffiliated MPs 3.95%.

## **Lider TV**

Lider broadcasts Sada (Voice) news program at 7 pm every day except Sundays. The program usually starts with coverage of the president's activities. Lider TV acts as the government's channel. The head of Lider TV is president Ilham Aliyev's cousin. The channel periodically presents political analyst Sahil Isgandarov's commentary on political issues favouring the authorities. Isgandarov loves to speak against the government's political opponents. On October 13, Isgandarov said: "Our country is slandered based on the fables of the fifth column (referring to the opposition). We can say with full confidence that people's participation in the referendum held in Azerbaijan 20 days ago and their support for Ilham Aliyev was a cold shower for these forces. People support the policy of the Azerbaijani president." On October 18 and November 9, Heydar Aliyev image was shown on screen during the day.

In connection with October 18 Independence Day, almost in all news items (even those about sports, culture, etc.), the narrator said Heydar and Ilham Aliyev had done so many useful things for the country and they valued every citizen. They even showed Heydar Aliyev singing the folk song named "I have splashed water on the streets" to show how thoughtful he was towards music, culture and people of art. In general, Lider TV talks about the government's activities, provision of all necessary conditions for the population, and the creation of many jobs. It stresses that people do not need to move to Baku as a sufficient number of jobs have been created in the regions. This was said at the opening of a factory during Ilham Aliyev's visit to Aghstafa (Oct 21).

On October 29, Lider TV showed an item where Russian journalist Dmitry Kiselev was praising Ilham Aliyev by saying "Ilham Aliyev is a large-scale public figure. There is few like him in Europe. Our conversation with him left a deep impression on me. He is an independently minded and morally healthy person. I wish him good luck". On November 11, the anniversary day of NAP's establishment, Sada presented an extended item about Heydar Aliyev. It was stated that Heydar Aliyev was the political force who rescued the country from crisis and the people repeatedly cast their votes for this party and its chairman Ilham Aliyev. NAP was called the largest party in the region. NAP executive secretary Ali Ahmadov was shown saying "Heydar Aliyev and NAP is our political line. NAP works for the welfare of every citizen of Azerbaijan." Lider TV frequently uses such pompous sentences.

Quantitative results are as follows: President 29.51%, unaffiliated MPs 19.53%, New Azerbaijan Party 18.48%, government 17.89%, and Heydar Aliyev 7.7%.

## **Websites**

**[Azadliq.org](http://Azadliq.org)**

Azadliq.org is an independent media outlet. It covers trending political, social and economic events in the country in an impartial and prompt manner. Besides, the website also publishes various journalistic investigations and researches. Such journalistic investigations can only be found on this website. Due to this, Azadliq.org is subjected to restrictions by the Azerbaijani authorities. The website's activity has been repeatedly hindered and its staff has faced pressure.

The news items on Karabakh war is constantly updated on the website of Azadliq Radiosu (Radio Liberty's Azerbaijani service). During the reporting period, the website's news items on various topics presented the views of both the government and opposition representatives and independent experts and human rights defenders. The president's speeches and visits were covered in a neutral light. MPs, as well as employees of ministries and committees, were also covered. In such news items, the subjects covered were presented in a predominantly neutral, but sometimes positive or negative tone. Furthermore, the website also published the viewpoints of opposition party members and independent experts as an alternative to the pro-government opinions. Such views were presented mainly in a neutral tone. Azadliq.org publishes continuously updated reports on political arrests, human rights violations, and the high-profile trials taking place in the country. Therefore, lawyers Elchin Sadigov, Fariz Namazli and Yalchin Imanov, political prisoners Bayram Mammadov, Giyas Ibrahimov, Fikrat Faramazoglu, Faig Amirli, Taleh Bagirzade, Ilgar Mammadov and Fuad Gahramanli are among the most-covered subjects, and their coverage was primarily neutral.

The website also covers human rights defenders and independent experts' comments on news stories on various topics. Such coverage is principally neutral. In the economy news, experts Gubad Ibadoglu's and Natig Jafarli's comments on the economic developments in the country were devoted more space. The news items that included such comments had a neutral tone.

Thus, Azadliq.org complied with the principles of balanced reporting and diversity of opinions. As for the video reports uploaded on the website, their characteristic features are brevity and specificity. One can get information just by reading the headlines. Azadliq Radiosu strives to present accurate news. Whenever something happens in the country, Azadliq Radiosu is usually among first to report on it. The radio already earned the trust of people on January 20, 1990. Back then, when Azerbaijani people were kept under an information blockade, Azadliq Radiosu was the one that provided them with the most accurate and reliable news. Today, the radio continues to uphold this tradition and enjoys people's trust and respect. Azadliq Radiosu always remains committed to its tradition. The Radio maintains balance and other journalistic standards.

### **Meydan TV**

Meydan TV website is an independent media outlet. It impartially covers the events occurring in the country. Meydan TV reports on social problems and presents citizens' grievances against officials and representatives of executive authorities. It publishes video materials about people's unaddressed complaints and appeals. The political trials conducted in the country are covered by the website.

According to the monitoring results, the website posted news items on various topics between October 1 and November 30. Reports on political court proceedings are constantly updated on the website of Meydan TV. The coverage of the trials was presented in a neutral light and was aimed at informing the readers about the course of the trials. Among state officials, the most covered one was Ilham Aliyev. His coverage was mostly neutral. The website also gave coverage to MPs, ministers and their deputies. Their coverage was also typically neutral, but rarely negative or positive, too. Along with public officials, Meydan TV also devotes space to opposition party representatives. Their coverage was largely neutral and served to give visibility to their views. Meydan TV also reports on economic issues and in such reports it more often quoted Natig Jafarli and Gubad Ibadoglu as economic experts.

It can be said that the website has maintained balance and complied with the principle of diversity of opinions. The website provided a balanced reporting of the developments in the country.

Meydan TV produces video reports focusing on the new events that occur in Azerbaijan. Actually, the website does not cover all news. It presents only those news reports that are in tune with the times and are interesting and newsworthy for viewers. Its news reports cover the events related to both government and opposition, avoiding criticism. The journalists preserve their neutrality. They do not get involved or express their viewpoints on the events. Facts are not distorted but conveyed to the audience as they are. Balance is maintained. Despite being known as a pro-opposition media, Meydan TV does not show a discriminatory attitude towards the government with an attempt to humiliate or insult. Their opinions are also respected. (“Armenians showed their genocide memorials to the Pope, Georgians their religious holidays, but the Azerbaijani President his family” (Oct 3)).

Meydan TV has a different approach to events. In its news items, it presents the perspectives of the parties involved in their own words, e.g. Youth Activist Giyas Ibrahimov: They told me ‘you have dropped yourself in a deep well’ for writing that slogan on the statue on Flower Festival. Yes, I have dropped myself into a deep well in order to dig out the dirt so that the mouth of the spring opens (Oct 26). Baku mayor Hajibala Abutalibov: No matter how many flowers we brought, we have yet to bring flowers worthy of the name of Heydar Aliyev (Oct 28). Meydan TV does not demonstrate a prejudiced attitude towards the authorities.

### **Contact.az**

Contact.az website is an independent media outlet attached to Turan Information Agency. The news items published by Turan information agency also appear on this website. Contact.az uploads on average 30 to 50 news items per day. The news items cover various topics such as social, political and economic.

During the monitoring period from October 1 to November 30, Contact.az gave coverage to government representatives, opposition parties, as well as independent experts and human rights defenders. The website reported on the president’s meetings, visits and decisions, and

this coverage was mainly neutral, but occasionally negative or positive as well. In addition to the president, ministers, their deputies and MPs also received coverage, which can also be characterised mainly as neutral.

The website also devoted space to the views of opposition party representatives. Representatives of the opposition parties such as the National Council, APFP and Musavat received coverage. They were presented primarily in a neutral light. More covered experts in economic news items are Gubad Ibadoglu and Natig Jafarli. The political trials under stronger public spotlight were extensively covered. It is possible to keep track of the court proceedings on the website.

The website also published independent experts' and human rights defenders' comments on the important events in the country. Among human rights defenders, Ogtay Gulaliyev's and Leyla Yunus' thoughts were given more space, and this coverage was in a neutral tone. Overall, the website preserved balance by giving balanced coverage to the views of both government and opposition party representatives and independent experts and human rights defenders. Thus, Contact.az complied with the principle of diversity of opinions. The video reports of Contact.az are short and to the point. Daily uploaded videos are not so many. No one is insulted. News presented is generally based on reliable information. Balance is maintained. The majority of the news items are about the political situation in Azerbaijan. The guests on the Chatin Sual (Difficult Question) program are politicians. Interviews with them are conducted on political, economic and social issues.

### **Kanal 13**

Kanal-13 website publishes a large number of news items that cover all areas. Hardly any the developments in the country go unnoticed. The news items are generally published in a timely manner. Most importantly, their news items cover a variety of topics. Kanal-13 adheres to this principle in its other programs, debates, too. It chooses subjects that interest the audience. Individuals, who are also under the spotlight on the political stage but are not invited to programs by national broadcasters, are invited by Kanal-13. This is what makes Kanal-13 interesting for viewers. Insults are avoided. Balance is maintained.

### **Voice of America (Azerbaijani Service)**

Video reports of the Voice of America have a less focus on news related to Azerbaijan. Only seven news stories were presented during the two-month period. The website lacked news about the government. And, the geographical scope of the news items was limited to Baku. It could be a good idea to present news about regions of Azerbaijan. The news items are accurate and unbiased.

### **Azerbaijan Saati (Azerbaijan Hour)**

Azerbaijan Saati is a one-hour television program that goes on the air twice a week, on Saturday and Sunday. It is a product of Turan TV, which is broadcast from abroad. Unlike the

television channels broadcast in Azerbaijan, Turan TV is the only channel whose program, Azerbaijan Saati, gives a detailed impression about the contemporary and real Azerbaijan and its citizens. Here, you can see people left alone with their problems and suffering from high-handedness of officials on a daily basis. Azerbaijani television channels do not show this. Azerbaijan Saati shows average Azerbaijanis, their lifestyles and struggle for existence. This program can be considered as a real alternative to AzTV.

Azerbaijan Saati preserves balance. The footages shown, stories told, and facts presented all strive to reflect the reality. “Oghuz-Gabala-Baku water pipeline was built in 2007. Back then, 3000 villagers were deprived of their land plots, but they have not been compensated as yet” (Nov 26). “The ploughs have reached the Ajinohur winter pasture. Now the massacre of animals is about to begin. Lands are taken away from cattle-breeders. Allegedly, they are going to grow cotton here” (Nov 19). This is how villagers’ problems are portrayed.

Contacts with people show that the channel’s audience is growing day by day because people trust and rely on this channel. Court proceedings on political cases are covered without distortion of facts. “NIDA youth [activist] Giyas Ibrahimov and poet Tofiq Hasanli have been planted drugs and arrested for, respectively, writing a slogan on a statue and pointing out shortcomings” (Oct 8). No one on the national TV channels says this. This alternative channel provides an alternative opinion.

Sometimes, not-so-pertinent comparisons are made on the program. The host of the program, Ganimat Zahid voices ironic opinions such as “Trump would make a good president, but Ilham Aliyev wouldn’t make even a good foreman” (Nov 12).

Azerbaijan Saati does not encompass all regions of Azerbaijan, which is expectable given the limited opportunities for filming due to obstacles created by the government. Therefore, citizen journalism is increasingly used. Yet, not all of the population can watch Turan TV due to problems with broadcasting. There is inconsistency on Azerbaijan Saati in terms of professionalism.

### **Qaynar Qazan (Hot Pot)**

Qaynar Qazan (Hot Pot) program, which is a product of Xural.com website, is popular and is closely followed on the website and on social networks. The author of the program is a former prisoner of conscience, journalist Avaz Zeynalli. He invites socially and politically active individuals to his program and asks open-ended questions. The audience is informed about the guest of the program, and the program is prepared based on viewer questions. The interviewee has to bring clarity to unexpected questions that interest the viewers. The guests of the program are people whom the public find interesting. Since they are interesting, viewers want to get more information about them. Serious, strong and critical questions are asked on the program. The guests answer such questions reservedly. (Ruslan Izzatli: “I am the representative of the youths who cherish strong and core Republican values against the government” (Oct 10)). On Qaynar Qazan, no one is an offender. Balance is preserved.

## Azadliq.info

Azadliq.info is the online version of the Azadliq (Freedom) newspaper whose publication has been ceased. Azadliq newspaper's cessation of publication, after having faced constant pressure from the authorities for taking an oppositional stance against the government, has led to the expansion of the scope of the website. Azadliq director general Faig Amirli and prominent reporter Seymour Hazi are currently in jail.

According to the results of the monitoring conducted from October 1 to November 30, the most covered subjects on Azadliq.info were the National Council, APFP, and APFP chairman Ali Karimli. This coverage was mainly in a neutral light. NAP and its chairman President Ilham Aliyev were mostly criticised. Political diversity is noticeable. The reason Azadliq.info stands out for its oppositional stance is because it more often highlights and elucidates problems and illegalities, and extensively covers the problems faced by citizens and the country's socio-political landscape. It comprehensively reports on trials in political cases. Azadliq.info devotes large space to citizens' grievances. It informs its audience of protest rallies held in Azerbaijan's regions and even those held by our compatriots living abroad. Trending political news is operatively presented.

There are some shortcomings; sometimes the same news item is re-uploaded several times with different headlines, and the previously published one is later deleted, example 1 "Detention of this person is disrespect to land of Karabakh" (October 31, 4.49pm) and "Asif Yusifli to remain in detention" (October 31, 4.59pm); example 2 "Shocking statement by Hilal Asadov: Eldar Mahmudov said 'buy the market, but canonically'" (November 3, 1.16pm) and "What did Eldar Mahmudov's right-hand man confess to investigators?" (November 3, 1.16pm); example 3 "Unfamiliar organisation has been registered in his name" (November 17, 9.47pm) and "Azerbaijan's membership risks suspension unless the authorities change their rhetoric" (November 17, 9.47 pm). Azadliq.info sometimes publishes other websites' news reports, but in this case, it provides a reference to the source.

Despite being REAL Movement's executive secretary, Natig Jafarli is presented as an economist (Nov 1, 8).

Sometimes, technical errors are made. Some articles are later re-uploaded with a previous date, e.g. "Illusion of political stagnation: from social opposition to political opposition" (November 13), "It becomes clear in what a mess the 'state' built by Aliyev is" (November 18), "It becomes clear in what a mess the 'state' built by Aliyev is" (November 19).

The website is updated inattentively. One article has been uploaded thrice, e.g. "If not for the fake [expert] opinion on those claddings, so many people would not have died" (November 9, 10.50pm), "If not for the fake [expert] opinion on those claddings, so many people would not have died" (November 10, 7.52pm), "If not for the fake [expert] opinion on those claddings, so many people would not have died" (November 10, 8.04pm). Nevertheless, among the online media outlets, Azadliq.info is the one which is most strongly and consistently critical of the authorities.

## Musavat.com

Musavat.com is the online version of Yeni Musavat (New Equality) newspaper. Yeni Musavat newspaper has no affiliation to the opposition party Musavat. The newspaper has declared that it functions independently. The website posts on average 100 to 200 news items per day on political, economic, social and other topics.

During the reporting period, the website focused on issues on various themes (political, social, economic, etc.). In this period, Ilham Aliyev was the most covered public official. His coverage was mostly neutral, but sometimes also positive due to other people's praiseful remarks about the president. The president's visits and meetings received broad coverage. The website also devoted space to MPs, government representatives and opposition parties aside from APFP and the National Council. Following Yeni Musavat newspaper's conflict with APFP, the website also devoted very little coverage to these organisations and this coverage was typically negative.

Independent experts' views were also presented. The most covered political expert was Elkhan Shahinoglu, whose coverage was neutral. On economic subjects, experts Natig Jafarli and Gubad Ibadoglu were covered, and their coverage also was in a neutral light. Human rights defenders also received neutral coverage.

Musavat.com can be deemed to have preserved balance, but not completely. It provided a diversity of opinions. The website covered various topics and issues, particularly those that can be considered burning issues in the country.

## Conclusion

Data from the second monitoring period conducted under the Change in the Air project revealed wide differences in the way political subjects were portrayed and in the amount of coverage provided to different political subjects. The monitoring results indicated that state media did not follow the standards of balance, fairness and impartiality and openly supported the ruling regime. The qualitative analysis also indicated that these media neglected to offer any opposing views on particular stories. News reports were mainly driven by activities of the president, his family members and the government - journalists themselves did not try to dwell on problems, single them out. There was an apparent lack of any analytical approach, and conversely reports were sometimes limited to superficial coverage.

The majority of Azerbaijani media do not facilitate exchange of opinions, public debate, investigation and commentary that would offer the public fully informed, analysed and assessed views of persons running the country.

There was a clear problem in the way the state-funded media portrayed political issues. As recipients of public resources, state-funded media have an enhanced duty to ensure balanced and fair treatment of politicians as well as comprehensive reporting on politically relevant events. They showed only the activities of state authorities and overwhelmingly from a positive perspective; whereas largely ignored any views independent of or critical of the government. There was generally no discussion on social, economic and political problems of the country, with no information to the citizens about the consequences of bad governance.

It can be concluded that overall some monitored online media tried to provide alternative coverage.

The monitoring revealed that the problems identified during the previous period in the media were not results of short-term anomalies but reflect general atmosphere. While after the elections the media started to cover more intensively political parties in the news programmes, they continued to show their more or less open preferences towards certain politicians and/or parties. In addition, there continued to be a general lack of investigative approach as well as a lack of critical and independent opinions on the performance of the authorities. As such, a number of important reforms and changes will be necessary in order for the media to provide their audience with a more diverse coverage of political views and opinions.