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Media Monitoring and Early Warning to tackle hate speech, mitigate conflict and gender based violence

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Preface

This publication is produced in the context of the European Development Days (EDD) which are Europe's leading forum on international partnerships. Organised by the European Commission, the forum brings key actors together to share ideas and experiences in ways that inspire new partnerships and innovative solutions to the world's most pressing challenges.

For its 15th edition, the EDD will focus on "Global Gateway: building sustainable partnerships for a connected world." ECES is proud to have been selected to have a stand to show case our activities under the theme of Internet and Human Rights in the Digital Space. Our stand focuses on "**Media Monitoring, Hate Speech and Gender-based Violence**" taken from an election perspective.

In particular, hate speech on social media and other platforms is known to catalyze environments of conflict and violence among groups and communities during elections. Indeed, hate speech targeted to gender-based violence in the digital space are increasingly becoming a threat to inclusive participation of women in electoral and political life. At ECES we work to strengthen the capacities of our partners to identify and monitor hate speech and gender-based violence and recommend appropriate remedial measures.

We promote electoral and democratic strengthening through the provision of advisory services, operational support and management of large projects also by mainstreaming capacity and leadership development via peer exchanges to share comparative experiences, and promote political dialogue.

ECES has crafted and copyrighted its strategy called "A European Response to Electoral Cycle Support - EURECS", which is implemented via specific methodologies and tools also copyrighted by ECES. EURECS is an innovative delivery mechanism to implement electoral and democracy assistance activities that are consistent primarily with European values and EU policies targeting the facilitation of the cooperation on electoral matters between the EU, the EU member states and their partner countries. To that end, this paper highlights our work in the last 12 years in preventing and mitigating electoral violence through two important tools: the Monitoring of Hate speech in mainstream and social media, and the Early Warning and Early Response systems in the electoral context.

Following our experiences in more than 50 countries, mainly in Africa and Middle East, with projects funded by the EU and EU member states., ECES intends to share best practices in the utilisation of these tools and the internet towards addressing existing gaps while ensuring an open and broad platform for citizen engagement that will allow for active participation of often marginalised groups. We hope that this publication will contribute to facilitate a better understanding of the impact hate speech from an electoral perspective, whilst at the same time highlighting important tools that make use of the digital space to help mitigate and prevent electoral violence.



Fabio Bargiacchi
Founder and Executive Director

The media play a crucial role in voters' awareness and information, they are also a determining factor regarding how people form opinions that will influence their choices when voting, and at the same time allows political actors to express their views and present their political programmes.

This is why the international standards usually use to describe elections as "free and fair" include "fair access to the media by parties and candidates" and "impartial" media coverage of the electoral process.

To ensure the respect of the free will of the voters, it is essential to observe and analyze media coverage all along the electoral process. Not only during the election campaign, but also beforehand. It is equally important to monitor the institutional communication of Electoral Management Bodies, to keep a track of how their perception and portrayal is in the media.

The monitoring methodology applied to the media must take into consideration the legislative and regulatory texts relating to the organisation and coverage of elections - in order to analyse in an objective and impartial manner the coverage of the electoral campaign and its different actors. The analysis is a team effort, in which all observers should strive to follow the same methodology to ensure consistency of results. This systematic work makes it possible to generate various statistical data that are indispensable for assessing the degree of responsibility and objectivity with which the media have fulfilled their information mission. Ultimately, monitoring allows for an assessment of the role of the media in ensuring a free, transparent and fair electoral process.

Objectives of Media Monitoring

We can distinguish between four different types of media monitoring objectives, although they may also be intertwined:

- Media monitoring at the service of public and institutional communication. The aim being to support electoral management bodies' communication strategies and assess their visibility, as well as the technical aspects of the electoral process, in order to adjust public communication depending on the actual needs and goals.
- Monitoring incitement to violence, through the media. This generally implies hate speech and any other message that incites violence, discrimination, social and political tensions, etc.
- Monitoring related to electoral campaign regulations. This serves as a complementary tool to verify campaign spending, abuse of public resources and the use of any banned symbols during the campaign (e.g. national flags and symbols).
- Monitoring political pluralism; to verify whether the press, primarily state-owned media, ensures equitable coverage of political actors (or equal coverage, as established in relevant regulations concerning the role of the media during electoral campaigns)

Media monitoring makes it possible to follow and analyse, according to an appropriate methodology and on the basis of objective indicators and criteria, the way in which the media - all categories taken together: radio, television and the written press - ensure an independent, impartial, responsible and equitable treatment of the electoral event and its actors. It aims to produce reports based on proven, credible and observed facts on the media coverage of each event during the electoral process: the distribution of the slots of the political actors, the content of the messages delivered, the comments made, the tone used and the topics addressed.

In doing this, the media monitors take into account the basic rights of each of the three actors:

Voters' rights to receive information;

voters have the right to be informed about political alternatives and candidates' platforms in order to be able to make an informed choice.

Candidates' rights to impart information;

candidates and parties have the right to communicate their platforms and their views. To that end, they have a right of unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis in order to inform the electorate about their policies and opinions on matters of public interest.

The media's right to freedom of expression.

The media enjoy the freedom to inform the public about an election campaign and to express their opinions on issues of public interest. They also cover all relevant election-related issues and play an active role in informing voters by offering them a diverse range of views, which include those of journalists and political analysts free to criticise politicians for their platforms or their performances.

At the same time, they have a duty to inform voters in a correct, accurate, transparent, and balanced manner.

1. Quantitative analysis measures the total amount of space and time devoted to coverage of selected monitored subjects or topics (e.g. elections) by the media. The analysis also evaluates whether the information about selected monitored subjects is positive, negative, or neutral in its content.

2. Qualitative analysis aims at assessing elements of the coverage that cannot be fully observed through quantitative methods.

The most common elements to be assessed are:

Journalistic style: Do journalists tend to mix opinions and facts when reporting? Do journalists try to provide the public with in-depth analysis and accurate information, or do they tend to report in a superficial and incomplete way?

Formats of the coverage used to cover the elections: Are there any examples of innovative election coverage? Have satirical programmes or articles been produced? Have the broadcast/print media produced any programme or article in the language(s) of national

minorities? Are they dealing with national-minorities issues? Have the broadcast/print media produced any programme or article dealing with gender issues?

News omissions and distortions: Was any relevant piece of news omitted by the media observed? Was information conveyed in an inaccurate or distorted manner?

Women: Did media outlet devoted coverage for women candidates or women issues? Were there any programmes targeting such issues as key component of the campaign? Did candidates and politicians (male or female) devoted some of their time or space to discuss women's issues and role as a part of their platform or campaign (both in editorial and advertising content)?

Voter education: Is there any specific campaign for voter education? Does it provide voters with correct and clear information on their right to vote and voting procedures? Does it target different audiences, particularly the disadvantaged or groups that are traditionally discriminated against? Is it focused on particular aspects or problems widespread in a specific country? A special attention is given to voter education targeting women and the youth.

Coverage of election administration: Is the activity of the electoral commission being covered? Are sensitive issues related to the administration of the election being covered? Is the coverage promoting confidence in the institutions and the electoral process, or is it undermining their legitimacy?

3. Monitoring of hate speech

In monitoring hate speech, monitors scrutinise the way in which the media report or disseminate hate speech during the election campaign. They consider hate speech to be any message that incites: violence, discrimination, social and political tensions, defamation, belligerence, etc. with the caution that there is a fine line between what is Harsh political or social criticism and what is hate speech.

“This methodology is inspired by various guides and reports from different organisations and observatories (EU, OSCE, Osservatorio di Pavia and Mena media monitoring)”



Social Media Monitoring (SMM) aims to follow and analyze, according to an appropriate methodology and based on objective indicators and criteria, the way in which the social media - all categories taken together: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others are used by different political actors and candidates during the electoral process in particular during the campaign.

Social media monitoring analysis aims to produce reports based on proven, credible, and observed facts on social media networks during the electoral process in particular during the campaign to answer the following questions:

- Which content is being shared during the campaign?
- What was the use of the platform (by parties, actors and candidates)
- Did the social media users, especially the political actors and candidates, respect the principles and the regulation in terms of political advertisement, hate speech, disinformation and Misinformation?
- To assess the visibility of the different political actors by identifying the nature of their communication strategy.
- Was it possible for social media users to obtain sufficient information to make conscious decisions on voting day?
- Was there any violation of the law or regulations concerning the activity of the social media during the election campaign?
- Which social media networks was the most used by the political actors to reach the audience and why?

“Malicious use of social network sites (SNS) and other digital information dissemination tools includes an analysis and where possible, an assessment of digital practices that have the potential or indeed undermined the integrity and fairness of the election. This assessment will be primarily based on social media monitoring results and could feature the three most wide-spread malpractices... Primary online sources where a political or electoral dis/misinformation messages originate from tend to have small audiences and to be effective, such content is expected to be picked up by political parties and candidates, legacy media and/or state institutions...new malicious online manipulation methods are constantly emerging, additional subjects can also be considered.”¹



¹ Eu-Eom guidelines for observing online election-related content

Early warning is an instrument of conflict prevention that collects and analyses data to provide verified information for political decision-makers. There is a short-term objective aiming to focus on intervention, and then there is the response mechanism implemented by the different actors. In the context of the electoral process, the Early Warning mechanism can play a substantial role in flagging the potential conflicts that can flare up as a result of miscommunication, operational mismanagement, lack of trust and transparency, and political manipulation with the intent to influence the election results.

Early Warning and Early Response systems are essential in conflict prevention and peace building. Facing increasingly complex conflicts around the world, more focused attention has been given to how to effectively operationalize these approaches.

While many EWER systems are focusing on the question of what happens if something happens, what is needed for decision-makers is a more predictable approach, answering the questions of when something will happen and also how.

Given the dynamic nature of the conflict that can erupt around elections, the complex relationship between different stakeholders, and the political, social, and economic developments, it is crucial that the government, communities, civil society, and other stakeholders should form a close-knitted system, capable of assessing effectively different triggers, vulnerabilities, and other conflict drivers within the context of the electoral process.

The Early Warning mechanism consists usually of a quantitative dimension, in which the data is collected from the field through various methods (questionnaires, SMS, social media), and a qualitative dimension in which qualitative data is acquired and processed through interviews with different stakeholders, involving a triangulation and verification of the sources of the information. The information gathered is then used to formulate comprehensive reports that are sent to the decision-makers to take the appropriate steps to address the situations that could lead to open conflicts.



Media monitoring projects carried out by ECES

Burkina Faso 2015 - 2016

As part of the Project to Support Credible and Transparent Elections in Burkina Faso (PACTE-BF), media monitoring is developed as a tool to support the CENI's institutional communication.

This particular media monitoring captures:

- The quality of coverage of the technical aspects of the electoral process of the CENI and its representatives.
- The main themes that shape the electoral period and how they are portrayed.
- The tone of the coverage regarding the CENI and the different aspects of the process.
- The propensity of different media to offer balanced, neutral and precise coverage or, its contrary
- The tendency towards bias and lack of objectivity regarding the organization of the electoral process.

The Media Monitoring Unit analyzes a sample of media outlets prepared in consultation with the CENI and produces analytical reports that are used by the PACTE-BF Institutional Communication Expert in formulating corrective advice and strategies to adapt and improve the CENI's communication.

Madagascar 2013 - 2015

As part of the Project to Support Credible and Transparent Elections in Madagascar (PACTE-Madagascar), ECES supported media monitoring conducted by the Committee for National Election Observation – Civic Education (KMF/ENOC) on the quality of the media coverage of the electoral process and on the compliance with regulations related to political pluralism. The monitoring also focused on unfounded opinions and hate speech conveyed by, and through the media. The PACTE project followed on from the INCIPALS project (Citizen's Initiative for the Consolidation of Peace, Leadership and Stability). INCIPALS has been designed in response to the recommendations of the electoral observation missions and the self-assessment of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Within the context of this project, the Media Monitoring Unit conducts an integrated content analysis of the media coverage to provide information with tools to promote self-regulation and professionalization of the media and of the CSOs.



Benin 2015

Within the context of the Technical Assistance Mission to the Autonomous National Electoral Commission (CENA) of Benin, aimed at contributing to the consolidation of democracy in Benin by strengthening the electoral administration's capacities to organize and conduct the presidential elections of 2016, a Media Monitoring Unit has been created. The Media Monitoring Unit was in charge of assessing the media coverage of the electoral process and the CENA. On the basis of a media sample established with the CENA, the Media Monitoring Unit produces analytical reports that are used by the Institutional Communication Expert to support the communication strategy of the CENA.

Nigeria 2017 - 2022

ECES has supported the set-up of the INEC Media Monitoring Unit (MMU) and the introduction of a media monitoring methodology. Both play a key role in INEC's institutional capacity in effective communication, media management and capacity to address fake or inciting news. ECES' support to INEC's current media monitoring unit has included: (i) the provision of equipment and software for setting up the Media Monitoring Unit (MMU) at INEC in the annex housing INEC's Voter Education and Publicity Department; and (ii) the design of a training manual on media monitoring. ECES also organised trainings for the Commission's staff on various aspects of media monitoring, involving the Publicity Division. The focus was on print, audio and TV but also covering social media and fake news. Over the last four years, about 370 INEC staff involved in Media and outreach were trained on Media monitoring, covering the management of the Media Monitoring Unit, but also how to detect and analyse fake news and its spread, particularly through social media. The last training to support the INEC Media Monitoring Unit was held in September 2020. At present 3 sub-units of the MMU are established.

Ethiopia 2020 - 2021

CECOE and NEBE Media Monitoring Units 2020/2021

ECES supported the establishment of two Media Monitoring Units for Coalition Of Ethiopian Civil Society Organization for Election (CECOE) and National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) through the procurement of necessary equipment, including monitoring software, as well as the recruitment of media monitors.

A full media mapping of the print, radio, and television media landscapes was undertaken and communicated with the partners in order to create a media selection to be monitored. The MMU has been essential in monitoring the media coverage of key electoral stakeholders during various stages of election operations since its inception in March 2021. A daily press review and weekly media overview reports were generated and distributed to relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, reports were released on a variety of topics, including political party debates throughout the campaign, media coverage of NEBE's operations and political parties' social media activity. These reports have been useful in monitoring the electoral process, and CECOE has used them as input for its role in election observation and the establishment of the Election Situation Room.

The MM units produces the following reports:

- Reports on print media, online media and social media
- Nine consecutive social media monitoring reports on the mentions of NEBE across the social media platforms, online News, and Blogs were produced
- Reports on the use of political parties at national and regional level of social media networks (Facebook and Twitter)
- Social media reports on the conflict in social media
- Qualitative analysis of the media coverage during the campaign has been produced
- Reports on the coverage of silence period
- Monitoring report on social media user's sentiment towards women involved in the 2021 election
- Final report of the media coverage of the electoral campaign



Senegal

PAPE Senegal aimed to reinforce the General election direction's (DGE) institutional communication and interactions between institutions and the National Broadcasting Council Regulation (CNRA). Thanks to ECES media monitoring solid expertise, the project provided specific and targeted advice on how to strengthen existing media monitoring methodology.

The main objectives of media monitoring activities is to give an overview of the current electoral environment. Among the activities implemented are journalists seminars and monthly press and media reviews. These bring to light the evolution of the DGE and relevant political parties' media visibility. This monitoring allowed the DGE to adapt and further efficient and impactful communication strategy.

As a result, the project final report underlines that PAPE contributed to strengthen DGE institutional communication thanks to these specific activities, even if the communication and the interactions between the CNRA and the DGE could still be reinforced.



Early Warning System and Rapid Response carried out by ECES

Zanzibar

One of the main PROPEL Zanzibar objective was to prevent and mitigate electoral violence by implementing training sessions and Early Warning System project to predict potential outbreaks or incidents, including map pockets of civil unrest and radicalisation trends. To meet the challenge, a joint effort was conducted to establish a conflict mapping. For instance, a training session on conflict mapping successfully took place on 8 September, thanks to the support of local organizations like ANGOZA, the network of religious leaders via the Joint Committee and the domestic observer platform TEMCO. Even if the Early Warning System proved itself very positive and useful in the post electoral context perspective, it is likely that a more thorough mechanism would have been needed, such as the Situation Room.

In addition, to increase information and communication on electoral violence, a sensibilisation outreach programme that includes media monitoring training for awareness of election related violence and conflict workshops for media owners and editors were organized.



South Africa

In order to prevent conflict and potential violence in South Africa during the National and provincial elections held on 8 May 2019, ECES, in collaboration with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) intended to coordinate, capacitate and revive human “early warning mechanism”. To this end, the project leaned on existing peace infrastructures and early warning mechanisms. By providing institutional support, stakeholders committed to spread these infrastructures to the province mired with conflicts. The target groups were mainly the IEC, the population living in disputed provinces, panelists and the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The project's final report underlines that over 1200 individuals were successfully gathered in an early warning network in the 9th provinces of South Africa. This report demonstrates that the project meets its targets.



ECES Current Projects with MMU and EWS

Kenya 2022

Media monitoring unit – ProPeaceKenya

In the framework of the ProPeaceKenya project, ECES in partnership with National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) have established a Media Monitoring Unit (MMU) to monitor mainstream media, social media platforms and public space to detect and address hate speech, ethnic contempt and incitement to violence.

The MMU produced the following reports:

- Two reports on Monitoring Hate speech lexicon during April and May 2022
- Two reports on the disinformation and Misinformation during April and May 2022
- Social media monitoring report: Twitter Analysis of the inflammatory #NoRailaNoPeace
- Report on violence and incidents during April and May 2022

Early Warning

Early Warning System in Kenya has been used continuously since its introduction in the late nineties, therefore a wealth of expertise is available throughout the civil society and the government level. ECES's contribution adds a specialized dimension to this effort by offering a much-focused view on the electoral process and its stages. Thus, the Early Warning mechanism designed for the NCIC (National Cohesion and Integration Commission) particularly concentrates on the capacity to detect built-in key process-related, institutional, and operational indicators that would signal potential conflict ahead and after the elections. This will offer NCIC the capacity to better analyze the critical warnings related to the electoral process and inform the stakeholders about early interventions.

A Situation Room is designed to incorporate the Media Monitoring Unit under the Early Warning mechanism, thus ensuring the complementarity of the two components. Specifically, the media monitoring unit will hone in the information extracted through the specialized software and the monitoring of the traditional media outlets and pass it on to the Early Warning component, flagging the potential conflict-charged topics and queries. This new approach will substantially enhance the efficiency of the early warning mechanism, provide a solid foundation for formulating a proper response to the flagged situations and increase the capacity of other stakeholders to intervene promptly to address the conflictual environment ahead, during, and after the elections.

The Situation Room will become the platform on which different stakeholders who are invested in the peaceful electoral process, such as IEBC (Independent Elections and Boundary Commission), Judiciary, Ministry of Interior, civil society organizations, and international donors could further enhance their dialogue and coordination. In fact, ECES is envisioning a coordinating role for NCIC among the stakeholders, due to its neutral position within the institutional arrangement in Kenya and its clearly defined mandate aimed at integration and cohesion among the Kenyan people.

Ethiopia

ECES assisted Coalition Of Ethiopian Civil Society Organization for Election (CECOE) in setting up an Election Situation Room (ESR) for the Sidama Referendum in November 2019 as a pilot initiative, including training and technical support. The training and technical assistance covered topics such as:

- how to structure the ESR (the core group and data officers);
- how to collect information from the field;
- the frequency of data officer debriefings;
- how to organize and analyze collected data;
- how to prepare a press release for broadcast and print media;
- how to prepare and release preliminary and final observation reports.

The ESR was part of the early warning and rapid response mechanism for an immediate resolution of diverging views with the risk of conflict escalation in real space and time.

It was composed of 6 reporting officers who collected data four times during the day from eight observer teams allowing CECOE's core team to get an accurate picture during the process. It also included an automated system of data capturing, regular exchange, and production real time data on electoral conflicts for NEBE and other stakeholders.

The situation room served as a center where all information is coordinated, collated, and analyzed. It was also a center for the preparation of reports and external communication affairs including issuing of public press releases. This created a hub for CECOE to interact with key stakeholders like NEBE, media, and the public and provided regular updates on the Referendum. During the election, from June 11 to June 25, 2021, ECES supported the establishment of an Election Situation room and training/coaching CECOE.



Hate speech during the electoral process

Hatred and inciting speech during the electoral process can potentially undermine the peaceful conduct of elections process. During such period and critical atmosphere of an election process especially during the campaign activities, inflammatory language can have the effect of inciting people to violence, thereby affecting freedom of expression and democratic human rights.

Unfortunately, many countries lack the legal basis to prevent a candidate or party with hate speech from registering for elections. But even when a legal framework is there and hate speech is strongly reprimanded, the dilemma consists in the fact that is precisely during an election that different political opinions must be expressed, and imposing restrictions on the expression of these opinions may limit both the rights of free expression and democratic rights.

As hate speech and ethnic contempt on social media and other platforms is known to catalyze environments of conflict and violence among groups and communities during elections, European center for electoral support (ECES) has started years ago working strongly on strengthening capacities of its partners to identify and monitor hate speech and ethnic contempt incidences and recommend appropriate remedial measures. This aims at avoiding electoral related violence by tracking media-transmitted incitement to violence, hate speech, fake news, and other messages that promote discrimination or social and political tensions.

Gender based violence and hate speech targeting Female political actors

If hate speech in the social media plays a significant role in contributing to electoral violence, it exacerbates gender-based violence in particular towards those women who have chosen to run for office, and increasingly becoming a threat to inclusive participation of women in electoral and political life. This type of violence against women aims at intimidating and silencing them in order to exclude them from both the public and political space.

According to The UN Women: Political violence can occur in many contexts, but it has a uniquely negative impact on women during an election period. Political tensions and fierce competition during elections can create vulnerabilities for the political participation of women, who in many cases are already at a disadvantage compared to men; this can lead to the exclusion of women from the process. Tactics such as physical assault, intimidation and psychological violence affect both men and women, but their impact varies by gender and some forms of gender-based violence are specific to women. Responses to prevent and mitigate political violence during elections must reflect these important gender dimensions.

To combat this kind of violence, the UN is continuously strengthening the legal framework for women's political and electoral participation. This is evident in the declarations, covenants and conventions on human and political rights, in the reports, resolutions and action plans of the UN in these areas, and in the electoral assistance policies developed and implemented by the UN. Citing as an illustration, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) , adopted in 1979, reaffirms the right of women "to hold public office and to perform all public functions at all levels of government".

More Specifically, Article 7 states that:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the State.

In particular, they shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men:

(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies

(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof, to hold public office and to perform all public functions at all levels of government.

At the end, it is a fact that hate speech constitutes a threat to societies and their cohesion and is a particular danger during election periods because of its complicity. While hate speech threatens both men and women, it has a greater impact on women as a vulnerable group and especially on those who have chosen to take part in political action. This phenomenon is exacerbated by social networks which provide a fluid and easy channel for the often anonymous dissemination of violence against women politicians.





ecēs

**EUROPEAN CENTRE
FOR ELECTORAL SUPPORT**

Av. Louise 222, 1050 Ixelles
Brussels – Belgium
+32 2 325 55 58
info@eces.eu
www.eces.eu



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