

LEBANON PETROLEUM DAY: EVALUATING THE MEDIA COVERAGE

The Lebanon Petroleum Day (LPD) 2014 organized on October 22 by the Lebanese Petroleum Administration (LPA) presented an opportunity to evaluate the progress made by Lebanese media in their coverage of the nascent oil and gas sector. The event was a watered-down version of the Lebanon International Petroleum Exhibition and Conference, LIPEC 2014, which was supposed to be held over two days on October 22-23 but was postponed until 2015. The more ambitious LIPEC could have represented a more consistent test for local media but LPD was nonetheless the first major oil and gas event in the country since the launching of the *Lebanese Media Coverage of the Oil and Gas Sector* report in August 2014, based on the findings of a thorough monitoring conducted between February 1 and April 15, 2014.

The conference was covered by all major media outlets in the country, including:

- TV channels: LBCI, MTV, Al-Jadeed
- Newspapers: Annahar, Assafir, Al-Akhbar, The Daily Star and L'Orient-Le Jour
- News website: El-Nashra

As we are dealing with a public event, the type of reporting was expected to be direct news coverage. From a monitoring perspective, we were interested to see if media outlets went further in their reporting and offered additional input, for instance an interview or a featured story.

Out of the nine media monitored, five did not restrict their reporting to news coverage:

1. Assafir conducted a brief interview with the head of the LPA, Nasser Hoteit;
2. L'Orient-Le Jour conducted a brief interview with one of the speakers, Fadi Gemayel, head of the Association of Lebanese Industrialists. It was also the only media monitored to mention that the event is an alternative to LIPEC 2014;

3. The Daily Star published a featured story about the onshore petroleum draft law;
4. MTV's report, aired during the evening news, included an interview with an energy expert;
5. LBCI's report, also aired during the evening news, included an interview with the head of the LPA, Nasser Hoteit.

On the other hand, Annahar, Al-Akhbar, El-Nashra and Al-Jadeed restricted their reporting to news coverage. Al-Jadeed's story was probably the briefest of them all; it aired a brief report during its evening news that only reproduced segments of the Energy Minister's speech.

Journalists behind these stories did not make any *direct* factual mistake. This is a positive development, even if most stories (eight out of nine) are categorized as "news coverage". Al-Akhbar's article contained references to conspiracy theories that are widely accepted as "facts" in Lebanon, but the journalist was merely reproducing ideas repeated by some of the participants in the conference.

Sources that were cited in the media reports were mostly participants that took part in the event. Besides conducting a side interview with Nasser Hoteit, Assafir quoted all nine participants in the opening session. Annahar quoted only the first three speakers in the opening session. Al-Akhbar used five sources, four participants and a moderator. The Daily Star relied on five sources for its piece, three of whom are anonymous, including an industry source (it did not specify the function of the other anonymous sources). It quoted the head of the legal department at the LPA, Gabi Daaboul, in addition to an energy expert. Beside conducting a side interview with Fadi Gemayel, head of the Association of Lebanese Industrialists, who took part in the event, L'Orient-Le Jour quoted four participants (including Gemayel), and an unnamed diplomat. LBCI quoted the head of the LPA Nasser Hoteit, while MTV used two sources, including the Energy Minister Arthur Nazarian. The latter was Al-Jadeed's only source in its brief TV report. Finally, El-Nashra used three sources, all from the opening session, but its piece covered mostly the speech of the Energy Minister.