



mass - media

June 2015



in Moldova

Horizont la nivel internațional

Horizont interațional

Remarcăm din R. Moldova a de pând cu aprilie 2003, de "consolidare a și protecție a martorilor de trafic de ființe umane scopurile urmărite, OS

Press Freedom Days send a strong anticorruption message this year

Key media organizations—the Independent Journalism Center (IJC), the Independent Press Association (API) and the Electronic Press Association (APEL) — launched the week-long celebration of Press Freedom Days in Moldova starting Monday, May 4, with nine media NGOs signing the [Press Freedom Memorandum \(May 3, 2014–May 3, 2015\)](#) which summarizes the current main issues concerning local media outlets (see the Annex).

Nadine Gogu, IJC Director, highlighted the key points in the memorandum: the outpouring of Russian propaganda into our country through local channels broadcasting programs from the Russian Federation; transparency in media ownership which has not yet been achieved since a law passed to that end will come into force only in the autumn; and the danger of media concentration in the hands of politicians including during the transition from analogue to digital transmission. In this context, Ms Gogu recalled the deficient behavior of some media outlets during the election campaign last year and the lack of independence of the Coordinating Council for Broadcasting, the Supervisory Board of Teleradio Moldova, and the Supervisory Board of the regional Public Broadcaster Gagauzia Radio Televizionu among other items.

Some of the media NGOs recommendations to the authorities included in the memorandum were to implement without further delay the provisions of the Government Program for 2015–2018 concerning the media, to ensure the security of the national information space through legal mechanisms that would not affect freedom of speech and other values of a free press, and at a minimum to ensure the access of the media to the plenary sittings of Parliament, a problem that has persisted throughout the reference period.

In his turn, **IPA Director Petru Macovei** presented data on the lack of protection of journalists globally. According to the International Committee to Protect Journalists, 1,122 journalists have been murdered worldwide from 1992 to 2015. “They were attacked, murdered for being journalists,” he underscored adding that although fortunately there have not been such cases in Moldova, “The protection of journalists is not ensured in this country either.” He cited several cases of physical and verbal



abuse of media representatives mentioned in the memorandum such as the beating of activist Oleg Brega in June 2014, a case that has not been resolved to this day. It was no accident that Moldova fell 16 positions in the ranking of Reporters without Borders in 2014. The IPA director urged the government to be aware that “journalists are a key element of democracy.”

APEL Chairman Ion Bunduchi referred to the Corruption Index global ranking, which places Moldova last among 144 countries in the chapter on Corruption in Justice. “This is where we are now. I had some hopes for the media back in 2009, but they never materialized. The world sets aside a day to acclaim press freedom while we have been trying for the last several years to organize decades/weeks that we call Press Freedom Days to advocate for more freedom for the press,” he concluded.

In this context, the expert recalled that the transition to digital television was to be completed in June while the government had adopted a program to that effect just two weeks ago. “When it should have been completed, we’re just starting,” he commented. In his view, Moldova has become the hostage of politicians. In conclusion, Mr. Bunduchi urged fellow journalists to act together as information is a factor contributing to the general welfare. “We vote as we are informed,” he added.

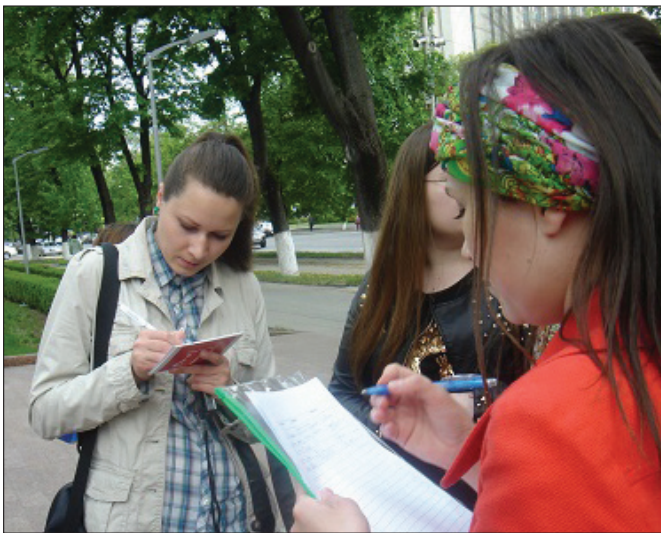
Press Freedom Days included an array of events and actions.

A Petition: We Want Access to Parliament!

The petition concerning media access to plenary sessions of Parliament signed by hundreds of representatives of media outlets and by media consumers including via www.media-azi.md was sent to the leadership of Parliament a year ago; lawmakers, however, have not yet reviewed it.

“We urge the leadership of Parliament to immediately solve the issue of granting the media access and to fulfill the countless promises made earlier. Limiting the access of journalists to the plenary sittings of Parliament and confining them to a room lacking adequate working conditions is a violation of the right to freedom of expression and of the right to work. In addition, it runs contrary to the principle of transparency in decision making,” the petition stated.

The signatories reminded Members of Parliament that they are in the service of the people and are paid with public funds. Therefore, every citizen is entitled to know the position of each MP regarding the issues under discussion.



The Campaign “The Media and the People Command: Stop Corruption!”

To mark Press Freedom Day, IJC together with other media NGOs initiated the Campaign “The Media and the People Command: Stop Corruption!” aimed at urging journalists to act together and to get involved in fighting the corruption that “affects the lives of the people in all areas: economic, social, cultural, education, and justice”. Bearing in mind that media organizations aim to promote the public interest and write for the people, media NGOs suggested that from May 4–8, 2015 outlets publish

and mention the slogan in newspapers and magazines, during TV and radio newscasts and thematic programs as well as on-line.

“We urge and encourage you to be united and show that the media can be a watchdog for society, can draw attention to the pressing problems in society and can put pressure on state authorities to genuinely fight corruption,” said the statement on the initiative.

Wall of Shame “Enemies of the Press” in Front of Parliament

The event was held in front of Parliament as a rally against the recent attempts of some lawmakers to limit the freedom of expression. Through their actions, they have hampered the work of journalists in Moldova from May 3, 2014 to May 3, 2015.

“This event aims at reminding the authorities once again that since they have taken on public functions they need to be more tolerant toward the media and to accept a greater degree of criticism from the media as the press has the right and obligation to report on government activities, including in a critical manner,” said **Nadine Gogu, IJC Director**, in her address to the flash-mob participants.

The Wall of Shame includes the people listed as Enemies of the Press in the column published daily on the IJC’s Media Azi portal. Among them are Parliament’s leadership who have not resolved the problem of limiting the access of journalists to plenary meetings; lawmakers who have put forward bills that if adopted could limit the freedom of press; and the MP who allowed a person accompanying him to attack a journalist among others. Although these transgressions were reported by national media in due time, the organizers wanted the Wall of Shame to draw the attention of the leadership to the fact that the free press operates in line with European standards and values and that not only the press but also top officials should comply with them.

“We in civil society have monitored so far and will continue monitoring what is going on, and whenever officials try to limit press freedom making use of their official positions and decision-making powers, we will respond,” said Nadine Gogu. In addition, the IJC director urged journalists to report aggression or abuse by the authorities stating that the Wall of Shame “Enemies of the Press” is not a one-off event. “Next year we will prepare a new Wall of Shame to be revealed during Press Freedom Days. I sincerely hope that next year it will be smaller and will include fewer names. I hope that it will teach the authorities a lesson,” she told journalists.

(Media Azi, May 4-8, 2015)

Digital TV: a stake of 1 billion lei. For whom do the authorities keep silent?

Under the agreement signed at the Regional Radiocommunication Conference held in Geneva in 2006 and ratified by the Law No. 69-XVI of 27 March 2008, the Republic of Moldova agreed to cease conventional analog broadcasting. Most existing analog terrestrial television networks cannot broadcast digital signals unless they have transmitters produced after 2011. Therefore, the transition to digital television will affect virtually all radio and TV operators; they will have to invest in modern equipment.

The spectrum of frequencies is a limited resource owned by the state for which several operators compete. The transition to digital terrestrial broadcasting should solve this problem. The major objective of the transition is ensuring uniform access to alternative sources of information and increasing the number of TV stations to 42, at least 12 of which will have national coverage. Another 12 stations will have the status of regional broadcasters, and the remaining 18 will have the status of local operators. The only problem is the limited advertising market which is unable to provide business opportunities for all. In addition, broadcasting costs for TV stations are extremely high at about 30,000 euros per month for national operators which makes this service quite unattractive. In confirmation of this, in Chisinau municipality two terrestrial digital television transmitters owned by the SE Radiocomunicatii (DVB-T and DVB-T2 standards, MPEG-4 compression) operate in testing mode on channels 58 and 61. These two transmitters broadcast 18 radio and TV channels (capacity 30) in a radius of approximately 30 kilometers from the television tower.

Ground zero in the audiovisual sector: The hidden fight for the distribution market

The transition to digital terrestrial broadcasting is not only about a few technical changes; rather, it is a complicated process of modernization. It is truly ground zero that we have no right to marginalize. The high degree of exposure to foreign stations and their excessive penetration of our audiovisual space should force



us to explore this opportunity for significant reforms; however, the circles of power are instead discussing whether to implement digital broadcasting and establish multiplexes or to develop cable networks and distribute TV signals to operators through Internet protocol (IP) TV. These discussions are motivated by the business opportunities offered by new market realities.

An analysis of the distribution market shows that 69.4% of households receive TV signals through antennas in analog format and 5% have no access to TV. A total of 25.34% of households are subscribers to cable networks of which 19.79% are consumers of IP TV services. Simply speaking, only 25% of TV consumers in Moldova are payers, and in 2014 the market was estimated at about 162 million lei. Most interesting is that the IP TV distribution network of JSC Moldtelecom has experienced growth in terms of quantity and value, and from the perspective of the distribution market, it is as good as it can be. Keeping the current parameters we can talk about a market of about 650 million lei annually. This may slightly increase up to 1 billion 86 million lei if there is an absolute monopoly by Moldtelecom.

Too small and too many

I have already shown above that the transition to digital terrestrial broadcasting can provide new TV opportunities by broadening the distribution area and increasing business opportunities. The

only problem is that the advertising market is unable to support such a large number of stations, and the Republic of Moldova currently does not have a mechanism capable of ensuring free competition in the market. This issue becomes even more serious when the TV stations with access to the first multiplex created with public money will be determined. More serious is that the Audiovisual Coordinating Council (ACC) does not to date has not set any criteria for the selection. I also insist again that the transition to digital broadcasting is a unique opportunity to reform the audiovisual sector. Here are some recommendations.

- Establish a public communication agency to provide a general concept of public communication in the Republic of Moldova.
- Create a national concept of audiovisual development and hence the Moldovan television market and industry.
- Adopt a special law for the protection of Moldovan audiovisual space.
- Discourage rebroadcasts of foreign content. Encourage Moldovan companies to invest in creating their own programs. This would include compliance with national laws with reference to broadcasting in Romanian and with European norms.
- Change the principles for establishing the Audiovisual Coordinating Council and protect this institution from outside political influence. The ACC should be composed of one representative from each of the following:
 1. TV outlets
 2. The Association of Advertising Agencies
 3. The National Council for the Protection of Competition
 4. The National Regulatory Agency for Telecommunications
 5. The Union of Journalists
 6. The Association of Lawyers
 7. Three members appointed through public competition by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova.
- Establish multiplexes with national coverage based on companies with original content only.
- Prohibit a single person from owning more than one TV station with national coverage. Sooner or later the Republic of Moldova will have to do this.
- Disseminate advertising exclusively in Romanian.
- Tax 50% of the advertising income of companies rebroadcasting foreign content.
- Tax 90% of the income of companies that have income that are not clearly active in the TV market in the Republic of Moldova.
- Establish audience measurements by public auction under ACC and the National Council for the Protection of Competition control.
- Involve the state in financing audience measurements for a minimum of four years.
- Mandatorily double the number of movies and series in Romanian.
- Change the nomenclature of professions to tackle the deficit of staff in the TV market.

Ion TERGUȚĂ

From *Charlie Hebdo* to the hate speeches these days in Moldova

The limits of freedom of expression is quite a complicated issue as there are countless aspects to take into account. *Charlie Hebdo* defined itself as a magazine of satire and caricature leaving no room for misinterpretation. Yet even though the magazine does not mislead its readers, it can offend. In Moldova, satire and caricatures are protected by the Article 7 of Law no. 64 of April 23, 2010 on the freedom of expression providing in paragraph (8) that, “No one may be held accountable for humoristic and satirical statements unless such manner of expression misleads the audience regarding the state of facts.”

At the same time, *insult*, which is defined by law as “a verbal, written or nonverbal expression deliberately offending someone, against the generally accepted norms of decent conduct in a democratic society” is forbidden. Our level of *unacceptability* will therefore decide whether we are in the legal or the forbidden category. Theoretically, a caricature may be deemed as an insult in the event the representation is far beyond the moral norms accepted by the current democratic society; however, a caricature may go beyond decency as it is an artistic manner of expression. There have been no complex public debates or intense discussions related to the acceptability/unacceptability of satire or caricature, but a new topic needs to be analysed: hate speech. It is connected especially with discrimination.

Even if it is generally believed that Moldovans are a tolerant people, that quality is not necessarily true of all of us. Our mentality is still impregnated with negative stereotypes related to particular ethnic groups, religions, people with a different sexual orientation or disabled people. Stereotypes are not far from hate speech. The reality in Moldova is that there are plenty of homophobic and LGBT hate speeches in addition to occasional derogatory speeches against certain ethnic groups or religions.

Our jurisprudence has started to focus on certain related aspects in a series of cases as well as in a range of interesting judgements by the Council for Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination and Ensuring Equality (“Equality Council”).

The first case to be noticed in this respect was *Oleg Brega vs. Privesc.eu* in which the portal was accused of hate speech against people reputed to be or who truly are homosexual and for insulting the plaintiff by failure to moderate the chat on its site <http://privesc.eu>. The portal lost the case and was forced to post a public apology to the plaintiff as well as the operative part of the court judgement on its front page. The plaintiff also obtained 5000 lei in moral damage. Another case is *Genderdoc-M vs. the Bishop*



Training organized as part of the project “Combating hate speech in online media and social networks” is a project implemented by IJC with the support of Civil Rights Defenders (Sweden), a partner of the IJC.

of Balti and Falesti, Marchel. In this case, the judge ordered the bishop to retract his statement and to apologize in addition to paying moral damage in the amount of 10, 000 lei and court fees (approximately 12,000 lei).

Among other precedents, we could mention the decision of 16.10.2014 issued by the Equality Council against General Media TV (Publika TV) and Hristofor Ciubotaru, as well as the decision of 13.10.2014 on the statements in the political speech by Renato Usatii that contained insults about Romany people.

Today, Moldova perceives hate speech in the light of the antidiscrimination law. It is important to mention that the categories protected by the antidiscrimination law are more exposed to hate speeches than others, especially homosexual people, because a law protects them. Speeches related to a category falling under the protection of the antidiscrimination law shall be deemed as incitement to discrimination/hate speech and shall be sanctioned, while speeches related to an unprotected category shall fall under freedom of expression.

The philosophy behind freedom of expression is that it is legal and insured in a democratic society under the condition that we are tolerant of other views and opinions as well. Accepting intolerance could put an end to the freedom of expression and other rights and freedoms characteristic of a democratic society.

Olivia PÎRȚAC

analytical magazine

Shield and sword for securing our local information space

Journalists have lately invited civil society to discuss securing our local information space, an issue that has become a national priority since aggressive Russian propaganda has emerged in former soviet countries. This issue has been repeatedly discussed since our country declared its independence, but successive governments have ignored it.

The military expansion of the Putin regime into Ukraine including a Goebbels-like propaganda expansion made the Chisinau government realize the danger that menaces our country. The bill aimed at amending the Broadcasting Code to regulate information space security registered in Parliament by a group of Democratic Party and Liberal Democratic Party MPs raised doubts with specialists who believed it could lead to censorship. Media, civil society and CCA representatives, journalists, sociologists and opinion leaders voiced prompt reactions and launched several discussions seriously criticising the bill which led to the postponement of its passing.

Those who tried to bury the bill may soon regret their actions. It is high time our government as well as civil society learned a lesson from the ongoing atrocities in Ukraine during the last two years. The Kremlin ignores tears and tries to reach its goals by any means, ignoring the standards of civilization including with respect to an information war against its neighboring country. Talking to several peers in Kiev, I realized Ukraine is now between Scylla and Charybdis when it comes to addressing Russian propaganda attacks. On the one hand, the county wishes to join Europe and cannot respond in kind to Russia's aggressive use of information. On the other hand, Ukraine loses against Eastern propaganda. It's like facing a tank with a flower. The tank would only stop in a poem or in a romantic movie, but if the

tank is Russian, it will not stop in either a movie or in a poem...

The president of the Kiev Press Club, Iuri Peresunyko, believes one of the errors in addressing the Russian propaganda is Ukraine's reactiveness. He believes the country should take proactive steps instead as propaganda must be stopped not only by interdictions and by revealing false statements but also by addressing the country with its own well made speeches.

After recovering from the recession in the early 1990s, the Kremlin realized that to recreate its empire it needed to adopt new military tactics. Thus, a "hybrid warfare" emerged which it successfully implemented in Crimea and then in Donbas. In February 2013, the Chief of Staff of the Russian Army, Valeri Gherasimov, gave a clear explanation of what would be "hybrid warfare." He said war and peace are now notions "with boundaries almost erased" and that the methods of conflict involve "massive political, economic, information, humanitarian and other non-military means." All these measures may be supplemented by consolidating the "fifth column" created in the local population and with covert armed forces. Thus, the investment in this hybrid warfare is mainly in propaganda. The Kremlin also admitted this when allocating 643 million euros to support pro-Russian media institutions. Vladimir Putin himself revealed this figure during a seminar of the All Russia People's Front.

It is the joint duty of both the authorities and of civil society to secure our local media space as soon as possible by addressing the information war started by Russia. Civil society must take control over this issue and require the government to develop a program to address the Russian information war. I would even suggest a social movement: Stop Russian Propaganda!

Gheorghe BUDEANU

The new class of the School of Advanced Journalism (CSAJ) graduated on June 19. The 12 students of the 2014–2015 academic year received their degree certificates during a special ceremony.



Mass Media in Moldova

Journalist's credibility: a personal issue

My colleague Tatiana Corai asked me to comment on the issue of Moldovan journalists' credibility. The topic she suggested sounds quite dramatic and alarming: "Journalism: a profession in search of credibility."

What do the polls show?

My first impulse was to find out what the opinion polls say about this. Do they show an incipient decline or a lack of citizens' confidence in local media? I was happy to learn that after the church, the media is one of the most trusted institutions by the citizens of Moldova. According to the Public Opinion Barometer carried out by Civis at the behest of the Institute for Public Policy in November 2014, 60% of those interviewed said they trusted the local media which is almost the same level as in the last 10 years.

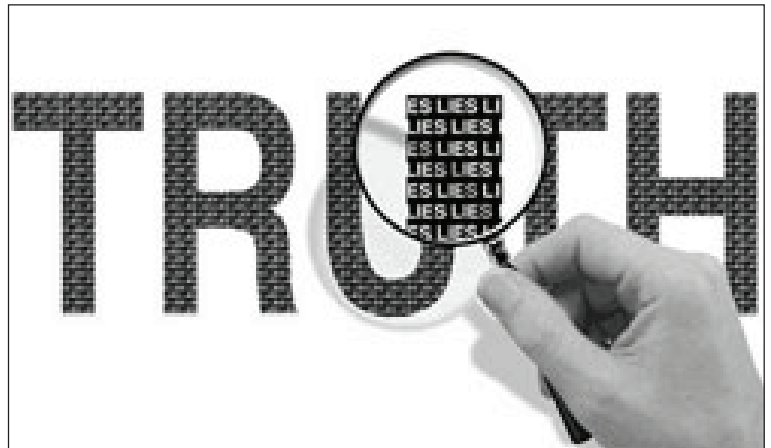
Trust in public TV station Moldova 1 has not changed since 2009 when it ceased to be an instrument of communist propaganda and started reflecting quite objectively political life and realities in the Republic of Moldova (according to the CCA). This means that professional standards are not crucial for the listeners and the viewers of Moldova.

Dissatisfaction

Beyond the poll data, journalists struggle with pessimism, dissatisfaction and uncertainty that audience credibility cannot repress. Twenty years ago, (when Soros Foundation Moldova was established) Carole Brennan, an American journalist, created the Center for Independent Journalism—the future of Moldovan journalism—whose role and impact at the time seemed much clearer. It seemed to us it was enough just to manage media products in such a way as to attract and sell advertisements and to obtain economic profit while the rest of the problems would solve themselves. Reality was, however, different from our romantic and naïve views.

Monopoly of the information market

The national economy was unable to revive, our country lacked a fair investment environment and an adequate tax policy and lacked a certain political and social stability: This is why media was doomed to failure as a business. The monopoly of the advertising market and unfair mergers in the information market led to a strong anticompetitive system similar to that in other fields (like importing meat, cooked meat, drugs etc.) and in



the end forced media to serve a certain party. Consequently, more politicians started to buy and create new media institutions to the extent that the strategies of the majority of media institutions in Moldova serve electoral interests promoting certain political powers with economic interests in second place.

Meanwhile, due to the technology revolution, 36% of the citizens read electronic media according to the opinion poll mentioned above. Online media have changed the journalist's "philosophy" and manner of acting. Now, being first is more important than being accurate.

The auto regulatory effort

After 1991, journalists made certain auto-regulatory efforts. They adopted an ethical code and created the Press Board to "contribute to raising awareness in the media..., promote qualitative journalism and insure compliance with journalism's ethical principles."

Because media has always been divided on political, ideological, geopolitical and linguistic criteria, it was difficult to approach the issue of journalistic credibility as well as other related professional issues. On the other hand, media credibility is quite relative according to the opinion polls reflecting audience tastes and expectations rather than journalistic standards and information quality. Partisanship sells very well; propagandistic TV channels still have audiences. This is why credibility as an indicator of balance, objectivity and professionalism remains the concern of journalists, each of them struggling to do their best.

Nicolae NEGRU

Investigative Journalism: Who needs it? What is it for?

Moldovan journalism has recently acquired some features that have a negative impact on investigative journalism.

- There are currently many editorial offices run by editors younger than 25. I have visited editorial offices in scores of countries, and I can clearly state that I have seen such young “senior” journalists only in our country. To understand all the peculiarities of a journalistic investigation, one needs several years of training and of fieldwork interacting with sources.
- Famous journalists. Moldova has now more press than ever and more popular journalists “liked” on Facebook, but these are not at all the ones who conduct investigations. They don’t read dozens of files or spend whole days in courtrooms. Popular journalists are those who attend fashionable events with questionable and minor stars.
- Money and the quality of work very often have nothing in common. A journalist writing articles based on several contradictory sources addressing complex social issues is very poorly paid. It’s the stars mentioned above who get the big salaries.

Who are investigative journalists after all?

Reporters writing investigative articles probably have the most difficult responsibilities to readers. They need investigative products every day, even several times a day. This is because the Republic of Moldova is robbed of public money every hour (I have no official data. It is just a feeling).

A good reporter digs everywhere, receives all sorts of threats, has many worries, but does not give up. Satisfaction with the final output is not due to high salaries or even to the potentially devastating effects of the investigation. I have not seen investigative reporters happier than those who receive messages of encouragement and gratitude from readers. Yes, this is the only price readers pay for a journalistic investigation: a “like” on social networks.

Who pays?

It is obvious and clear that due to the incredible development of the online environment, the very few subscribers to printed newspapers remaining have mostly given them up. Consumers don’t give a dime about investigations anymore. They get them for free on the web pages of the publications that wrote the articles.

Institutions practicing investigative journalism are among the poorest for a variety of reasons.

- They have greater expenses. There are costly charges for access to state databases. They have low incomes. Advertisers are not in a hurry to post on the pages of newspapers criticizing the government.
- There is the ongoing danger of lawsuits which involve costs even if the newspaper does not lose the case as it still needs to pay an attorney to represent it in court. From our experience, lawsuits usually last two to three years. We even had a lawsuit that lasted six years.
- It takes a lot of time to educate a good investigative journalist, more than it takes to educate a good news reporter.
- Moldova does not have any institutions or civil organizations providing investigative journalists with financial support. They are almost fully supported by foreign funders or by the governments of other countries.

Who needs it? What is it for?

I believe investigative journalism along with news journalism is the most important in Moldova. The changes that have occurred due to certain investigative articles have been more significant and efficient than many actions of law enforcement authorities. The “judge from hell” series led to begging for the purification of the local judicial system; the “palaces of officials” series led to both the owners of palaces working in the government and press consumers realizing and accepting the essential necessity to publish data on civil servants’ wealth statements.

We believe the reactions of competent authorities to journalists’ investigations are the weakest link. Given the wide political control over much of Moldovan media, especially over TV channels that impose self-censure, the few institutions that still do investigative journalism seem to be even more forgotten / ignored by the political powers. The only comforting thing is that this feeling is not reciprocal. Investigative journalists keep digging more and more into the secret affairs of politicians and of government representatives.

Alina RADU

Local media: exhausting work for little money

On an internship in the United States (US), I heard the following statement from a news editor: “The newspaper brings in millions of dollars.” There in the US, the press is a real industry. Newspapers, including local ones, are issued in editions of 10,000 copies in small towns with populations between 40,000 and 100,000 people; hundreds of thousands of copies are issued in big cities. The situation is somewhat similar in Western Europe. In Poland, for instance, it is not a surprise to anyone to have an edition of 20,000 or 50,000 copies of a local newspaper.

What do we have?

On average, local newspapers in Moldova are issued in editions of 3000 to 5000 copies. Exceptions to this are publications appearing in two languages. Their circulation is cumulative and of course creates the impression of a bigger edition. What is happening? Why is there such a discrepancy?

There are several explanations.

1. The financial situation of the population takes its toll.
2. **Lack of a reading culture.** A survey that we conducted in the post offices in Ungheni revealed a very sad picture. In many locations teachers, considered to be the peak intellectuals in villages, did not subscribe to any newspapers. What could we say about the other categories of the population?
3. **The monopoly of Moldova Post on the distribution of newspapers.** Since there is no real competition, Moldova Post at present pays too little attention to the distribution of newspapers. In many cases, the newspapers reach the subscribers with delays of a few days, so people subsequently refuse to subscribe.

What is it like to produce a local newspaper?

When editions are very small, the editors of local newspapers are just trying to survive. There is no way that the press can be the fourth estate as some like to call it. What power does the press have today when it daily faces unimaginable, material hardships? Those who thrive have good sponsors who support them, or they know how to blackmail and manipulate in a most commendable way. I do not see how else one can do well financially and economically. Let's do a simple calculation. In order to produce a weekly newspaper such as the *Express* which has 12, A3 monochrome pages with a total edition of 3000 copies, it is necessary

to spend over 13,000 lei monthly. Attention: this is just the cost of printing! In addition, there are a thousand and one other expenses: transportation, rent, electricity, telephone and Internet connections, distribution, salaries, fees, equipment and so on. Yet the monthly subscription cost is only 7 lei. Why so little? Because, given the purchasing power of the population, if we charge a price that covers all expenses, we simply condemn ourselves to death.

Where do you get the money, then?

Advertising, of course. Where does the advertising come from? A review of the *Express* reveals that half of all advertising comes from traders, and the other half from political parties and local governments (especially during election years). In these circumstances, is it possible to imagine an open media confrontation with these leading suppliers of advertising and implicitly of money? This is one reason why we do not have factual investigative journalism in Moldova, particularly in the local press!

What is the solution?

Under the aforementioned circumstances, in my opinion producing only newspapers is a suicidal act. Therefore, for the last two to three years we have engaged in other types of activities somewhat “related” to the printing of a periodical. It is a grueling job but ultimately rewarding from a financial standpoint. Beyond that, we do not feel the pressure of tomorrow so acutely and do not ask ourselves questions like “What shall we do? Where will we get the money? How long can we survive?”

In conclusion

Even if we know how we should transform the newspaper into a business, there are many difficulties in using all those ideas and knowledge. We do not, however, give in. At present, we focus more and more on developing the *Expresul.com* website because in our view, online media is much more likely to turn into a profitable business, even though the competition in this area is becoming increasingly fierce.

Nevertheless, we do not neglect the printed version of the newspaper. We strive to bend an ear to the readers' wishes; we continuously experiment hoping that finally, we find the best option for producing a newspaper.

Lucia BACALU-JARDAN

Faculty of Journalism as part of a series of paradoxes of life

(Scattered thoughts)

Faculty of Journalism as part of a series of paradoxes of life: scattered thoughts The phrase “of Journalism” in the title might be omitted because I’m sure this faculty is like any other in the country. I wrote what I wrote because it’s good to write about what you know, and I have known the faculty for some 20 years, starting with the time I taught there. Let’s start with life which is a series of paradoxes, the first of which would be that we are born to die. What we do between birth and death completes the series. Here are a few scattered thoughts about a part of what we do.

About normalcy

A few years ago, after a graduate defended his thesis he wanted to say something to the examination board members. He told us that on that day that a friend with whom he shared a rented room and who had taken an exam in another institution had asked him how much he had paid for a passing mark and hearing that he hadn’t paid anything was astonished. The graduate wanted to thank all of us that there was no bribery in journalism. I listened to what I didn’t expect to hear, because it is abnormal to receive thanks for normality.

About intellectual laziness

At an extended meeting of the faculty council I had the misfortune to witness “public revenge.” A faculty colleague had discovered that one of his students had plagiarized something in writing an essay and wanted us to seek together how to painfully “decapitate” the “offender.” We condemn plagiarism without hesitation, but without hesitation, let’s slap each other because we haven’t been able to develop practical tasks that would exclude the very possibility to plagiarize.

About watchfulness

At another faculty of journalism where I worked for one year, there were days when entire groups were absent. On one of such day I was going to leave, but that very moment someone opened the door and told me that he had come to check whether the professors were present. I said that the students were not present! His reply was, “We don’t care about the students; they have paid their fees. We want the professors to be present.” So, I was paid for not being absent... Checks are necessary, but perhaps you leave the faculty after counting the good workers? Or, the faculty produces specialists rather than graduates with marks, and then maybe we

will look not only for disciplined teachers but also for knowledgeable ones being sufficiently confident that they will be able to “forge professionals” without opening the door during class.

About knowledge and marks

During one of the breaks, two students approached me and asked me to mediate as each of them had written a news item in a different way but they had received the same mark. They also told me, “You taught us ‘to kill’ adjectives in the news. I ‘killed them,’ but my classmate didn’t. The professor gave us the same mark.” This case reveals, perhaps, the worst thing: the incompetence of professors. Professionalism implies a common body of knowledge, otherwise, what would happen if a future driver could do as he wished at a red light? We are different in terms of experience, knowledge and beliefs, but when it comes to transferring knowledge to future professionals, the body of knowledge should be common and able to bear good fruit.

About democracy

One day when the Senate of the university was sitting, I saw a Gagauzian student in the corridor whom I knew to be a member of the Senate; I asked him why he was not at the meeting. He said that he had given up because his opinion was not sought there. In addition to the rector, vice-rectors, deans and professors, the Senate is composed of students as well, including representatives from ethnic minorities. What a democracy! Why give up? Probably, the student did not understand something, but that’s a little unlikely.

About priorities

A group of students once asked me to wait 5 minutes until their classmate came. They had classes in another building, and their classmate could not get there in the 15 minute break as he had to go on foot, with crutches up 3 floors. The building had a lift, but it didn’t work. Instead, it was blocked off with a beautiful, metal fence. The building also has students with disabilities, but it does not have a lift...

I’ll end a few scattered thoughts here. That I can do. But I won’t end the series of paradoxes. That I can’t do.

Ion BUNDUCHI

Six steps backwards in a single year of democracy

The international organization Freedom House stated in its annual report that in 2014, Moldova remained as it was in 2013, in the category of countries with a partially free press. The report ranked Moldova 188 out of the 199 countries included in this research. At the same time, a simple comparison showed that in 2014, Moldova made six steps backwards compared with 2013 when the same organization ranked it 112 on the press freedom index. Usually the main criteria underpinning the placement of a country as having a “free,” “partially free” or “not free” press are (i) **legal environment**, namely the drafting and adoption of laws and legal regulations that can influence media content and support authorities to use these laws to the detriment of the free press; (ii) **political influence**, specifically political control over information and (iii) **economic pressure**, in other words the economic barriers faced by media institutions.

What is meant by six steps backwards? What does this regression mean for our press beneficiaries?

First of all, this demonstrates that society believes less that the media is indeed the fourth estate. As long as people expect the authorities to react to articles addressing society’s complicated problems published in newspapers and broadcast on TV and radio and this does not happen or happens only as a formality, their conviction that the press is truly a power is destroyed, and their confidence will be much more difficult to restore.

The officials targeted in articles about corruption are pleased that by avoiding reactions, their colleagues in government are “covering” their sins.

Each week, *Ziarul de Garda* receives plenty of letters or phone calls asking us how the authorities reacted to subjects such as the undeclared wealth of some officials or falsified files in certain courts of law, the auctions rigged in some state institutions or on the articles about the state profiteers, beneficiaries of millions from the budget. What should we answer them? We used to say that we also looked forward to the reactions of the institutions responsible, but we continue to wait in vain. Our readers get tired of asking us the same questions, and the officials in the articles about corruption rejoice because their colleagues in government avoid reacting and thus “cover” their sins. The few other media institutions in Moldova that are not politically or economically dependent on political parties or economic agencies face a similar situation, even if a professional study on this subject has not yet been carried out. In such circumstances, the press cannot be



classified as free but at most as only partially free which corresponds to the conclusions of the recent Freedom House report.

The loss of confidence by press consumers directly results in poorer quality information. The doubtful freedom of the press implies insufficient public information on social and political issues, on the right to impartial justice or on corruption’s adverse effects on society. Research conducted in this area shows a direct relationship between press freedom and good governance, the fight against poverty, and combating corruption and discrimination.

According to the above report, the doubtful freedom of the press ranks Moldova among democratically degraded states such as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and North Korea and at the same time separates it from the Community of European states to which, although shyly, the current government of Moldova is said to aspire. It is undisputed that a free press is the only effective liaison between the citizens and the government, but this is as yet poorly understood.

Aneta GROSU

Drama of the news sites

In 2005, people started to connect to the Internet in a big way as it became a very important source of information. Editorial offices in Moldova started improving their sites; however, things were changing too slowly. In September 2005, Unimedia was launched and provided the necessary stimulus for the rapid development of online journalism in Chisinau.

When they realized that others were successful due to the product they had created, editorial offices hired more staff to work on sites and started to focus more on online journalism. Protv.md, Publika.md, Jurnal.md, Timpul.md, Zdg.md, Europaliber.org, and Kp.md thus solved the problem of publishing information in real time. In addition, they had a trump card: their brand and, of course, credibility. People trust news sites when they know these are the virtual variants of a newspaper or a TV channel.

The online journalism boom led to the growth of non-TV or newspaper websites. Deschide.md, Independent.md, Hotnews.md, Vesti.md, and Stirilocale.md are just some of those information sites, but most have a problem that does not necessarily refer to the sites themselves. It is connected to the essence of journalism as we were taught at the university: **CREDIBILITY**. Credibility is the supreme guarantee that the editorial office offers a product that is has not been altered or that is not out of date.

The rising importance of the news sites is proved by their recent involvement in large scandals. For example, Vadim Ungureanu, a journalist working for Deschide.md, was accused on June 20, 2014 by the police of reportedly trying to blackmail Dan Chirita, chief of the Monitoring Centre of the General Police Inspectorate. Deschide.md announced then it was in the middle of a denigration campaign as their journalists had exposed some police officers and had become thorns in their sides. The story is quite complicated, so we are all waiting for a ruling from the court.



The boom in the virtual information environment has led to many discussions and suggestions that a national anticorruption center for Internet entities be created. I doubt it would work, and I think it would destroy the spirit of democracy on the Internet.

In this context, selling the Unimedia site was crucial for online journalism in the Republic of Moldova. Unfortunately, it was sold in an untransparent manner. While in civilized countries, the sale of a site is reported down to the smallest detail, in Moldova we cannot but guess. In my opinion, the actual price was certainly above one million euros. Whoever the buyer was, he or she did not buy a site or “the Uni-team”: The new owner bought the **CREDIBILITY** of the Unimedia brand. The important question no one has yet clearly answered is who the actual buyer in this transaction was. The credibility of the site is thus now hanging on a thread. If until recently news sites wanted to prove they also count in the media, they now have another drama and fight to start. They must prove they are **CREDIBLE** and that they can resist the economic pressures applied by politicians. In other words, **trust takes years to build, but only seconds to break**, even online.

Vitalie COJOCARI

“There can be no free society without an independent press”

Interview with Valentina URSU, editor at Radio Free Europe

You have been producing “Jurnal săptămânal” [Weekly journal] and “La sfârșit de săptămână cu Europa Liberă” [Weekends with Free Europe] for years now. What are these weekends like for you?

For over ten years I have been preparing and hosting “Weekends with Free Europe,” a show aired on Saturdays. Also, it is on Saturdays that I have traveled throughout Moldova to about a thousand villages to talk with ordinary people for hours with the microphone of Radio Free Europe. I went despite rain, cold or heat and through muddy and snowy roads. It was the only way for me to know the people of this country. They told me about their troubles, but there were also many who showed that with desire and skill, a lot can be done. So far, I haven't exhausted my energy and want to spend more weekends with a microphone in my hand.

You make reports and interviews for Radio Free Europe, but you are also an editor which means that you are responsible for the station's editorial policy. What principles and values are guiding the team of Radio Free Europe in its work?

The main principles of quality journalism are maintained regardless of the type of media. The first principle is correctness; the second is avoiding bias; the third is trying to present several viewpoints or perspectives; and the fourth is searching for the truth. There are certain issues on which we journalists can take a position such as human rights, justice and corruption, for example. Public interest, pluralism of ideas and opinions and the responsible practice of journalism are the main values on which Radio Free Europe bases its work.

What do you think about Moldovan journalism? Can our mass media be considered “the fourth estate”?

The quality of mass media in our country has declined in recent years at the same pace as society has. It is worrying that the media's role as watchdog of democracy is decreasing. One



case of corruption fuels two or three articles; then silence and, of course, oblivion. That has created a sense of mistrust in Moldovan society, and many wonder if the fourth estate remains powerless. I believe that the media has lost its influence, both on consumers of information and especially on the authorities. But real, honest journalists understand that they must be close to the people's souls and concerns. Let's not forget Albert Camus saying that, “A free press can be good or bad, but most certainly, without freedom a press will never be anything but bad.”

What means do some media outlets use to win more popularity and public trust?

Because the number of radio and television stations has grown a lot, the time that people spend following a single one has decreased considerably. To capture public attention, the media feel forced to present unusual programs. It seems that newscasts, especially on television, have become a successive display of images chosen to shock or intrigue while reports are condensed to

meet the increasingly short attention span of viewers. The greatest trust is gained by means of objectivity and quality.

You said in an interview that, “politics divided society even more.” How did that happen? Who wins and who loses in this situation?

Moldovan media outlets were often used as instruments in political fights without resistance from editorial offices which revealed a crisis of image in terms of quality of content and public trust. They were also politically polarized especially during election campaigns. Both sides have to lose.

What happens with media consumers? How do they orient themselves in the sea of information? In what cases can people tax media outlets for distorting the truth?

It is for consumers to decide. They must want to be informed rather than manipulated. They can only tax by pushing buttons on the remote control.

What is the relation between the governing power and the media in Moldova?

Considering that we live in a country that wants to be democratic, I find that the public is offered diverse opinions and has access to a multitude of sources. We all need freedom to search for information and to know the truth. Therefore, although the media are often subservient to political power, we citizens must be interested in knowing the truth. There are contradictory discussions based on different information. We can observe and understand political scandals from many perspectives. The governing power shouldn't interfere with the affairs of the press. By taking the road of compromise with political circles, the media condemn themselves and risk losing even more credibility. It seems that public trust in the media goes hand in hand with mistrust in political leaders.

What do MPs have to hide from journalists who are denied access to plenary parliamentary meetings, and why do journalists need to fight for the right to do their jobs in decent conditions? What do you think as a journalist accredited to Parliament?

The regulations governing the work of accredited journalists contain requirements limiting access of the media to parliamentary debates. There are some surprising requirements, and the fact that they were not discussed with the journalistic community is incomprehensible, which is the reason why media outlets demanded the annulment of this document. Lawmakers who are the servants of the people shouldn't have anything to hide from those who elected them.

How can the interests of the media and of the public be protected from political interference?

The lack of intelligent policies ensuring public interest in media overall and particularly in broadcasting led to the current situation of monopoly and broad political control undermining true reforms. The lack of political will, especially the lack of solidarity in the journalistic community, make reforms go around in circles.

Mass media behavior in the coverage of last year's election campaign was negatively surprising in many aspects. Do you think this situation will occur again during local elections this June?

Although numerous journalists and their media outlets committed to covering election campaigns accurately and informatively, there were and still are reasons for concern in this regard. A free press allows and even organizes debates between people with different opinions, but do we have a culture of media debates in Moldova?

Let's also speak about securing our information space from foreign propaganda. What solutions could exist in such cases?

It seems that a legislative initiative of MPs has developed the basis of a program to ensure the security of our information space, but it is also an attempt by politicians to defend themselves from criticism by limiting the media's freedom of expression. That legislative initiative had no chance to be examined in Parliament in its initial form. Any project modifying the legislation on broadcasting must begin with public debates which didn't happen in this case. I also feel that public discussion of this project is necessary, but I share the lawmakers' concern for real sovereignty of information space. A compromise would be welcome.

How much freedom do journalists in Moldova have now?

Press freedom has developed a little since the proclamation of the country's independence. Even this interview proves the existence of a free press in Moldova. Unfortunately, however, there is no truly free press. Press freedom refers, first of all, to journalists' freedom to do their jobs, collecting and spreading real information. Then, there is freedom of expression and freedom of opinion which are basic rights in a democracy. The state should have a fundamental interest in making space in the citadel and guaranteeing press freedom. A society cannot develop without access to information and the possibility to discuss it freely. The state must give information, not hide it unless it is truly related to the safety of the state. Essentially, all institutions of the state must provide all the information they have, but it does not hap-

pen and this fact shatters the state. There can be no free society without an independent press. At the same time, disinformation and manipulation are hiding political and economic arrangements and “protecting” bribery while the system is becoming more and more corrupt and more deeply corrupt. It feels as if the separation of powers in Moldova is disappearing.

Unfortunately, quality press has a limited public, and the fact that the state has no levers to help this quality press means it becomes increasingly feeble. If the public isn't educated about their right to correct information, we can hardly speak about press freedom and the true reforms that are needed in this field.

In the programs you do on Radio Free Europe, you often address local realities. What changes do you see in the landscape? How ready are our people to accept European values?

There are two realities, two parallel worlds in the country: the Moldova of the poor and the Moldova of the rich. There are also lots of good people who impress me by their welcoming nature, goodwill and ways of thought. It is a different kind of people, a different type of reality for those who have eyes to see and minds

to understand. There still are people for whom European values are not foreign. I have been asking questions and searching for answers for almost 30 years. I'm sorry that in my programs I speak more about poverty and corruption. I hope that it won't take many years for us to be able to speak about the true modernization of this country and about the fact that Moldova has a political elite, too.

Congratulations on the tenth edition of “Jurnal Săptămânal” which was launched on the eve of Easter.

It is a jubilee edition, the tenth. The launch of the publication was organized in Cosnita, Basarabeasca, Balti, Soroca, Cahul, Straseni and Chisinau. Generally speaking, over 700 weeks were covered in the ten years since the first issue of “Jurnal Saptaminal” and over 700 people were featured. We say that these authors portray Moldova without make-up or bias. It is a parallel chronicle of events, produced by listeners of Radio Free Europe. I hope years later it will be read with even greater interest.

(Media Azi, April 17)

Ethical dilemmas of public communication/PR

Although the reputed Romanian specialist university professor Mihai Coman believes that reality is totally indifferent to professional ethics, the book *Deontology of Public Communication* recently published by Polirom shows us how important compliance with deontology is for the legitimacy, credibility and long-term success of professionals and institutions in public space.

This volume is a collaboration of professionals and teachers from Romania, European countries and the US and is edited by Raluca-Nicoleta Radu editor of the Romanian *Journal of Journalism and Communication* and an associate university professor. It is worth mentioning that among the authors is American professor Clifford G. Christians, coordinator of the well known volume *Media Ethics. Case Studies*, a reference book on professional ethics in public communication with worldwide circulation.

The foundation of ethics: theory of social responsibility

Several contributors to the volume have taken as a landmark the theory of social responsibility according to which public communication professionals have a duty to reproduce an accurate picture of society by representing social diversity and by presenting all points of view on matters of public interest in a particular society at a particular time (p.77).

Editor Radu believes that social responsibility of media institutions can be required only in democratic countries or in those in transition to a democratic system. "Difficult conditions for professional work are no excuse for ethical mistakes, but they have a great deal of influence. Errors of behavior knowingly undertaken or carried out with evident bad faith, however, are blameworthy regardless of working conditions." (p.35).

About the limits of freedom of expression and information

The value of this book is also that it approaches key issues of deontology in public communication with respect to the technological evolution that has changed the modes of production and consumption of media content over the decades. Currently, a common practice is to remove unfavorable opinions and in-

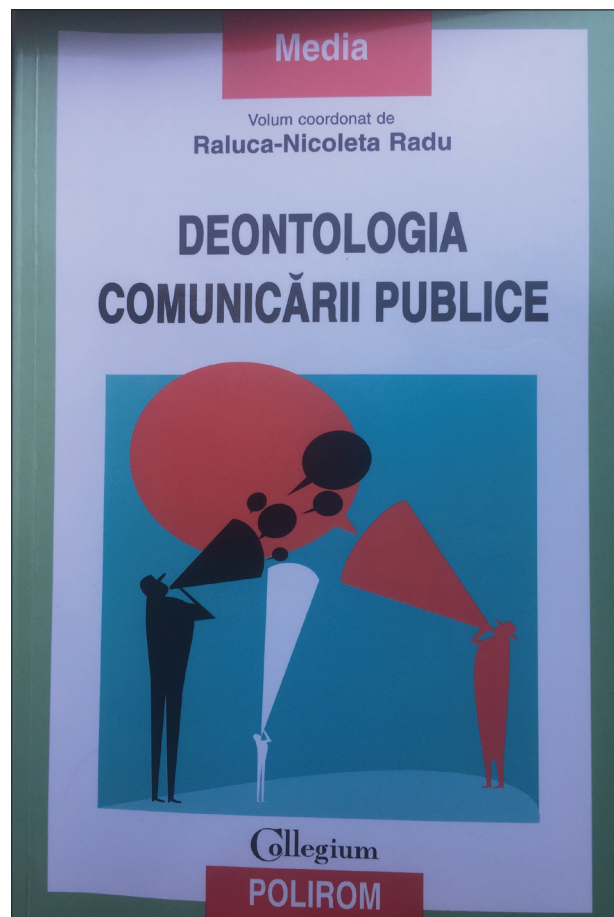
formation pages from social networks controlled by companies, political parties or candidates or from the websites of various organizations. This leads to a new form of censorship that has no place in a democratic society according to A. Thiemann, the author of the chapter on freedom of expression and information. Since the media continues to have a very powerful influence on our perceptions of the world, public communication professionals must responsibly use their freedom of expression carefully evaluating the consequences of their work.

Principle of truth account

Even if there are explicit differences between professional ethics in journalism and those in public relations and advertising, presenting the truth is a basic principle of public communication in either case and is determined by the need to ensure a minimum level of credibility.

Protecting sources is a binding principle though there are legal provisions when a journalist is obliged to disclose them (p.119).

An ethical issue concerning the presentation of truth especially in areas of conflict is the practice of so-called *embedded journalism* (enlisted journalism), which inevitably leads to truncated descriptions of reality from the perspective of only the party concerned that has facilitated access to every reporter in the area. While journalists are asked to be objective and fair, specialists



in advertising and public relations have requirements like honesty; clarity; truth and avoiding ambiguity, exaggeration, and unsubstantiated suggestions. Although it seems obvious that the person or organization that launches a message should acknowledge any interests represented, bloggers, some of whom are paid to promote products and services, do not do it.

Protecting privacy

Another controversial topic of professional ethics is the presentation of details of personal lives and diverse facts in public space. Editor Radu defines the concept of privacy as finding borders in approaching intimate subjects including the need for empathy, decency and professionalism in presenting these issues in the media. Technological evaluations in recent years have significantly broadened the range of privacy intrusions that are detailed in this chapter.

Avoiding stereotypes

Stereotyping has undesirable effects such as prejudice, stigmatization, discrimination and incitement to hatred among others. Unfortunately, hate speech occurs in public space which refers to forms of expression that promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. Extremist groups, public figures, politicians have recourse to it, and it is picked up by traditional media, social networks, forums and independent sites. It is important to understand that journalists, specialists in advertising and public relations and specialists in entertainment must avoid the language of hatred and should contribute to overcoming stereotypes (p. 176) by increasing tolerance and social cohesion.

Conflicts of interest

There are many individuals or groups whose interests are expected to be defended by a communication specialist. Conflict of interest is the "...basis and cultural archetype of journalistic corruption" (p. 200). So-called *envelope journalism*, journalism in exchange for an envelope (of cash), is writing favorable articles for whoever pays or on the contrary, writing a critical article about the competition. By corrupting journalists, these practices contribute to the loss of credibility of media institutions and to the messages they send via journalists (p. 201).

The volume includes a series of case studies such as media coverage of the Rosia Montana project, the takeover by media of information disclosures on WikiLeaks, a study about "antagonistic" relations between journalists and public relations specialists, and one about changing electronic images in photojournalism among others. These studies show not only solutions but also ethical issues and invite the reader to reflect on the situation.

Instead of conclusions

The volume is actually a guide to professional ethics in journalism, public relations and advertising that offers the possibility to specialists in communication to overcome the ethical problems they face while maintaining their integrity. Anyone interested in a career in public communication—students, new specialists or those with experience—will learn from this book that I recommend with great conviction.

Ludmila LAZĂR

Report on the freedom of media in Moldova

3 May 2014 – 3 May 2015

During the reference period, Moldovan media did not evolve; on the contrary it devolved in certain respects. In the international rankings, our country appears as a country with a “partially free media” just like in recent years. During the period, local media was profoundly affected by two main events: the signing of the Republic of Moldova and the EU association agreement and parliamentary elections, as well as the elections of the Gagauz Autonomy Bashkan. Several older problems emerged during the election year among them the political partisanship of several influential media outlets in favor of certain political candidates thus ignoring both legal and ethical norms. The media is still extremely politicized. Members of the CCA and of the Council of Observers of the state-owned public radio and TV broadcaster Teleradio Moldova and of state-owned regional radio and TV broadcaster Gagauziya Radio Televizionu are still appointed based on political criteria. Moreover, the limited access of Parliament-accredited journalists is still unsolved.



The danger of concentrating the media in the hands of groups of politicians

In 2014, civil society continued to advocate for media ownership to be made public, requiring Parliament to adopt Bill No. 240 ensuring media ownership transparency. Under constant pressure, the bill was included in the parliamentary agenda and was voted on in the first reading on July 21, one year later. Although according to the law MPs should have examined the bill in a second reading within not more than 45 days from its adoption in first reading, they had not passed the bill by the end of 2014 when their mandate expired. The new members of Parliament adopted the law on March 5, 2015, but they excluded an important amendment forbidding the registration of companies in off-shore areas. Without this amendment, the media ownership transparency will not be fully ensured.

The danger of media concentration may also continue in 2015 after digital television replaces analogue transmission. The gov-

ernment voted on the digital program on April 22, 2015, although Moldova had engaged to undertake the transition by June 17, 2015. Thus, some experts fear the risk that new licenses will be obtained by the same politicians who currently own the most influential outlets. The situation might become worse if because of a lack of financial resources, many local/regional broadcasters close. The danger of broadcast market monopolization will be still imminent after the transition to digital television.

The media during the election campaign

During the election year, the politicization of the media exceeded all limits. Monitoring was done by the Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (IJC, API and APEL), the CCA and the OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observation Mission. The CCA and the International Mission monitored the most influential outlets including the local broadcasters Prime TV, Publika TV, Canal 2 and Canal 3 and found that they replaced journalism with propaganda. The CCA reaction to this behavior did not have the desired effect because of the imperfection of the national legal framework regulating broadcasting.

Constant pressure of political powers

Just as under the communist government, during the reference

period politicians showed clear attempts to subject Moldovan media to political control. Both by intervening in the editorial policies of the media institutions they own and by some decisions made by government or Parliament, politicians showed they were not willing to comply with the European media standards.

A relevant example is the Parliamentary Commission for Media postponing for more than one year the election of new members of the Council of Observers of Teleradio Moldova. Throughout 2014, the council was not functional having just three members instead of nine. In early March 2015, Parliament finally assigned four members to the six vacancies rejecting some media experts who did not enjoy political patronage. The four places on the council were shared politically by the Liberal Democratic and Democratic governing parties. Civil society worried that the two remaining places for which a new contest was organized could be shared according to the same criterion.

Another relevant example of the current governors not understanding the essence of European media standards is the recent legislative initiative of Liberal Democratic and Democratic MPs on the amendment of the Broadcasting Code and of the law on freedom of expression. Although the authors of the bill stated their purpose is to ensure a safe informational environment in the Republic of Moldova, they actually violated several norms related to freedom of the media and freedom of expression. The project raised a wave a negative feedback from the media and society. On the grounds of fighting Russian propaganda, the authors of the project were accused of intending to limit freedom of expression. Media organizations disapproved of the secrecy and of the lawmakers' rush when they submitted the legislative initiative without prior consultations with civil society and requested that the examination of the bill be postponed. "We are worried that the new legislative initiative contains stipulations which, if adopted, could endanger both the freedom of the media, and the freedom of expression," read their press statement. Other provisions of the bill also received criticism. Under the pressure of public opinion, the bill was not put to a vote in its original form, and the politicians stated they would initiate public debates.

Limitation of access to information

The reference period was marked by the limitation of Parliament-accredited journalists' access to information. During the year, media representatives were denied access to plenary sittings. Journalists were provided a small room with two monitors; the information appearing on them was selected and filtered by Parliament appointed specialists. The requirements of civil society to ensure Parliament-accredited journalists better working conditions were ignored by the MPs.

Mention should be made that there was a previous bill that passed only the first reading according to which sittings of Parliament would no longer be broadcast live online. Then civil society accused the government of trying to reduce transparency. At the initiative of the IJC, Liberal MPs registered a bill on the amendment and completion of the Law on Access to Information (articles 15 and 16) and of the Contravention Code (Article 71) on June 27. The bill provided for the reduction to 10 days of the term to submit information and adopted harsher penalties for individuals violating the legislation on the access to information. The bill was not, however, examined by the XIXth legislature and was excluded from the legislative procedure.

In February 2015, the permanent Bureau of Parliament approved a new regulation regarding journalists' accreditation which contained restrictive provisions likely to limit the access of certain media institutions to information. Article 5, for instance, provides that only the institutions that have "an independent and balanced editorial policy that guarantees pluralism of opinions" may obtain accreditation which is actually subject to interpretation.

The security of our information space

During the reference period, a lot has been said about the necessity to ensure the security of our information space, but no specific decisions were adopted in this respect. In July, the CCA sanctioned Prime TV, TV7, RTR Moldova, and Ren TV Moldova tharebroadcast TV programs from the Russian Federation and decided to suspend the broadcasts of channel Rossia 24 in Moldova for six months. The CCA set forth the argument that Russian channels use instruments of aggressive propaganda, promote and intensify unconfirmed rumors, manipulate text and video materials, and misinform and manipulate public opinion regarding the events in the Ukraine. Unfortunately, the steps the CCA took did not have the intended effect, because Rossia 24 continued to broadcast in the Gagauz Autonomous Unit and in other regions of the country. Civil society pleaded for the adoption of a law on the security of national information space.

In September 2014, the Parliamentary Commission for Mass Media passed a bill submitted by the Liberal Party MPs providing for the prohibition of broadcasts promoting separatism and violent messages in the territory of the Republic of Moldova. The document was not examined during the plenary sitting of Parliament and was excluded from the legislative agenda of the new Parliament.

In absence of adequate legislation, the information war intensified. Only after the government acknowledged the impact of Russian propaganda on the results of the Gagauz Autonomy elections that could also be repeated in the general local elections in June did the problem of information space security be-

come topical again. There are several relevant bills pending in this respect that have, however, not been examined yet.

The media from the Gagauz Autonomy and the Transnistrian region

The administrative crisis at the public regional company Gagauziya Radio Televizionu resulted in several trials, and political control over the Council of Observers blocked the activity of the public broadcaster in the region. The situation was also influenced by the election of the Bashkan in the Autonomy in March 2015.

On November 4, 2014, the People's Assembly of Gagauzia passed the bill amending and completing Gagauz ATU Law no.66 on television and radio, comprising several provisions that went against the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, the Broadcasting Code, the Law on the special legal status of Gagauz, and the Law on the freedom of expression among others. The bill provides that the Executive Committee of Gagauz shall be assigned the competence to issue broadcasting licenses, use and retransmission licenses, and will replace the legal competences of the CCA to supervise compliance with broadcasting legislative provisions by license owners and retransmission permit holders, and shall apply sanctions to the latter in the event of violations of legal provisions. The People's Assembly proposed amending the legal procedure for electing and removing the members of the Council of Observers of the public regional broadcaster, i.e. with a vote of the majority of elected MPs. Media NGOs called on the People's Assembly to reject that bill; nevertheless, it was passed and ex-Bashkan Mihail Formuzal promulgated the law the same day.

The CCA stated that the action was illegal and referred the matter to the Presidency, the Parliament, the Government, the General Prosecutor's Office, the Constitutional Court and the Intelligence and Security Service of Moldova. Currently, this law is challenged by the State Chancellery.

Compliance with freedom of expression and human rights in Transnistria has constantly deteriorated. In August 2014, the Transnistrian leader Evgheni Sevciuk signed a decree obliging public authorities, organizations and ordinary citizens to inform the security committee of the separatist region about all instances in the information systems, including on the Internet, that could be classified as extremist actions or information. In March 2015, journalist and activist Serghei Ilcenco was accused of posting anonymous messages on social networks urging people to topple the Tiraspol regime. Sources close to Ilcenco denied the accusations and do not exclude the possibility of a well staged scenario against the activist who has lately adopted a critical and harsh position against Evgeni Sevciuk.

Journalists subject to verbal and physical abuse

Intimidations against media representatives did not cease during this period either.

On June 3, journalists from a news portal were thrown out of the People's Assembly of Gagauzia sitting room and were prohibited from recording an argument that arose between the MPs during the debates. "They kicked us out. We came there with the camera, knocked at the door, opened it and tried to get in. A councilor came and pushed us out of the way blocking our access and even swore at us," the director of the portal said.

On June 20, intern reporter Vadim Ungureanu was apprehended for 72 hours and the headquarters of the news portal was sought. The editorial management classified the incident as "vengeance" by the Ministry of Interior because the portal published several investigations regarding this minister.

On June 21, the civic activist and human rights advocate Oleg Brega was physically abused. That evening, a group of masked individuals allegedly sprayed him in the eyes and kicked him after which the journalist needed medical care. According to the video posted on the portal Curaj.md the next morning, Oleg Brega was insulted and physically abused by a man driving a car registered under RM P 007. The man did not want the activist to record the license plate, so he hit the camera and Brega accordingly. The video shows that after a short while, the Communist Party MP Maria Postoico got in that very car.

On August 25, RISE Moldova journalist Iurie Sanduta was threatened by Ruslan Siloci whose company was mentioned in an investigation about an extensive cross-border money laundering scheme published on the site of Rise.md. Mr. Sanduta stated he was called from a telephone number belonging to Ruslan Siloci and was threatened angrily: "If you don't delete that picture of mine and the text, you're in trouble." The investigation revealed the largest money laundering operation in Eastern Europe involving a cousin of Vladimir Putin; FSB officers; Russian companies; off-shore companies; Russian, Latvian and Moldovan banks; Moldovan judges; proxy agents and infamous criminals.

Another case in which journalists were **intimidated** took place in Corjova where a Publika TV crew coming from the ceremony at the beginning of the school year in the village was verbally abused by the local militia. About 20 militiamen became angry when they were recorded and wanted to confiscate the camera and the video tape.

In September, the website of *Ziarul de Garda* was hacked. The hosting company had to suspend the site until the situation was

under control. Previously, the website had undergone another external cyber attack in the same month after posting the article “Casa de lux și femeia din spatele ÎPS Vladimir” (“His Eminence Vladimir’s luxury house and the woman behind Him”). Then Zdg.md was blocked.

On 4 March 2015, Jurnal TV reporter Catalina Rosca was physically abused at the Orhei Law Court where a criminal case was to be examined with the participation of Democratic Party MP Constantin Tutu as a witness. After the court was seated, the reporter stated that a bodyguard of MP Tutu allegedly hit her in the stomach with his fist after she asked the MP a question. The statement was confirmed by attorney Roman Zadoinov who witnessed the incident, but Constantin Tutu denied the accusations. The case is under investigation by the Orhei Police Inspectorate.

Recommendations

The government of the Republic of Moldova should be fully aware of the important role that the media plays in the construction of a democratic state and should treat the press in accordance with relevant European standards.

In this regard, we recommend the following.

- Achieve without delay the media-related provisions included in the 2015–2018 Government Activity Program.
- Undertake concrete and effective measures to guarantee that the transition to digital terrestrial television will be made for the benefit of the citizens and not for those who are seeking to monopolize the audiovisual sector.
- Adopt a new Audiovisual Code that expresses a modern, European vision.

- Ensure the genuine independence of the CCA and of the Supervisory Boards of the public broadcasters including some criteria for appointing members based on their professionalism and not on their political affiliation.
- Abandon practices meant to influence editorial policies or to enslave media institutions. Politicians and media patrons must stop treating media institutions as party branches.
- Create decent working conditions for accredited journalists in Parliament and allow media representatives access to plenary sittings.
- Adjust the law regarding access to information to digital-era requirements and to electronic governance practices.
- Ensure the security of Moldova’s information space through legal mechanisms that do not affect the freedom of speech and other free press values.
- Communicate effectively with journalists and media institutions, react in a timely manner to citizens’ needs and requirements expressed via the media and take action every time issues of public interest are raised by the press.

*The Independent Journalism Center
Association of Independent Press
Association of Electronic Press
Press Freedom Committee
Union of Journalists of Moldova
“Acces-info” Center
Association of Independent TV Journalists
Center for Investigative Journalism
Young Journalist Center from Moldova*

Summary

PRESS FREEDOM

1 Press Freedom Days send a strong anticorruption message this year

PRESS AND STATE AUTHORITIES

Ion TERGUȚĂ

3 Digital TV: a stake of 1 billion lei. For whom do the authorities keep silent?

LETTER OF THE LAW

Olivia PIRȚAC

5 From *Charlie Hebdo* to the hate speeches these days in Moldova

Gheorghe BUDEANU

6 Shield and sword for securing our local information space

ETHICS AND PROFESSIONALISM

Nicolae NEGRU

7 Journalist's credibility: a personal issue

PROBING

Alina RADU

8 Investigative journalism: Who needs it? What is it for?

REGIONAL PRESS

Lucia JARDAN-BACALU

9 Local media: exhausting work for little money

JOURNALISM EDUCATION

Ion BUNDUCHI

10 Faculty of Journalism as part of a series of paradoxes of life: scattered thoughts

OBSERVER

Aneta GROSU

11 Six steps backward in a single year of democracy

ONLINE JOURNALISM

Vitalie COJOCARI

12 Drama on news sites

EXPERIENCES

Valentina URSU

13 "There can be no free society without an independent press"

BOOK REVIEW

Ludmila LAZĂR

16 Ethical dilemmas in public communication

ANNEX

18 Report on the freedom of media in the Republic of Moldova, 3 May 2014 – 3 May 2015

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