



## **Monitoring Report**

# ***Elements of Propaganda, Disinformation, and Violation of Journalism Ethics in the Local Media Space***

*May 1 – July 31, 2020*

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## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Introduction and context.** From May 1 to July 31, 2020, the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) monitored 12 media outlets – news portals and TV stations – to identify whether the published/broadcast journalistic materials contained any breaches of deontological rules or elements of disinformation. The monitoring was based on case studies that analyzed the manner in which the selected media outlets covered events of public interest in politics, economy, foreign policy, and in other fields, in order to see whether they complied with professional and ethical standards, such as verification of information through several sources, pluralism of opinions, balance in the news reports on conflicts, and so on. By appealing to the Moldovan Journalist’s Code of Conduct and specialized academic works, we could identify information manipulation techniques used in the news stories of the media outlets concerned.<sup>1</sup>

Given the politicians’ control over some media outlets and the dangers posed by fake news, information manipulation, and political propaganda, it is important for journalists to do their job conscientiously in order to inform citizens in a fair and impartial manner. The monitoring was based on the assumption that news is the main media product where people search information, so, regardless of the media owners’ political views, news must present exclusively facts and not journalists’ opinions. Also, they should be presented in a neutral and accessible language, and should reflect reality as accurately as possible, observing the balance of sources. Furthermore, journalists must be accurate when they collect information, must separate facts from personal opinion, and must ensure the right to reply. Journalists’ failure to comply with these principles leads to disinformation and mass manipulation of the public.

**The purpose of monitoring** is to determine whether and how Moldovan media complied with the standards provided by the Journalist’s Code of Conduct in their coverage of topics of public interest. Starting from the findings of the monitoring reports produced by the Independent Journalism Center in the period of 2016-2019 (see [Publications](#) on [Media-azi.md](#)), this monitoring will follow the development of the media behavior in order to produce recommendations for journalists as well as for the general public. At the same time, the research aims to contribute to increasing the consumers’ awareness of the risks of disinformation that exist in the local media.

**Criteria for selecting** media outlets for monitoring:

- Coverage – national;
- Language – Romanian and Russian;
- Impact – circulation and audience.

**Monitored media outlets:**

**Television:** Moldova 1, Jurnal TV, RTR Moldova, NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Prime TV, Publika TV, Televiziunea Centrală.

**Online media:** Unimedia.info, Sputnik.md, Kp.md.

**Methodology.** For this monitoring, we selected events of major public interest in the political, economic, and social spheres that took place between May 1 and July 31, 2020, and analyzed how these events were covered by the 12 media outlets. The monitoring was based both on the *quantitative method* (i.e. the airtime given to the monitored topic in newscasts, the most often used sources and the time given to them for direct interventions, etc.), and the *qualitative method*, which

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<sup>1</sup> Bogdan Ficeac, *Tehnici de manipulare*, Editura Nemira 2004; Radu Herjeu, *Oglinzi mișcătoare. Tehnici de propagandă, manipulare și persuasiune în televiziune*, București 2000.

we used for content analysis – in terms of compliance with deontology and use of disinformation techniques – of the quantitative data collected during the monitoring. The language and images used by journalists, the correctness of source quoting, and the tone of presentation were analyzed by referring to the Journalist’s Code of Conduct<sup>2</sup> and to the notions of **manipulation** and **propaganda**, as defined in the Dictionary of Sociology<sup>3</sup>.

- **Manipulation:** *“Action taken to make a social actor (a person, a group, or a community) think and act in a way that is compatible with the interests of the initiator and not with their own interests, by using persuasion techniques that intentionally distort the truth, leaving an impression of freedom of thought and decision. Unlike influence by means of rational persuasion, **manipulation** aims not at a more accurate and deep understanding of the situation, but at suggesting a convenient idea by means of misleading through false arguments and by appealing to non-rational emotional levels.”*
- **Propaganda:** *“Systematic activity of transmitting, promoting, or spreading doctrines, messages, or ideas from the position of a particular social group and ideology, in order to influence, change, or shape certain concepts, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, or behaviors. Propaganda is practiced in such a way as to achieve the goals and interests of the group it serves, so there is no neutral or objective propaganda.”*

**The main topics monitored** between May 1 and July 31, 2020:

- Humanitarian aid granted by the Romanian Government in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic (May 6-7)
- Adoption by the Parliament of the declaration condemning party switching (June 11)
- Release of Veaceslav Platon from detention (June 15)
- Stefan Gatcan: leaving the PSRM, joining the Pro-Moldova parliamentary group, and resigning from the position of MP (June 30 – July 2)
- Motion of no confidence against the Chicu Government and debates in the Parliament (July 20)

## I. GENERAL TRENDS

- A. In the period of May to July 2020, some media outlets continued covering events of public interest in a tendentious manner and based on political preferences. For example, the televisions **NTV Moldova**, **Accent TV**, **Primul în Moldova** and online platforms **Sputnik.md**, **KP.md** had an approach that was in favor of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM); **Prime TV** and **Publika TV** – in favor of the Pro-Moldova parliamentary group; **Televiziunea Centrală** – in favor of the Shor Party; **Jurnal TV** – in favor of the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (PPDA).
- B. Compared to the previous monitoring period (January – April 2020), both ethics violations and manipulation technics have increased. The media outlets that admitted the most ethics violations and manipulation techniques in presenting information were **NTV Moldova**, **Accent TV**, **Primul în Moldova**, and **Kp.md**.

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<sup>2</sup> Moldovan Journalist’s Code of Conduct, <https://consiliuldepresa.md/ro/page/codul-deontologic-al-jurnalistului-din-r-moldova>

<sup>3</sup> Cătălin Zamfir, Lazăr Vlăsceanu, Dictionary of Sociology, Bucharest, 1998, p. 332., p. 457.

<http://vignette4.wikia.nocookie.net/nccmn/images/1/1c/Dictionar-de-Sociologie-Catalin-Zamfir-Lazar-Vlasceanu.pdf/revision/latest?cb=20150813042511&path-prefix=ro>

- C. The public television **Moldova 1** and the television **RTR Moldova** covered the monitored topics mainly in a neutral and unbiased manner. However, they committed some ethics violations, too.
- D. Some media outlets had a preferential approach to some sources and gave them excessive airtime for statements and opinions. For example, for **NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Sputnik.md, KP.md**, the PSRM representatives were the main sources in news, while the opposition parties were completely ignored. The latter were not provided even with the right to reply in nearly any of the cases when they were targeted/accused. **Prime TV** and **Publika TV** gave preference to the MPs of the Pro-Moldova parliamentary group as sources. The key sources for **Televiziunea Centrală** were the representatives of the Shor Party, and for **Jurnal TV** – those of the PPDA.
- E. The most common ethics violations committed by the monitored media outlets were **the lack of the right to reply** and **mixture of facts with opinions** (all 12 media outlets committed at least one of these violations), followed by **labelling** and **tendentious and manipulative headlines** (which have become increasingly used), **selective presentation of information and statements, irony, reference to unverifiable sources, inclusion of footage without mentioning its source, generalization, and change of the logical course of a news story**. The media outlets that committed the most violations were **NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Kp.md, Sputnik.md, Televiziunea Centrală, Prime TV, Publika TV**.
- F. The most common disinformation and manipulation techniques used by the monitored media outlets were **blurring, suggestion, internal enemy technique, national savior technique, exacerbation of information, and manipulation by means of sound**. The monitored media outlets that used manipulation techniques were **NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Kp.md, Sputnik.md, Televiziunea Centrală, Prime TV, Publika TV, Jurnal TV**.
- G. In many cases, if the topic addressed in the news was contrary to the political preferences (preferred authority, politician, or political entity) of the media outlet/author, then it was either blurred (its importance was intentionally reduced by selective and incomplete presentation of information), or emphasis in the presentation of information was intentionally shifted to less important aspects of the event/news.

## II. DATA ANALYSIS

### Topic 1. Humanitarian aid granted by the Romanian Government in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic

*Context: On April 30, 2020, the Government of Romania approved humanitarian aid of 16.5 million lei for the Republic of Moldova, in the form of medical products and supplies necessary to treat the new coronavirus infection. The humanitarian aid, transported by a convoy of 20 trucks, left Bucharest on May 6 and arrived in Chisinau the next day, May 7. The official reception procedure took place under the bridge on Hancesti Road in the Telecentru district of Chisinau.*

**General conclusion:** *The 12 media outlets approached this topic differently. Some devoted much space to the event (Prime TV, Publika TV, Jurnal TV, Unimedia.info), while others covered it selectively (Accent TV, Kp.md, Sputnik.md). The most frequently committed ethics violations were mixture of facts with opinion and suggestion (Primul în Moldova, Prime TV, Sputnik.md, Kp.md). As for manipulation techniques, some outlets used blurring (Accent TV), soundtrack in newscasts (Jurnal TV), and the internal enemy technique (Kp.md).*

**Moldova 1** covered the topic of Romanian aid [in one news story](#) of 6 minutes 13 seconds. The public television presented the event in detail, in a neutral and unbiased manner, without ethics violations. Likewise, **RTR Moldova, Televiziunea Centrală**, and **NTV Moldova** each broadcast

one news story on the topic, presenting the information in a neutral and unbiased manner, without ethics violations.

**Accent TV** covered the topic in a selective and biased manner. The news story on this topic was of about 2 minutes and was based only on the statements of President Igor Dodon (two interventions totaling 1 minute 25 seconds). Thus, **Accent TV blurred** the event. **Primul în Moldova** broadcast [one news story](#) on the monitored topic, **mixing facts with opinion**: “*The event was accompanied by some incidents organized by the political opposition*”; “... several unionists led by the liberal Dorin Chirtoaca had a scandalous behavior at the handover of the humanitarian aid”. At the same time, this station used **generalization**: “*The representatives of Romanian authorities qualified it as provocation.*”

**Jurnal TV** used a soundtrack in the news story as a manipulation technique aiming to convey to the media consumer certain attitudes in addition to information and facts. Moreover, in the coverage of the topic this television emphasized emotions rather than facts, which can be described as **mixture of facts with opinion**: “*Many Chisinau residents gathered at the bridge in Telecentru in respect for Romania, which helps us whenever it is necessary.*”

**Prime TV** broadcast three news stories on the monitored topic, totaling 11 minutes 17 seconds. In one of them, the station used **suggestion**: first, the authors said that „*Prime Minister Ion Chicu was booed*” for having organized the receipt of aid from Romania under a bridge, but then noted that „*the Moldovan Prime Minister Ion Chicu, who holds the citizenship of Romania, too, thanked the brothers from across the Prut for the humanitarian aid offered to our country.*” Thus, **Prime TV** suggested and emphasized details about the Moldovan prime minister (his citizenship), irrelevant for the context of the news, in order to present him in a negative light. **Publika TV** presented the information in eight news stories (one aired on TV and 7 posted on the official website of the station), using the same scenario, footage, and text as **Prime TV**.

**Unimedia.info** published eight news stories about the humanitarian aid offered to Moldova by the Romanian government. The outlet presented information in a neutral and unbiased manner and without ethics violations.

**Sputnik.md** published three news stories on the topic, having **mixed facts with opinion**: “*The Ambassador of Romania Daniel Ionita was clearly disturbed by the protest... A group of unionists led by Dorin Chirtoaca booed Prime Minister Ion Chicu. Ionita approached the protesters and asked them, in a strong tone, to protest somewhere else.*”

**Kp.md** published two materials about the humanitarian aid provided by the neighbor state. One of them was a [story](#) in which the only source was a statement by Igor Dodon about this aid. Thus, authors emphasized the head of state and presented him in a positive light. At the same time, **Kp.md blurred** the event by presenting the information selectively, from a single perspective and based on a single statement/opinion. The outlet also published [a material](#), which, given its style, can be classified as an opinion article for the Politics section, but has not been marked as such. In this text, **Kp.md** used the **internal enemy manipulation technique**, with “unionists” as the “enemy”: “*Moldovan unionists are tired of self-isolation and, apparently, got scared of disappearing from the public agenda.*”

## Topic 2. Adoption by the Parliament of the declaration condemning party switching

**Context:** On June 11, 2020, a declaration was proposed for debate and adoption at the Parliament meeting, with the aim of condemning the acts of party switching and political corruption. The initiative was proposed by MPs from the parliamentary group of the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM). The document generated discussions, but was eventually supported by all those present at the meeting. The declaration has no legal force, being rather a symbolic act, as the mandate of the MPs, according to the country’s Constitution, is an imperative one.



**General conclusion:** *The most common ethics violation was the lack of the right to reply (NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Kp.md), followed by tendentious and unbalanced selection of sources and statements (NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova), labelling (Primul în Moldova, Unimedia.info), suggestion (Sputnik.md), and mixture of facts with opinion (Jurnal TV, Unimedia.info).*

**NTV Moldova** broadcast one news story of 4 minutes about the Parliament's declaration condemning party switching. This station presented the topic selectively, favoring the PSRM and PDM. At the same time, **NTV Moldova** presented the representatives of the Pro-Moldova parliamentary group in a negative light. It also committed the following violations:

- **Tendentious and unbalanced selection of statements/sources.** **NTV Moldova** cited directly only the representatives of the PSRM and PDM.
- **Lack of the right to reply.** Andrian Candu was targeted/accused by the sources in the news story, but his right to reply was not ensured.

**Accent TV** broadcast two news stories of about 3 minutes total. This TV station presented in a positive light President Igor Dodon (**national savior/messiah technique**), the PSRM and its representatives. In addition, the station **selected statements in a tendentious manner**, including into one of the stories only one statement of the Socialist MP Grigore Novac.

**Primul în Moldova** broadcast one news story of 4 minutes 28 seconds, based on the same scenario and with the same footage as **NTV Moldova**. **Primul în Moldova** presented information in a tendentious and biased manner, having committed the following violations:

- **Labelling.** *“The PDM leader Pavel Filip set an example for his parliamentary group, broken down by the former democrat Andrian Candu and the runaway convict Ilan Shor.”*
- **Lack of the right to reply.** Andrian Candu and the Pro-Moldova parliamentary group were directly accused by some sources of the news, but their right to reply was not ensured.
- **Tendentious and unbalanced selection of statements/sources.** The representatives of PSRM and PDM had several direct interventions in news, while the opinions of other parties on this topic were not included.
- **National savior/messiah technique.** **Primul în Moldova** presented Igor Dodon as the person who came up with the initiative to vote on this declaration, thus putting him in a positive light. In fact, the initiative was put forward and proposed by MPs from the PDM's parliamentary group.

**RTR Moldova** and **Moldova 1** broadcast one news story each, presenting the information in a neutral and unbiased manner, without ethics violations. The journalists of these media outlets cited the statements of all parliamentary groups regarding the topic discussed.

**Televiziunea Centrală** covered the topic in a news story of 4 minutes 10 seconds, referring to several initiatives debated in the plenum of the Parliament. **Televiziunea Centrală** presented the PDM and its representatives in a negative light.

**Prime TV** broadcast one news story of 45 seconds on the monitored topic, while **Publika TV** posted **one news story** on its online platform, making a general presentation of the statement, without directly citing any source. Thus, both televisions **blurred** this topic.

**Jurnal TV** broadcast one news story of about 6 minutes on the topic. The station **lacked the right to reply**. Several sources of the news – Lilian Carp of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS), Denis Ulanov of the Shor Party, Alexandru Slusari of the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (PPDA) – brought accusations against some politicians (Marian Lupu, Viorica Abramciuc, Igor Dodon, Ion Ceban), but their right to reply was not ensured.

**Unimedia.info** published 2 news stories with tendentious headlines, **labelling**, and **mixture of facts with opinion**: *“The ‘turncoats’ from Pro-Moldova disagree with MPs leaving one party for another one: with their vote, the declaration condemning party switching and political corruption, voted by the Parliament...”; “Candu’s statements that annoyed Babuc and her reply from the Holy Scripture. Pavel Filip: MPs left the PDM one at a time, because offers were increasing.”*

**Sputnik.md** published [one news story](#) on the monitored topic, having used the **suggestion technique**. According to this media outlet, Igor Dodon was the one who suggested and anticipated the initiative (implicitly, the **national savior/messiah technique**). **Kp.md** published two news stories about the declaration adopted by MPs. It presented in a positive light and favored the PSRM and its representatives. In addition, **Kp.md did not ensure the right to reply** to those targeted and/or accused (Andrian Candu, Pro-Moldova parliamentary group) by the sources of news (Corneliu Furculita, Grigore Novac).

### Topic 3. Release of Veaceslav Platon from detention

*Context: In April 2017, Veaceslav Platon was sentenced to 18 years in prison for fraud and money laundering due to the embezzlement of 800 million lei of the former bank Banca de Economii. On June 15, 2020, he was released from Penitentiary No. 13 in Chisinau, following a request to suspend the execution of the sentence, filed by the Prosecutor General Alexandru Stoianoglo and admitted by the court.*

**General conclusion:** Some media outlets used this topic to present Vladimir Plahotniuc in a negative light (NTV Moldova, Primul în Moldova, Accent TV). Others truncated the statements of Veaceslav Platon (Prime TV, Publika TV). Some of the most common ethics violations were labelling and lack of the right to reply (Televiziunea Centrală, Accent TV, NTV Moldova, Primul în Moldova). There were also cases of mixture of facts with opinion (Prime TV, Sputnik.md), irony (Accent TV), and suggestion (Prime TV).

**NTV Moldova** broadcast one news story of about 2 minutes on this topic. The outlet committed the following violations:

- **Labelling.** “... according to him, the criminal cases against him were investigated at the command of the runaway oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc.”
- **Lack of the right to reply.** Vladimir Plahotniuc was targeted/accused by one of the sources (Veaceslav Platon), but was not offered to reply, directly or indirectly, through his lawyers or some of his entourage.

**Primul în Moldova** broadcast one news story of about 1 minute 45 seconds on the topic, having the same approach and using the same footage as **NTV Moldova**, committing **labelling**: “The controversial businessman Veaceslav Platon...”

On its website, **Accent TV** published three news stories on the monitored topic, having committed:

- **Irony.** “Maia Sandu’s MP Sergiu Litvinenco is an agent of Vlad Plahotniuc. Veaceslav Platon made this statement after he was released from prison.”
- **Lack of the right to reply.** Vladimir Plahotniuc was targeted and accused by Veaceslav Platon, but his right to reply was not ensured.
- **Labelling.** “The controversial businessman Veaceslav Platon has been released from detention.”

**RTR Moldova** broadcast one news story in which the authors of the materials cited several sources (Veaceslav Platon, Ion Cretu, Alexandru Stoianoglo), without including any source with direct statements. **RTR Moldova failed to ensure the right to reply** to Vladimir Plahotniuc, who was accused by Veaceslav Platon: “Platon claims... that his extradition to Moldova from Ukraine was illegally organized by the then president of the country, Petro Poroshenko, at the command of the former leader of the PDM, Vladimir Plahotniuc.”

**Moldova 1** broadcast one news story of 3 minutes 25 seconds, presenting the information in a neutral and unbiased manner, without committing ethics violations.

**Prime TV** broadcast one news story of 3.5 minutes on the monitored topic. This TV station omitted and/or truncated the direct statements of Veaceslav Platon, in which he was referring to Vladimir Plahotniuc. At the same time, in background information the journalists mentioned some video

recordings that had previously appeared in the public space, suggesting (**suggestion technique**) that Alexandru Stoianoglo and Veaceslav Platon had a friendly relationship: “...Subsequently, three video recordings appeared in the public space, on three different days, from Platon’s hearings, where the voice off screen seemed to be Stoianoglo’s. The two men seem to have a friendly talk, and the atmosphere seems to be relaxed” (**mixture of facts with opinion**). **Publika TV** had the same approach to the presentation of information and used the same footage as **Prime TV**, committing the same ethics violations.

**Jurnal TV** highlighted the criticism of the opposition (especially the parties PAS and PPDA) related to the event, without including their direct statements into the news story. At the same time, **Jurnal TV failed to ensure the right to reply** to the people targeted in the material (Vladimir Plahotniuc and Igor Dodon) by some of the sources that were cited either directly (Veaceslav Platon) or indirectly (Sergiu Litvinenco). The reporter’s phrase “*the head of state has not yet commented on the accusation*” cannot be qualified as ensuring the right to reply.

**Televiziunea Centrală** broadcast two news stories, in which it committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinion / Suggestion.** “*In one of them, Platon and Stoianoglo are greeting each other as friends or even as people to have known each other for a long time.*” **Televiziunea Centrală** wanted to suggest that the two men are good friends, and this fact allegedly influenced the release of Veaceslav Platon.
- **Labelling.** “*Veaceslav Platon, also nicknamed the number one raider in the CIS space...*”
- **Lack of the right to reply.** Maia Sandu accused Igor Dodon of being behind the release of Veaceslav Platon from prison. However, the president’s right to reply was not ensured.

**Sputnik.md** published two news stories, and in one of them **facts were mixed with opinion**: “*After four years of detention in Penitentiary No.13, Veaceslav Platon was released. He appeared in front of journalists obviously radiant, and accepted to talk with them.*” **Unimedia.info** published four news stories on the monitored topic, and presented information without violating ethics, just like **Kp.md**, which published two news stories about the release of Veaceslav Platon from prison.

#### **Topic 4. Stefan Gatcan: leaving the PSRM, joining the Pro-Moldova parliamentary group, and resigning from the position of MP**

*Context: The Party of Socialists MP Stefan Gatcan announced on June 30 that he was leaving the Socialists’ parliamentary group and was joining the Pro-Moldova parliamentary group. The next day, MPs from the Pro-Moldova parliamentary group announced that Stefan Gatcan had been abducted by the Socialists and forced to sign his resignation from the position of MP.*

**General conclusion:** *The greatest in number and most serious violations were committed by NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Televiziunea Centrală, and Kp.md – lack of the right to reply, mixture of facts with opinion, labelling, tendentious and ironic headlines, generalization, citing of unidentifiable sources. Some media outlets also used manipulation techniques, such as manipulation by means of audio/soundtrack (Jurnal TV).*

**NTV Moldova** presented information in a tendentious and unbalanced manner, having committed the following violations:

- **Tendentious selection of statements and information.** All news stories on **NTV Moldova** included only the direct statements of PSRM representatives (Vlad Batrincea, Corneliu Furculita, Grigore Novac, Vasile Bolea, Zinaida Greceanii) and/or the supporters of this party.
- **Tendentious headlines.** “*Protest against Gatcan’s betrayal*”; “*Reprehended for betrayal*”; “*Voters condemn Gatcan’s betrayal.*”



- **Lack of the right to reply.** Ilan Shor and Vladimir Plahotniuc were directly accused, but their right to reply was not ensured. In fact, **NTV Moldova** did not ensure in any of its news stories the right to reply or present the opinion of Stefan Gatcan and of the Pro-Moldova parliamentary group, who were directly accused by PSRM representatives.
- **Labelling.** *“The Pro-Moldova parliamentary group is led by Andrian Candu, the godson of the runaway oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc...”*
- **Mixture of facts with opinion.** *“...the representatives of Pro-Moldova and of Shor Party organized a protest in front of the presidential building and launched rumors on social networks, claiming that Gatcan had been abducted.”*

**Primul în Moldova** had the same approach and used the same footage as **NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV**, having committed the same ethics violations. Moreover, **Primul în Moldova** used the same sources in its news, including citizens (vox pop). In some scenes, the reporter who was interviewing sources was holding only the microphone with the logo of **NTV Moldova** and/or **Accent TV**. Therefore, this TV station borrowed footage from these two outlets without mentioning the source. **Primul în Moldova** also committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinion / Irony.** *“The news puzzled those of the Pro-Moldova group... Throughout the day, the members of this group, led by Andrian Candu, together with the representatives of the Shor Party, gave interviews in the area near the Parliament and the Presidential Administration, claiming either that Gatcan had been kidnapped, or that he was being held by force in one of the buildings.”*
- **Citing of unidentifiable sources.** *“The head of the PSRM’s parliamentary group Corneliu Furculita told a news portal that he had to address the officers of the State Guard Service.”*
- **Lack of the right to reply.** The Pro-Moldova parliamentary group, the Shor Party, and Stefan Gatcan were directly accused, but their right to reply was not ensured.

**Accent TV** covered this topic in a tendentious and unbalanced manner, with several ethics violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinion / Labelling.** *“...the MP Stefan Gatcan did not have the courage to bring the application to the Parliament. The MP Sergiu Sirbu, a person close to the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc, came instead of him.”*
- **Generalization.** *“Voters from Hincesti electoral district are also outraged by Stefan Gatcan’s act, which they find scandalous...”*
- **Mentioning unverifiable sources.** *“...several months later, political analysts and former colleagues of Gatcan from PSRM had the opportunity to see that the values that the MP would be promoting from then on were the financial amounts reported to the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc.”* **Accent TV** did not mention any name in this context and included no statement confirming the things said by journalists (**mixture of facts with opinion**).
- **Lack of the right to reply.** The Pro-Moldova parliamentary group and the Shor Party were directly accused, but their right to reply was not ensured. The phrase that *“Accent TV is ready to offer the right to reply to all the people mentioned in this report”* cannot be qualified as ensuring the right to reply to the people concerned.
- **Accent TV** borrowed video footage from **NTV Moldova** without mentioning the source. In several scenes, the reporter who was interviewing sources was holding only the microphone with **NTV Moldova** logo.

**Moldova 1** and **RTR Moldova** covered the topic in a neutral and unbiased manner, without violations.

**Televiziunea Centrală** committed the following violations in the presentation of information:

- **Mixture of facts with opinion.** *“Although nearly three weeks ago President Igor Dodon was firmly convinced that the PSRM’s parliamentary group was unshakable, the first MP broke the ice...”; “The Presidential Administration looked like a real fortress, where dozens of MPs and ordinary people came, worried about the fate of their colleague Stefan Gatcan... However, while MPs were running about looking for Gatcan, he was quietly broadcasting live from a vineyard.”*

- **Lack of the right to reply.** In one news story, the PAS’s MP Lilian Carp referred to PSRM, but **Televiziunea Centrală** failed to ensure the right to reply to the latter. The phrase used by journalists – “*The Socialists have not commented yet*” – cannot be qualified as ensuring the right to reply to the people targeted/accused. In addition, Igor Dodon and Pavel Filip were targeted/accused by Marina Tauber, but none of them was provided with the right to reply.

**Jurnal TV** broadcast five news stories with a total of 12 minutes 10 seconds of airtime. The majority of news stories were neutral and unbiased, but in one of them **Jurnal TV** used manipulation **by means of audio/soundtrack**. In the story illustrating the moment when Stefan Gatcan’s car was stopped by the PSRM’s MPs Vlad Batrincea and Corneliu Furculita, **Jurnal TV** included the soundtrack of the Russian TV series “Brigada” [“Law of the Lawless”].

Both **Prime TV** and **Publika TV** presented the monitored topic in detail. **Prime TV** dedicated to it about 20 minutes, and **Publika TV** broadcast and/or published on its website 18 news stories on this topic (**exacerbation technique**). Both outlets had the same approach and used the same sources and footage. **Publika TV** committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinion.** “*Change of the situation in the governing coalition of PSRM-PDM. The MP Stefan Gatcan left the party and parliamentary group of the Socialists...*”
- **Labelling.** “*... now, the red-blue coalition has 49 MPs.*”
- **Lack of the right to reply.** In one news story, President Igor Dodon was targeted/accused by the MP Sergiu Sirbu of “*lawless actions,*” and the president’s right to reply was not ensured.

**Sputnik.md** published four news stories on the monitored topic, presenting the information in a neutral manner and committing no ethics violations in its news.

**Unimedia.info** covered the events in detail, publishing 18 news stories on the monitored topic and committing several ethics violations:

- **Lack of the right to reply.** Stefan Gatcan was accused by PSRM’s MPs Vlad Batrincea and Corneliu Furculita of having been paid to leave the PSRM’s parliamentary group. Given the seriousness of accusations, **Unimedia.info** should have ensured Stefan Gatcan’s right to reply in the same story, which did not happen.
- **Tendentious and ironic headlines.** “*‘Vanished.’ The Presidential Administration denies that Gatcan is at the institution.*”

**Kp.md** published nine materials on the monitored topic, presenting information in a tendentious and unbalanced manner, having committed the following violations:

- **Lack of the right to reply.** **KP.md** failed to ensure the right to reply to the MP Sergiu Sirbu, who was accused by the Socialist Vasile Bolea of being “*the well-known servant of Plahotniuc... who took money in order to leave the PDM and create the Pro-Moldova group together with bandits.*”
- **Generalization.** “*Experts and politicians have repeatedly said that these withdrawals are paid for by the former leader of the Democrats Vlad Plahotniuc, who is thus taking revenge on the current government.*”
- **Ironic and tendentious headlines.** “*Gatcan has been found: The scandalous (shackled) MP said that no one is keeping him locked up and tortured.*”

## Topic 5. Motion of no confidence against the Chicu Government and debates in the Parliament

*Context: On July 14, 2020, the PPDA party signed a motion of no confidence against the Chicu Government. On the morning of July 20, 2020, the Parliament’s Standing Bureau decided to examine the motion on the same day. At the Parliament meeting, the initiative was rejected. 46 MPs from the PPDA, PAS, Pro-Moldova group, and Shor Party voted for it.*

**General conclusion:** *With the exception of RTR Moldova, all monitored media outlets committed at least one violation of ethics. The most common were mixture of facts with opinion and lack of the right to reply, followed by tendentious selection of statements and labelling. At the same time, several media outlets used the internal enemy manipulation technique along with the national savior technique (NTV Moldova, Primul în Moldova, Accent TV). In addition, some outlets intentionally blurred details regarding the monitored topic, either presenting only opinions, or emphasizing the vision of only one party involved (NTV Moldova, Kp.md). Some outlets focused on the sensational and scandalous element of the topic, also diminishing its importance (Primul în Moldova).*

**NTV Moldova** broadcast one news story of 8 minutes 45 seconds, presenting the information in an unbalanced and tendentious manner and committing several ethics violations and manipulation techniques:

- **Change of the logical course of the news story / Blurring.** The entire story focused on the report of Prime Minister Ion Chicu, without mentioning details about the motion of no confidence filed by PAS and PPDA.
- **Mixture of facts with opinion.** *“The opposition tried to thwart the presentation of the report by Prime Minister Ion Chicu in the context of the motion of no confidence.”*
- **Labelling.** *“The parties led by Maia Sandu, Andrei Nastase, and the runaway oligarch Ilan Shor tried to disturb the process by shouting and stamping. Despite this chaos created by the opposition, the head of the Cabinet of Ministers continued his speech.”*
- **Tendentious headlines / Labelling.** *“The Alliance of Chaos in the Parliament.”*
- **Internal enemy / national savior techniques.** On the one hand, the opposition was presented in a negative context, accused of and blamed for the problems the country is facing. On the other hand, the Chicu Government was presented in a positive context, as the Cabinet of Ministers that managed to do only good things for the citizens.
- **Unbalanced presentation/inclusion of statements.** The authors included into the news five direct statements of Prime Minister Ion Chicu, totaling 6 minutes (70% of the news story), while the statements/opinions of the opposition representatives were not cited in the material.
- **Lack of the right to reply.** The opposition parties and some politicians (Maia Sandu) were targeted/accused by Prime Minister Ion Chicu, but their right to reply was not ensured.

**Primul în Moldova** broadcast one news story of 6 minutes 45 seconds on the topic. The TV station presented the information in a tendentious and biased manner, committing the following violations:

- **Blurring.** **Primul în Moldova** blurred the information on the motion of no confidence by highlighting the scandal elements from the Parliament (dispute between the MPs Dumitru Diacov and Marina Tauber) and focusing on the report and performance of the Government, summed up by Prime Minister Ion Chicu. The station omitted some details on the motion, as well as the opinion of the opposition.
- **Tendentious headlines.** *“Chaos in the Parliament.”*
- **Mixture of facts with opinion.** *“The opposition created chaos in the Parliament, by booing and behaving inappropriately”; “A meeting with political show in the Parliament today. The examination of the motion of no confidence... turned into a gross squabble...”*
- **Internal enemy / national savior techniques.** On the one hand, the opposition was presented in a negative context, being accused of the problems faced by Moldova. On the other hand, the Chicu Cabinet was presented in a positive context, as a government that managed to do only good things for citizens.
- **Lack of the right to reply.** The opposition parties and some politicians (Maia Sandu) were targeted/accused by Prime Minister Ion Chicu, but their right to reply was not ensured.

In the case of **Accent TV**, we monitored two news stories that were broadcast (**Chaos in the Parliament** and **Greceanii: The opposition wants chaos**) and four materials published on the station’s website. This station presented the information in a tendentious and unbalanced manner, with the same scenario, footage, and text as **NTV Moldova** and **Primul în Moldova**. **Accent TV** committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinion.** *“The opposition suffered a strong failure! The motion of no confidence fell, and the Chicu Government remained to lead Moldova.”*
- **Lack of the right to reply.** The opposition parties and some politicians were targeted and accused by Prime Minister Ion Chicu, President Igor Dodon, and Socialist MPs Vlad Batrincea and Vladimir Golovatiuc, but their right to reply was not ensured in any of the cases.
- **Internal enemy / national savior techniques.** On the one hand, the opposition was presented in a negative context. On the other hand, the Chicu Government was presented in a positive light.

The public television **Moldova 1** broadcast one news story on the topic, having committed several ethics violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinion.** *“The debates were accompanied by sour remarks and chaos...”; “...there was just a little step until chaos...”*
- **Biased selection of statements.** The journalists included into the news story statements by Prime Minister Ion Chicu, while for the opposition parties they inserted only the questions addressed to the prime minister, and no direct quotes from the speeches regarding the motion.

**RTR Moldova** broadcast one news story of 4 minutes 6 seconds on the monitored topic, presenting the information in a neutral and unbiased manner, without violations.

**Prime TV** broadcast three news stories on the topic, providing unbiased coverage, with 9.5 minutes of airtime. **Prime TV mixed facts with opinion:** *“Meanwhile, circus was in the Parliament today. The examination of the motion of no confidence against the Chicu Government heated up the spirits.”*

**Publika TV** broadcast and published on the website 16 relevant news stories/materials. In the video news stories, the station had the same approach and used the same text and footage as **Prime TV**. In articles, **Publika TV** committed the following ethics violations:

- **Lack of the right to reply.** Two MPs from the Shor Party were targeted and accused by the source of one news story (Nicolae Furtuna, director of the National Agency for Public Health), who claimed that they were allegedly infected with the coronavirus *“at OrheiLand”* [amusement park in Orhei], but they were not provided with the right to reply.
- **Tendentious headlines.** *“A new meeting, a new circus. MPs a step from a FISTFIGHT”;* *“Circus and chaos in the Parliament.”*
- **Mixture of facts with opinion.** *“Show at the Parliament. The MPs Marina Tauber and Dumitru Diacov were the protagonists of an exchange of funny remarks at the beginning of today’s meeting”;* *“The examination of the motion of no confidence against the Chicu Government turned into a real chaos”;* *“Ion Chicu did not hesitate to shoot arrows at the opposition.”*

**Jurnal TV** focused on the statements by the PPDA representatives (Maria Ciobanu, Andrei Nastase) to the detriment of Prime Minister Ion Chicu, who was cited directly with some short statements. At the same time, **Jurnal TV** had one case of **mixture of facts with opinion:** *“It should be noted that at the latest meeting of the Parliament, on Thursday, the two MPs of the Shor Party did not wear protective masks. Some of the PDM MPs did not wear masks, either. Even so, the Parliament’s leadership, provided by PSRM-PDM, hurried to announce a plenary meeting for today.”*

**Televiziunea Centrală** broadcast three news stories on the monitored topic, totaling almost 12 minutes of airtime, and committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinion.** *“Chaos in the plenum of the Parliament spread to the hall of the building”;* *“MPs fought together with journalists to get access to the Parliament”* (including **generalization**).
- **Biased and disproportionate selection of statements.** Prime Minister Ion Chicu was cited directly with general statements of little relevance to the issue of the motion, while the representatives of the opposition parties were provided with generous airtime, with large statements.



- **Lack of the right to reply.** Igor Dodon was accused by some sources of news, but his right to reply was not ensured.

**Sputnik.md** published 11 news stories on the topic, having committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinion.** *“The MP Marina Tauber of the Shor Party put on a show at the beginning of today’s meeting of the Parliament.”*
- **Lack of the right to reply.** In one of the news stories, **Sputnik.md** mentioned the statements of Igor Dodon, according to which *“attempts to dismiss the Government, after it adopted important decisions for citizens, looks either like an adventure of parties from the former ACUM bloc or like an agreement with oligarchic forces, which want to restore control over the state institutions.”* The outlet failed to ensure the right to reply to the representatives of the parties PAS and PPDA, who were accused/targeted in the statement of the head of state.

**Unimedia.info** published 13 news stories on the topic of the motion of no confidence against the Chicu Government. The outlet committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinion.** *“Access of the media into the meeting room was voted for after long minutes of scandal and chaos in the Parliament.”*
- **Lack of the right to reply.** **Unimedia.info** published the opinion of President Igor Dodon and the PPDA secretary Ion Terguta regarding the rejection of the motion of no confidence. The former accused the Pro-Moldova parliamentary group and the Shor Party, as well as some politicians (Maia Sandu and Andrei Nastase); the latter targeted President Igor Dodon in his statement. In none of the cases, the people targeted/accused were provided with the right to reply.

**Kp.md** published six materials, presenting the information in a tendentious and biased manner. The authors presented in a negative light the opposition parties and favored the Government and the governing parties. **Kp.md** committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinion.** *“During the speech of Prime Minister Chicu (by the way, a motion of no confidence against the prime minister was discussed at the meeting [irony]) the opposition was upset about the ‘attack’ on Maia Sandu and organized a chaos with shouts, screams, and stamping.”*
- **Labelling.** *“The Parliament is examining today the motion of no confidence filed by PDDA and PAS and supported by the groups of Candu and Shor, which are controlled by the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc.”*
- **Lack of the right to reply.** In one of the news stories, the PSRM’s MP Vasile Bolea accused the opposition parties: *“The alliance of chaos Sandu-Candu-Plaha-Shor transformed the Parliament into a territory for defense of the airport. They are defending with teeth and fists the billions stolen by oligarchs.”* **Kp.md** did not ensure the right to reply to those concerned.
- **Tendentious headlines.** *“Chaos reigns in the Parliament of Moldova, where a fight happened: Opposition MPs made a circus show during the prime minister’s speech, and others went to calm them down.”*
- **Generalization.** *“Political analysts noted that the motion of no confidence coincided with the decision of the Chicu Government to annul the airport concession agreement.”*
- **Reference to unverifiable sources.** *“Just like some analysts assumed at the beginning of the Parliament’s meeting, the opposition did not find the necessary votes.”*

## CONCLUSIONS

During the monitoring period (May 1 – July 31, 2020), all 12 monitored media outlets committed violations of ethical standards. The most common violations were failure to ensure the right to reply to the people targeted or accused in news and mixture of facts with opinion, and each of the 12 outlets committed them at least ones. Other violations are selective presentation of information and statements, tendentious headlines, labelling, generalization, irony, borrowing of video without mentioning the source, and reference to unverifiable sources.



**Labelling** was used more and more frequently by television stations (**Primul în Moldova, Unimedia.info, NTV Moldova, Televiziunea Centrală, Accent TV, Publika TV**), as well as **tendentious headlines** (**Sputnik.md, NTV Moldova, Kp.md, Unimedia.info, NTV Moldova, Primul în Moldova, Publika TV**). In some materials on the monitored topics, some media outlets used **irony** (**Primul în Moldova, Accent TV, Unimedia.info, Kp.md**) or **generalization** (**Accent TV, Kp.md**). At the same time, some media outlets – **Primul în Moldova, Accent TV, Kp.md** – referred to **unverifiable sources**, while others **borrowed video without mentioning the source** (**Accent TV, Primul în Moldova**). Furthermore, there was one case of **changing the logical course in news** (**NTV Moldova**).

**Selective presentation of statements/sources** (**Kp.md, NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Moldova 1, Televiziunea Centrală**) was one of the major violations found during the monitoring of the 12 media outlets for this report. The media outlets tend to cite directly the representatives of the political parties that they support and to exclude/ignore almost altogether the statements of the opposition party representatives. Thus, because topics are covered through the prism of political preferences, their politicization happens. For example, the television stations **NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova** and the portals **Sputnik.md, Kp.md** had a pro-PSRM approach in news, favoring the Chicu Government and President Igor Dodon; **Prime TV** and **Publika TV** broadcast mostly the same content, slightly favoring the Pro-Moldova parliamentary group and its representatives; and **Jurnal TV** in some situations showed a slightly pro-PPDA approach.

Some of the most common manipulation and disinformation techniques were blurring (**Accent TV, Kp.md, Prime TV, Publika TV, Primul în Moldova**) and the suggestion technique (**Prime TV, Sputnik.md, Publika TV, Televiziunea Centrală**), followed by the internal enemy technique (**Kp.md, Primul în Moldova, Accent TV**), the national savior technique (**Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Sputnik.md**), the information exacerbation technique (**Prime TV, Publika TV**), and manipulation by means of audio/soundtrack (**Jurnal TV**).

**RTR Moldova** and **Moldova 1** covered the majority of topics in a mostly neutral and unbiased manner. However, these two TV stations also committed some ethics violations (lack of the right to reply, mixture of facts with opinion, and selective presentation of information and statements).

**Unimedia.info** had some cases of irony, lack of the right to reply, tendentious headlines, and mixture of facts with opinion.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Broadcasting Council (BC), based on article 75 (*Responsibilities of the Broadcasting Council*) and article 86 (*Cooperation with civil society*) of the [Code of Audiovisual Media Services of the Republic of Moldova](#), should take note of the findings and monitor the televisions, the content of which, according to reports, delivers manipulating information.
- The editors of TV stations should supervise the editorial content so that it complies with the mission of the media to inform the public and correctly present the reality, and not with the desire of political circles to promote their interests and attack opponents.
- Reporters should report all relevant facts on events in an unbiased manner and after verifying information, not selectively or unilaterally. At the same time, they should understand that the right to reply for the persons targeted or accused is mandatory and is one of the key rules in journalism.
- Media consumers should seek information in several media sources, in order to avoid the risk of receiving wrong and manipulating information.