



## **Monitoring of Political Diversity in Myanmar Media Reporting 15 August - 30 September 2016**

Yangon, 17 February 2017 – The Myanmar Institute for Democracy (MID), an independent, non-partisan organization dedicated to freedom of expression and the media, in cooperation with the Slovak media watch-dog organization MEMO 98, has been systematically monitoring the level of political diversity in Myanmar media reporting. The overall objective of this initiative is to keep the public informed about the conduct of media, in particular through a comprehensive analysis of the trends and tendencies of media reporting and to facilitate discussion about the objectivity and quality of media reporting. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) provided support to this one-year project.

The monitoring is intended to offer a professional, comprehensive, and objective assessment of political diversity, accuracy, and balance in news and current affairs coverage on four television channels, two radio stations, three newspapers, and two online media outlets.<sup>1</sup> The project's findings are not intended to support any political actor, but the integrity of the media environment as a whole. This is the second of three monitoring reports concerning performance of selected media outlets and are disseminated to the public, media, civil society, political parties and international community.

The methodology was developed by MEMO 98 which has carried out similar projects in more than 50 countries in the last 18 years, including in Myanmar.<sup>2</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, examined in the proper context, and incorporating detailed comparisons and analysis.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most significant events that received substantial coverage during the monitoring period was the Panglong Peace Conference. The media focused on the point of view presented by the Chief of Defence who expressed his intention to roll out the peace process within the

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<sup>1</sup> Television: *MRTV, Myawaddy TV (state-funded), Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) and Up to date;*  
Radio: *Radio Myanmar (state-funded) and BBC Radio (foreign service);*  
Newspapers: *Myanmar Ahlin (state-funded), Eleven and Voice;*  
Online media: *Irrawaddy and Mizzima.*

<sup>2</sup> For previous projects conducted in 2010-2011 and 2015 see [www.memo98.sk](http://www.memo98.sk)

<sup>3</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 per cent are portrayed: positive, neutral or negative. The 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 lies, distortions, unbalanced coverage, unfairness, inaccuracy, bias, and anything else that is relevant to presenting the quality of reporting. This data is reported separately and integrated into the comments and conclusions of the narrative reports.

space provided by the Constitution (2008) which he pledged to uphold. Overall, the media coverage of the peace process can be evaluated as cautiously optimistic with the media covering the conference mentioned above extensively as well as other related events and statements. Another important event that drew media attention was the formation of the Advisory Commission for the Rakhine issue. The Commission is headed by the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, and the media provided a diverse range of views both in support and against the commission. The monitoring team found out that while the incumbent president has received somewhat smaller coverage in comparison with the 2015 election periods, the newly established position of the State Counsellor held by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi received considerably significant media attention.

Following is the summary of the main monitoring findings covering the period 15 August - 30 September 2016:

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Overall, the media continued to focus their coverage on the activities of the state authorities and the ruling NLD. The government was by far the most presented subject. Major share of the coverage allocated to the government focused on the State Counsellor.**

- **The state-controlled TV channels MRTV and MWD continued to offer biased and uncritical coverage promoting either the government (MRTV) or the *Tatmadaw* (MWD). The state radio and the state newspaper *Myanmar Ahlin* also focused on the government but their support to them, in comparison with the state television, was less pronounced.**
- **Private media offered a more diverse and balanced picture of developments in the country and unlike during the previous monitoring period also included some negative coverage when it comes to implementation of the activities conducted by the government. In the same time, the State Counsellor was often portrayed in a very positive light. State Counsellor received the single largest share of the coverage in four out of seven private media outlets monitored.**

## MEDIA MONITORING FINDINGS

### Television

The State-funded *MRTV* gave 38.5 per cent of its political news coverage to the government, and 14.6 per cent to the State Counsellor. The NLD received 22.5 per cent. The president was given almost 6 per cent of coverage, followed by the military (the *Tatmadaw*) with 4.5 per cent of the coverage, and the vice-president with up to four per cent of coverage. In addition to airtime allocated to the NLD, only two other parties, the ANP and the USDP, each received around 3 per cent of the coverage. All political actors were portrayed in an overwhelmingly positive light – this is a long-lasting trend in the way *MRTV* covers political subjects in its news programs. The most covered event during this monitoring period was the 2016 Panglong Conference that began on 31 August with an aim to negotiate the country-wide peace agreement between various armed groups. The *MRTV* did not offer objective news coverage of the conference and included only those views and positions which supported it but failed to report on those who opposed it and decided not to participate (like the United Wa State Army). Moreover, songs endorsing the Panglong Conference were frequently aired before and during the conference. The key message was that all the ethnic

groups welcomed the conference and that the government made efforts to implement the conference' goals. The MRT aired live broadcasts of the event.

**Myawaddy TV** news broadcasts were dominated by the coverage of the *Tatmadaw* and authorities in general. This TV gave almost two thirds (65 per cent) per cent of its prime-time news political coverage to the *Tatmadaw*. The government received 10 per cent of the coverage, and the State Counsellor almost 5 per cent. Vice-president was allocated almost 6 per cent, and the president some 4 per cent of the coverage. The NLD obtained 3.7 per cent. Similar to MRTV, the subjects were portrayed in an overwhelmingly positive light. The broadcasts focused on the activities of the *Tatmadaw*, in particular, the commander in chief (Senior General Min Aung Hlaing), and gave clear preference to the views of the military both in time and tone of the coverage which was very positive. An example of such positive coverage was the medical assistance provided by the army in the rural areas of the country. After the news program, the peace process related songs were broadcast.

Similar to the state-funded TV channels, the privately-owned *Up to Date* devoted most of its coverage to the authorities which were portrayed primarily in a neutral manner. The government received more than 41 per cent of the channel's news prime time news political coverage, and the State Counsellor was given additional almost 19 per cent. The local governments received 13.6 per cent. The NLD was given 7.6 per cent of the coverage. The political subjects were portrayed primarily in a neutral manner, but the portrayal of the State Counsellor was rather positive. Negative coverage was almost absent. The Panlong Conference was also among the key events featured on this channel during this monitoring period and presented as being endorsed by most people in the country. *Up to date* offered relatively diverse coverage of various topics ranging from politics to religion, social issues or education. Reports about natural disasters like floods or earthquakes received notable coverage; in comparison, the coverage of military operations in the northern territory was limited. Songs dedicated to the peace process were broadcast after the evening news programmes.

**DVB** gave more than 34 per cent of its political news coverage to the State Counsellor, and additional 20.6 per cent of the coverage to other government officials. The NLD received more than 18 per cent and the *Tatmadaw* was allocated up to 9 per cent of coverage. The local government followed with 7.5 per cent of the coverage. By comparison, the USDP received 5 per cent of coverage. The political subjects were presented mainly in a neutral way; the State Counsellor was portrayed in a rather positive light while there was some critical coverage of the *Tatmadaw*. The news programs of DVB focused on the key issues of the day in a relevant manner. For instance, the DVB coverage of the Panglong Conference provided the necessary context in which the event took place. The reports included the information on the results of the conference with the proper background regarding the situation regarding ethnic armed groups and the fact that the United Wa State Army decided not to take part in the conference. When it comes to the activities of the government, the *Tatmadaw*, and the ethnic armed groups, the news items included experts' analyses. Overall, DVB offered its viewers coverage of economic and social topics and issues relevant to citizens.

## **Radio**

The **Myanmar state-funded radio** also allocated the majority of its political news coverage to the state authorities, with the government receiving almost 35 per cent of coverage. The State Counsellor was further given almost 10 per cent of the news coverage. The *Tatmadaw* received some 12 per cent, the speaker of the parliament 4 per cent and vice-president and president received some 3 per cent of the coverage respectively. From among the political parties, the NLD received the largest share of the coverage – almost 14 per cent. All other political parties received significantly less coverage. For example, the KPP, the ANP, and the PNO received respectively 2.5,

2.2 and 1.7 per cent of the coverage. The tone of the coverage was mainly neutral or positive. The state radio provided live coverage from the Panglong Conference. The event was presented positively, and radio aired promotional songs.

**BBC** allocated the bulk of its prime-time news coverage to the authorities - the government received combined over 40 per cent (the State Counsellor received more than 13 per cent of coverage and other government officials were given more than 27 per cent of such coverage) and the *Tatmadaw* was allocated almost 29 per cent. Unlike with the other broadcast media, the tone of the coverage was more negative, particularly *vis-à-vis* the *Tatmadaw* and to some extent also towards the government. The political parties to receive some more substantial coverage were the NLD (almost 11 per cent), the ANP (over 7 per cent) and the USDP (over 4 per cent). The activities of the cabinet ministers, the peace process, and the armed conflicts were the key topics featured during this monitoring period.

### Newspapers

The state-funded newspaper *Myanmar Ahlin* devoted the bulk of its coverage to state authorities. More specifically, the government received as much as almost 60 per cent (the State Counsellor was given over 21 per cent and other government officials received 37.7 per cent), the *Tatmadaw* over 9 per cent, the president almost 8 per cent, and the vice-president up to 6 per cent per cent of the coverage. From among the parties, the biggest share of the coverage was allocated to the NLD (8.7 per cent). By comparison, the USDP and the ANP received only some 1.6 and 1.2 per cent of the coverage, respectively. The tone of the coverage was predominantly neutral unlike the other state-funded media which portrayed the ruling powers mainly in a positive light. Similar to other state-funded media, *Myanmar Ahlin* allocated substantial coverage to the Panglong Conference.

The private newspaper *Voice* allocated more than 43 per cent of its coverage to government (the State Counsellor received more than 26 per cent and other governmental officials were given up to 17 per cent of the coverage) while more than 17 per cent of its coverage was allocated to the NLD. per cent. Local governments received more than 12 per cent and the *Tatmadaw* almost 10 percent. The ANP and the USDP received some 7 and 6 per cent of the coverage, respectively. The subjects mentioned above were presented mainly in a neutral way (with exception of the State Counsellor, who was portrayed overall in a positive manner) with some occasional criticism which was more visible than during the previous monitoring period.

Another private paper *Eleven* also focused on the government which received more than 50 per cent of the coverage (State Counsellor was given almost 20 per cent of the coverage, and other government officials received more than 31 per cent of the coverage), followed by the NLD (19 per cent), the local government and the *Tatmadaw* (respectively more than 6 per cent) and the president (some 4.5 per cent). Other parties to receive some coverage were the ANP (over 4 per cent), the USDP (up to 3 per cent) and the SNLD (2 per cent). The presented subjects were portrayed predominantly in a neutral and light. Similar to other monitored newspapers, the tone of coverage was less positive when compared with the previous monitoring period.

### Online media

*Irrawaddy* gave the largest share of its coverage (almost 42 per cent) to the government (composed of over 31 per cent of the coverage allocated to the State Counsellor and additional 10.5 per cent to other government officials) , followed by the NLD which received over 26 per cent. The next most covered subjects were the *Tatmadaw* (over 10 per cent), the USDP (9.5 per cent) and the ANP (over 7.5 per cent). The tone of their coverage was rather neutral, although some subjects were portrayed somewhat negatively, in particular, the ANP and the *Tatmadaw*.

Similarly, *Mizzima* also allocated the largest share of its coverage to the Government (the State Counsellor received 38.5 per cent of the coverage, followed by other governmental officials who were given over 16 per cent of the coverage). The next most covered subjects were the ANP and the NLD which received each respectively almost 9 per cent of the coverage. By comparison, the USDP received 6.5 per cent of the coverage. The local government received more than 8 per cent and the president up to 5 per cent of the coverage. While most political actors were presented in a positive light, there was also some negative tone of the coverage, particularly when it comes to the coverage of the *Tatmadaw* (which received over 3 per cent of the coverage). Besides, while some negative coverage was also devoted to the government and the NLD, they were both mainly portrayed in a positive light. By comparison, no negative coverage was given to either the ANP or the president.

## CONCLUSIONS

The coverage of the state authorities by the state-funded television channels resembles the uncritical style of reporting from the previous periods when reporting about the former state administration. This approach reveals their lack of editorial freedoms as well as the lack of interest to serve the general public. There are however signs of the less submissive way of coverage of the authorities noted in some state media, more critical tone of reporting about political actors and more diverse reporting on political developments identified in some private media. This trend could signal a shift in the role of the state media, from obedient servants to more mature watchdogs, and could be a sign of some ‘normalization’ of the media scene. The so-called *honeymoon period* when the media cut the new government a lot of slack in its first months of their tenure, identified in the first monitoring report in connection with relatively positive tone of coverage of the government, noted not only in the state, but also in the private media, seems to slowly come to an end. MID and MEMO 98 will continue their media monitoring to provide regular feedback on the quality of Myanmar media reporting.

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For further information, please contact:

*Myo Min Zaw, Project Coordinator, Myanmar Institute for Democracy*  
*53<sup>rd</sup> Street Middle Block, No.10, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Botahtaung Township, Yangon, Myanmar*  
*Mobile: 0945 001 6483, E-mail: [myominzaw1998@gmail.com](mailto:myominzaw1998@gmail.com)*  
*Online: Facebook/Myanmar Institute for Democracy*