

2018

“WatchDog.MD”  
Community

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**[REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA’S  
TELEVISION CONTENT AND THE  
MANNER IN WHICH IT IS SHAPING  
ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR: AN  
ASSESSMENT OF RUSSIA'S INFLUENCE  
ON THE COUNTRY’S GEO-POLITICAL  
OPTIONS]]**

The study examines the way in which voters' opinion about the country's foreign orientation options is formed. On the example of reflecting the global state leaders' actions, it is proved the Russian television's domination over informing most citizens on foreign policy issues. By doing so, the media controlled by the Russian state denigrates manipulatively the image of the EU and the US and induces an erroneous view of the real situation in the Russian Federation. Through this domination, the Russian Federation shapes geo-political options among Moldovan voters. Because of the distorted image over the Western foreign policy, almost half of the voters opt for the Eastern integration vector. Moreover, due to media influence, Vladimir Putin is the most popular politician in the Republic of Moldova, and his support generates very high electoral confidence to the domestic political actors. The new legislation applied regarding limiting the Russian media presence has a small impact and requires far more consistent legislative intervention. In addition to the effort of striving to limit the influence of manipulating mass media from the Russian Federation, it is necessary to stimulate the local media to provide more consistent information on international politics.

## Contents

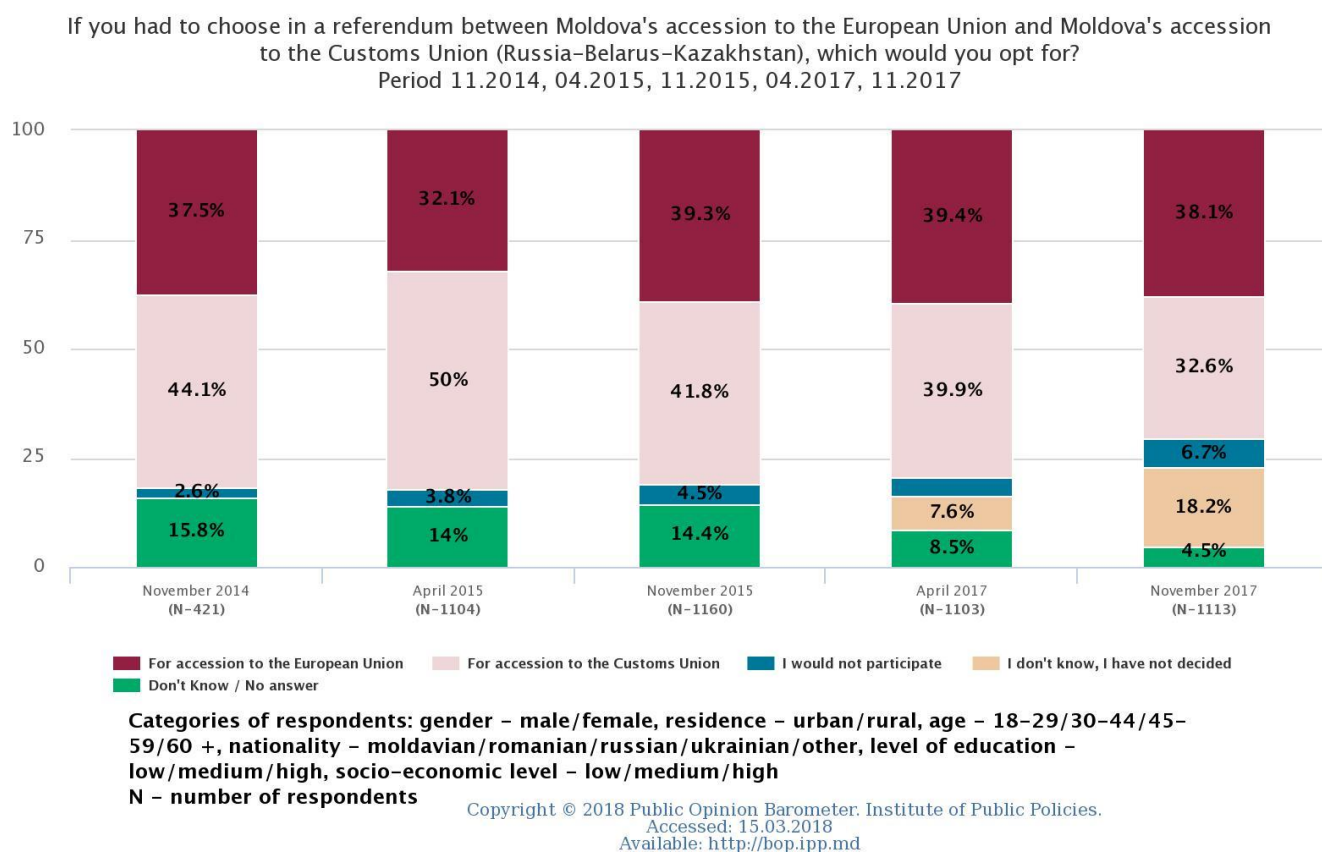
Introduction.....	2
Context .....	3
Methodology.....	7
Monitoring - week 1.....	9
Monitoring - week 2.....	11
Conclusions on the TV channels' influence and the share of the presence of international leaders .....	12
What kind of opinion is the television in Moldova creating about the international leaders?.....	13
The kind of news the Russian media broadcasts - the main narratives of Russian propaganda.....	17
Ways to solve the problem - the new "anti-propaganda" law .....	19
Policies and actions suggestions to protect TV space from manipulating content.....	21
First six days' result of anti-propaganda law enforcement's monitoring .....	22
Non-legislative solutions to protect TV space from external manipulation.....	24
Conclusions.....	24
Annex. Media consumption's specifics in the Republic of Moldova and the impact on (geo-) political preferences of media consumers. ....	26

The study was developed as part of the project “Watchdog.MD: Whistle-blowers in Energy and Public Policies in Moldova”, implemented with the financial support of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED). The content does not necessarily represent the official opinion of the EED. Responsibility for information and expressed views belongs entirely to the authors.

## Introduction

In the Republic of Moldova, the subject of external orientation has been largely determining the political affairs and the election results over many years. The division of voters into pro-European and pro-Russian generic groups is recognized in the country and abroad. Politicians, as one can easily note, play voters' geo-political preferences. For years the political debate at home is dominated by geo-political topics. The phenomenon can be treated either negatively or positively, but one thing is certain: it exists. The preference for one of the two political options varied quite a lot over the years, and only a few years ago it reached a stable relative parity (Chart 1)<sup>1</sup>.

**Chart 1. Evolution of foreign orientation preferences in the Republic of Moldova (2014-2017)**



It is very difficult to provide an objective explanation of this phenomenon. The pro-European option has been declining steadily from 55% in 2010 to below 40% in 2016. The

<sup>1</sup> <http://bop.ipp.md/>

most widespread explanation is the association of the image of the EU – and Western partners in general – with unpopular and corrupt governments from Moldova. This would seem to be a plausible explanation; however, it is difficult to define a clear connection between the two rationales. According to the Public Opinion Barometer (POB) from 2017<sup>2</sup>, the pro-European option has grown considerably in popularity while the government majority's rating remains small. While we can still see certain parity between the cumulative rating of the governing parties and the pro-EU choice during 2013-2014, after 2015 the latter is 6-7 times higher than the ruling parties' rating. As a result, this hypothesis is not a reliable explanation.

Moreover, the increasing popularity of the pro-Russian choice over 2014-2015 cannot be reasonably explained. Over this period, Russia has suffered serious economic issues caused by the sanctions it was imposed. Russia's military interference in Ukraine should not add popularity to this country among Moldovans.

Overall, the fact that almost half of the population prefers integration with the Customs Union is irrational. Quality of public services, justice and living standards in general are much higher in the EU. For Moldovans who consider poverty and corruption to be the main problems in the country, it is unnatural to seek resolution in an area of equally high level of social inequality and corruption, especially to the detriment to the option of affiliation with a space relying on rule of law and social equity as main values.

Through this study we wanted to understand why many Moldovans vote in contrast with elementary logics, why they choose an undemocratic region, even if they are very much concerned with their voting rights. We will try to understand how the Russian Federation succeeds to attract Moldovan citizens, making them opt for the obviously worse option. In the context of the international discussions about the Russian Federation's interference in elections in different countries, the existence of such a paradox in the Republic of Moldova naturally raises the question over the methods Moscow uses to influence the electoral behavior of the Moldovan voters.

## Context

In order to understand how the Moldovan voters' opinion about the geo-political options is formed, we need to understand the sources and the type of information voters receive. Naturally, by gathering and analyzing information about a particular phenomenon over the years, an opinion is formed on it. Until we come up with the analysis, we will look for more details about the opinion of the Moldovans about the pro-Western and pro-Eastern options. From the data we have, we can also outline another trend, which is directly

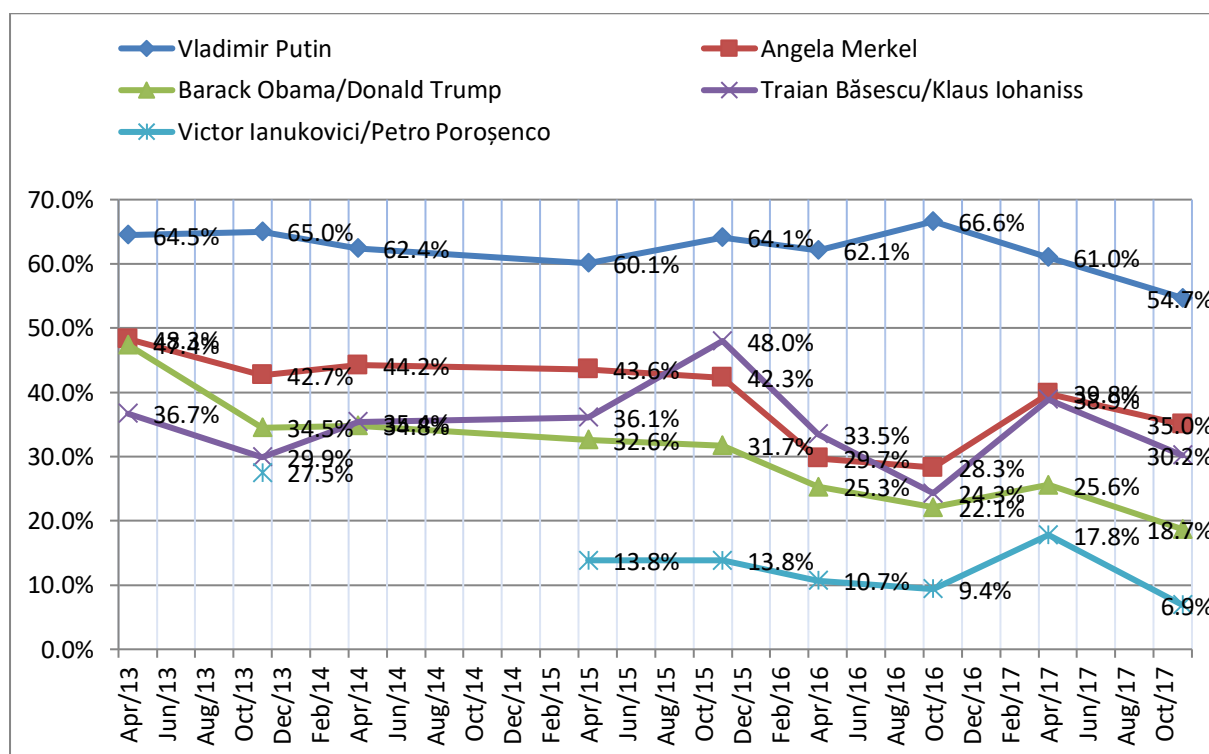
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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bop.ipp.md/en>

connected to the geo-political orientation option. In order to determine the manner in which the Moldovan citizens are informed, we need to identify an element that can be measured directly on the basis of sociological data. We need to compare the quantitative and qualitative presence of that phenomenon in citizens' sources of information and in opinion polls. Of the available data, the most relevant is data on Moldovans' level of trust/mistrust in international political leaders. It is present in the multi-annual measurements of the Barometer of Public Opinion and can be measured based on the sources of information.

For relevance, we have systematized data on the level of trust/mistrust in the most relevant political leaders: the Russian president, the US President, the German Chancellor, the Presidents of Romania and Ukraine. We covered 2013-2017 (Figure 2 and 3).

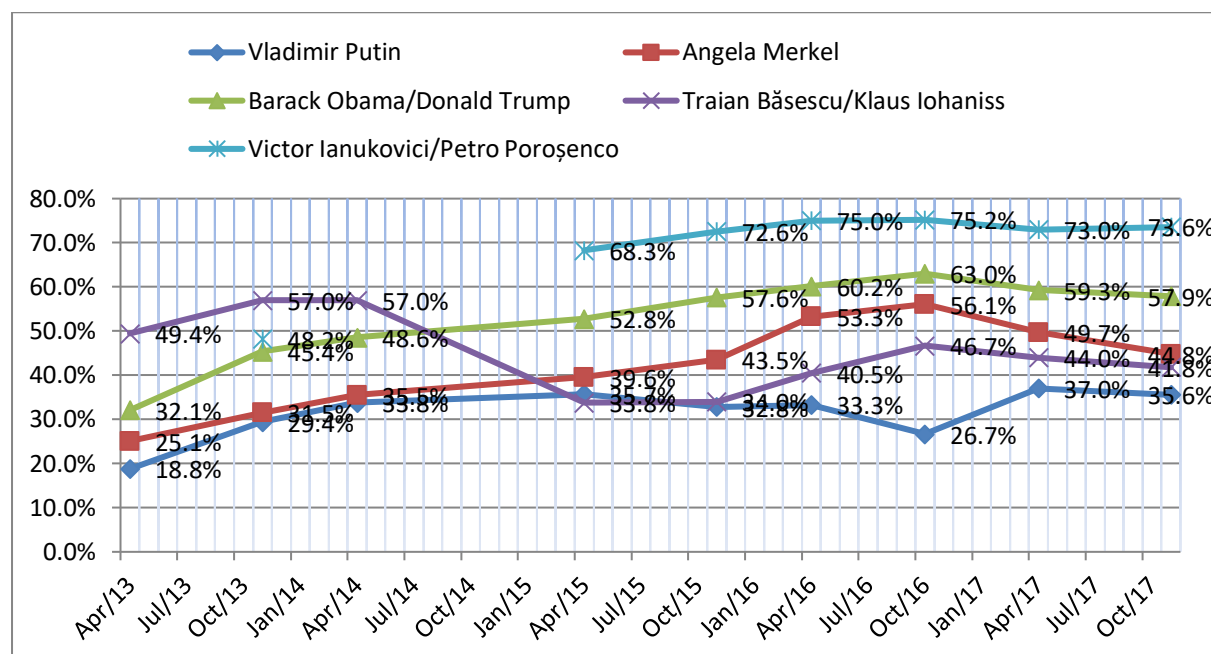
**Figure 2. Evolution of the positive (high/low) level of trust in international political leaders according to Public Opinion Barometer data (2013-2017).**



From the two charts we see a spectacular development over the last 4 years. First of all, we have to note Vladimir Putin's very high and positive rating, he has a popularity of over 60%, with only one exception in the most recent survey, where his popularity dropped to 54%. This makes Putin the most popular politician in the Republic of Moldova during all these years, with more than double digits compared to any other local politician's rating. One trend we should pay attention to is Putin's degree of recognition among respondents

is practically 100%. Not even 1% of the people answered that they did not know Putin over all the polls we examined. No local politician has such a degree of recognition.

**Figure 3. Level of mistrust in international leaders (I do not really trust/I do not trust at all) according to Public Opinion Barometer data (2013-2017)**



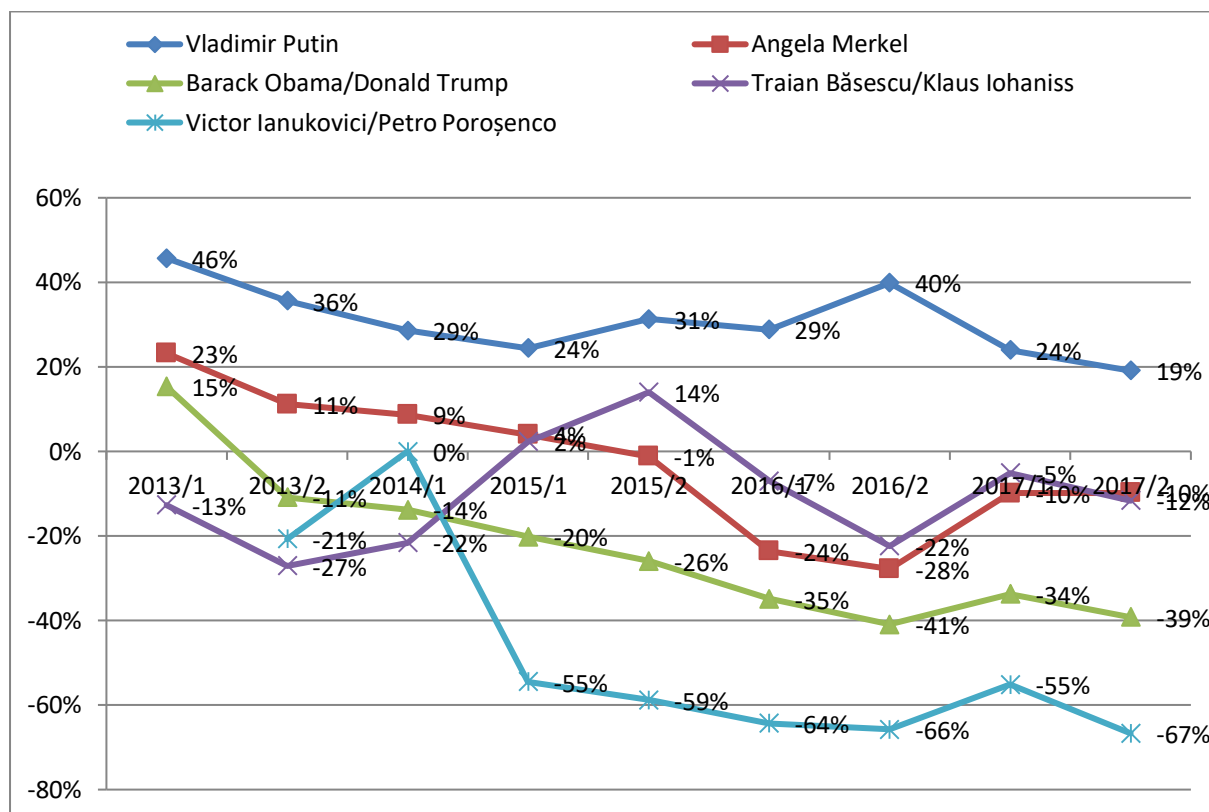
Another clear trend is the steady and practically synchronous decline in confidence levels and increased distrust in Western leaders (including the Ukrainian president). If the level of mistrust in the German Chancellor and in the American president was 25-30% in 2013, it reached 55-60% in 2016, and slightly recovering in 2017. This phenomenon is unclear as no substantial changes have occurred in the policy pursued by these leaders in their countries, in international politics or even more so in their relation to the Republic of Moldova; things are different when it comes to Vladimir Putin, especially considering Russia's intervention in Ukraine. Even more striking is Petro Poroshenko's rating, his attitude towards the Republic of Moldova is quite friendly, and he was even associated with our country due to his past. He had lived and worked many years in Moldova, he speaks Romanian and understands Moldova culture.

For a clearer picture, we have plotted the evolution of the relationship between the level of trust and mistrust in the international political leaders (Figure 4).

We notice that in 2013, Vladimir Putin's image along with German and American leaders was more positive than negative in Moldova. Thus, in 2016 and 2017, Putin remained the only international leader with a mostly positive image in the country. Moreover, Putin is the only politician who has a positive image more than negative – according to the Public

Opinion Barometer's data of November 2017 (all local politicians in the Republic of Moldova have a level of mistrust of 60% or more).

**Figure 4. Evolution of the relationship between confidence and mistrust in international political leaders according to Public Opinion Barometer's data (2013-2017)**



As a conclusion at this stage, we can see a visible deterioration of the image of foreign leaders in the recent years, with a very pronounced effect on the leaders of the Western Bloc and the contoured positive image of Vladimir Putin. The period of decline of the European Integration option to the detriment of that of the Customs Union lead by Russia is synchronizing with similar trends in the evolution of the level of confidence in the political leaders of the two blocs.

The level of confidence of Moldovans in state leaders and political blocs that embody one of the two geo-political options is a very relevant indicator. If Moldovan citizens appreciate the work of the political leader positively, it means that they agree with his/her results. If the level of trust in foreign leaders is low, it means that the respondents do not have a positive assessment of the result of the activity of these leaders. In other words, if Moldovans believe that the Russian Federation is well governed and would prefer such a pattern of development in their country, their level of trust in Vladimir Putin will be

high. If the level of trust in Angela Merkel has fallen, that means Moldovans are thinking she is a bad leader and they do not want to have such a model for Moldova.

Considering the economic success in the EU and in the US and Russia's economic issues, these pro-Eastern orientation trends seem very unclear and questionable. Not to mention the generous financial aid the West offers to Moldova on an annual basis.

The level of confidence in international leaders is as irrational as the geo-political preferences in the Republic of Moldova, the trends of these two phenomena are very similar. It is clear that similar methods were used to get these two views. The reasons for Putin's high rating and the preference for the Customs Union (Euro-Asian) are the same. If we understand how the opinion about international political leaders is formed, we will be able to understand, implicitly, how the opinion about the countries/blocs they lead is created.

## Methodology

In order to understand how the opinions of the Moldovan citizens on the international political leaders have been formed, we need to examine how and what kind of information about leaders' activity respondents consume. According to the same Barometer of Public Opinion, television is the first or second source of information for 80% of respondents. For 56% TV is the main source. The Internet is an important source for 48%, for about 27% it is the most important source. 85% of Moldovan citizens watch TV daily or several times a week. Nearly 60% access the internet daily or several times a week.<sup>3</sup>

We find that television remains the dominant source of information, even if the Internet is a competitor. The big discrepancy between those who use the Internet daily (49%) and the ones who call it the main source of information (27%) explains that the Internet is used for personal interest, work or daily needs, and TV news stand for the main source of information. Because the Internet is a source of information with less impact on consumers than the television and it is highly segmented on social networking portals, it is virtually impossible to determine the weight of each piece of information, this is why we will only analyze the television content for our study.

Without underestimating the importance of information on Internet, we can only identify examples and very few measurable data on this informational space, but TV broadcasting can be measured in very precise figures. Moreover, the conclusions for the television' monitoring are valid for 80% of the population, which is a very representative factor.

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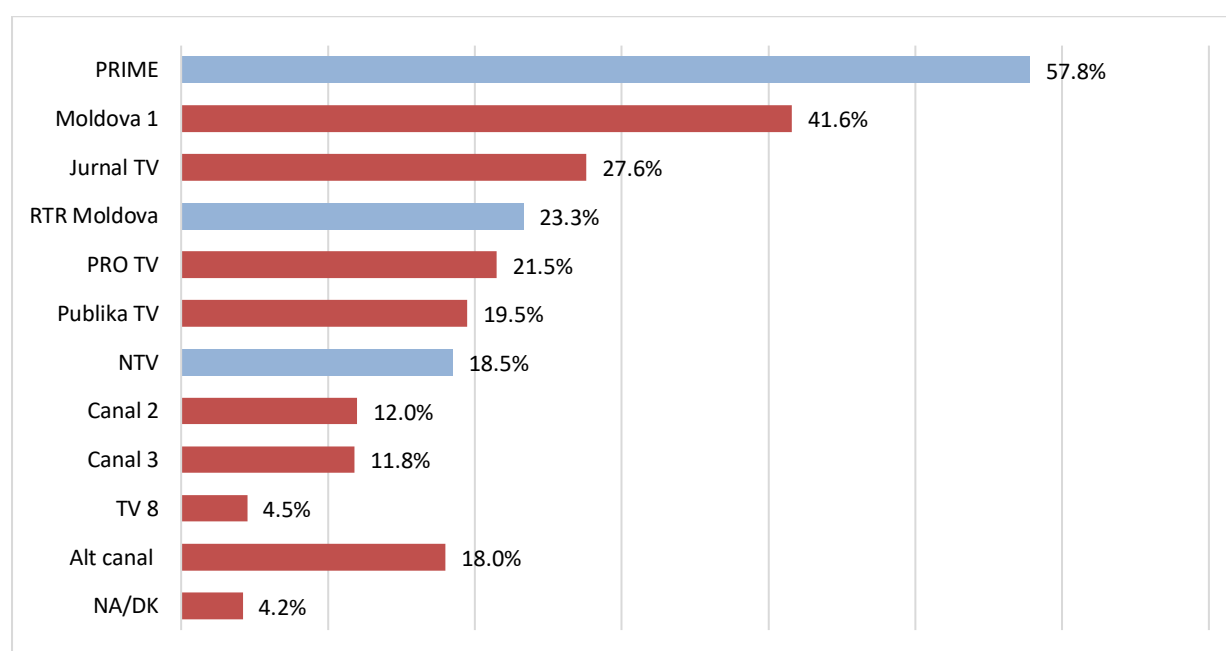
<sup>3</sup> <http://bop.ipp.md/> Barometer of Public Opinion, November 2017.



In order to measure the impact of each news broadcasted on each monitored television station, we will use its rating among citizens' preferences. We will systematize and analyze the content of the main news bulletins from the top 10 TV channels. Only the content of the news broadcasts during prime time (18: 00-23: 00) will be systematized, at one news bulletin per day. In addition to the top 10 news channels that broadcast informational content from the outside, we will also be monitoring the retransmitted main news bulletin (reference to the following TV channels: Perviy Kanal, Rossia 1, ProTV and NTV).

For every regular news (50 seconds - 1.5 minutes) a score will be awarded based on the rating of the television. The ratings are shown in Figure 5. If a television has a 40% rating, it means that it is an important source of information for 40% of citizens. Every piece of news that brings interest to us on this TV channel will be rated with a score of 0.4 points. That's how we can see not only the number but also news' *weight*.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 5. The rating of each television (top 10) - the percentage of respondents who indicated that this TV channel is among their three most frequently viewed channels**



In addition to the systematization of the number of the pieces of news about political leaders (foreign heads of state), we will also systematize the context in which each of the leaders is presented in these narrations. Depending on the way the news is written, produced and presented, depending on the emphasis and the subject of the news itself, it can present the protagonist (the state leader) in a positive, negative or a neutral light. It is

<sup>4</sup> For the news monitored at Perviy Kanal an amplifier was applied with a reduction of 1/3 due to the start of the main news bulletin only at 9:50pm. If a piece of news on Prime TV in the 9 pm bulletin is dotted with 0.58, then the retransmitted one from Perviy Kanal is only 0.383.

clear that a cumulus of news consumed about a topic (in our case, a state leader) creates the viewer's opinion about it, or at least it has a great influence on the consumer.

We have chosen to monitor all TV news at top 10 channels for a week at considerable distance of time, a daily news bulletin for each TV channel, as explained above.

Just to reiterate, we have monitored the presence of foreign political leaders in the main news bulletins in Moldova for two weeks. We have marked scores and contexts for each occurrence depending on the rating of the television and the way in which the news influences the opinion about this leader.

### Monitoring - week 1

The first week was September 6-12, 2017. Table 1 systematizes all the results, the rating of the foreign leaders and the light in which they were presented (negative, positive or neutral).

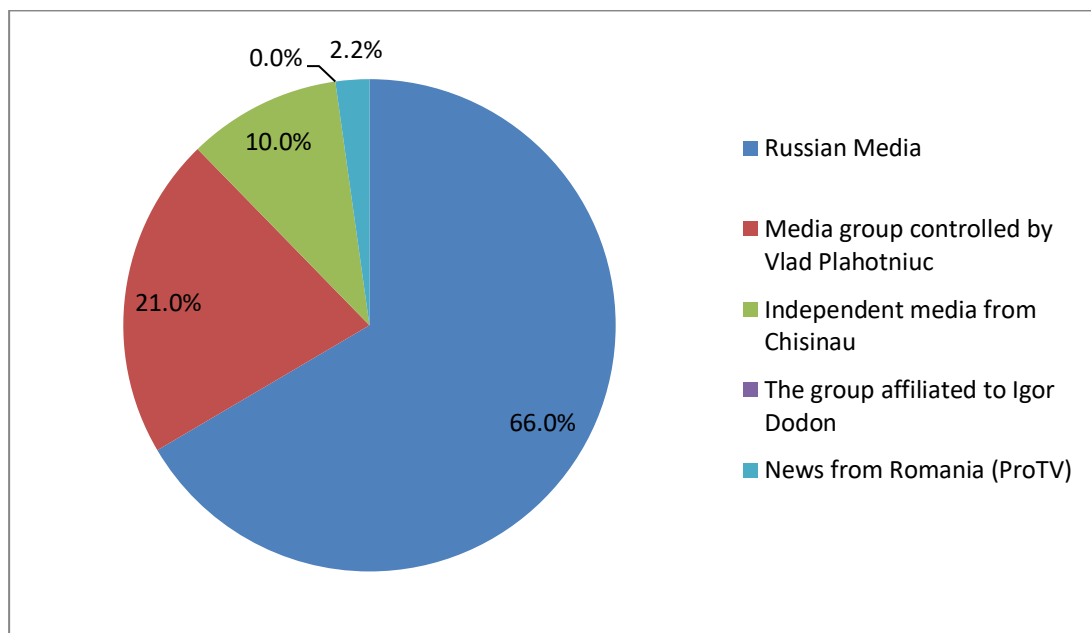
**Table 1. Results of the first-week of TV monitoring**

	Leader's name	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	TOTAL	Score (positive-negative)
6-12 Sep 2017	Vladimir Putin	24.542	0.51	0.91	25.962	24.032
	Angela Merkel		1.05	0.363	1.413	-1.05
	Emanuel Macron	2.03		0.26	2.29	2.03
	Theresa May	0.22	0.66	0.42	1.3	-0.44
	Fedreica Mogherini		0.79		0.79	-0.79
	Klaus Iohannis	0.4			0.4	0.4
	Donald Trump	1.62	9.453	1.343	12.416	-7.833
	Petro Poroshenko	1.2	2.413		3.613	-1.213
	Ilham Aliev		0.8		0.8	-0.8
	Dilma Rusev		0.29		0.29	-0.29
	Mu Chzhe In			0.363	0.363	0
	Recep Taip Erdogan			0.16	0.16	0
	Sinzo Abbe	2.163			2.163	2.163
	Kim Jong Un	1.78	1.62	1.39	4.79	0.16
	Justin Trudeau	0.29			0.29	0.29
	Aun San Si Jin		0.16		0.16	-0.16
	Alexandr Lukaşenko		0.26		0.26	-0.26
	Enrique Pena Neto	1.07		0.51	1.58	1.07

The conclusions of the first week of monitoring are more than suggestive:

- 41.6% of all the news about foreign leaders' activity which is presented on Moldovan TV stations is positive news about Vladimir Putin;
- 44% of the news about foreign leaders on the Top 10 TV channels in the Republic of Moldova is news about Vladimir Putin;
- 69.4% of the positive news about foreign leaders is news about Vladimir Putin;
- 52% of the negative news about international leaders is about Donald Trump, while negative news about Putin is only 2.8%;
- The news about Vladimir Putin has twice as much weight than that of the US president and 18 times higher than Angela Merkel;
- 66% of all news about international leaders in Moldovan TV space were broadcasted by Russian state-controlled TV stations (Pervii Kanal, RTR, Rossia 1, NTV), as represented in Figure 6. TV channels directly or indirectly controlled by the government from Chisinau (Prime, Moldova 1, Publika TV, Channel 2 and Channel 3) come second, and the independent televisions from Chisinau (JurnalTV, ProTV Chisinau and TV8) all together are at only 10% of the total news on foreign leaders. NTV Moldova channel, controlled by persons affiliated to President Dodon, did not include any foreign political news in their newscasts during the week we conducted the monitoring. The Romanian media provided just slightly over 2%, through the presence of ProTV.

**Figure 6. The weight of media groups in reflecting foreign state leaders' activity (6-12 September 2017).**



## Monitoring - week 2.

The second week monitored is January 15-Jan. 21, 2018<sup>5</sup>. Table 2 shows the results of this monitoring.

**Table 2. Monitoring results of the reflection of state leaders' activity during January 15-Jan. 21, 2018.**

	Leader's name	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	TOTAL	Score (positive-negative)
15-21 Jan	Vladimir Putin	13.08	0.41	0.22	13.71	12.67
2018	Angela Merkel		0.38		0.38	-0.38
	Emanuel Macron			0.19	0.19	0
	Alexandr Vuchich	1.15				
	Theresa May	0.22		0.64	0.86	0.22
	Klaus Iohannis	2.14	0.22	3.97	6.33	1.92
	Donald Trump	1.37	4.19	0.82	6.38	-2.82
	Petro Poroshenko	0.19	1.26	1.03	2.48	-1.07
	Ilham Aliev	0.19			0.19	0.19
	Milosh Zeman			0.24	0.24	0
	Nursultan Nazarbaev	1.37			1.37	1.37
	Paolo Gentiloni	0.23			0.23	0.23
	Papa Francisc	0.28		0.28	0.56	0.28
	Recep Taip Erdogan	0.65		0.66	1.31	0.65
	Sinzo Abbe	0.42		0.86	1.28	0.42
	Kim Jong Un		0.41	0.23	0.64	-0.41

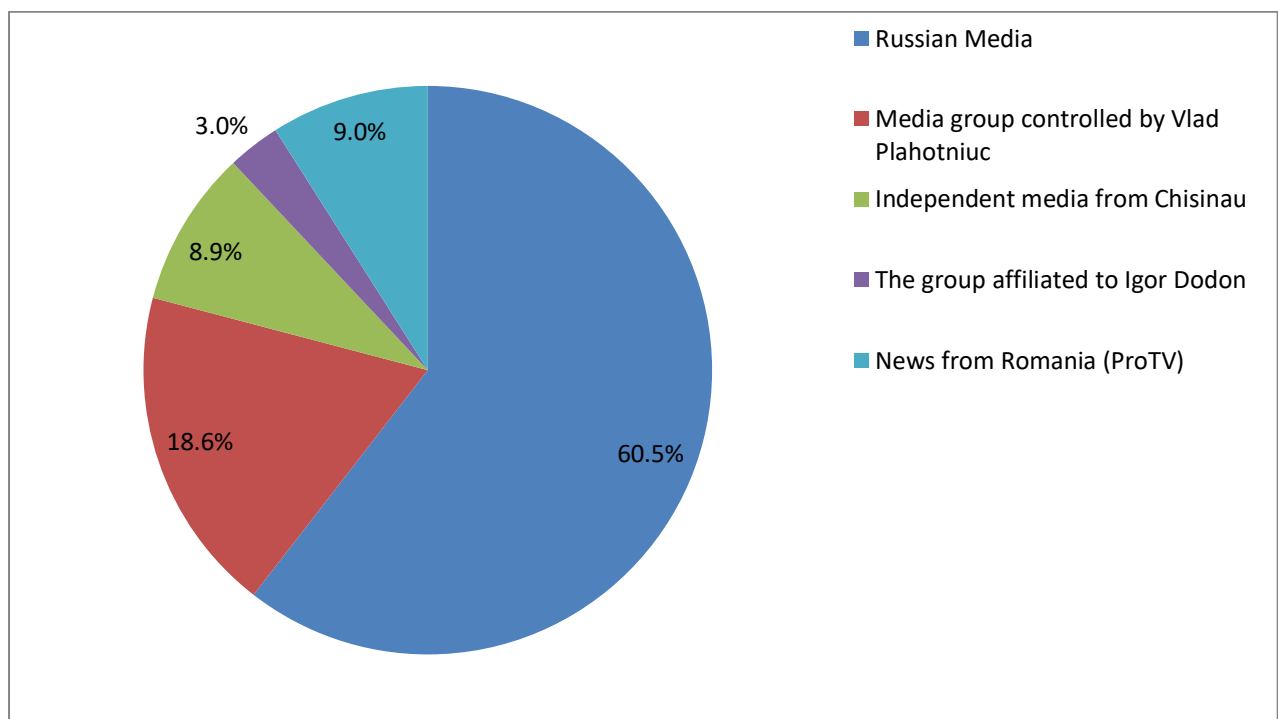
The first thing to notice is the very few news about the activity of foreign leaders during this period. The conclusions of this monitoring are as it follows:

- 36.1% of all the news about foreign leaders' activity which is presented on Moldovan TV stations is positive news about Vladimir Putin;
- 38% of the news about foreign leaders on the Top 10 TV channels in the Republic of Moldova is news about Vladimir Putin;
- 61% of the positive news about foreign leaders is news about Vladimir Putin;
- 61% of the negative news about international leaders is about Donald Trump, while negative news about Putin is only 6%;

<sup>5</sup> The monitored weeks were selected entirely random, based on the monitoring capability that was performed in viewing each news bulletin. For the first week of monitoring it took more than 4 weeks to be able to document all the news broadcasts.

- The news about Vladimir Putin has twice as much weight than that of the US president and 36 times higher than Angela Merkel;
- 66% of all news about international leaders in Moldovan TV space were broadcasted by Russian state-controlled TV stations (Pervii Kanal, RTR, Rossia 1, NTV), as represented in Figure 7. TV channels directly or indirectly controlled by the government from Chisinau (Prime, Moldova 1, Publika TV, Channel 2 and Channel 3) come second at 18.6%, and the independent televisions from Chisinau (JurnalTV, ProTV Chisinau and TV8) all together are at only 9% of the total news on foreign leaders. NTV Moldova channel, controlled by persons affiliated to President Dodon, had a share of only 3%. The Romanian media had a share of 9% through the presence of ProTV.

**Figure 7. The weight of media groups in reflecting state leaders' activity (15-21 January 2018).**



### Conclusions on the TV channels' influence and the share of the presence of international leaders

The two monitored weeks demonstrate through quantitative indices the disproportionate influence of Russian media on the informational space in Moldova. Through only three televisions retransmitted by the local broadcasters (Perviy Kanal, NTV and Rossia 1), the Russian Federation holds a dominant position in informing Moldovan viewers about the

international politics situation. Reflecting the activity of state leaders is perhaps the most eloquent marker of this situation. Even the stronger position of ProTV in the second week of monitoring is due to the circumstances and not to the editorial policy of this channel in Romania. Its higher weight/rating is due solely to the fact that it was the fall of the Government in Bucharest and there were active consultations with the involvement of the head of state - Klaus Iohannis. In other conditions, the news about Romanian politics in general and the activity of the President are very rare in the Moldovan television informational space. In the first week, there was only one piece of information with the participation of the Romanian President, and it was presented only at Moldova 1 not even at ProTV Bucharest.

The Russian Federation does not hold a dominant position in the Moldovan informational space in general; Moldovan citizens are primarily informed by local news broadcasts. But in terms of information on external issues, Russian televisions have a dominant position. As we have shown in the introductory part, namely the opinion on the geo-political option is a decisive factor in the electoral behavior formation. And on this segment, the Russian Federation generates more than half of the information consumed by the Moldovan voters. In other words, the Russian Federation influences in a proportion of 50% the formation of opinion on geo-political options in Moldova.

The problem is wider than the high rating of the news coming from the Russian Federation. We cannot fail to notice the extremely small amount of news about international politics at the local televisions. They pay more attention to internal news of all kinds, neglecting the international component. One can also find the lack of a consistent editorial policy on foreign news at all the TV channels in Moldova. There are no constant priorities on topics to be included in news broadcasts; no effort is being made to track the presence of foreign countries and international politicians in the news. At the same time, the geo-political agenda is the absolute priority of the Russian televisions.

### **What kind of opinion is the television in Moldova creating about the international leaders?**

The total amount of information of any kind ultimately forms the opinion of the person about one phenomenon or another. The same is state leaders' case. We will systematize the ratio of positive and negative news about international political leaders at Moldovan top 10 TV channels. In Table 3 we have their systematization on each of the two monitored weeks.

**Table 3. The ratio of the positive and negative news about the state leaders in the TV informational space in RM.**

	Political leader	Score		Political leader	Score
1 <sup>st</sup> week	Vladimir Putin	24.032	2 <sup>nd</sup> week	Vladimir Putin	12.67
	Angela Merkel	-1.05		Angela Merkel	-0.38
	Emanuel Macron	2.03		Emanuel Macron	0
	Theresa May	-0.44		Alexandr Vuchich	1.15
	Fedreica Mogerini	-0.79		Theresa May	0.22
	Klaus Iohannis	0.4		Klaus Iohannis	1.92
	Donald Trump	-7.833		Donald Trump	-2.82
	Petro Poroşenko	-1.213		Petro Poroşenko	-1.07
	Ilham Aliev	-0.8		Ilham Aliev	0.19
	Dilma Rusev	-0.29		Milosh Zeman	0
	Mu Chzhe In	0		Nursultan Nazarbaev	1.37
	Recep Taip Erdogan	0		Paolo Gentiloni	0.23
	Sinzo Abbe	2.163		Papa Francisc	0.28
	Kim Jong Un	0.16		Recep Taip Erdogan	0.65
	Justin Trudeau	0.29		Sinzo Abbe	0.42
	Aun San Si Jin	-0.16		Kim Jong Un	-0.41
	Alexandr Lukaşenko	-0.26			
	Enrique Pena Neto	1.07			

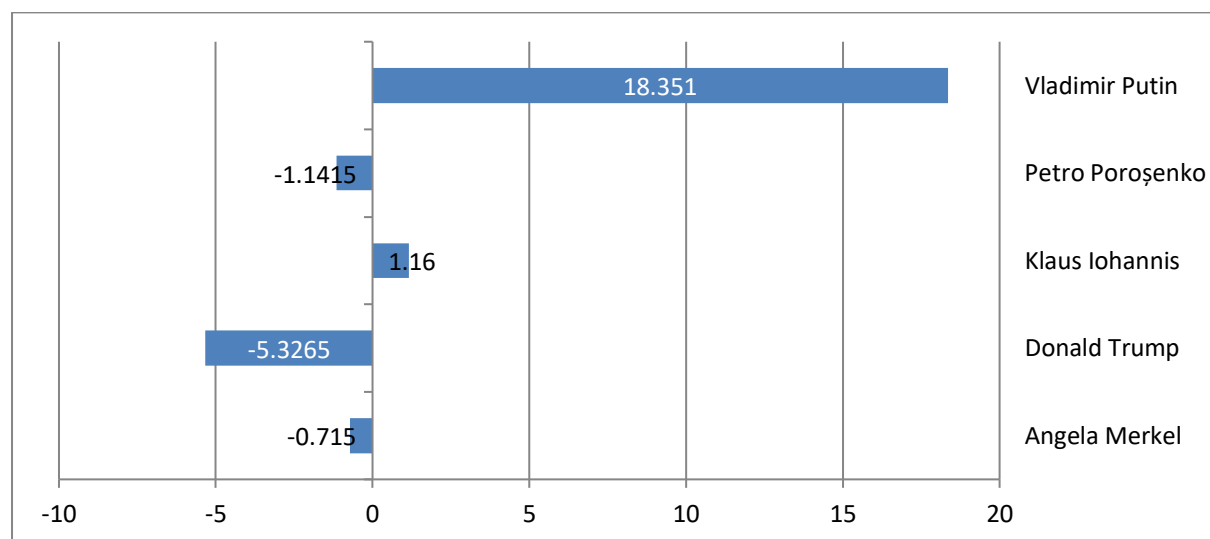
For a more practical view, we will present below a graph on those international policy leaders whose confidence can be defined based on sociological data (see Figure 8). We have found out the reports' averageness that was made over the two weeks monitoring. For a more convenient comparison, we will place closely the ratio of the positive and negative levels of trust in the same political leaders as shown in the Public Opinion's Barometer data of November 2017 (see Figure 9).

Basically, the comparison denotes the cause of the paradox regarding the image of international political leaders. If we overlap the objective causes that must shape their image and the content of the informational space, we will understand that the rating of each leader is absolutely natural. At this stage, we can conclude that due to the massive media presence, the Russian Federation manages to artificially increase the level of trust

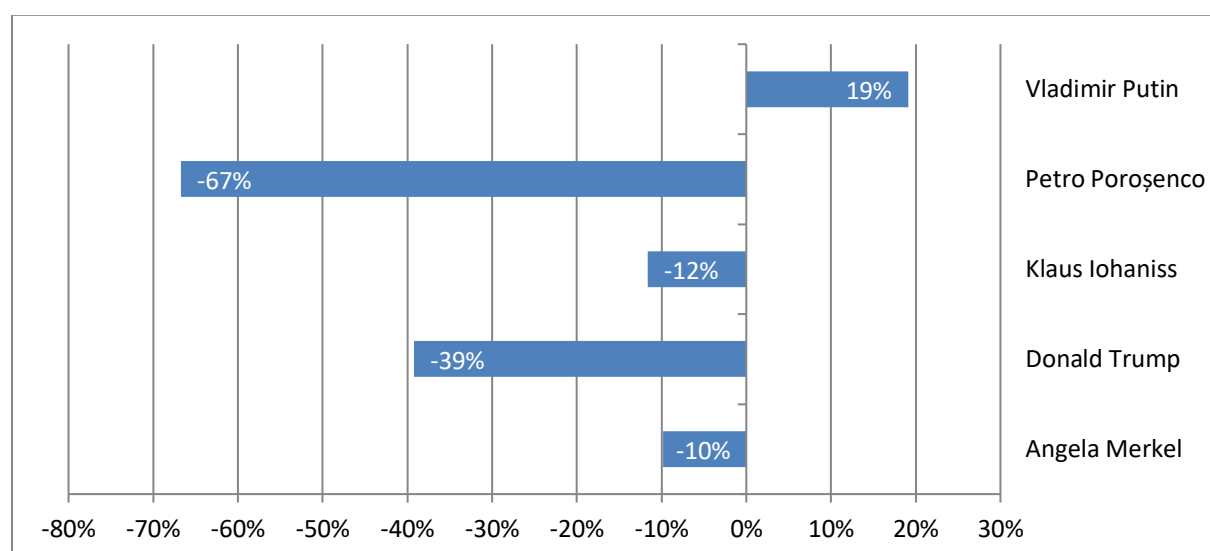
in Vladimir Putin and, also artificially, it can lower the level of trust in the leaders of the Western bloc.

For a better understanding how the Russian Federation is shaping the public opinion about the 5 international leaders, we will systematize the sources that deliver news about them (Table 4).

**Figure 8. The ratio between positive and negative news about international political leaders in the Moldovan television space (for both monitored weeks)**



**Chart 9. Relation between Positive Trust Level and Mistrust in International Political Leaders (Barometer of Public Opinion, November 2017)**





**Table 4. Sources of the news about state leaders according to their weight.**

		Russian Media	Plahotniuc's affiliated media group	Moldovan indiependent media	Dodon's affiliated media	Romanian media (ProTV)
1 <sup>st</sup> week	Angela Merkel	48%	27%	25%		
	Donald Trump	64%	22%	12%		2%
	Klaus Iohannis		100%			
	Petro Poroşenko	31%	62% <sup>6</sup>	7%		
	Vladimir Putin	88%	4%	6%		2%
2 <sup>nd</sup> week	Angela Merkel	100%				
	Donald Trump	58%	11%	16%		15%
	Klaus Iohannis	7%	48%	17%	3%	24%
	Petro Poroşenko	92%	8%			
	Vladimir Putin	86%	8%	2%	3%	2%

We see a direct, visible impact also in Figure 9. Political leaders whose activity is mainly reflected in the Republic of Moldova through the Russian media (Putin, Merkel, Trump, Poroshenko<sup>7</sup>) are affected by an abnormal deviation of the level of trust. Basically, Russia has a dominant position in informing about its own country, Ukraine, the EU and the US. Thanks to this tool, it manages to shape the opinion of the Moldovans about these countries. There is another case, that of Klaus Iohannis; the President does not appear in Russian news and his image is not so badly affected. In the case of the Romanian President, we can see an indirect impact of the negative image creation built by the Russian press regarding the European countries.

Reflecting the work of international leaders is such a sensitive indicator that we can easily translate it into all the information about the two geo-political blocks: Western (EU and US) and Eastern (around the Russian Federation). Through the abundance of negative news about Western leaders and positive news about Vladimir Putin, the Russian Federation distorts the Moldovan informational space. This is certainly the leading cause of the unnaturally large popularity of the Euro-Asian integrationist option and the visible diminution of the pro-European option followers. Moreover, given the Russian

<sup>6</sup> Trebuie să precizăm că interesul sporit față de Petro Poroşenko în prima săptămână de monitorizare în mass-media locală din RM a fost cauzat de promulgarea controversatei legi privind învățământul minorităților naționale în Ucraina. A fost o știre care vizează conaționalii noștri, respectiv a devenit subiect pentru buletinele locale.

<sup>7</sup> We have to say that the increased interest in Petro Poroshenko during the first week of monitoring in the local mass media in Moldova was caused by the promulgation of the controversial law on the education of national minorities in Ukraine. It was a news story for the Moldovan interest, and it became a topic for local news broadcasts.

dominance in the opinion-forming segment about the two directions of integration, the popularity of European integration in Moldova is still at an unexpectedly high level.

### **The kind of news the Russian media broadcasts - the main narratives of Russian propaganda**

In addition to the negative news about Western leaders, positive news about Vladimir Putin, the general picture induced by the Russian press is the result of a strategic approach in terms of messages. The main narrative is building a true cult of Vladimir Putin's personality. Putin is presented as the perfect leader. The second narrative is building a distorted image of the quality of life and governance in Russia. Typical for state-controlled media in Russia is avoiding uncomfortable issues for the government. No corruption investigations, no scandal related to dignitaries' abuses, no news about military or government failures will come into Russian news bulletins.

The next strategic narrative is the systemic construction of a distorted picture about the Western countries. The denigration of the leaders of these countries is a central priority - they are presented as inefficient, aggressive, conceited, etc. It is built an image of the "West in putrefaction" with an incapacitated leadership that has only one purpose in life - to abuse Russia's "natural" interests. Pro-Western states are presented as being dominated by domestic economic and social problems, with an exponential increase in extremist (fascist) movements. In contrast, the Russian Federation, through its leader Vladimir Putin, is presented as the only world pacifier.

The journalistic quality of all (!) news that reflects the activity of foreign political leaders on Russian televisions is below any acceptable deontological norm's level. Things like presenting the whole range of opinions, giving the right to reply, not implying terms and expressions that can influence the spectator's opinion - all this is simply lacking at Russian presented news. We cannot talk about a quantitatively balanced presentation of international leaders and local politicians in the Russian Federation.

A special case study deserves the news about Vladimir Putin at the three Russian TV channels (Pervyi Kanal, Rossia 1 and NTV). The news regarding Russian President's daily activity occupies a special emission time at the beginning of each news bulletin. In fact, it is not a single story ever, there are 3-4 news items brought in a long report, which can reach up to 12 minutes. At all of the three TV stations, the news about Putin has an identical structure. That is, they are not even written inside the editorial board, but by the President's communications service. Even the intros and the background images are

similar at each of the three TV stations. Moreover, in most cases, the images depicting President Putin are similar, that is, they are not even filmed by the cameramen of that television channel.

We have presented these details to draw attention upon the fact that what appears in the Russian news broadcasts cannot be considered as information. This informational content can only be defined as manipulation. And, like any manipulation, it is malicious, pursuing political goals.

Moldova's situation has no equivalent in the world. We will not find any other country where the whole foreign policy agenda in the television space is dominated by a foreign state. Russian televisions have a high popularity unlikely in other former Soviet countries, neither in Belarus, nor in Armenia or Kyrgyzstan, the channels retransmitted from Russia hold a dominant position.

We will not have to examine the causes and the history of the problem, it is certain that it is a problem. We do not innovate by conclusion that the Russian media has an influential position in the Republic of Moldova, nor is it a matter of security and interference in domestic politics. What we have succeeded is to analyze in details the content of the problem and explain the mechanisms by which this influence works.

Unlike many Western countries, which have recently fought with the issue of Russian media influence, the situation in the Republic of Moldova has remained unchanged since the Independence Day till nowadays. Russian television has always dominated the formation of citizens' views on geo-political options. TV stations that retransmit Russian Pervyi Kanal (formerly ORT and Ostankino) have always been on the first place in Moldovan preferences. This was due to the much more attractive entertainment content than the product of the domestic or Romanian market, the economic interests of the TV licensees in the country and the back-story arrangements between the Moldovan and Russian politicians.

Another key difference about the Russian interference in the informational space in other countries is that Moldova is not the target of direct manipulation campaigns; it is simply integrated into the informational space of the Russian Federation. In the case of EU countries, there are created media institutions, messages and narratives specific to the local context. Meanwhile, in Moldova, it is delivered exactly the same content as the Russian people receive. The analytical news and TV programs in Moldova are created for the domestic use in Russia. Respectively, the main objective is not to undermine the confidence in the democratic model and internal destabilization, as in the US and in the EU countries. The same objective applies to Moldovan citizens as for the Russians – the

main objective is to build a cult of Putin's personality and trusting that Russia is the "heaven on earth" and the West is the embodiment of the supreme evil desiring the destruction of the "holy Russia".

Without denying the role of other factors - church, social networks, local politicians in the Republic of Moldova, Internet manipulation and fun content, given the figures presented above, we can say that these are only complementary and secondary factors compared to the opinion poll formed by Russian televisions.

## Ways to solve the problem - the new "anti-propaganda" law

The situation is certainly part from the field of national security and media policy. Discussions about the diminishing and even the limitation of the dominant presence of Russian televisions have been present in Moldova for many years. These initiatives have materialized in the form of numerous draft laws, some originally approved, during the years 2005-2017. However, every time they have been sabotaged by the interests of politicians who have interests in the media market. For example, the intention to limit the presence of Russian news and information broadcasts in 2014 was blocked by Vlad Plahotniuc, who has a contract for retransmission of the Russian channel Pervii Kanal in Moldova.

Already in 2017, following a visit to the US, Vlad Plahotniuc came with the initiative to exclude news and analytics from the Russian Federation from Moldovan TV. The initiative was materialized in the form of a draft law passed in June 2017 in the Parliament. After being forgotten for 5 months, the draft was urgently voted in two readings in Parliament at a new visit by Vlad Plahotniuc to the US. After a series of delays generated by President Dodon's refusal to promulgate the law, it did not come into force until February 12, 2018. From the initiative until its implementation, it has just been 8 months, a term that has no objective justification.

Following the publication of the initiative, we have worked with another colleague from "WatchDog.MD" Community to evaluate the impact of this initiative<sup>8</sup>. At that stage we have drawn attention to the fact that the project leaves spaces to partially avoid the desired impact. However, we found that the initiative is a necessary one and needs to be finalized. The new law supposes that re-broadcasting of news, analytic-political and military programs from the states that have not ratified the European Convention on

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<sup>8</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzXusHtfb4ztUTU1eEJVUmROZ1k/view>

Trans-border Television is forbidden in Moldova. The goal of the law was clearly to ban the retransmission of news and political talk shows from the Russian Federation.

On Feb. 12, the three broadcasters, which retransmit Russian channels and are in the top 10 popular TV channels, stopped retransmitting news bulletins from Russian partners. PrimeTV and NTV Moldova have replaced these programs with others, also re-broadcasted but not forbidden by the new law. The same was done by RTR Moldova, but it has resorted to a procedure about the danger that we have prevented at the stage of evaluation of the draft law. RTR Moldova takes over part of the news from Russia 1, modifies them insignificantly and introduces them in their news bulletin as "international" news. Such a procedure does not fall under the impact of the new law.

We cannot exclude the fact that NTV Moldova, controlled by Igor Dodon, will do something similar in the near future. So far, the amount of news produced in the Russian Federation has fallen substantially in the news broadcasts, even at RTR Moldova. We cannot be sure however, that this will last for a long time. Below we will present the results of a similar monitoring carried out for the first week of application of the new law. There is a visible change in the informational environment, but there is no certainty about its sustainability.

The most important impact has yet been the elimination of the retransmitted Russian news at PrimeTV. In June 2017, we have asked the initiator of the "anti-propaganda" law, Vlad Plahotniuc, to show real political will and to immediately give up the retransmission of manipulative programs at his own TV station. If to apply the same procedure as RTR Moldova (to take Russian news and introduce them as *foreign news* in the local news broadcasts), NTV Moldova will return to the distribution of manipulating content from Russia, and finally the only visible impact of the new law will be the disappearance of this type of programs from Prime TV. In this case, a natural question arises about the law initiator's sincerity. For such an impact, a personal decision with the managers from Prime could have been taken long ago.

It is certain that the new law already has an undeniable positive impact on the TV informational environment in Moldova. But it is not sustainable. Neither the legislative solution (linked to the European Convention on Transfrontier Television) is very functional, although it is a pretty elegant find. Firstly, the law has affected non-manipulative televisions (such as RBK and RainTV from Russia, or a news station in South Korea), secondly it leaves room for a return of the Russian similar content in the form of a "personal product".

## Policies and actions suggestions to protect TV space from manipulating content

From a public policy point of view, the new law announces the objective of protecting the informational space from manipulative content that affects the national security. So far there can be no objection. As we have seen above, through massive presence and aggressive manipulation, the Russian Federation has a decisive influence on the formation of geo-political opinions, thus determining the elections' results. Such interference is inadmissible in any existent/independent state. The proposed solution does not, however, address the existence of this manipulative news, but the jurisdiction from which they are retransmitted. This jurisdiction can be modified; the content can be modified so that it is not treated as retransmitted.

The problem is not in the source of the manipulative news, but in their existence. A more appropriate solution would be to extend the provisions of the Audiovisual Code to retransmitted content, regardless of its origin. It should be applied similarly to all media content. Unfortunately, the current version of the Code provides only strict rules on the presence of the local politicians within the local televisions. Foreign news does not fall under Article 7 (2), which requires a balanced presence of all the political actors.

However, the new draft of paragraph (1) implies the application to the retransmitted content the principle by which "political and social pluralism is achieved and ensured ...". However, the words' formulation is rather vague. In order to truly achieve the objective of protecting the TV space from manipulation, a number of amendments to the Audiovisual Code can be implemented:

1. Ensuring balance in foreign news by forbidding the existence of more than 20% of the total of foreign news about a single country or its exponents;
2. Description of a precise mechanism ensuring the quantitative and qualitative balance of news and broadcasts (whether produced locally or retransmitted);
3. For the non-observance of a minimum quality and for the retransmission of manipulating content, the Audiovisual Council will impose sanctions, including the exclusion of programs from the grid (in the case of retransmissions);
4. In order to ensure informational security, the monitoring capacities for the TV content within the BCC (Broadcasting Coordinating Council) must be stricter compared to the current ones;
5. Requiring broadcasters to include in news broadcasts at least 25% of international news content.

Manipulative news bulletins and talk-shows have to disappear because they are brain washing the media consumers and not because they are produced in the Russian Federation.

In the way of applying such a legislative solution we see only one impediment - the total lack of independence and training of the BCC staff. Even the current legislation is quite demanding in terms of political pluralism and fairness of the news. If the BCC was to apply these provisions within a maximum of two months, all the televisions of the group controlled by Vlad Plahotniuc and Igor Dodon should not be licensed for broadcasting. Given this situation, there is a risk that the law will not apply to external propaganda, just as it does not apply to the internal propaganda.

It is essential and a priority for the state to ensure the independence and the capabilities of the national regulator (BCC). If this condition is to be achieved, the securing of the television informational space from the external and the internal propaganda can be granted in a short period of time.

### First six days' result of anti-propaganda law enforcement's monitoring

In order to determine the difference brought by the new law in the Moldovan television informational space, we have monitored the presence of the state leaders in the remaining news bulletins and the weight they have accrued. For the time being, only the first 6 days have been systematized. The accumulated data already allow us to have some substantial conclusions (See Table 5).

**Table 5. Monitoring results of international leaders' presence in TV news according to the rating and context (February 12- Feb. 17, 2018).**

	Leader's name	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	TOTAL	Score
	Bashar al-Assad			0.19	0.19	0
12-17 feb	Benjamin Netaniahu		0.68		0.68	-0.68
	Donald Trump	1.69	0.66	0.84	3.19	1.03
	Kim Jong-Un			0.61	0.61	0
	Klaus Iohannis	0.28			0.28	0.28
	Petro Poroşenko	0.65	0.27	0.65	1.57	0.38
	Recep Erdogan		0.96		0.96	-0.96
	Theresa May			0.42	0.42	0
	Vladimir Putin	2.99	0.6	0.42	4.01	2.39

The first thing that needs to be noticed is the spectacular decrease in the share of foreign political news during the monitored period. The total score accumulated by news about state leaders over the three days is only 11.91 points. For comparison, from Monday to Wednesday of the second week monitored, the total score was 27.97. If we compare the other indicators with the weeks monitored before the new legal provisions' application, we get the following results:

- 25% of all news about the activity of international leaders in the TV informational space in Moldova is positive news about Vladimir Putin;
- 34% of the news about international leaders at the Top 10 TV channels in Moldova is news about Vladimir Putin;
- 53% of the positive news about international leaders is news about Vladimir Putin;
- 21% of the negative news about international leaders is about Donald Trump, while similar news about Putin represents 19%;
- The Russian state-controlled televisions share their news about the international leaders in a proportion of 42% on the informational TV space of Moldova through the RTR channel. On the second place, there come the TV channels controlled directly or indirectly by the government from Chisinau (Prime, Moldova 1, Publika TV, Channel 2 and Channel 3) which gained 31 % and the independent televisions from Chisinau (JurnalTV, ProTV Chisinau and TV8) share 16% of this weight. NTV Moldova, controlled by persons affiliated to President Dodon, had a share of 5%. The Romanian media held a 5.5% share through ProTV channel.

The six days of monitoring prove that the Russian Federation will still be able to maintain a rather influential, if not a dominant, position in the formation of geo-political options even through a single block of news on a single television. This will happen if the local televisions continue to neglect the external news. Even so, we can already conclude that applying the new law will eliminate the dominant position of the Russian Federation in forming views about the foreign policy and about the international leaders. But there is room for much better, above being exposed already by us possible legislative solutions. Below we will also present recommendations for the editorial policy or possible ways to intervene in order to dismantle the Russian domination in voter's behavior formation.



Vladimir Putin remains however the most *present* politician, but also with the highest positive score. The major difference is the high drop in the number of negative news about the Western leaders.

### Non-legislative solutions to protect TV space from external manipulation

The example of the last three monitored days shows that the issue of the influence of the manipulating Russian Federation's mass media on the opinion of the Moldovan citizens will not be solved without the creation of consistent alternative information. If for the majority of voters the traditional information channels will present non-objective information about the competing geopolitical blocs, it can be easily combated through products made by Moldovan media affiliated with Russia. Even the Internet / Social networks can easily ensure the continuation of Russian media domination in the event that sufficient objective information on foreign policy is not disseminated through television and other media sources.

Television remains the main source of information, and it is in the national interest and the external partners should acknowledge that TV consumers should be properly informed about the foreign policy. And it is not about informational campaigns with spots, street banners and flyers about the benefits of European integration; they are virtually powerless in the face of an EU and US denigration campaign. The solution is not to explain the benefits to the RM, citizens need to realize that integration into the European space is the integration into a safe and well-governed space. This requires that every citizen receive this constant information.

The best contribution of the external partners would be to support news programs and news stories of the independent televisions; so as to increase their quantity and quality. The subjects to which attention is drawn are the same as in the Russian press, but they are presented equidistantly and objectively.

### Conclusions

The external option is the main argument for voting one party or another in the Republic of Moldova. This is certainly not normal, but it is an objective reality. Given that it can shape the visions of how good each of the two geo-political options is, the Russian Federation has decisively influenced all the elections in the Republic of Moldova since Moldova's independence gain. After the military intervention against Ukraine, the Russian state has launched an internal campaign to denigrate the Western states and, implicitly, their leadership. This campaign has totally invaded Moldova by reducing the popularity of European integration and the rating of the Western political leaders.

In addition to the non-stop anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian propaganda campaign, the worship of Vladimir Putin's personality cult also took on further revolutions. Voters in the Republic of Moldova were directly affected. The impact is so great that the level of confidence in Vladimir Putin is high even among those who support the European integration option. In these two parallel campaigns, the role of Russian televisions retransmitted to the Moldovan public was decisive.

The level of indoctrination related to Vladimir Putin's person in the Republic of Moldova is so high that a simple photograph and a written message raised the Socialist Party from 1.5% to 21% in 2014. Basically, if we say that President Dodon's popularity is a mere projection of Vladimir Putin's level of trust, it will not be an exaggerated statement. The PSRM example illustrates the best how the Russian Federation influences the elections in the Republic of Moldova.

The situation is solely due to local politicians. By offering at ridiculous prices the right to retransmit the Russian channels (that is to say to corrupt the consumers), through backstage understandings and games of politicians with the purpose of a geo-political division of the population, the Russian Federation solved a strategic objective – to take the control over the Moldovan informational space. Objectively, for any Moldovan citizen there can be one better option – to have a better living standard. The manipulation of the public opinion by the Russian press in the Republic of Moldova has persuaded many Moldovans to act against their own interests.

We can only salute the effort to secure the informational space from this harmful influence. Without believing in the sincerity or the voluntary nature of this initiative, we encourage authorities to make the effort by completing further the legislation and to ensure the independence of the Broadcasting Coordinator Council.

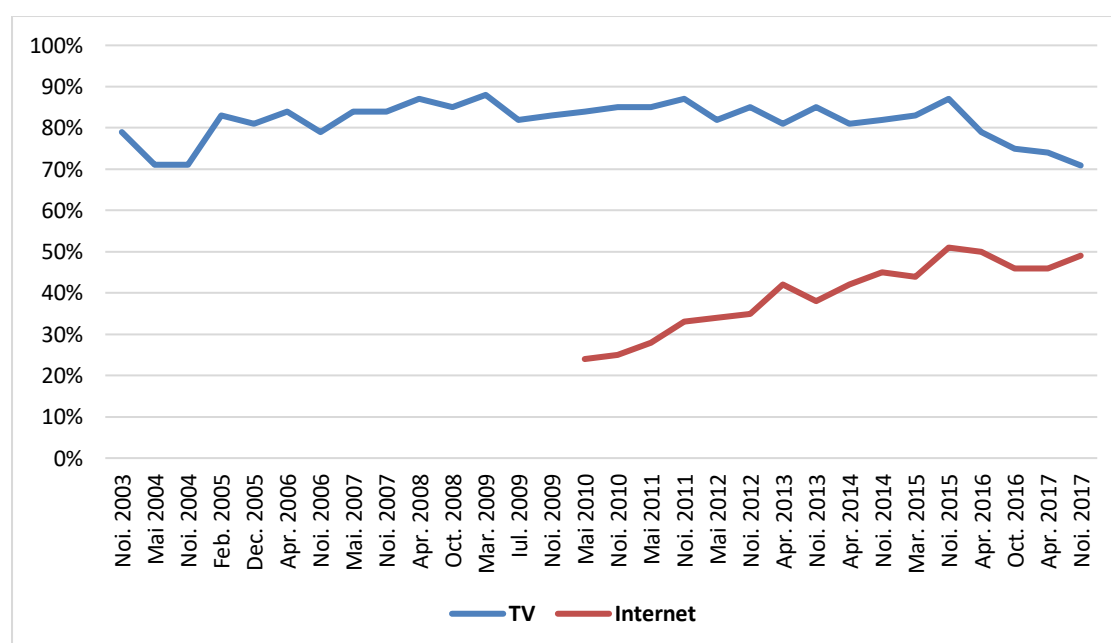
If in the case of other states we can talk about elections' results intervention of the Russian Federation, in the case of Moldova we can even assume the determination of these elections. Given that the Russian Federation determines 40% of the votes, it can no longer be a mere influence. If we refer to the situation of the media space in the Republic of Moldova until February 12, 2018, then it can't be defined as part of a media war. In the case of the Republic of Moldova we can talk about a real ``media occupation``.

## Annex. Media consumption's specifics in the Republic of Moldova and the impact on (geo-) political preferences of media consumers.

by Vasile Cantarji, sociologist, CBS AXA.

Citizens' media preferences are traditionally measured within the Public Opinion Barometer. Currently, TV and the Internet are considered to be the main sources of information. Figure 1 shows the dynamics of the respondents' weight that indicates that they are watching / accessing daily TV and Internet. We find that TV is the most watched type of media. At the same time, the Internet has also grown, which is currently accessed daily by one of two citizens.

**Figure 1. Share of the population that is informed daily from ...**



According to the Barometer of Public Opinion in Nov. 2017, 71.4% of citizens watched daily TV programs, 19.3% sporadically watched it and only 9.3% not at all<sup>9</sup>. In the case of the Internet, it is accessed daily by 50.9% of citizens, 14.7% - sporadically and 34.4% are not accessing it at all.

There are variations in age and place of residence, the older people in rural areas are accessing television, while young people in the urban area are accessing the Internet.

From the perspective of the intentions of involvement in the eventual parliamentary elections, in the case of television, the highest level of consumption was recorded for the

<sup>9</sup> In order to simplify the presentation, the percentage distribution was achieved without the share of "do not know" and "do not answer" answers.

people who expressed their intention to go to vote and those that are decided who to vote for.

**Table 1. Segmentation and profile according to frequency of media production's consumption**

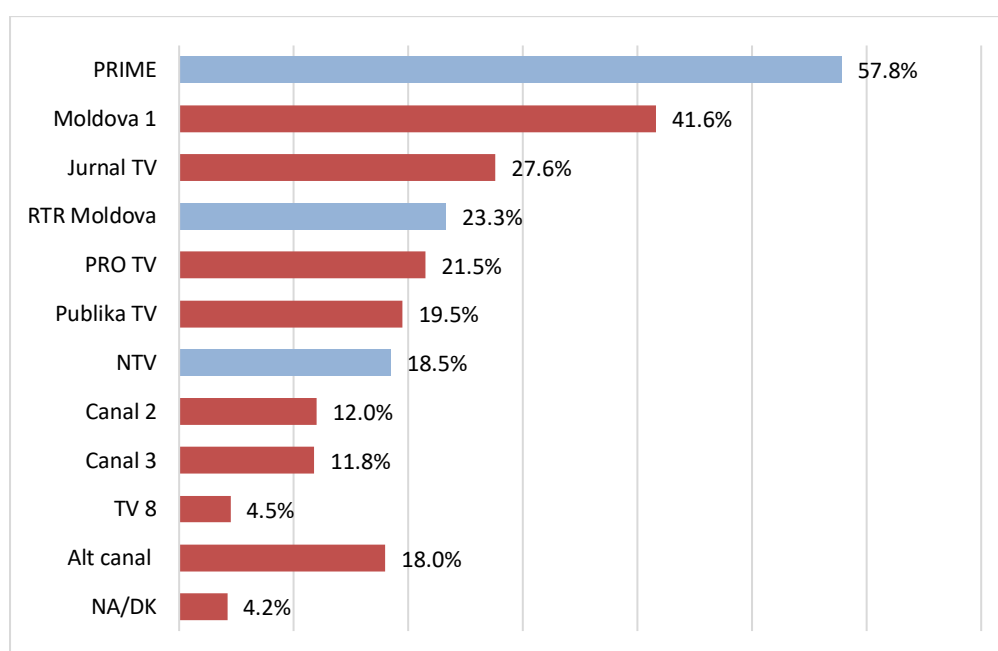
		Consum producția TV:			Consum Internet:		
		Consum zilnic	Consum moderat	Consum scăzut	Consum zilnic	Consum moderat	Consum scăzut
<b>Total</b>		<b>71,4%</b>	<b>19,3%</b>	<b>9,3%</b>	<b>50,9%</b>	<b>14,7%</b>	<b>34,4%</b>
Vârsta:	18-29 ani	52,9%	30,9%	16,2%	82,7%	11,0%	6,3%
	30-44 ani	71,0%	22,5%	6,5%	62,3%	17,1%	20,6%
	45-59 ani	80,8%	13,3%	5,9%	38,3%	18,9%	42,8%
	60+ ani	78,5%	11,5%	10,0%	18,8%	10,7%	70,5%
Mediu de reședință:	Oraș	66,4%	22,9%	10,7%	65,6%	13,1%	21,2%
	Sat	76,0%	16,0%	8,0%	36,5%	16,3%	47,2%
Tip alegător:	Indeciși	69,4%	22,1%	8,5%	53,6%	12,9%	33,5%
	Nu va participa la alegeri	67,9%	20,7%	11,4%	50,6%	17,7%	31,7%
	Deciși	73,4%	17,4%	9,2%	49,4%	15,0%	35,6%

Another specific for Moldova is related to the increased volume of media production created in the Russian Federation, and retransmitted to Moldova. Figure 2 lists the main TV channels ordered according to the share of respondents who mentioned them among the top three channels watched most often. This traditional top is headed by Prime, which re-broadcasts media production from Russia, followed by the public television.

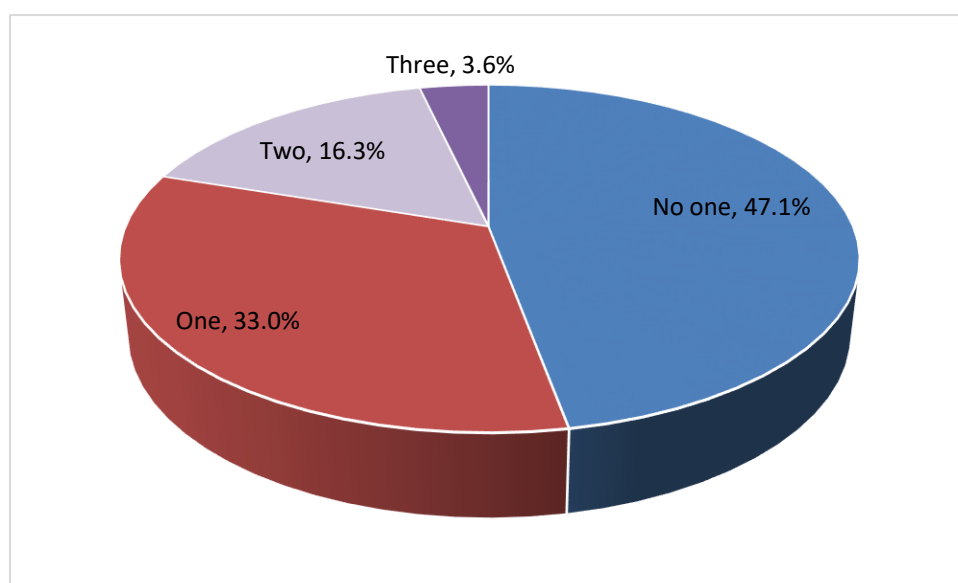
It is worth mentioning that three channels that re-broadcast the media production from the Russian Federation can be found in the top ten popular TV channels (Prime, NTV, RTR) and two of them in the top five preferred by the Moldovan population.

For later analysis, these data were used to express the preference level for Russian media production, quantified by the number of such channels among the 3 preferred by the respondent. Thus, less than half of the respondents (47.1%) did not mention any of the three televisions. Other 33.0% - one, 16.3% - two and 3.6% - mentioned all three channels.

**Figure 2. TV channels' popularity**



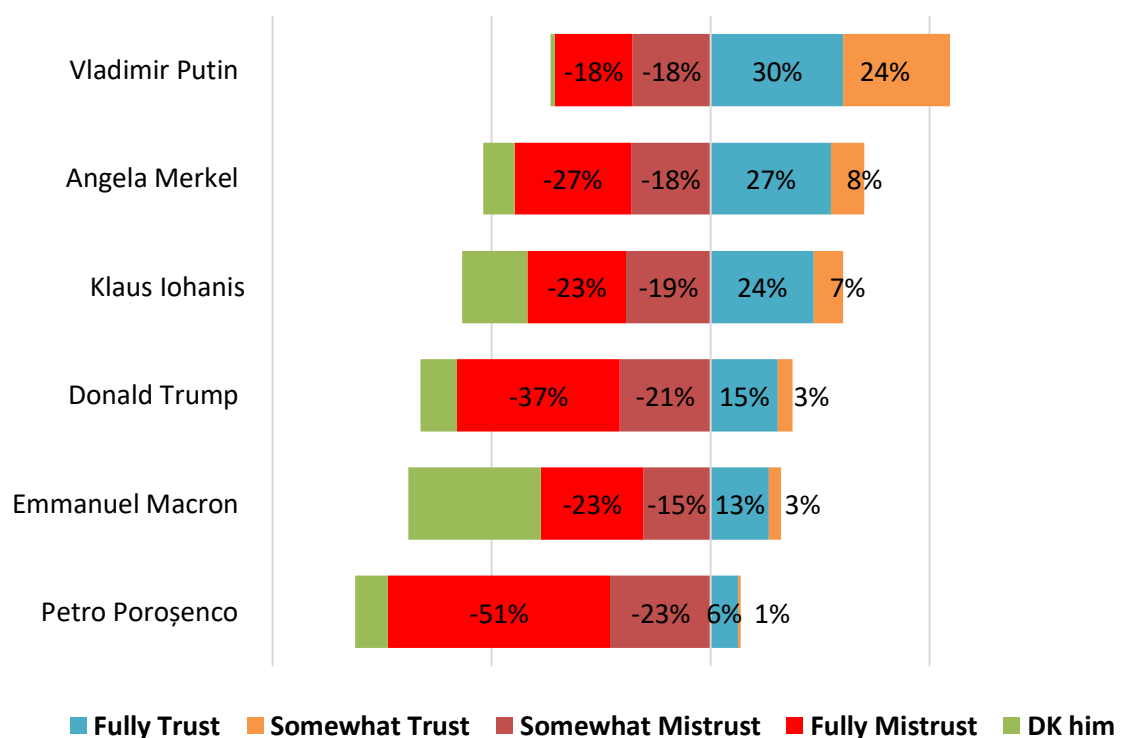
**Figure 3. Number of channels retransmitting media production from Russia to the top three preferred channels named by the respondents**



The aim of this analysis is to measure the potential impact of Russian media production on the domestic geopolitical and political preferences of Moldovan citizens. In the following analysis, the number of TV stations which retransmit Russian media production to the top ten preferred channels (named by respondents) will serve as an indicator expressing the influence of the Russian media on the respondent. This impact will be analyzed in correlation with the confidence expressed in national and international political leaders, as well as based on geopolitical preferences.

In November 2017, Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, was the head of the top compared to other political leaders such as the Presidents of Romania, Ukraine, the United States, France, and the Chancellor of Germany. Moreover, his popularity was far above the popularity of any political leader in Moldova.

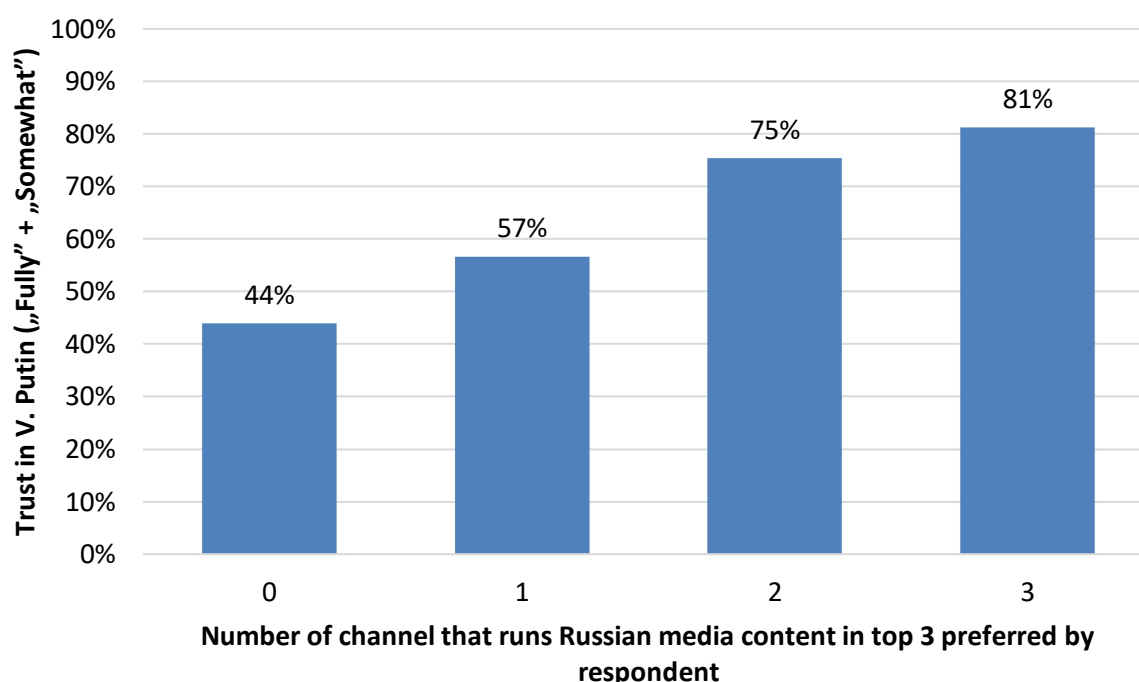
**Figure 4. Level of confidence in political leaders from other countries**



Barometer of Public Opinion data from November 2017 indicates a strong relationship between Russian media consumption and the level of confidence in the Russian leader. Although in all the categories of respondents the confidence level is a solid one, the oscillation ranges from 44% among those who did not nominate any TV channel with retransmission of broadcasts from Russia among its favorites, up to 81% in the last group. Trust level increases steadily from one step (preferred channel number) to another.

In the case of other political leaders, without exception, the relationship is opposite, and the discrepancy is a visible one. In the case of those who have not named any TV channels re-broadcasting Russian channels, the level of trust in leaders such as Macron, Trump, Iohannis, or Merkel is double compared to those who named three such channels (See Table 2).

**Figure 5. Relationship between the preference level for Russian media production and trust in Vladimir Putin**

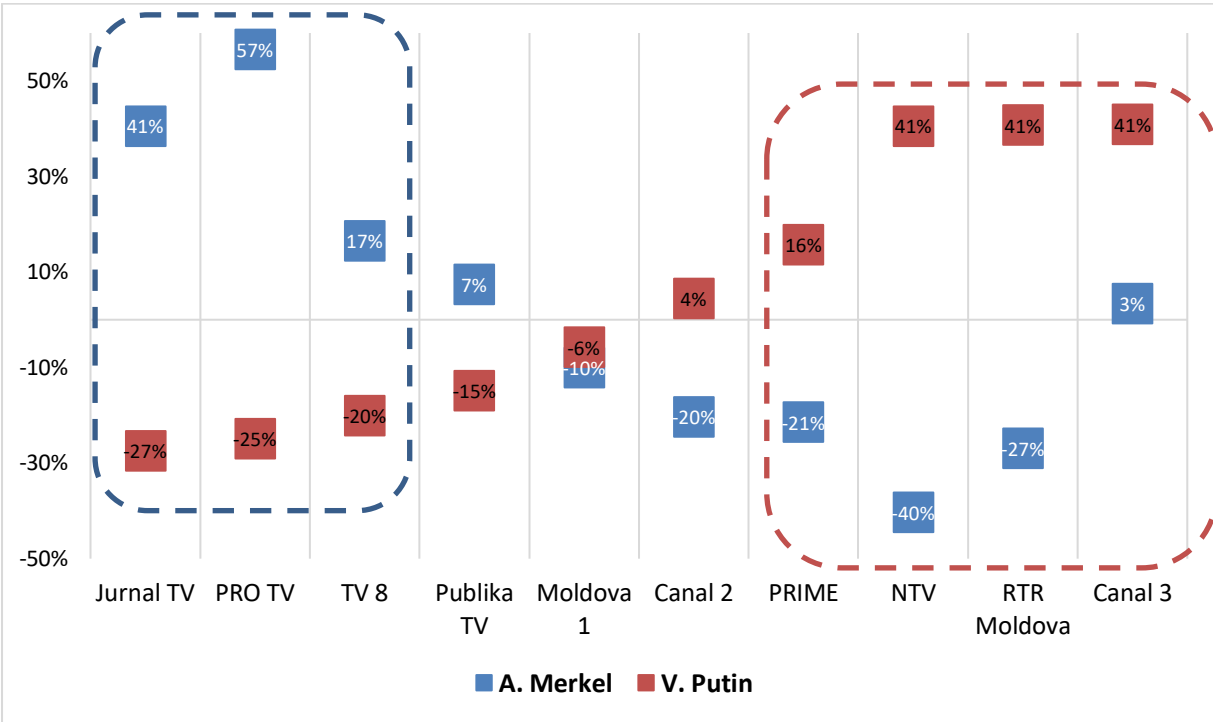


**Table 2. The relationship between preference level for Russian media production and confidence in political leaders**

	Numărul de canale cu producție mediatică rusă în top 10 preferate			
	0	1	2	3
Petro Poroșenco	6,6%	8,6%	6,6%	0,0%
Emmanuel Macron	20,1%	15,1%	7,0%	10,8%
Donald Trump	20,9%	20,0%	11,6%	11,8%
Klaus Iohannis	35,8%	31,4%	14,7%	15,4%
Angela Merkel	43,2%	31,2%	21,5%	22,7%

In general, there are few TV channels in Moldova, the audience of which would be balanced in terms of trust in foreign policy leaders. In this case we compared the level of trust in V. Putin and A. Merkel of the top ten channels' audience, which allowed us to highlight the obvious "antagonism" between the supporters of the two political leaders. The audience of channels like Jurnal TV, PRO TV and TV8 tend to have a much higher level of trust in Angela Merkel, while the confidence in Vladimir Putin is, on the contrary, below average. The audience of channels like Publika TV, Moldova 1 and Channel 2 are more balanced in this respect. All three channels that are retransmitting Russian media production (Prime, NTV and RTR) as well as, surprisingly, Channel 3 are placed on the other side with a pro-Putin prominent public.

Figure 6. The relationship between the preference for certain channels’ production and trust in V. Putin and A. Merkel<sup>10</sup>



At the national level, relations are also quite obvious. In order to measure the level of correlation, we use the level of trust in the two main political figures on the national arena, according to the Barometer of Public Opinion - Igor Dodon and Maia Sandu, the confidence in the political parties led or associated with these politicians, and the intention to vote for these parties at possible parliamentary elections. We reiterate that these parties and leaders in all of these indicators in the November 2017 Barometer of Public Opinion occupied the first two positions on the one hand, being on the other hand perceived as antagonists in the political struggle in Moldova. This makes it easier to see the discrepancies in the correlation with the preferences for media production from the Russian Federation.

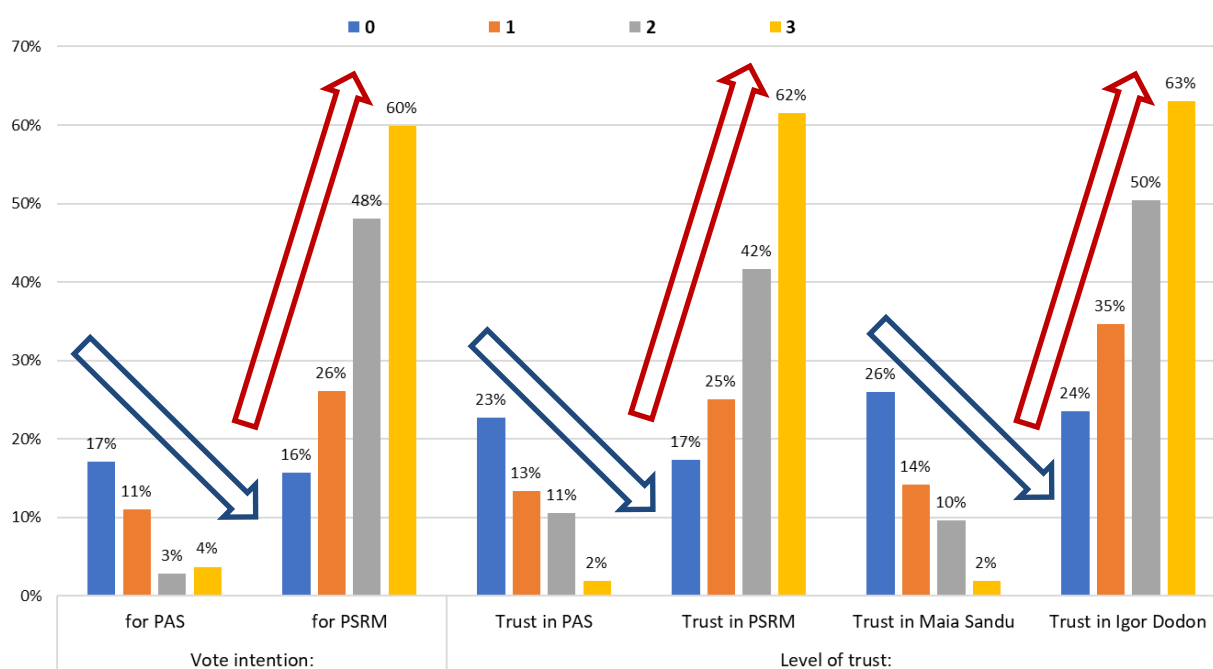
The results of the latest BPO poll indicate a very strong predictability of political preferences based on preferences for Russian media production. The level of trust in Igor Dodon and in the PSRM (Socialist Party of Moldova), as well as the voting intention for this party directly correlates with the consumption level of Russian media production, and the level of correlation is very pronounced. The number of those intending to vote for PSRM, who trust in this formation, and in I. Dodon (among those who named at least one from the channels retransmitting Russian media products) exceeds 60%, being three to

<sup>10</sup> It is expressed in percentage points as compared to the confidence ("very much" + "much") recorded on the whole sample



four times higher than among those who did not have such channels through their preferences.

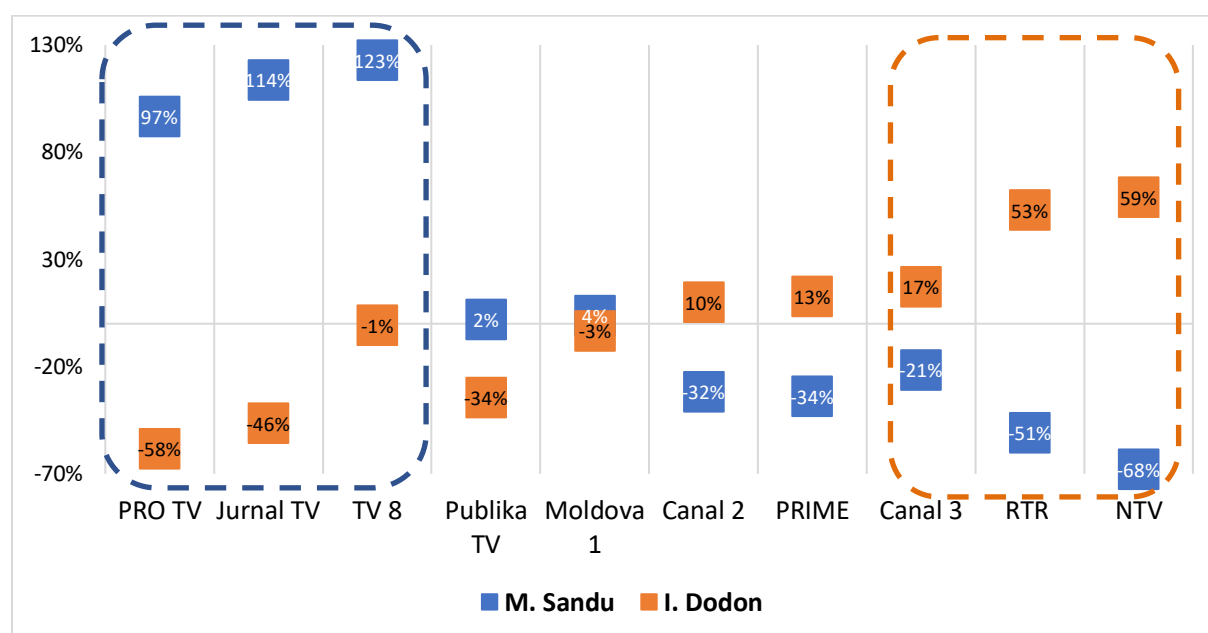
**Figure 7. Relationship between the preference level for Russian media production and national political preferences**



The relationship between channel audience specificity and the attitude towards national political leaders is similar to those found above regarding the trust in V. Putin and A. Merkel. The audience of channels like PRO TV, Jurnal TV and TV8 show higher levels of trust in M. Sandu, and lower in I. Dodon. The audience of the Prime, NTV and RTR Channels as well as Canal 2 and Canal 3 alike show a higher level of trust in I. Dodon and much lower in M. Sandu. Therefore, the correlations of the media preferences with the confidence in these two political leaders perfectly align with the positions of these politicians regarding external orientations.

In line with the variations in trust in the political leaders, we will demonstrate in the following part that integrationist geopolitical preferences are also in close correlation with media preferences.

**Figure 8. Relationship between preference for certain channels' production and trust in I. Dodon and M. Sandu<sup>11</sup>**



The support for the EU integration project has been measured in the BPO since 2003 with the following question: If the next Sunday there will be a referendum on Moldova's integration to the European Union the next year, would you vote Pro or Against? Between 2003 and 2007, the number of supporters increased, reaching a maximum of about 75% in the BPO in November 2007. In the aftermath, there can be noticed a steady decline in the indicator supporting integration in the European Union.

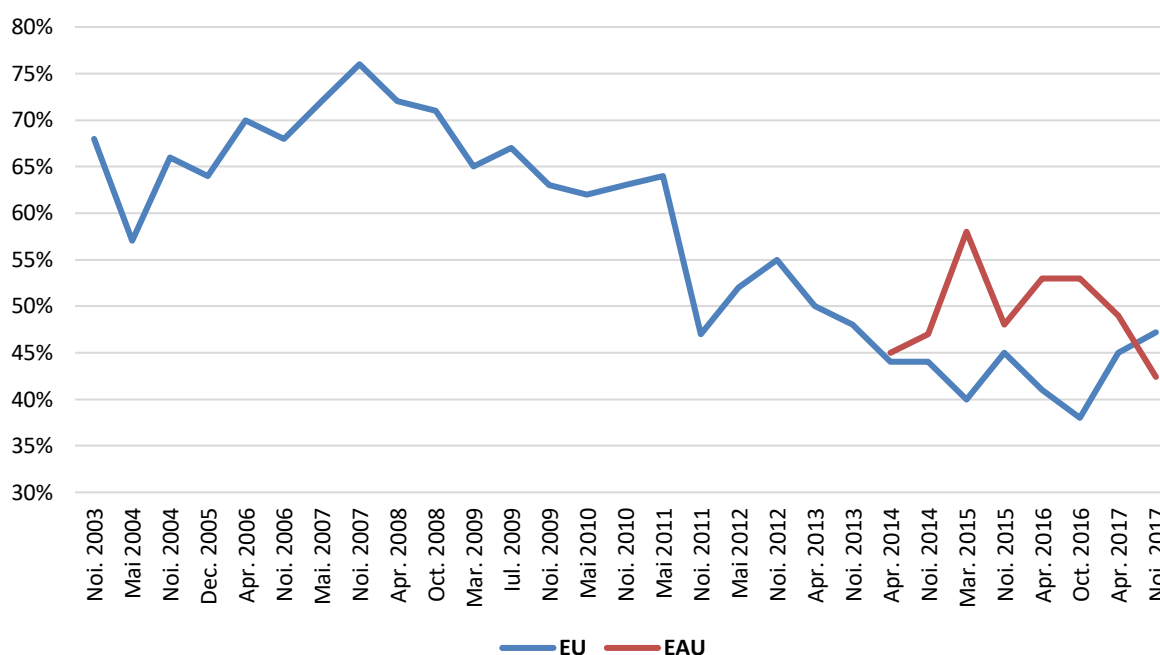
Since April 2014, the similar question has been addressed with reference to integration into the Euro-Asian Union (EAU). Support for EAU membership oscillated around 50%, with a slight advantage and pronounced antagonism with the level of support for EU integration, and only in November 2017 the positions reversed insignificantly<sup>12</sup>.

In the BPO from November 2017, 42% of respondents pronounced themselves pro- EAU and 47% pro-EU. At the same time, 17% of respondents expressed their support for both directions. Two-thirds of respondents have antagonistic positions, 41% are pro-EU and against EAU, and 37% pro- EAU and against the EU. Another 5% of citizens do not support integration into any of the unions.

<sup>11</sup> It is expressed in percentage points as compared to the confidence ("very much" + "much") recorded on the whole sample

<sup>12</sup> It is worth mentioning that this wave of BPO has also recorded a low level of trust in V. Putin.

**Figure 9. Share of respondents who would vote for pro eventual referendum on integration into...**



**Table 3. Geopolitical preferences<sup>13</sup>**

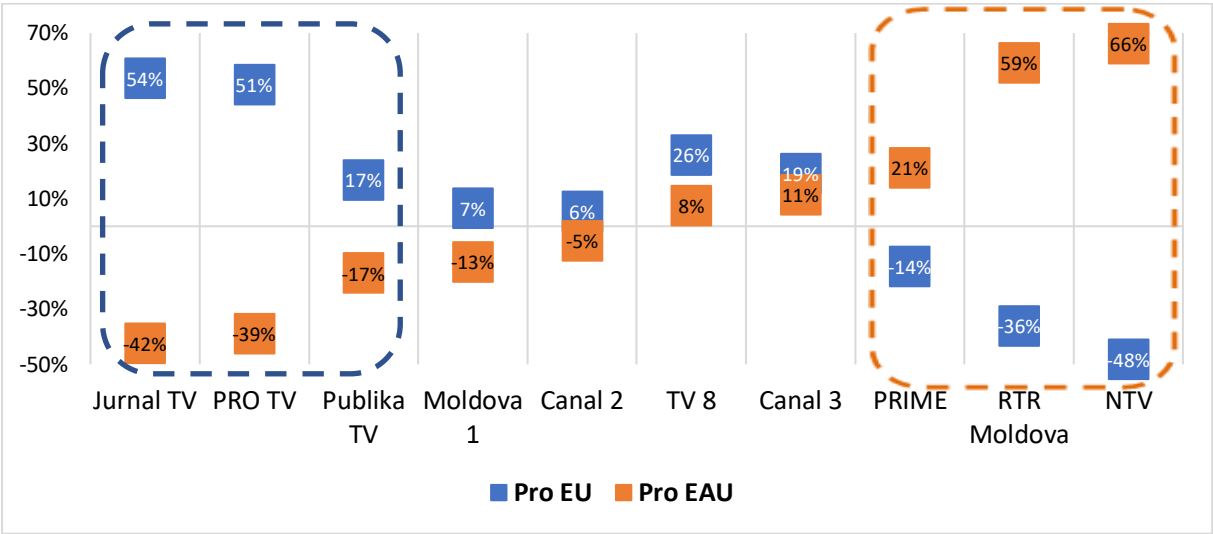
		UE	
		Pro	Against
UEA	Pro	17%	37%
	Against	41%	5%

*Sursa: Public Opinion Barometer, November 2017*

Also, in the case of preferences for integrationist orientations, the public manifests preferences from different TV channels. BPO's relationships show that citizens who are more often informed from TV channels such as Jurnal TV and PRO TV show a pronounced level of trust in the Pro-EU trend. And, obviously, channels retransmitting Russian media production are viewed by the population with a Pro-EAU preference.

<sup>13</sup> Recalculated with the omission of unsatisfied respondents to at least one of the questions

Figure 10. Relationship between channel preference and the rating of EU and EAU (Customs Union) options<sup>14</sup>

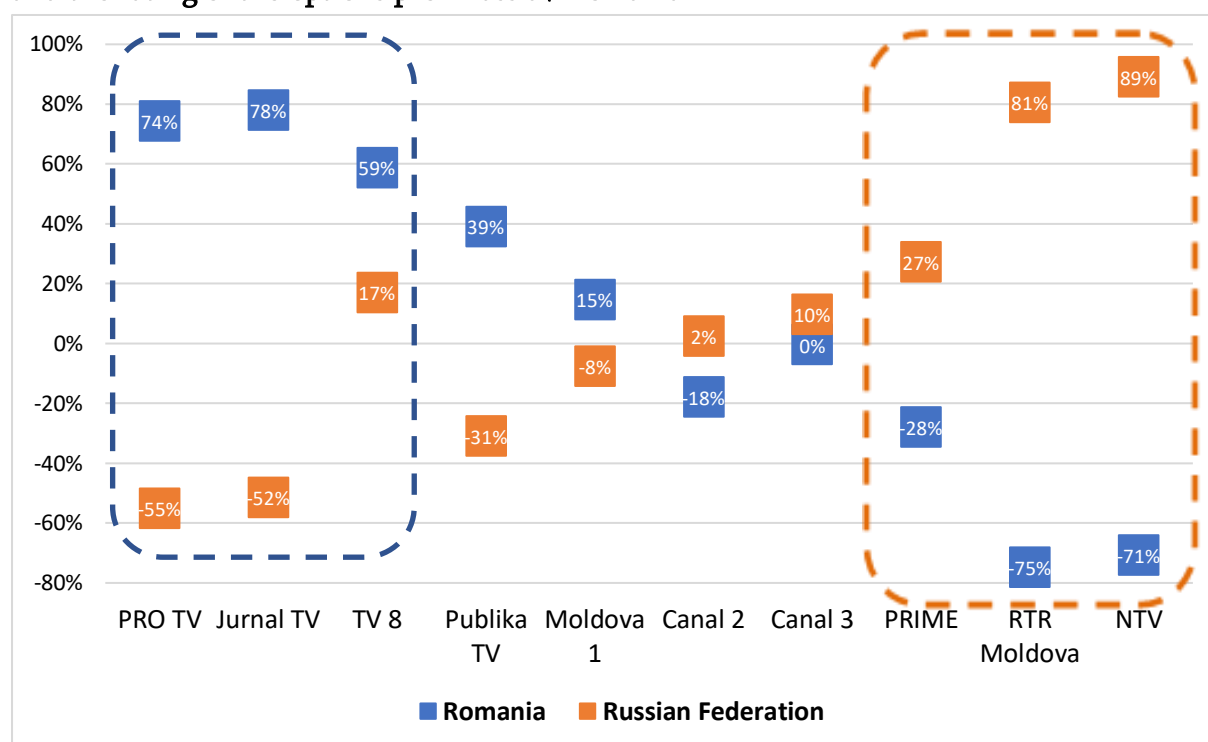


Such questions (regarding referendum simulation) were also given regarding the unification of the Republic of Moldova with Romania or with the Russian Federation. In November 2017, about 22% of respondents declared themselves pro-unification with Romania, and 33% voted for a referendum on the unification with the Russian Federation.

The correlation between the share of respondents in the two directions and the preferences for certain TV channels are almost identical to what we have previously discussed about. PRO TV, Jurnal TV, TV8, and Publika TV’ audience is more inclined towards the option of unification with Romania. On the opposite side there are the same three TV channels - Prime, RTR and NTV, whose audience would, to a much greater extent, support the unification with the Russian Federation and they adopt very critical positions on the unification with Romania.

<sup>14</sup> It is expressed in percentage points compared to the Pro weights recorded on the whole sample

**Figure 11. The relationship between the preference for the production of certain channels and the rating of the options pro- Russia / Romania<sup>15</sup>**



In conclusion, we mention that the analysis of the BPO results indicates a very powerful and a very strong relationship between the media preferences (especially the preferences for Russian media production) and the (geo) political preferences of the citizens. At the same time, it should be noted that the methods of analysis we have conducted do not allow conclusions on the cause-effect relationship. In other words, we cannot say that media preferences influence (determines) political preferences or vice versa. But taking into account the multidimensional character of the public opinion, it would be logical to say that they are interdependent. A more deep analysis on cause-effect relationship is presented in the main research.

<sup>15</sup> It is expressed in percentage points compared to the Pro weights recorded on the whole sample