

mass - media

December 2018



in Moldova

Efortii
internationale
Remarcabile
din R. Moldova
până cu aprilie 2018
de "consolidare"
protecție a martorilor
de trafic de ființe

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Media in the Era of Fake News: the Implosion of Trust in our Country and in the World

Introduction

In a comment on the 2018 Barometer on French confidence in the media, Belgian researcher **Julien Lecomte** noted that, “Media mistrust did not appear in a day, and it would be illusory to believe that confidence can be rebuilt quickly. It’s a long term job. When someone betrays me, it is difficult for me to believe him/her again, and my trust can be thrown off balance at the slightest detail that I doubt. It is a mistake to believe trust is something acquired.”^[1] In a world overloaded with information, trust in the media can be thrown off balance at the slightest touch, and the most trivial lack of attention or neglect can throw the press/media outlet/journalist into the abyss of betrayal. Although both relative, difficult to quantify and questionable when quantified, the binomial trust/mistrust of the recipients of media information is an important indicator not only of press freedom and quality in a country/region, but also of democracy.

Americans’ Trust in Mass Media Sinks to New Low

In the US, for example, where since 1972 the Gallup opinion poll has contained questions about Americans’ trust in mass media^[2], public trust in the press has fallen steadily in recent years, with 2016 being the most dramatic in this respect with (only) 32% of respondents saying they trusted this social institution compared with, for example, 1976 when the high point of 72% was recorded in the wake of widely lauded examples of investigative journalism regarding Vietnam and the Watergate scandal.^[3] After the implosion^[4] of Americans’ trust in the press shown in the steadily declining trend over the last decade, in 2017 people showed a somewhat higher regard for the fourth estate (41%^[5]), and most of those who had lost their trust in mass media were optimistic about the possibility

of restoring it (69%^[6]). “Betrayed” by inaccuracy, bias, fake news, reports based on opinions or emotions, sensationalism^[7], poor fact-checking, propaganda and/or lies^[8], Americans have shown greater trust in 2017–2018 in their usual information sources^[9], as their quality has been verified/formed in the minds of citizens over time. It is probably a refuge for the US information recipient in the current circumstances. More specifically, studies show that although most Americans think media is key to a functioning democracy, many can’t name an objective news source, and the general perception of the press and the degree of trust in it depend to a large extent on the political affiliation of citizens to media that practice political partisanship.^[10] Eroded in recent years by political earthquakes and Donald Trump’s particular attitude towards the press and information, American democracy, as perceived by its citizens across the ocean, remains a key concept in people’s mind, a concept that even when challenged is related to media freedom and the credibility thereof.

Press Credibility in Europe

In Europe, be it the Member States of the European Union and/or other states that aren’t part of this organization, the issue of trust in the press on the part of recipients of information has also become more pronounced during recent years, especially with the magnitude of the fake news phenomenon, mainly prevalent in online media. Several recent studies are relevant in this respect, proving a growing rift between traditional media and new media regarding citizens’ trust in media products. Thus, an analysis of this subject made by the European Broadcasting

[1] Lecomte, Julien. La confiance dans les médias : commentaires de l’enquête KANTAR-La Croix 2018, 24 January 2018, available at: <https://www.philomedia.be/la-confiance-dans-les-medias-commentaires-de-lenquete-kantar-la-croix-2018/>

[2] Americans’ Trust in Mass Media Sinks to New Low: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/195542/americans-trust-mass-media-sinks-new-low.aspx>

[3] Ibidem

[4] <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/implozie>

[5] Indicators of news media trust, available at: <https://www.knightfoundation.org/reports/indicators-of-news-media-trust>

[6] Ibidem

[7] Ingram, Mathew. Most Americans say they have lost trust in the media, 12 September 2018, available at: https://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/trust-in-media-down.php

[8] Trust in mass media is at an all time low not because reporting has gotten worse, but because data access has gotten better, available at: <https://govtrackinsider.com/trust-in-mass-media-is-at-an-all-time-low-not-because-reporting-has-gotten-worse-but-because-data-ec8118a69dc>

[9] Levels of trust and how Americans feel about the fairness and accuracy of the press, 11 June 2018, available at: <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/publications/reports/survey-research/fairness-accuracy-of-press/>

[10] 10 reasons why American trust in the media is at an all-time low, available at: <https://medium.com/trust-media-and-democracy/10-reasons-why-americans-dont-trust-the-media-d0630c125b9e>

Union (EBU) showed that in 2018 the relation between media and public trust had four basic trends in the European context (based on data collected from 33 countries): 1) broadcast media are trusted the most; 2) citizens' trust in broadcast media is closely connected with a free and independent press; 3) while traditional press (TV, radio and print) increased their levels of trust compared to last year, the online press and social networks lost even more trust, i.e., the trust gap between the two information sources is widening; 4) social networks are the media that people trust the least.^[11] Moreover, study data provides nuances in certain realities specific to different parts of Europe, which draws our attention and indirectly targets us. Thus, broadcast (especially radio) and print media enjoy a higher credibility in northern Europe while online media enjoy greater trust in Eastern Europe.^[12] This is true while overall the general trust in the media, fuelled by misinformation and fake news, is lower than ever,^[13] especially in southern Europe where it has declined a lot in the last five years.^[14] At the same time, in EU Member States radio is the most popular media platform (59%) with citizens the least receptive to information on online platforms and social media and print media enjoying a balance between trust and mistrust.^[15] In the case of Europe as a whole as well as in the US, people go back to traditional media, finding more information there they perceive as true, balanced and accurate compared with that published on online platforms, especially on social media. In the past five years for instance, there has been a steady increase in the trust of Europeans (especially those in northern states) in written media.^[16] Note in this context that the northern European countries have also for years had the highest indices of press freedom not only in Europe, but also in the rest of the world.^[17]

The Reasons for Trust/Mistrust in the Media

The fact that trust is the product of work and long-term investment is also proven by the figures showing that

most Europeans simply believe in the media ('I just do') as a result of personal experiences through which media outlets have demonstrated to people over time that the stories they disseminate have turned out to be right.^[18] Another important reason relates to journalistic processes such as multiple sourcing and fact-checking, which are ways in which the media are able to support assertions or information with evidence, and that also demonstrate the depth and quality of journalism.^[19] Their "brand," similar to the one mentioned in the US case, is also one of the top three reasons Europeans trust the news media because they are more and more likely to come back to the media they are accustomed to consuming that have proven to be the most worthy of their trust,^[20] especially in this fake-news, post-truth era.^[21]

On the other hand, bias, including political bias, habit/intuition ('I just don't'), exaggerating facts, declining journalistic standards,^[22] fake news and misinformation^[23] make Europeans rather skeptical of news media. Analysts in France, a state where since 1987 a key national newspaper has commissioned the measurement of citizens' trust in the media, has added the "non-representativeness of the diversity of opinions, cultural media and ideologies of French citizens within the media spectrum"^[24] to the reasons why the French have less and less confidence in the media. And this has happened even though France has

[11] Market insights. Trust in media 2018, media intelligence service of EBU, February 2018, available at: <https://www.ebu.ch/publications/trust-in-media-2018>

[12] Ibidem

[13] Les médias dans l'UE: confiance au Nord, défiance au Sud, l'Express, 17 novembre 2016, available at: https://www.lexpress.fr/actualites/1/monde/les-medias-dans-l-ue-confiance-au-nord-defiance-au-sud_1851600.html

[14] Ibidem

[15] Ibidem

[16] Ibidem

[17] See the reports of Freedom House, Reporters sans frontières, etc.

[18] Newman, Nic; Fletcher, Richard. Bias, Bullshit and Lies. Audience Perspectives on Low Trust in the Media. DIGITAL NEWS PROJECT 2017, Reuters Institute, University of Oxford, 46 p., available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-11/Nic%20Newman%20and%20Richard%20Fletcher%20-%20Bias%2C%20Bullshit%20and%20Lies%20-%20Report.pdf>

[19] Ibidem

[20] Ibidem

[21] La confiance des Français envers les médias traditionnels remonte, l'Express, 23 January 2018, available at: https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/medias/les-medias-traditionnels-retrouvent-la-confiance-des-francais_1978509.html; Marcé, Carine. Baromètre 2018 de la confiance des Français dans les media, KANTAR France Insights, 23 January 2018, available at: <https://fr.kantar.com/m%C3%A9dias/digital/2018/barometre-2018-de-la-confiance-des-francais-dans-les-media/>

[22] Newman, Nic; Fletcher, Richard. Bias, Bullshit and Lies. Audience Perspectives on Low Trust in the Media. DIGITAL NEWS PROJECT 2017, Reuters Institute, University of Oxford, 46 p., available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-11/Nic%20Newman%20and%20Richard%20Fletcher%20-%20Bias%2C%20Bullshit%20and%20Lies%20-%20Report.pdf>

[23] Market insights. Trust in media 2018, media intelligence service of EBU, February 2018, available at: <https://www.ebu.ch/publications/trust-in-media-2018>

[24] Dubuy, Fabrice. Pourquoi les gens ont de moins en moins confiance dans les journalistes et les médias ?, Quora, 19 October 2017, available at: <https://fr.quora.com/Pourquoi-les-gens-ont-de-moins-en-moins-confiance-dans-les-journalistes-et-les-m%C3%A9dias>

a complex system of press subsidies as one of its basic aids for ensuring pluralism.^[25]

Moldovans and Their Trust in the Media

Information recipients in the Republic of Moldova partially confirm the data collected in the studies mentioned above related to Eastern Europe, even if our country was not included in any of it. Thus, the most recent national surveys show that online platforms are on an upward trend in terms of both consumption and the trust of people in media though TV is still in first place.^[26] Contrary to Western trends, in Moldova people are consuming less and less information from print media (for the moment) and do not make a connection between it and a higher quality of journalism and/or with more independence, objectivity, etc. Although the number of those who say they have no trust in any media source and the number of citizens who believe that media institutions release only fake news is high (35%^[27]), the media ranks fourth out of 18 in institutions highly trusted by citizens^[28] which means that media, unlike Parliament, the government or the President, has not (yet) betrayed them. In the Republic of Moldova, one should also mention that the “habits, traditional media and brands” to which foreign studies refer are mostly identified with Russian media sources that are massively consumed by local beneficiaries of information and that enjoy a high degree of trust among a large number of citizens.^[29] The relatively short history of the domestic media market, authorities’ lack of concern regarding the security of the domestic information space and the general inability of the system to become

an element of democratization in Moldovan society by providing accurate, professional information to citizens have given Moldovans an often unclear and contradictory perception of what they read/hear/see in the media.

How Do We Rebuild Trust?

The views of certain French media experts on solutions for restoring/rebuilding citizens’ trust in the media could be useful here. They identified at least three elements on which media should rely, namely: 1) the reliability, depth, fairness and professionalism of journalists; 2) media education and 3) persuading young people to consume media products (especially those of traditional media).^[30] After suffering media betrayal, information seekers need outlets to (re)build their trust in the media whether they live in Washington, Paris or Chisinau, and if the media really wants to be (ever) trusted again, it should start acting now.

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[30] Ubertalli, Olivier. Médias : comment rétablir la confiance?, Le Point, 7 February 2017, available at: https://www.lepoint.fr/medias/medias-comment-retablir-la-confiance-06-02-2017-2102659_260.php

[25] See the study INVESTMENTS IN MEDIA PLURALISM. Practices for the support and public subsidizing of media development, Chisinau 2018, 36 p., available at: http://api.md/upload/files/Study_public_subsidizing.pdf

[26] See the survey ‘Media Consumption and Consumers’ Perceptions of Media Manipulation’, IJC 2018, available at: <http://media-azi.md/en/%E2%80%9Cmedia-consumption-and-consumers%E2%80%99-perceptions-media-manipulation%E2%80%9D>; Public Opinion Barometer, May 2018, available at: <http://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Prezentarea-rezultatelor-BOP-2018.pdf>; Media Evolution and Preferences in the Republic of Moldova, IMAS, March 2018, available at: http://imas.md/pic/archives/10/imas_evolutie_si_preferinte_mass_media.pdf

[27] See the survey ‘Media Consumption and Consumers’ Perceptions of Media Manipulation’, IJC 2018, available at: <http://media-azi.md/en/%E2%80%9Cmedia-consumption-and-consumers%E2%80%99-perceptions-media-manipulation%E2%80%9D>; Media Evolution and Preferences in the Republic of Moldova, IMAS, March 2018, available at: http://imas.md/pic/archives/10/imas_evolutie_si_preferinte_mass_media.pdf

[28] See the Public Opinion Barometer, May 2018, available at: http://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/BOP_05.2018_sondaj.pdf

[29] See the sociological surveys quoted above

New Advertising Law: What Changes Can It Bring in Media Activity

Brief history

The old Law on Advertising was adopted two decades ago. We do not know to what extent the law served its purpose for other market players, excluding media, who are directly involved in this complex and very dynamic area. Media outlets have often reported how the law restricts their daily activities, though the law was amended 13 times with 42 changes made from 2001 to 2016.

The Independent Journalism Center conducted the study "Assessment of the legal framework regulating advertising and recommendations for its optimization" in 2016. The study found that 18 of the 34 articles of the law required at least 27 amendments. We will go over all the legal provisions that needed to be amended.

We offer one example. The law of 1997 defines advertising as, "public information about people, goods (works, services), ideas or initiatives (advertising information, material) meant to encourage and support the public interest in them, to contribute to their sale and to improve the manufacturer's prestige." Let's decipher this definition a bit. So, advertising would mean "public information about people... meant to... contribute to their sale and raise the manufacturer's prestige" or "public information about ideas or initiatives... meant to improve the manufacturer's prestige." On the one hand, the definition says that people can be sold; on the other hand, that they are producing ideas and initiatives.

It is known that any language spoken on Earth is rich, including Romanian. But, it is also known that language, as rich as it is, does not accept gratuitous combinations of words. The main function of language is to ensure communication among its speakers. Communication must lead to an understanding of the messages transmitted by speakers of the language to the language speakers, irrespective of how messages are transmitted: orally, in writing or by sign language. It is good that the media did not broadcast advertising that would have contributed to "selling people." It is good that other laws in force firmly ban the sale of people. It is bad that one law provides for one thing, and another law for another thing.

This is one example. Along with others, it indicated the need for a new law. A draft was developed by the Independent Journalism Center in early 2017 and was publicly presented and debated for almost two years.

Relevant details

There is commercial advertising and non-commercial advertising. There is no social advertising. Social advertising is an unfortunate Soviet invention that resulted from the unsuccessful translation of some English phrases. It was necessary to give up social advertising because commercial advertising is also social and no advertising can be outside society. It does not make any sense to be outside of it while it is addressed to society, either entirely (for example advertising soap) or to some social groups (for example advertising vegetarian foods).

Some say advertising is the fifth and the greatest estate. We could declare it the greatest because the media should not be defined as the fourth estate. Arguments for it to be the greatest include that advertising orients us in the ocean of ideas, initiatives, people, services, products offered (in this respect, advertising sits alongside newscasts); whether we like it or not (most likely not), advertising is omnipresent and we cannot neglect/counteract/liquidate it (if we ignore it on TV or radio, online or on street panels it doesn't mean it disappeared); daily we are unintentionally bombarded with about three thousand advertising messages (even if we remember no more than ten a day) so that willy-nilly there is something we will keep in our minds (for that matter, that's what the advertising producers count on) especially if the message is repeated. Let's remember the general psychological principle used in advertising: Repetition shapes psychology. In other words, the more often something is repeated to us, the easier it is to believe it without further thought.

A law on advertising in any circumstance cannot be a law of the community dealing exclusively with advertising. It's not a law especially for the media that deals with advertising inclusively. It must be written, perceived and understood as a law of the state. In addition, like the Law on Access to Information, it is not a law for just someone but for all of us. The law on advertising should set up clear

and sufficient rules for the fair, efficient and profitable activity of all relevant stakeholders. Rules should be put in place to ensure, in particular, the rights of the majority of advertising consumers (that is why the European community has provided interdictions, for example, for misleading advertising).

Lately, the methods for distributing advertising have been significantly diversified, but written, audiovisual and online media continue to be the main platforms for disseminating advertising.

There are many studies, including allegedly scientific ones, that state that media outlets offer space for advertising. False! Media outlets sell neither square centimeters in the written and online press nor air time (minutes) in the audiovisual press. The media “sells” its audience that it has managed to acquire according to the journalistic products it offers. That’s the deal in a market economy.

Benefits for Media

As I said, the advertising law should benefit the whole society, abiding by the game rules set up for the relevant stakeholders, including the media. In the very first article it says: “The purpose of this law is to organize and develop the national advertising market on the basis of international principles and good practices in the area, including the principle of fair competition and the principle of protecting consumers’ rights.”

So, a prime benefit to the media would be clear game rules, including for online media. We just have to take into account that the rules of game are not established only by the Advertising Law. Additionally, the benefit undoubtedly occurs only if those rules of play are not violated.

Of the four central players determined in the new law (and unclear in the old law)—advertising suppliers, advertising manufacturers, advertising distributors, advertising broadcasters—the media may have one or two or all of their skills though of course with certain restrictions, whether legal or deontological, for example: “Journalists are not the subjects of promotions and commercials for commercial products,” or “A journalist shall not use his/her own name, own image or own voice for purposes of advertising, except for cases in which either social and humanistic values are promoted through messages of public interest or their own journalistic products are

promoted,” or “The professional activity of the journalist is incompatible with... commercial activity.”

As provided in the new law, with few exceptions media must conclude written contracts for disseminating advertising. This rule results, by the way, from numerous complaints filed by media outlets, not necessarily in court, for neglecting the obligations undertaken by either suppliers or distributors of advertising.

The new law establishes the concept of “political advertising” so media outlets will no longer have to guess about content when concluding a contract, since until now political advertising was regulated only by the electoral legislation in force. Therefore, during extra-electoral periods we have had a lot of political advertising and no legal regulations. Let’s agree: Certainty is also a benefit.

Despite initial amendments, the old law did not clearly state what the media would do with social advertising, and there were a lot of producers who paid well to produce some commercials, especially for TV, that were somehow necessary, but they didn’t have the money to broadcast them. They instead identified a good strategy: Address the Broadcast Coordination Council (BCC) with a request to recommend the free broadcasting of those video spots which the BCC then did. Yes, the BCC has no legal right to order the broadcasting of the spots; it can just recommend. But let’s ask ourselves how many broadcasters would like to enter into a conflict with the BCC. So, for the majority of radio/TV outlets, the recommendation meant an obligation.

The new law brings important clarifications by removing the concept and definition of social advertising and introducing the concept and definition of message of public interest (MPI). The law requires that an annual MPI Broadcasting Plan be drafted based on the experience in other countries that MPIs can brilliantly fulfill the mission of changing behavioral patterns in society. It is only necessary that state structures (the bodies responsible for the act of governance) want this and provide the necessary funds. At the same time, the law stipulates that MPIs that are not provided for in the MPI Broadcasting Plan shall be disseminated on the basis of a government decision approved at the request of the Council for Messages of Public Interest. Thus, the pressure on media outlets, especially on audiovisual ones, will weaken.

The provisions on MPI could, on the one hand, organize this segment, and on the other hand make government bodies important participants in the advertising market as are governments from states to which we are aligned, at least declaratively. For instance, in the UK, the government is a larger advertiser than British Telecom or Procter & Gamble. Examples may include the practices of the US, Germany and Italy as well.

The new law sets a limit for advertising (30%) in public periodicals. Private publications set their limits on their own. This is logical as it is in the case of advertising itself. The periodical will not exaggerate the volume of advertising in order not to lose readers/subscribers/users.

Also, it is also assumed that the advertiser will not misrepresent the qualities of the objects advertised. The advertiser understands perfectly: Do not make/pay for advertising to entice someone to buy a product/service once only to be disappointed and then reject the purchased product/service. It would be spending money in vain. The advertiser has to convince us constantly to buy what he is offering to us.

It is an extremely difficult, much debated and controversial issue: Who is responsible for the content of advertising, no matter the type, in media or on billboards. There are interdictions beyond which we cannot pass (for example, hate speech, stipulated in the supreme law of the country, but also in international documents). It would be, I think, an error for the prerogative of approving the content of advertising to belong to a government institution. There are enough examples (presented during the debates on the draft law) that strengthen our belief that an acceptable solution would be the verdict of self-regulatory bodies, but those bodies must exist, be active, have appropriate expertise, have more duties, be known and recognized by society and impose appropriate discipline on all content developers. Otherwise, it would seem strange for the law to dictate where to place a comma, or which word should be replaced by a synonym.

The law enshrines and forbids misleading advertising, which meanwhile has occurred in our daily lives due to the lack of a national legal framework. Thus, the media

has an extra mechanism to avoid such advertising which is punishable by sanctions.

Certainly, the new law also provides other benefits to the media that we cannot present in just one article.

Final details

Let's be aware that no law is perfect. In our opinion, the new advertising law sets the rules of the game that are necessary today. Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow it might be necessary to optimize, supplement or improve them. It is a natural process.

In order to work in the legal space of advertising, the media still needs to know and comply with other national laws that contain interdictions, for example, regarding the sale of medicines.

It is unlikely in the realities of Moldova that the advertising segment of media activity can be regulated by a single law. Over time, the legislature has adopted several laws. Is that good? Is that bad? It seems like it doesn't matter. It's a reality. It would be extremely difficult to withdraw the provisions of other laws on advertising and merge them into one law. Maybe there's no need.

It is known that any law, however good, can be dodged. The law is not like the Bible for genuine parishioners. It's also the case for the new law, similar to the law prohibiting crossing the street when the traffic light is red. Traffic enforcement agents are needed in order to ensure compliance with that law.

The new law did not provide for a special body to be in charge and hence have exclusive duties in the advertising arena. Such a body, though necessary, would not have been accepted by the government. A new state agency would mean a new structure (usually bureaucratic), new staff, a new budget, etc, etc. In fact, there is no need for a new structure as there are already many, each responsible for a particular segment.

We reiterate: The new advertising law will bring benefits to all relevant stakeholders, including the media, if it is implemented in good faith.

Ion BUNDUCHI

Party TV Channels, PR Companies and Misinformation Laboratories

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to our main newscast of electoral sound bites from which you should understand that our patron, also chairperson of the X party, is targeting an important position after the elections of February 2019. They gave us a well-paid job to advertise them and give them the microphone whenever they ask us to. In this newscast you will not see balanced news about the embezzlement they were involved in or about the controversial decisions they made. So, if you don’t want to eat a new piece of misinformation, you’d better switch the TV channel.”

We will not hear such confessions at the beginning of news bulletins on TV stations owned by politicians, of course. However, we should be critically aware when we use the remote control and we choose a channel controlled by those who have aligned themselves to the election starting line before the Central Electoral Commission kicks it off.

These politicians have crossed the threshold of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office more than once in criminal cases and were targeted in wide-ranging journalistic investigations and paid journalists fat salaries to work for the TV stations they own.

Remember 2018. While a large part of the independent media gasped, trying to stay on their feet in a market that is not suitable at all for press development, two TV stations were launched in Orhei that sing the praises of businessman Ilan Sor: Canal 2 was launched in Nisporeni, and Vocea Basarabiei ended up officially in another pocket. Examples can continue.

The television stations on the Monaco-Orhei “axis”

Early this autumn, journalism was shaken after the people of Ilan Sor offered tempting salaries to reporters, anchors, editors, technical staff, etc. Even some seemingly independent journalists were attracted leaving some TV stations in the middle of a crisis. On the ruins of two stations—Euro TV and Alt TV—two more were “built” in Orhei: Central Television and Orhei TV.

Let’s clarify matters from the start: Officially, Ilan Sor has no connection with the two institutions. On paper, the

beneficiary of the stations is Rita Tvik. Central Television, the former Euro TV, and Orhei TV, once known as Alt TV, are managed by Media Resource SRL. The company was created by another company: Klassika Media SRL founded by Rita Tvik.

It is known that Rita Tvik, the author of the book *Life and Destiny*, a biography of Ilan Sor’s father Miron Sor appeared in the Kroll report, the company hired by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova to investigate the banking frauds. According to the document, Rita Tvik, former shareholder of Unibank, has borrowed millions of lei from a foreign enterprise. The web of firms, loans, and close links could be described in detail, but let’s leave this to investigative journalists.

Kroll’s account and “investors” generosity

Dumitru Chitoroaga, the proxy representative of the Sor Party is the manager of the two newly created institutions. He says Ilan Sor has nothing to do with TV channels as money for the development of the media business was borrowed from “partners.”

Ilan Sor denied any connection with Central Television in a short interview for Pro TV. “It is not my TV station. This project has shareholders. Now, the shareholder is Rita Tvik. She probably has investors,” the mayor said when it was launched.

Well, it’s been weeks. Here are a few conclusions that viewers could draw: Politician Ilan Sor is more and more popular, the extra-parliamentary opposition is irresponsible, Vlad Plahotniuc and his ministers are not that bad, and living in Orhei is almost like living in Monaco, as the mayor promised.

Journalistic balance asks are the sources independent from one another? No, it is almost impossible to see it in the newscasts. The election campaign is too close for the project’s investors to waste their time on the rubbish that several tired media outlets and non-government media are relying on. And, in case the approximately 30 minutes of news a day is not enough, Ilan Sor has a separate show, “The Mayor’s Hour.”

Of course, the investors relied on entertainment offering a platform to singer Jasmin, the mayor's wife, and to some singers and actors from Moldova and more. Central Television and Orhei TV have probably more own content than the few independent television stations in Chisinau have. What's at stake? To keep citizens in front of screens before the actual campaign and to brainwash them that if Ilan Sor reaches Parliament, the Republic of Moldova will "bloom" just like Orhei has.

Is Plahotniuc's Jackpot in Nisporeni?

Let's go to Nisporeni. There, in the district where the Chairperson of the Democratic Party was born, the media holding of Vladimir Plahotniuc called "the center of gravity of the media industry in the Republic of Moldova" took its roots in the spring.

Canal 2, one of the two TV stations that the PD leader allegedly gave to his counsellor, Oleg Cristal, in 2017 as a result of some amendments to the Broadcasting Code, has opened a local studio. The representatives of the media project denied then that it had anything to do with the electoral campaign. "It's really a coincidence. We have been thinking about it for a couple of years. And when we found the equipment, we launched it (the project – e.n.)" Ruslan Grabari assured us.

Yes... But the fact is that we no longer believe in coincidences in the Republic of Moldova. Where, if not in Nisporeni, will we see Vladimir Plahotniuc attending all anniversaries with generous gifts? He gave money for repairing the church in Boltun; he gave Grozesti audio equipment as a gift; he danced the hora along with ordinary citizens in Varzaresti. On the villages' anniversary days you bring the key to the heart of the voters and create a "journalistic" pretext for broadcasting five-minute reports. Savior of the nation you know! And of course, only Plahotniuc's government is able to come up with projects to enhance the welfare of the people of Nisporeni.

Why is this local studio in Nisporeni and not Stefan Voda or Briceni? Until the official kick-off of the election campaign, we are only supposed to assume that Vladimir Plahotniuc is going to stand there, placing his big stake in his home district, and the local studio is needed to augment the information about his charity or the good parts of the party's projects.

Meanwhile, his big holding in Chisinau isn't resting. Prime TV, Publika TV, Canal 2, Canal 3 and a lot of web portals simultaneously send breaking news from PD headquarters throughout the republic and criticize "with all the breath in their lungs" anything that could be held against them.

Vocea Basarabiei and Noroc TV under the same umbrella

Let's stay in Nisporeni just a little while longer for a clarification. In the video report about launching the Canal 2 studio, one can see that the TV station shares its headquarters with two others: Noroc TV and Vocea Basarabiei. The headquarters of all these institutions are in the building of the district council. Now, let's remember that in 2017 and 2016, Vocea Basarabiei and Noroc TV went from one pocket to another, a shared one if we put together public information (although the companies managing the institutions are different).

In fact, it is enough to go to the websites of these TV stations to convince yourself that they are both under the same umbrella. There are the same titles and the same texts on both websites: PSRM – leader, PPDA and PAS – down, PD records the highest rating of the party during the last two years, Andrei Nastase is among the politicians who used the most the hate speech or Nastase doesn't give Ghimpu chances. The allegedly strengthened opposition breaks down. On the other hand, neither on Noroc TV nor on Vocea Basarabiei will you find criticism of the government.

Let's elucidate things here: After 17 years of collaboration, Vocea Basarabiei decided this year not to broadcast the programs of the Free Europe radio station. No comments are probably required.

PSRM stands with MPs on duty

PSRM people, like all hard-working politicians, take care of their own territory. The MPs are on duty: some act as moderators, others as guests. As with the Democrats or the Sor Party, you will not find a plurality of opinions on NTV or Accent TV. The newscasts, programs (supposedly of analysis), the web platforms of these TV stations, are instead podiums offered free of charge to Igor Dodon in his role as president of the faction and of the party.

It's somewhat obvious in their case. PSRM's TV channels held their final rehearsal before the election this February

in the spring when Ion Ceban entered the race for mayor of the capital. Andrei Nastase, Ion Ceban's opponent, was obviously at a disadvantage. Back then, media outlets affiliated with the Socialists failed the test on neutrality, impartiality and objectivity, with no chance of recovery. But they have brilliantly passed the test on political partisanship, manipulation and misinformation.

Why do politicians rely so much on TV when the online environment is the new power in the world? Because in the Republic of Moldova television is not only the most viewed media source but also the one that consumers trust (45%) more than any other type of press, as shown in the

data of a survey conducted by the Independent Journalism Center in August 2018.

Taking into consideration how many TV stations work as true party branches or genuine PR companies where journalistic deontology and information balance are viewed with skepticism, we still have to use the remote control with great caution. Beware of electric shocks before the elections.

Anastasia NANI

Politically Controlled Press and Gender Stereotypes

Are gender stereotypes an important issue? In a state that almost 30 years after independence continues to be the poorest on the continent and that is a world leader in terms of how fast its citizens migrate out of it; in a state where birth rates are steadily decreasing and corruption is increasing... Who, if not the media should deal with global issues such as poverty, corruption, development or even the welfare of families? Yes, I think that the media should particularly tackle these issues: the link between corruption, poverty and gender imbalance.

International research shows that in more than 100 countries, 46% of the information in all media sources contains gender stereotypes and only 6% of the products reflect gender equality. Other studies show that men hold more than 70% of top positions in media management according to the data from a global survey. What is the gender reality in politically controlled media? Such studies do not exist, but data can be collected easily.

On the eve of a new election campaign, initiating such a discussion is nearly as impossible as it is necessary. Why is it impossible? Because most of the Moldovan press is politically controlled. On the one hand, the ruling party chairman owns a large number of the TV licenses and a large number of online media outlets. Furthermore, studies show that the part of the media over which PD leader Vlad Plahotniuc doesn't have legal control provides content that is similar to that of the institutions he owns, i.e. exclusively positive news about the government and very critical views about matters regarding the opposition. Another segment of the media is controlled by President Igor Dodon or his political allies. Also recently, the leader of a party named after him, Ilan Sor, has increased the number of TV licenses and media outlets under his control.

Why won't these channels ensure gender balance appropriately since each and every one of them keeps on chanting from TV screens that they are very interested in the wellbeing of citizens, in social development, with gender equality being maybe the simplest thing to show on TV? Indeed, the television stations of the three political leaders connected to the government have been making efforts recently to ensure gender balance: reports

on flowers and anniversary dinners for women from the PD Party on 8 March, reports on channels affiliated with the socialists about the success of their party leader Zinaida Greceanii, reports about Jasmin Sor showing how much she loves the town of Orhei which is governed by her husband. Yes, there are media products empowering women, but the way they are made are mere confirmations of gender stereotypes.

An exercise to assess gender balance in the media

Try to count how many critical reports about Maia Sandu there are on TV stations Publika, Prime, Canal 2 and Canal 3? Hundreds! What's wrong with this picture? Since when is it that a TV station wouldn't be allowed to write about a party leader? Or, should she be coddled specifically because she is a woman and leads a party? Of course not. Gender imbalance is about other details. Let's try to count how many critical reports were there about Vlad Plahotniuc on those four stations? You won't find any, even if he is the party leader who controls the government of a state leading in terms of corruption, migration, and poverty. Is this a sign of a distorted approach? Is this a sign of gender imbalance? Both. Let's continue the analysis and count how many critical reports we'll find about another party leader, Zinaida Greceanii, on the same four TV stations. It is difficult to compare both the number and tone of the news items about the two party leaders. While Maia Sandu is accused of countless misdeeds in the only civil service position she has held—Minister of Education—Zinaida Greceanii who held much higher positions in the Voronin governments when Moldova was also a leader in terms of corruption and migration is not the heroine of many critical products on these stations. Does it make sense comparing the “products” on these TV stations dedicated to Maia Sandu as the Minister of Education with those attributed to Monica Babuc who holds the same position? It makes sense only if we're after finding yet another imbalance.

Let's try making similar comparisons but looking at socialists' channels. Reports criticising Maia Sandu, the leader of an opposition party, abound with stereotypes, often bluntly false ones. The leader of the Party of Socialists, Zinaida Greceanii, is seen only in pink and red lights by

these TV stations. Is it a sign of balance? A woman is promoted, another one is criticized... So, is it an individual approach without generalizations? Of course not. And the big issue with gender inequality at all these media outlets is that editorial teams comply with the unhealthy aims and needs of political men to suppress an opponent by using gender stereotypes.

Women who criticize government, gender standards

The political battles in the media during the latest political campaigns have revealed a lot of gender stereotypes. Women who are critical of government corruption, lack of transparency, money laundering, and misuse of power are attacked openly or through cyber groups for their gender qualities: whether they are married or not, have children or not, are too young or too old, whether they have intimate relationships or not, whether they look too good or too bad. What I mean now is not only the few women from the opposition parties but also journalists and women activists from various formal or informal organizations who criticize the authorities for corruption and misuse of power.

I would like to draw particular attention to cyber misuse. Try to see the link between the attempt of a political woman, a journalist or a woman activist to criticize Andrian Candu, Pavel Filip or Vlad Plahotniuc and the immediate wave of virtual attacks on her gender by some Facebook communities, which then just "like" whatever the officials listed above say. This year, 2018, the phenomenon of cyber violence through trolling has gained international legal status: Jessika Aro, a Finnish journalist, attacked the trolls in court and won the case, and the attackers were punished with incarceration in real, not virtual,

prisons. This case became a precedent and gave courage to the victims of cyber-violence in global journalism and activism. Of course, Moldova is not Finland, and Moldova is not the EU, but it has signed a lot of agreements whereby it has committed to respecting and ensuring the rights of all its citizens, including the rights of women, and their right to demonstrate civic activism without the risk of being attacked.

The Council of Europe (CoE) published its first study on cyber violence this year. The Republic of Moldova became a member of the Council of Europe in 1995, and each year since then a delegation of the Moldovan Parliament goes to Strasbourg to attend the sessions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Even though this study looks into various aspects of cyber violence in any CoE member state, the chapter on Moldova contains only three lines saying that Moldova does not have legislative acts that would explicitly tackle cyber aggression while misuse in this area is qualified on the basis of articles on violence in general. The latest verbal assaults of a political leader against journalists that included threats and incitement to physical violence have not resulted in any penalties. Thus, the legislation is applied selectively.

This year the Council of Europe is also monitoring the efforts of the Moldovan authorities to combat discrimination. Are gender stereotypes and gender-based assaults perpetuated on politically controlled TV stations a problem of discrimination? National and international legislative acts say they are. The next election campaign will show though to what extent these legal acts are observed.

Alina RADU

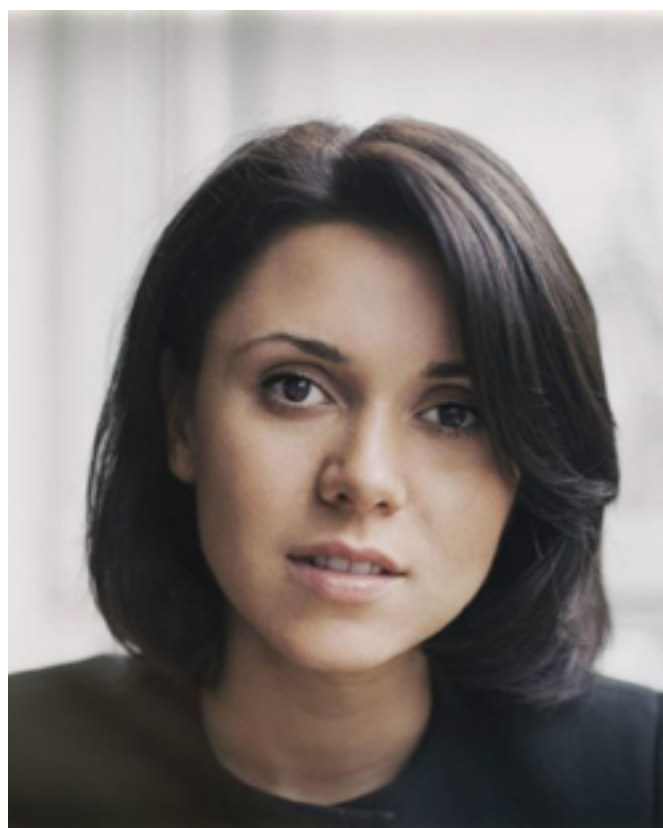
Natalia Morari, Chairperson of the Media Alternativa Association: “People need to know under what conditions free journalists work, who supports them, who attacks them and why”

Media Azi: *Dear Natalia Morari, recently, a high-level official stated publicly that he saw, “...less objectivity on TV8.” What would you say about that statement?*

Natalia Morari: Honestly, we were stunned to hear this from Prime Minister Pavel Filip. We immediately called Dragos Vicol (the Broadcasting Coordination Council (BCC) Chair – e. n.) and asked him for an official comment regarding the particular instances in which TV8 infringed the Broadcasting Code. We were told we had received a warning for an expired advertisement of a pharmaceutical product, but we’d just been advertising it for a long time and we weren’t paying attention to when the term expired. We took it off the channel. The BCC had no other remarks. It makes us believe that we are actually being kept a close eye on and we are not allowed to make any mistakes, in contrast with other TV stations. We fall under the category of enemies...

M. A.: *Why do you call it the category of enemies?*

M.: Because the BCC is a hundred percent politically controlled. I am not talking about all members, but about BCC as an institution and about the majority of its members who can guarantee/vote for any decision that would please the current government. As the government doesn’t really like us, I have the feeling that the BCC considers us enemies. Anyway, we do not see much fairness about this institution. I am currently an expert in the Stop Fals national campaign conducted by the Association of Independent Press (API). As such, I get to travel to many different places where we talk to people about manipulation, misinformation, biased material... Well, there are a lot of news items in which Publika TV spoke about “rolling heads” and “terrorists” in the context of the expulsion of Turkish citizens. In those items, the analysts interviewed by phone confirmed time and time again that



the people expelled were part of an Islamist group, but the BCC never even warned them about it! They do, however, notice everything we do. The BCC might have been given this order from above.

M. A.: *Why would an allegedly pro-European government not be interested in supporting a free press?*

N. M.: It’s not enough to proclaim yourself a pro-European government; you have to respect European values. For example, we will never understand why PD

has prohibited us from attending its briefings. What's the connection between such bans and the freedom of expression, an important value in a democratic state? Paying closer attention to the statements of our leaders, we notice that although they talk about democracy and European values, they are actually more concerned about their oligarchic interests. The oligarchic groups that have come to power in Moldova are taking advantage of the fact that state institutions are very weak and are trying to use them for their own benefit. For oligarchs, power is as precious as life; if they lose it, the criminal cases and the trials will start and they'll go to prison. A free press can expose many of their suspicious affairs. This phenomenon is typical of all ex-Soviet Union countries, although not so much of the Baltic States perhaps. The oligarchs are ready to do whatever it takes to get away from the press. They can threaten and intimidate us, they can prohibit us from attending the events they organize, they can call us public enemies.

M. A.: *Notwithstanding all the difficulties, you end the year with the Pavel Sheremet International Award offered by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum...*

N. M.: I am deeply moved and proud of our teamwork at TV8 for which we have been awarded. See how it happens: Some assault us, others reward us!

M. A.: *Looking back, what would you like to remember and what would you like to forget about the many events that you've been through in 2018?*

N. M.: I would like to forget about the issues we had to deal with because it was not a simple year at all. Each of our team members had some thoughts on whether to stay on at TV8 or to leave. It is extremely difficult to stick to your guns when you don't get paid for three months and keep hearing comments like "they will soon close you down," or having invitations from other TV stations where the salaries are three times higher, and which you have to refuse... Now, at least, we have salaries guaranteed for a year ahead. This is the good part. I've noticed a change in attitude among my colleagues. There is hope in their eyes. I am glad that more and more people talk not only about our TV shows but also about TV8 as a TV station. We have convinced ourselves that when you believe in something and you do everything that depends on you, the difficulties stop standing in your way. Our TV station is the only one led by three women: Mariana Rata, Angela Gonta and Natalia Morari. I hope that we will soon have a

new director who will help us because we lose a lot of time on administrative work instead of creating. (Meanwhile, the new director has already been appointed – e.n.). At present, there are 56 people on staff. We produce five hours of live content daily and another two hours we record for the weekend. So, in total, we prepare seven hours of local content daily with 56 people only. In addition, we also have the tv8.md website, which in our opinion is also a good product. Of course, for all of this, we still need a lot of money to stay in the market!

M. A.: *To what extent do you rely on the advertising market?*

N. M.: We don't rely on this market. There were months when the advertising didn't even cover the state taxes we have to pay monthly. This market is monopolized and so is the institution in charge of this matter—the Competition Council—which has closed its eyes to this. At the beginning of the year, we filed a complaint with the Competition Council asking it to investigate whether there is a cartel agreement between the two major advertising companies, i.e., Casa Media and the Exclusive Sales House. We have not been answered so far. Meanwhile, the BCC has set up a committee tasked to select an audience measurement company. The two sales houses against which we have filed a complaint are among its members. None of the signatories—TV8, Jurnal TV, Pro TV, RTR Moldova—are part of this committee. Most of the members are those who monopolized the advertising market in the first place. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that the cartel agreements will disappear. Moreover, with the emergence of the TV stations of Ilan Sor—Orhei TV and Central Television—advertising money which is very scarce and for which we fight will be divided among several players.

M. A.: *What does TV8 expect from the new Audiovisual Media Services Code?*

N. M.: I know that a lot of good people have been involved in the drafting of this law. However, our problem is not the laws but rather their application in good faith. We have already given the example of the committee meant to select the new audience measurement company. Formally, the BCC respected the broadcasters' willingness, but what will the final result be? I am convinced that we can adopt the best broadcasting code, but if it is implemented badly, the situation will not change.

M. A.: In 2019 we will have two election campaigns: parliamentary and local elections. What editorial policy will TV8 have during the elections?

N. M.: Our editorial policy during elections will not differ from the current one.

M. A.: How are you going to treat those who have placed you now in the enemy category when they come to you regarding advertising? Will you accept it?

N. M.: Yes, definitely. Right now, we have commercial advertising from the Democratic Party, for example. Viewers must understand that commercial advertising ensures our survival. Moreover, if we invented reasons to refuse them, how would that make us any different from them? We would like to have all parties' advertisements, but not all of them have money. On the other hand, a curious fact is that although some politicians assault us, they come to us anyway with their advertisements for which they pay. We say: Let this be one of the few cases when they spend their money to good use!

M. A.: What about political advertising?

N. M.: We will offer air time to absolutely everyone. You'll find the whole variety of political opinions on our platform, but we will never allow it to be used to attack and spread messages of hatred. We make a clear distinction: There is commercial advertising for which money is paid; it comes in advertising spots and we sign off. And then there are our own original products or news items that will never be influenced by any advertiser or party, not even donors, because our donors don't interfere and never ask why we address one topic or another. The monitoring carried out by the BCC or the IJC in the previous local election campaign showed that if there were objections, they referred to some authors' programs, not to newscasts or debates at all. We hope that during the following campaigns we will be able to offer the viewers all the opinions. By the way, we are often criticized for inviting experts recognized as being affiliated with the PD on our political programs. We do this consciously because when talking about politics, you cannot avoid the ruling power. We don't want to meet just "our people" in the studio. It's important that everyone is present.

M. A.: How do you promote your media products?

N. M.: We don't have money to invest in promotional campaigns; instead, the best advertising is made by our country's leadership. Not long ago while we were airing the interview with President Igor Dodon, Andrian Candu was talking about TV8 on N4, and Vladimir Cebotari, the Deputy Chairperson of the PDM, was on PRO TV making some comments about TV8 too. We congratulated each other among ourselves and said that this is the best advertising. But speaking of advertising, it's very nice when those in this business who might consider you a competitor decide to help you with a promotional article in a difficult moment. This year we had many beautiful collaborations of this kind with *Unimedia*, *Diez*, *Agora*, *NewsMaker*, and *Ziarul de Garda*.

M. A.: However, although we're colleagues, we are still divided. How could we overcome our divisions? What divides us, in fact?

N. M.: The political factor plays a key role in this division. The media in our country is divided into two different categories: free media and biased media. The second thing that divides us has a linguistic nature. We feel it not only in the media but in society too. Doing our job with high professionalism means overcoming these divisions. The first steps have already been made. I also say this as a native speaker of Russian who learned Romanian. For example, *NewsMaker*, which is not a Romanian media source, has secured a place in the media market as a media source followed by all readers, becoming known not for the language in which it writes but for fair journalism. If you do fair journalism, it really doesn't matter the language you write in. In this respect, I don't think that any colleague from TV8, RISE, *Unimedia* or *Agora* wouldn't feel proud to associate with *NewsMaker* journalists. In our trade, solidarity means associating yourself with those colleagues who are doing fair journalism. I will say even more: In my opinion, journalists should dissociate themselves from those who don't follow the Code of Ethics. Thus, we will be able to distinguish between journalism and propaganda, between journalists and non-journalists. There are many things that could strengthen this trade: the fight for independent justice and rule of law, free press values, equal game rules for all, the fight against corruption, etc.

M. A.: Journalism needs people who are not only talented but are also strong. When did you experience the most tense moments in journalism and how did you overcome the stress?

N. M.: Not long ago, my guests Liuba Sevcuic from RISE Moldova and Vladimir Soloviov from *NewsMaker* and I tackled the matter of stalking on a talk show and why this method of intimidation is used and how journalists feel when they are persecuted because they have published critical material targeting high officials. What should journalists do when feeling persecuted? Do they need to quit their jobs? We have such cases too. I think we must not give up. We have to go ahead and talk openly to the world, including about feeling persecuted and that you are going through a dreadful time. If you remember, I went publicly on air on TV8 with an open letter to Vlad

Plahotniuc, the PDM leader, and I told about the state of fear I was going through in 2016. People need to know under what conditions free journalists work, what issues they face, who supports them, who assaults them and why.

As for the stress... No matter how strong you are, it's very hard to get over it. There have been times when I went swimming twice a day to regain my balance. I smelled like chlorine all the time... You cannot fight stress alone. People helped me; they are still helping me—colleagues, relatives, friends, doctors, meditation and of course, TV8 viewers.

Tatiana CORAI

Why and Who Instigates Hatred Against Journalists?

MOTTO: An individual's behavior changes when he or she becomes part of a crowd. (Gustave Le Bon)

I am afraid of the moment when an individual will decide to divert public attention from a subject of great interest by murdering a journalist in Moldova. It feels like someone is preparing the ground for such a crime, and officials from state institutions who are in charge of preventing such a scenario make fun of it without doing anything.

It may seem that my feelings are a little exaggerated, but let's admit that harassing a journalist has never been easier than it is now. It is one of the most serious threats to journalists around the world. Encouraging feelings of hate against journalists is reaching shocking proportions in the Republic of Moldova. Remember the response of a charity foundation to the investigation carried out by Liuba Shevciuc from RISE, when the picture of the journalist was posted on the first page of the portal, saying, "We ask her for help." In this country, politician Ilan Sor threatens to bury journalists under the asphalt, to strangle them, to hang them on the Arch of Triumph..., while the state authorities, tacitly applaud and encourage him without undertaking any action. His party colleague, Marina Tauber, is attacking journalists with a broom, while Nicu Gusan from radio station Free Europe was pushed away by Sor's bodyguard at the end of August. Let's remember the WRITTEN response of the police about the assault on the journalist by Marina Tauber: "Following an investigation of the case, no violations have been established. During the demonstration, the participants expressed their opinions, and the actions of citizen Tauber Marina did not contain any constituent elements of crimes or misdemeanors. For these reasons, the case was closed."

Media NGOs and the Ombudsperson asked in vain that government authorities (including Prime Minister Filip) take action. At the PDM demonstration in October, Anastasia Antoceanu from Agora was treated high handedly after she approached Filip, Candu and Plahotniuc (at the same time, the journalist from Free Europe was hit by a policeman while filming the scene), but on the show of Gheorghe Gonța, Candu said that it was the journalist's fault for sticking her nose where it didn't belong at the PDM event (organized not in Plahotniuc's secret bunker,

but in the Great National Assembly Square): "Oh, what happened! That journalist was asked (ASKED, so cynically and ironically Candu said) to leave the restricted area." Candu is the Speaker of Parliament. Sor is the mayor of Orhei, and Tauber is also a mayor.

These are just the latest signs that some individuals whom we feed with our taxes have tried to inhibit journalists. All the journalists who criticize them, not only Anastasia, Nicu, or Tatiana Djamanov from Radio Orhei, do so because these ill-mannered habits aim at taking down the whole guild and restricting the freedom to inform. All of these serious cases occurred under the watch of policemen who just laughed.

The tones of these "great men of the day" just instigate hatred and violence against journalists. The armies of bloggers and trolls they maintain spread and amplify hatred against disfavored journalists every day on social networks, forums, blogs, or on any platform that ensures their anonymity. Their actions clearly show that their mission is not only to discredit these journalists. They are after something more serious.

The more detested the dirty politicians (who cling to power to avoid jail) are, the bigger their troll factories are. Their goal is to enter the consciousness of people, to impose a virtual parallel reality, to divert discussions and to annihilate all those who oppose them, primarily the free journalists who maintain a critical spirit and do not allow society to give up, to stop being vigilant. Generally, the trolls, bloggers and "journalists" fed by politicians are like infections in society that will destroy it if not treated in time.

The worst thing is that at this point in the Republic of Moldova, journalists are on their own in this battle. Most cyber trolls serve the powerful, and because the state institutions are captured, their representatives are no longer reacting but are making fun of it. There are cases in the world when trolls have been identified and punished by law enforcement bodies. In 2016, Jessika Aro, a Finnish journalist specializing in exposing Kremlin-funded trolls, filed a complaint with the Helsinki Police saying she was the victim of a defamation campaign. Last month, the

three trolls who “wooded” her received their sentences: 22 months of imprisonment.

In 2017, the French journalist Nadia Daan was harassed on forums. Trolls tried to discredit her by creating an image of an “obsessed pedophile.” Her email address was used to “subscribe” to some sites containing child porn. Subsequently on the forums, she received threats in which her daughter was mentioned. Daan filed a complaint, and two of the cyber trolls who coordinated the campaign against her were convicted.

In both cases, convictions were possible due to the fact that representatives of the state institutions did their jobs. In other words, they did not laugh when they realized that someone was harassing journalists.

Talking to a troll

In Moldova, some troll teams work on the same computers of two political groups. They are real people and, at some point, they will speak publicly about the tasks they are now receiving. Some of them have political beliefs opposed to what they do which is trolling for money. Among them there are also unionists whose task is to promote anti-unionist messages. They have remorse that generates difficult-to-control reactions. My discussion with them over a beer were identical to sitting in an electric chair:

- We have two kinds of profiles: temporary profiles and “true” profiles. The temporary ones are those with a single picture... with no history. We create them for one or two missions until you report them and they are blocked. The true ones are for “special missions.” We start writing about music and cats and when we receive the order, we slip in political posts or comments. It is more difficult for Facebook to block them.
- *Are you also the ones who are cleaning (deleting negative comments) their pages?*
- No. There are other people who have the password.
- *But are you aware of the evil that you are doing?*
- It’s horrible to live with this. I visited my parents, and talking to them, I realized that they were repeating what we are being asked to promote because everything happens in a chain reaction. Somewhere, there is a brain that distributes tasks according to a certain strategy; we are doing this on networks and forums, others on portals, on TV, on radio... because tonight I could see this scheme on TV.

- *Why don’t you give it up?*
- I feel this pressure at home when I’m alone. When I’m there with all of them, I feel like them. I have no remorse.
- *How do you get the tasks? Who sends them to you?*
- Usually, we have them in an e-mail in the morning. We do not know where they are coming from. They come from two directions: one we call the moderator, the other emperor. When they come from the emperor, it means that we have to drop everything and attack something immediately—someone’s programs, a special investigation, or someone’s special post.
- *How do you get paid?*
- I will be able to tell you about this when it is over..’

Assault on democracy

At this moment, democracy in the Republic of Moldova is threatened by hatred against journalists who refuse to be controlled by the government, with branches into organized criminal groups. The line separating verbal violence from physical violence against journalists tends to disappear. Yesterday we were beaten with a broom. What will happen to us tomorrow? And the worst thing is to know that you are in danger and you are not sure whether it is a good thing to call the police. Journalists in danger don’t need policemen who have come to make fun of them.

“Political leaders who fuel loathing for reporters bear heavy responsibility because they undermine the concept of public debate based on facts instead of propaganda. To dispute the legitimacy of journalism today is to play with extremely dangerous political fire,” Christophe Deloire, Secretary General of Reporters Sans Frontières, said.

Media hostility, promoted by politicians, is a global trend. The World Press Freedom Index of 2018 reflects an increasing animosity against journalists. According to the report, “The climate of hatred is steadily more visible,”... and... “is no longer limited to authoritarian countries.” Last year 81 journalists were killed worldwide while doing their jobs.

Minimum precautions

Fighting government-funded troll gangs that have captured institutions is like fighting hail (I don’t believe that Alazani rockets really work). However, we can do

something if we act in solidarity. In September 2018, troll teams of two co-operating groups tested a new trick: they were stealing identities of public figures and were posting, on their behalf, denigrating comments on the forum of the show “Politica” on TV8 and on social networks. The assault was massive and the test lasted for more than a week. That case convinced us to create a group of those affected who reported and thus blocked the false profiles. Of course, it’s not the most effective solution, but it’s better than doing nothing.

So, the number one rule in the fight against trolls is continuous reporting and blocking. Do not feed the trolls by getting into political squabbles with them; it is their most delicious victory. The moment you react, there is great joy in the hall where the trolls are. Encourage creating networks or groups reporting trolls. Combat online harassment campaigns that are orchestrated by

troll factories, and if you are a victim of such a campaign, file an official report with evidence and ask competent authorities to react (they will probably not react, but this effort will pay off later). File a complaint with the police, making sure you use the procedure to initiate a case, not just report a case.

Last but not least, follow at least these digital security rules: secure your email, phone and profile (in order to avoid a subscription to porn sites or other platforms that would compromise you); set up 2-step authentication as a further safety step; encrypt the hard drive of your phone to fully protect your content and update your software regularly when security updates are offered on the devices you use. In other words, protect yourself. We are still on our own! We must be strategists if we don’t want to be forced to take a step back!

Vitalie CALUGAREANU

Sledgehammer and Kaleidoscope: A Journalist's Double Loyalty to Truth and Balance

Popular wisdom says two things are absolutely certain in this world: death and taxes. According to St. Augustine, these two are God and love; according to Descartes, doubt and reason. Other more or less eclectic combinations have been formulated over the ages and across cultures according to the times. However, none of these rightly include the truth: a slippery, multifaceted concept which Romanian folk tradition says is at the bottom of the sea. And modern researchers avoid it, preferring to operate with terms that are much more accurate and easier to quantify.

Why did I start on such a philosophical note? The truth (allegedly) is that we have recently had a series of contradictory discussions, apparently endless discussions, among editorial staff about how to cover a complicated subject on media ownership. Some of us thought we would go strictly on the evidence—facts—while others wanted more context and a more thorough investigation of certain details. I will ask for a little patience and lead you to the conclusions we have reached in order not to jeopardize the intriguing aspects of the story. Anyway, it is about protection of personal data.

We risk losing the truth, in the (justified) momentum between balance and neutrality

Let's agree from the start: In journalism, as this profession was defined in states built by democratic institutions and rules, information needs to be verified by evidence, and its narrative must pass, among other things, the test of objectivity (facts, not opinions), impartiality (equal input from sources), references (two minimum), integrity (without hidden interests) and public interest. As a precondition, journalism must be honest, and here we understand that it is a reflection of the truth and immediate reality as it is. All these principles, plus a few others, have come to be the core of any code of journalistic ethics, whether it is [journalistic ethics in Moldova](#) or [in the USA](#).

The requirement to reflect the truth is not stated per se in the current version of the Moldovan code. The authors

have avoided on a precautionary basis terms that can be interpreted and have preferred more specific notions: "The journalist shall present information in an honest and balanced manner and only after having taken steps for verifying it." In the American version adopted by the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), the very first principle is formulated unequivocally and almost romantically: "Look for the truth and tell it." At the same time, it is necessary for the journalist to collect, update and possibly correct information throughout the life of a topic.

But, what do we do when we endanger or even miss fulfilling the primordial journalistic goal in the interests of caring for public interest, the need for neutrality, neutrality and fairness, and the exacerbated speed of information flow? It's not a fantasy. There is a provision against inaccuracies in the same SPJ code of ethics (Remember, neither speed nor format is an excuse for inaccuracies). It's a reality. A current one. This was shown by the results of the US presidential election in 2016 which have been so bad for American society and the press that for two years now nothing seems to be the same.

An American story: We can't see the forest for the trees

After decades of neutral and balanced journalism in which the standard that any newscast should include news equally about all candidates (in campaigns) or about both parties involved (in controversial subjects), the American press returned to the unequivocal concept of truth. Donald Trump brought the term fake news to the public agenda, especially in terms journalistic material that is uncomfortable for him (lying mainstream media). At the same time, major journalists and media outlets have been declared to be guilty of accusations and hate speech (press is the enemy of the people). More and more often, professional journalists were in a position of defending themselves and justifying their work.

A review of the last two years was required, and many have done it. The stakes are great: to understand how a president could become a political vulgarian who was not supported

by the press and made a lot of tactical mistakes during the campaign; to try to stop the accelerating deterioration of the press' image which is increasingly associated with elites and accused of being disconnected from the problems of ordinary people; to mitigate attacks against the freedom of the press and the rights of journalists; and, why not, to avoid a second Trump presidential term—an almost messianic mission.

In 2017 the first fake news investigations appeared: their history (not as recent as they seem), their dangers (since the destruction of democratic institutions till the start of a World War III), the functioning mechanisms (practice makes perfect) and methods of protection (media education and fact checking, though each fails).

Among other things, this moment of introspection was also an opportunity for the media to make mistakes. Thus, American journalists learned that the majority of them work in districts where Hillary Clinton won decisively which were overwhelmingly concentrated in coastal areas, in big, rich cities. The media bubble is not only real, it is even more exaggerated than previously thought.

Sledgehammer and Kaleidoscope

Then, a comprehensive analysis conducted by two media researchers and published in the Columbia Journalism Review based on the reporting of The New York Times highlighted how the classical journalistic approach of giving priority to the subjects of the day then trying to balance news and maintain distance from the candidates by running both favorable and unfavorable articles led to this result.

A few conclusions in a short list:

- Only 5 of the 150 articles on the front page of *The New York Times* published during the last months of the campaign tried to compare candidates' programs and only 10 described the program of one or another candidate. Only 10%, Karl!
- More sentences were written about the various scandals surrounding Clinton's emails than about all of Trump's scandals taken together.
- In retrospect, it seems that the press generally made the mistake of supposing that Hillary Clinton's victory in the presidential race was inevitable, so they positioned themselves from the start as credible critics of the next government.

The New York Times (NYT) was not chosen by chance and not because its performance was worse than that of other publications. On the contrary, it was chosen because it is widely read by both elites and ordinary citizens as well as for the historically exemplary quality of its journalism. In other words, if there was not sufficient and appropriate information on important topics on the pages of the NYT, where else could it be found?

As Vox.com notes, it's not like the NYT and other media outlets wouldn't report on Trump's scandals. They did, but they were so numerous that it was natural and perhaps even necessary for journalists to go on to the next one. But, as Watts says in his research, the news of Hillary Clinton's emails worked as a sledgehammer while Trump's scandals went from one day to the next with far less impact on the public: "A monolithic story that's constantly renewing itself seems to be disproportionately damaging compared to a kaleidoscope."

Back to the topic

Here we come back to the question of false equivalence which may be a side effect in the context of balancing sources. Sometimes in the rush that accompanies topical subjects, especially those related to electoral campaigns, journalists tend to understand that balancing news implies an equivalence between protagonists. Or, there is neither balance in the story of the American presidential race that Matthew Yglesias of Vox.com wrote some time ago was "bullshit" nor in our articles targeting the media for journalists (Media-azi.md) or case studies and monitoring reports aimed at educating consumers (Mediacritica).

"The real scandal here is how a subject of very modest value has come to dominate the presidential election in the US, overcoming much more important news subjects and giving American voters a completely misaligned impression of one of the two candidates," Yglesias wrote a few days after the end of the 2016 elections.

As for the Moldovan press, things seem to be even more disproportionate. We are obliged to look neutral and detached, observing and sanctioning any violation of the Code of Ethics by the very nature of the news we present when monitoring compliance with ethical standards in the media. This means that sometimes in the conclusions of a press release a press institution that admitted deviations from ethical standards may be on the list of those who

have not complied with the rules alongside others who have engaged in propaganda techniques and attempts to manipulate the public which are much more serious violations.

Of course, it can be argued that it is a matter of journalistic prowess to structure the news, the case study or the press release in such a way that by reading the entire text, it is clear that there is a certain gradation and different violations must be charged differently. However, let's not forget that a large number of readers get news from Facebook, and most of them just prefer to read the title and, at best, the lead. This is our main limitation, one which detractors don't hesitate to take advantage of.

In conclusion

How is it possible for journalists, trying to be as correct as possible, to put a spanner in the works, and for good intentions to cause damage? A possible answer can be found in the same Code of Ethics of SPJ. At the end of the list of ethical recommendations, we find a very necessary statement:

“The code should be read as a whole; individual principles should not be taken out of context.” Or, simply put, the

code of ethics has to be respected fully, not partially. So the principle of transparency, editorial independence, and mitigation of damage must go hand in hand with the search for truth and its full coverage. Editorial balance doesn't eliminate the need to accurately reflect what the journalist knows in good faith and in full knowledge or that he or she represents the truth.

This simple and almost essential conclusion was reached by the most prominent press institutions following the episode of introspection that I was talking about above. In 2017, The New York Times started a branding campaign changing its slogan to one that focuses on truth: “The truth is worth it.” The public reacted promptly: the first 24 hours after the launch of the campaign, the publication gained more subscribers than during the month and a half before that. Journalists have reported that through such campaigns a detached, factual model is no longer sufficient in the era of digital dissemination and misinformation. A return to the basic motivation of journalism is therefore required as a profession and vocation along with a complete integration of ethical principles. It may not be the most original solution to the current challenges the Moldovan press is facing, but it is certainly one that is worth trying.

Cristina LEVA-MOGILDEA

The Role of New Technologies in the Development of Regional Media

A few years ago, editorial offices refused to publish material on their websites before it appeared in the printed editions of their newspapers. This reticence was because of the fear of losing readers buying the newspaper. As a result, newspapers' websites became aggregates of outdated news that didn't add value either to the editorial office or to readers. It took a few years for the regional media to decide to invest time and effort in developing its online presence. Now, most local and regional newspapers have pages on social media and update their websites daily with information beyond that in the printed version.

Online News Decreases the Number of Printed Copies

Although local editorial offices feared that online publications would decrease the number of printed copies, the new technologies proved not to be their real danger. Newspapers are still struggling with issues such as the increase in the price of paper and the monopoly in the advertising market. Traditional media (e.g. radio, TV, print media) have lost status while online versions have started to gain increasing influence. It's a natural trend not only internationally but also locally. In addition, the audience has become more varied and younger due to the shift to online.

In Moldova, traditional sources of information are less popular among young people as most prefer online and social media information. According to the Public Opinion Barometer,^[1] the most important source of information for people aged 18–29 is the Internet (81%), followed by TV (66%), radio (9%) and newspapers (3%). Online doesn't mean anymore just having a website; it also means social media presence.

The results of the latest report on social media in Moldova^[2] show that social networks, such as Facebook, Odnoklassniki and Instagram are becoming more popular in Moldova (910,000, 885,860 and 470,000 real accounts registered) and that a large number of users are young

people: Facebook (18–24 years old=220,000; 25–34 years old=290,000), Odnoklassniki (20–29 years old=239,182), Instagram (18–24 years old=155,000; 25–34 years old=140,000). Thus, online publications allow us to attract a large new audience which when joined by the diaspora could be a very good source of crowdfunding for regional media.

Do We Focus on Expensive Technology or on Skill Development?

To create innovative material, you need only a computer connected to the Internet and a modern smartphone. Today, there is no need for expensive and bulky photo or video cameras to make quality content. Videos for websites and social media can easily be created with a mobile phone and free editing apps. Even the poorest editorial office has these things. Mobile journalism (MOJO)—journalism done with mobile phones—is an actual trend in international editorial offices. At the same time, although technical solutions for low budgets can be found, journalists should have the necessary training in MOJO, in photo and video editing, and in adapting material to social media. Increasing professionalism should be an ongoing process at an editorial office. It is important that the development of new skills is not only the responsibility of young reporters but also that of people with extensive experience in the field. Opportunities to learn new skills are more and more accessible both online (via webinars, guides, video lessons), and during regular training, thematic conferences, and forums.

It is also necessary that local media managers are open to new ways of presenting material and encourage reporters to experiment along with using traditional methods of preparing journalistic materials.

Local Opportunities

The Media Forum—an event that offers journalists in our country the opportunity to learn from and share the experiences of international organizations and experts via numerous workshops and master classes—has been organized for four years now. International know-how can be analyzed and adapted to local realities.

[1] <http://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Prezentarea-rezultatelor-BOP-2018.pdf>

[2] https://gallery.mailchimp.com/3b23f363248206ce95682f791/files/8414d1a3-ed25-4cd9-92c4-a9ab21e6b61a/Gramatic_Social_Media_Report_2018.pdf

Also, journalists have their own platform for online debates at www.mediaforum.md which is a product of the Press Council of the Republic of Moldova created to disseminate knowledge and positive practices, exchange ideas and experiences and encourage professional competition and improve journalistic quality standards.

In addition to debates, the platform provides webinars and professional enhancement guides.^[3] Journalists can find information on topics such as promoting journalistic content on social media; graphical ways to present content like infographics, tables, and schemes and what we need to know about donor-funded projects. Thus, it can be used as a tool for ongoing communication and exchanges of views, information/data and experiences among media professionals on the main issues they face in their daily work.

Also, many national media NGOs have projects aimed at enhancing journalists' and editorial office skills. Recently, a project implemented by the Association of the Independent Press was completed in which five start-ups in online regional media were set up and developed. For one year, the five teams participated in training and workshops on creating, managing and promoting an online media platform; producing quality and attractive online content; learning photo/video editing skills; moderating video debates, online marketing and advertising sale and on creating maps and infographics. The teams were helped to design and create a website and received the necessary equipment for a smooth running editorial office. At the same time, each office underwent a six-month mentoring program.^[4] Regional media journalists also benefited from the same training project.

Recommendations

International trends focus on community creation, online presence, visual content, and alternative monetization

methods. Local media can also adopt these examples.

Creating online and offline community. Regional media can become a core source for information about events for the community. Encouraging community involvement in creating material, informing readers about editorial office activities, organizing community events, and direct communication will reduce the distance between the media and the audience. Thus, a direct relationship with readers will be established, and the community will have an emotional bond with the local media outlet. This bond could further be translated into crowdfunding campaigns.

Presence on social media. Traditional media shouldn't be limited to the segment it specializes in; media convergence is a natural development path for newspapers and regional television. Multimedia, short videos, infographics, and visual content work with the current audience whose attention is increasingly narrowing. Ideally, a local editorial office should have a person to deal with social media, adapt website/newspaper/TV material to social media, answer comments, and create interactive posts thus encouraging the audience to express their opinions.

Alternative monetization methods. The development of community services such as creating events, filming, and photo services is an international trend that is easy to adopt and adapt to regional media. In Moldova, certain newspapers have started offering online subscriptions. Local media can test merchandise sales and crowdfunding (collecting funds from the community) as sources. Although in Moldova these methods are not popular among media, certain attempts have already been made.

It's paramount that editorial offices encourage creative and innovative thinking so that the media remains independent and develops instead of just surviving.

Stela ROMAN

[3] <https://mediaforum.md/ro/page/ghiduri-de-profesionalizare>

[4] <http://www.api.md/news/view/ro-in-regiunile-moldovei-s-au-lansat-cinci-portaluri-noi-de-stiri-1859>

Mobile Journalism: a Small Media Revolution

Most of us have smartphones in our pockets, and most of us use these devices minimally without fully realizing their technological and audiovisual potential. Obviously, we cannot say that everyone needs to experience this potential, but for a journalist it is vital to understand how useful a mobile phone can be in situations when other “journalistic tools” are not at hand. This is especially true today when journalism as a profession is looking for new, more affordable but at the same time more appealing and easily digestible formats for audiences.

It's hard to tell who the first journalists to understand this were, however BBC journalists were the first to apply mobile journalism (journalism with mobile phones or MOJO) at the professional and editorial levels. It is important to note that this evolved naturally as a result of editorial reforms undertaken over several years. This British media giant that emerged with the blessing of the royal family in the first half of the last century was and is still considered a world standard in media professionalism. BBC journalists set the fashion (adopted and maintained especially by Americans so far) that any subject or event, no matter how small and insignificant it might seem, needed special attention which implied a full filming crew: reporter, camera operator, operator's assistant (person responsible mainly for the “scarf”), sound engineer, producer and driver: six persons in total.

Everyone at the BBC understood at an early stage that this approach would be ruinous in the long run. Their new editorial policy therefore said that the subject and story are the key to a successful video report, not the size of the crew. The first thing the BBC did was to reduce the crew size to two persons—the reporter and the camera operator (who, according to the new job description also acts as a driver).

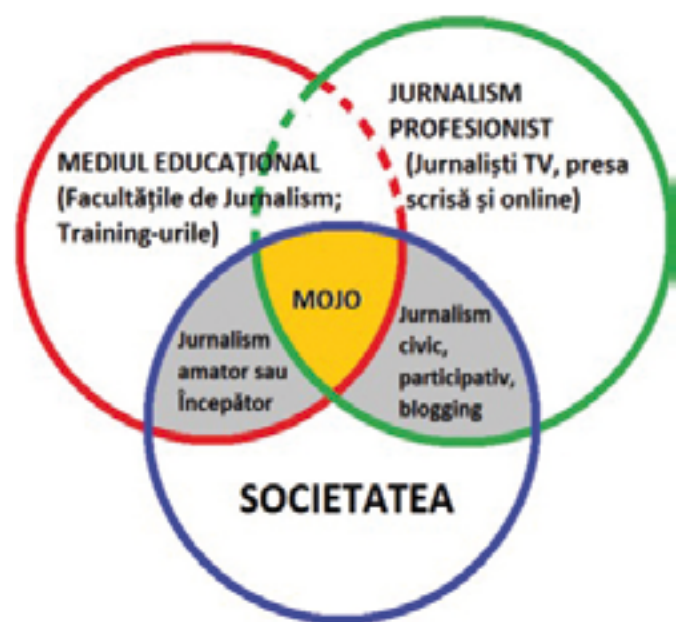
With the evolution of mobile phones, the BBC has come up with the idea that a reporter can single handedly produce a breaking news video if he or she knows how properly to use the capacities of these phones. BBC reporters are trained now how to do journalism only with their smartphones which they always have at hand. Thus, a single-person film crew is now able to create a full news video in just a few minutes.

What, in fact, is MOJO?

If we can basically assume we understand what mobile journalism means, then as a journalist it is very difficult to make a quality video product using only a mobile phone without understanding the theoretical part of this new type of media.

We will use a Euler diagram with three ovals representing three different phenomena— professional journalism, the educational environment and civic activism—to explain what MOJO is in fact. If we approach the ovals so that they intersect, a triangle appears in the center of the diagram; MOJO will be found in that very triangle because it is from the combination of the three phenomena that a journalistic product can be made with only a mobile phone.

This diagram can be explained using practical examples that are usually presented to journalists who are just getting acquainted with MOJO. One example would be the following situation: Imagine getting on a trolleybus and sitting next to a window. While passengers are getting off and on at a bus stop, you witness a serious traffic accident while looking out your window. You are a journalist and you know very well what the public interest is (which puts you in the first oval) and in your pocket you have a mobile phone on which you know how to film and edit a video



that looks like one on Euronews (which makes you part of the second oval as you attended training to acquire such skills). These two things are not, however, enough to produce a MOJO film. You also need the third: to want to get out of that trolleybus, take that phone out of your pocket, and start filming (civic activism).

Format compatibility

Even if at first glance it would seem that MOJO is compatible only with newsrooms and does not have a niche in editorial offices like investigative journalism, mobile journalism is quite universal due to the fact that we have access to all the latest mobile devices. You can never know when you'll need to get that phone out of your pocket and start filming. As examples, I can describe several situations that took place in the RISE Moldova editorial office.

During October and November of 2016, RISE journalists proposed monitoring how presidential elections are held outside the country. The process involved seven journalists in seven countries: Romania, Russia, Italy, Great Britain, Germany, France and Sweden. The purpose was to record in real time in an online chat in a multimedia format with text, photo, graphics and video how Moldovans voted at polling stations abroad. And as none of the seven journalists had camera operators, the video format was produced with their mobile phones. One of the small MOJO news stories produced was about Moldovan citizens storming the Embassy of the Republic of Moldova in Sweden; it went viral and was even picked

up by television broadcasters in Chisinau. The reason for that little success was simple: exclusivity plus quality.

Another example occurred in September 2018 when Speaker Andrian Candu held a press briefing. RISE Moldova reporters went to Parliament to get the reaction of Andrian Candu to his involvement in several real estate transactions, the beneficiary of which was Vladimir Plahotniuc, the leader of the Democratic Party. Because the reporters did not have a camera operator, the speaker's answers were filmed with their phones; their film also went viral. Content thus defeated form again. The video got 95 comments on Facebook; none of them asked why the video was filmed on a mobile phone. Moreover, I'm pretty sure that no one thought about how it was made or that the answers of Adrian Candu really mattered.

In conclusion

Mobile journalism can be seen as a bridge between classical media formats and what we might call the journalism of the future. It is important to note that we are talking only about format, not content. People will always want to consume interesting stories, important news, and all that quality journalism can offer, but the form and the way in which this journalism will be produced will always change. Journalists are obliged to keep up with these changes. Nowadays, mobile journalism is one of those intermediate formats that propels our continuous professional development and transformation.

Dumitru STOIANOV

Fear: Trump in the White House or the US president's fear of media

How I got to this book

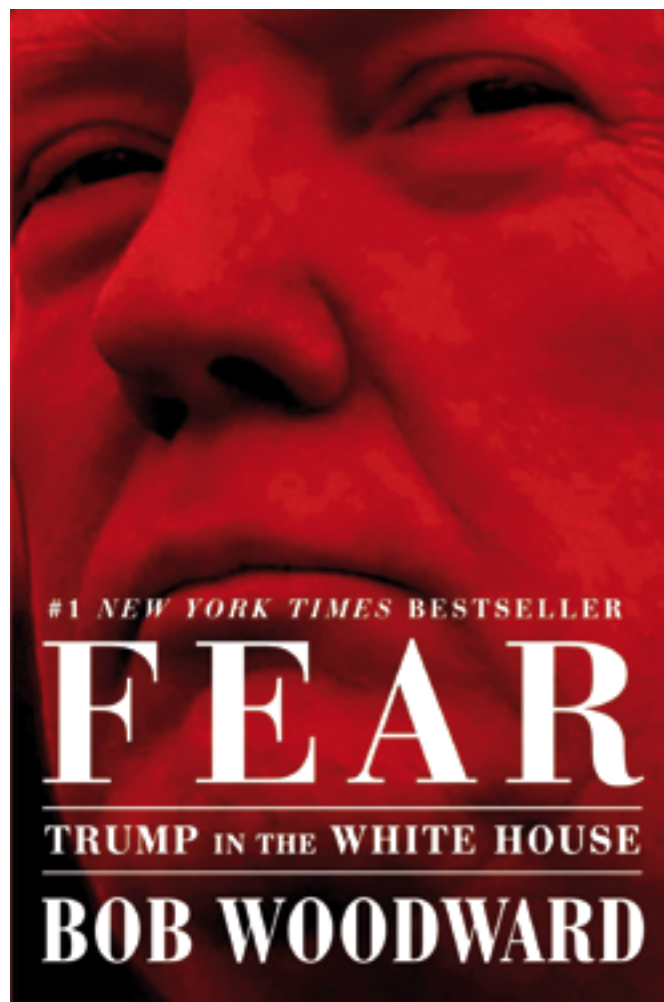
During the past two years I've developed a passion: I'm reading at maximum speed books about US President Donald J. Trump. I started with What Happened by Hillary Clinton even though it was not exclusively about Trump followed by Unbelievable by Katy Tur, Trumpocracy by David Frum, then A Higher Loyalty by James Comey, Unhinged by Omarosa Manigault Newman and Michael Wolff's Fire and Fury. I also browsed the other, less critical Understanding Trump by Newt Gingrich in order to balance my sources a little. None was more eagerly awaited than Bob Woodward's Fear: Trump in the White House. Why? Because it's written by the great Bob Woodward from *The Washington Post*, who, along with Carl Bernstein, helped to remove US president Richard Nixon from office. Because it's written by a journalist. Because he re-launched and re-invented so-called "deep background" journalism.

How did I get to this book? Even in early 2018, it was known that Woodward was writing a book about the current US president, and the author's name stood as a recommendation for it. Woodward is a reference name in global journalism. Those who have browsed or know the history of another of his bestsellers, All the President's Men, will understand. Nonetheless, let's just build up to it gradually...

Some bookmarks

Within a week from its launch on 11 September 2018, Fear: Trump in the White House set a sales record at over 1.1 million copies in one week only. Americans have literally stormed the bookstores, showing once again that the current US president is still a hot-selling brand.

The book describes the course of events in the last months of the US presidential election campaign from November 2016 to March 2018—a total of 18 months. The prologue of the book is an event that took place in 2010 at a meeting of Donald J. Trump with Steve Bannon (at that time manager of the far-right publication *Breitbart News*, then the head of the presidential campaign and senior advisor of president) and David Bossie (a conservative Republican activist), to whom Trump told his ambitions and desire to run for the most important US position.



The book mainly focuses on the people in President Trump's administration who describe the chaos prevailing at the White House, the embarrassing conduct of President Trump, and the actions of some advisors to counteract certain disasters. Most White House employees face a more alarming reality than has been portrayed and written about in the press (see the anonymous article in *The New York Times*, which was published at about the same time). Woodward paints an apocalyptic portrait of the White House under Trump's leadership, providing convincing details in which former or current employees are simply desperate and increasingly concerned about the president's chaotic and ignorant behavior. The most

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eloquent situation in this regard is when Gary Cohn, the former adviser on economic issues, and Rob Porter, the former head of the White House Staff, removed some documents from the president's desk before he could sign them as signing would have jeopardized trade relations with South Korea and would have endangered the ability to detect a North Korean rocket launch in only seven seconds. Cohn repeated this "feat" in the case of the letter withdrawing the US from NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement.

At the same time, the book presents a Trump who has not even an elementary knowledge of economy, trade, or foreign relations, and when he doesn't understand something always has one single answer: No. If it were up to the US president, he would start a war with North Korea tomorrow, he would kill Syrian President Bashar Al-Asad, or would dig up and transfer all the mineral deposits in Afghanistan to the US. Staff Chief John Kelly called Trump an idiot who is constantly dissatisfied; Secretary of Defense John Mattis says he has the attention span and logic of a fifth or sixth grade pupil; former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson called him an imbecile; and his former personal lawyer John Dowd described Trump as, "a fucking liar" saying that if he agreed to give a deposition in person to Robert Mueller's investigation of Russia's involvement in the presidential election, that he would most likely end up "in an orange suit" (in prison).

The author describes in detail the picture of a president who is in love with himself and how he presents himself to his followers. A president who is obsessed with Twitter and TV (media), "watching it for hours while eating burgers and drinking Coke." A president who doesn't miss any chance to humiliate and/or curse those who are in his way, offending even some of his closest people (Rudy Giuliani, Jeff Sessions). A president who sees the White House as a property of his and his family's: daughter Ivanka (The First Daughter of America as she loves to call herself) and her husband Jared Kushner who are always present in the Oval Office as well as at some official meetings.

About 'sources' in journalism

Besides the juicy details that capture your attention right up to the last page, the book is a lesson in journalism because firstly, it is written and is read as an investigative report about the chaos in the White House, and secondly, Woodward, as he himself said, used the so-called deep

background technique to write the book, interviewing many sources that were "witnesses to the events described." This deep background is very important because it means that all the information from the interviews can be used, but, "I wouldn't say who were the sources of information." Woodward as a true journalist, however, recorded the interviews (with the agreement of his sources, of course), so that the narrative is rendered with precision and credibility.

Even if the author doesn't mention the source for a particular statement or event, the reader can figure out who this might be. Situations and events described in detail convince the reader that the author has indeed discussed them with many sources close to the president. It is easy at least to identify several safe sources interviewed by Woodward who even after the publication of the book denied certain claims but didn't deny the fact that Woodward interviewed them (Gary Cohn, Rob Porter, Reince Priebus, John Dowd, Steve Bannon Lindsay Graham).

Fear convinced me that you can write a journalistic investigation book without quoting sources directly. It is important to have the skill to package the information in such a way that it is credible to readers (a quality that is achieved over time by fairness): Woodward has both **credibility** and **fairness**. The book is not affected by the lack of names next to quotes because the author is a credible personality in the world of US journalism, and very few (I refer to the real professionals) have so far disputed his writing and journalism. The several Pulitzer awards he has won over the years confirm this.

What I understood

It's a book about an American president who hates the media, which is still one of the few institutions he himself is afraid of (hence title of the book). Trump's relationship with the media is one of the love-hate type. He is a media-dependent president, like any of us.

The book is also about the journalist Bob Woodward and journalism in general. It is about one of the most important elements of this job: **sources**, how you use and how you protect them, how you build your credibility in the world of journalism, and also in front of the general public because **credibility** and what it generates—the **truth**—must have priority in a world full of misinformation. That's

what journalist Christiane Amanpour from CNN meant when she said, “I believe in being truthful, not neutral.”

I also understood that Bob Woodward cannot be accused of certain political preferences or that he wrote this book to discredit the current US president. Why? Because the author has written many other critical books over the years (18, if I’m not mistaken) and also about other US presidents: Reagan, Clinton, Obama, Bush Jr.

Even though Woodward didn’t name his sources, he presented facts, not opinions, just as a professional journalist needs to do. The interpretations were left to the reader. For all of the above reasons, the book represents more journalism than is believed.

Woodward’s method for writing this book has been described above; nonetheless, this is a true reporter’s method: He speaks with people/sources, collects information and checks it, collects notes and documents and analyses them, reads letters, checks and cross-cuts among all his sources. Personal conclusions? Those are what is probably missing. Woodward leaves them up to readers.

And yes, the book is about the right to reply and/or to voice an opinion, because this right is one of the essential rules of the journalist’s profession. Bob Woodward, as a true journalist, tried several times, as he himself said, to get interviews with Donald J. Trump, the first source of this book. But his advisors, or perhaps Trump himself, refused and/or ignored the requests until August 2018 when Trump himself called Woodward. But it was too late; the book was being rushed into print. Of course in his

characteristic style, Trump told Woodward that, “It will be a bad book,” but the latter said that it will be “a tough book” based on facts and information he had obtained from reliable sources.

... and about some question marks. Personal.

Sometimes the book is hard to read, even if Woodward takes the readers’ hands and takes them throughout the entire book to meetings and gatherings in the White House, the Pentagon, or the Senate, explaining in detail the context and the characters in the picture.

As mentioned above, personally I missed some final conclusions, but maybe this is why this book is interesting. It makes you think for yourself. Just as in the case of fair journalism which must be neutral, balanced and objective, media consumers are given the facts so they can draw their own conclusions.

There is more: the large number of “formers” next to sources who were part of Trump’s administration who either left or were fired at some point. This should provide food for thought to readers as to why this book is so critical. Woodward’s book must be read, including in this context.

Surely, Fear will not be another Woodward book that will unseat a US president. It is hard to believe; however, it is a book that describes the chaos of the current US president’s administration without disclosing sources, but with clear and precise details and information that only those who participated in it can describe.

Victor GOTISAN

The National Survey on Media Audience

(The survey was conducted by Magenta Consulting Agency and commissioned by the Independent Journalism Center in Moldova).

Conclusions

This nationwide survey made it possible to assess the audience and habits of people from different regions and of different ages.

According to the survey, TV broadcasters are still among the top media preferences with 86% of respondents saying they had watched TV the day before the interview. As much as 53% of respondents access the Internet every day or several times a week. At the same time, 68% visit the Facebook social network once a week or more often, and 66% visit Odnoklassniki. Of the total interviewees, 33% had listened to the radio the previous day and 21% said they read newspapers more than once a week. As much as 10% of survey participants regularly read at least one national magazine.

Prime TV, Moldova 1, and Jurnal TV were the most watched TV broadcasters nationwide, while Radio Noroc, Radio Moldova, and Radio Plai were the most listened to radio stations. As regards news websites, respondents often visited www.protv.md, www.jurnaltv.md and www.publika.md more than once a week. As far as print media is concerned, *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, *Makler* and *Argumenti i Fakti* newspapers and *VIP Magazin*, *Aquarelle* and *Agricultura Moldovei* magazines were the best known among the respondents.

According to the survey methodology, as the national sample was representative, there's a higher share of over 45-year-old respondents' preferences which is directly influenced by demographic factors.

Table 1.1: TV viewers' profile. Q6. What channel did you watch yesterday in the following time intervals? N = 807

% on the column		PRIME	Moldova 1	Jurnal TV	RTR Moldova	NTV
Total N		303	176	126	124	116
Sex	Man	38	46	46	31	45
	Woman	62	54	54	69	55
Age	18-25 years	3	1	8	7	5
	26-35 years	9	4	16	8	9
	36-45 years	13	7	17	11	16
	46-65 years	39	40	37	38	44
	More than 65 years	36	48	22	36	27
Region	North	30	26	17	23	26
	Center	47	54	63	58	49
	South	23	21	20	19	25
Location	Urban	41	33	55	57	51
	Rural	59	67	45	43	49

Table 1.2: Radio listener profile, % Q9. What radio station did you listen to yesterday in the following time intervals?, N = 807

% on the coloumn		Radio Noroc	Radio Moldova	Radio Plai	Hit Fm	Kiss Fm
Total N		87	80	60	46	38
Sex	Man	59	48	55	68	56
	Woman	41	52	45	32	44
Age	18-25 years	0	1	2	21	33
	26-35 years	8	5	11	27	38
	36-45 years	13	9	15	17	18
	46-65 years	41	37	41	32	9
	More than 65 years	38	48	31	2	3
Region	North	21	21	20	19	14
	Center	65	60	56	55	71
	South	14	19	24	26	16
Location	Urban	36	27	35	56	52
	Rural	64	73	65	44	48

Table 1.3: Profiling of people who read newspapers regularly, % Q17. What newspapers do you read regularly (every issues or every second issue)?, N = 425

% on the coloumn		Macler	Komso- molyskaya Pravda	Argumenty i facty	Jurnal de Chişinău	Ziarul de Gardă
Total N		161	136	93	66	55
Sex	Man	48	42	49	34	46
	Woman	52	58	51	66	54
Age	18-25 years	8	2	1	7	9
	26-35 years	17	10	8	15	8
	36-45 years	19	15	14	13	17
	46-65 years	31	37	40	32	34
	More than 65 years	25	37	37	33	32
Region	North	35	34	31	23	18
	Center	50	42	41	48	54
	South	15	24	28	29	29
Location	Urban	64	59	74	51	55
	Rural	36	41	26	49	45

Table 1.4: General sample with representation by age, N = 1138

Count	N	18 - 25 years	26 -35 years	36 -45 years	46 - 65 years	More than 65 years
Total	1138	138	174	164	359	303
Anenii Noi	28	5	4	6	7	7
Basarabasca	9	1	0	0	5	3
Balti	69	7	16	10	20	16
Briceni	29	3	1	7	12	6
Cahul	43	6	9	6	13	9
Cantemir	19	1	3	2	7	6
Calarasi	36	8	7	12	8	0
Causeni	22	1	4	5	6	6
Mun. Chisinau	276	62	58	38	63	56
Cimislia	33	2	3	4	10	14
Criuleni	32	2	7	4	11	8
Donduseni	7	1	1	2	1	2
Drochia	24	2	1	2	13	6
Dubasari	0	0	0	0	0	0
Edinet	36	3	6	5	10	12
Falesti	23	1	3	4	7	8
Floresti	41	2	2	9	17	12
Glodeni	21	0	2	3	8	8
Hincesti	23	3	4	3	10	4
Ialoveni	19	1	2	4	13	0
Leova	19	3	1	2	9	4
Nisporeni	22	0	2	0	10	10
Ocnita	11	0	2	2	3	4
Orhei	40	1	5	2	10	22
Rezina	19	4	2	0	8	6
Rascani	9	0	0	1	5	3
Singerei	26	4	2	3	7	9
Soroca	24	1	2	3	10	8
Straseni	27	2	3	5	10	8
Soldanesti	10	0	1	2	2	5
Stefan Voda	29	2	7	3	9	8
Taraclia	11	1	2	2	0	6
Telenesti	22	1	1	5	3	12
Ungheni	28	3	3	0	11	11
UTAG	51	6	8	10	22	6

Table 1.5: General sample with representation by week days, N = 1138

Count	N	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Total	1138	171	108	133	160	169	162	235
Anenii Noi	28	0	0	0	0	0	28	0
Basarabeasca	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
Balti	69	15	10	0	0	9	20	15
Briceni	29	0	0	0	0	29	0	0
Cahul	43	0	0	0	0	0	22	21
Cantemir	19	18	0	0	0	0	0	1
Calarasi	36	2	4	4	2	14	5	5
Causeni	22	0	0	0	0	12	10	0
Mun. Chisinau	276	20	22	53	81	67	13	21
Cimislia	33	4	0	0	0	0	0	30
Criuleni	32	0	18	0	0	0	0	14
Donduseni	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Drochia	24	0	0	24	0	0	0	0
Dubasari	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Edinet	36	0	0	11	25	0	0	0
Falesti	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
Floresti	41	0	0	0	0	14	0	27
Glodeni	21	21	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hincesti	23	0	0	0	13	0	10	0
Ialoveni	19	0	0	14	6	0	0	0
Leova	19	19	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nisporeni	22	0	12	0	0	0	10	0
Ocnita	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
Orhei	40	21	0	0	0	0	10	8
Rezina	19	0	0	8	0	2	1	9
Riscani	9	0	0	9	0	0	0	0
Singerei	26	13	0	0	12	0	0	0
Soroca	24	0	20	0	0	0	0	4
Straseni	27	10	1	0	0	16	0	0
Şoldanesti	10	0	10	0	0	0	0	0
Ştefan Voda	29	0	11	0	0	0	11	7
Taraclia	11	0	0	0	0	0	11	0
Telenesti	22	0	0	0	11	0	0	11
Ungheni	28	28	0	0	0	0	0	0
UTAG	51	0	0	11	10	6	12	11

Table 1.6: General sample with representation by week days, N = 1138

Count	N	Primary Studies	Gymnasium	Lyceum	Specialized Studies	College	University	Ns/Nr
Total	1138	20	238	266	252	146	206	9
Anenii Noi	28	1	7	5	10	5	1	0
Basarabeasca	9	1	3	3	1	1	0	0
Balti	69	0	3	11	21	18	16	0
Briceni	29	3	7	7	8	2	2	0
Cahul	43	0	15	10	11	3	5	0
Cantemir	19	1	7	5	4	1	1	0
Calarasi	36	0	3	7	11	2	13	0
Causeni	22	0	11	7	3	1	0	0
Mun. Chisinau	276	0	24	59	43	43	106	1
Cimislia	33	0	6	4	9	6	8	0
Criuleni	32	0	11	4	13	1	2	1
Donduseni	7	0	2	1	3	0	1	0
Drochia	24	1	4	7	4	2	3	2
Dubasari	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Edinet	36	0	7	11	4	4	9	0
Falesti	23	1	4	6	5	3	4	0
Floresti	41	2	8	11	13	5	2	0
Glodeni	21	0	13	2	3	2	1	0
Hincesti	23	1	6	5	4	4	4	0
Ialoveni	19	0	2	12	3	1	2	0
Leova	19	0	7	2	5	4	1	0
Nisporeni	22	1	6	4	6	3	2	0
Ocnita	11	0	5	1	4	1	0	0
Orhei	40	0	8	16	4	7	5	0
Rezina	19	0	6	7	3	1	3	0
Riscani	9	0	4	2	2	1	0	0
Singerei	26	0	11	6	4	3	1	0
Soroca	24	3	4	5	8	1	0	2
Straseni	27	0	7	2	8	8	3	0
Soldanesti	10	0	2	2	5	1	0	0
Stefan Voda	29	1	5	3	7	4	7	2
Taraclia	11	0	5	4	1	0	0	1
Telenesti	22	0	9	6	4	3	1	0
Ungheni	28	2	11	5	7	2	1	0
UTAG	51	1	5	26	12	2	5	0

Table 1.7: General sample with representation by gender, N = 1138

	Total	Men	Women
Total	1138	538	600
Anenii Noi	28	16	13
Basarabasca	9	4	5
Balti	69	31	38
Briceni	29	14	15
Cahul	43	20	23
Cantemir	19	10	9
Calarasi	36	16	19
Causeni	22	10	12
Mun. Chisinau	276	126	150
Cimislia	33	14	20
Criuleni	32	16	16
Donduseni	7	2	5
Drochia	24	11	13
Dubasari	0	0	0
Edinet	36	17	19
Falesti	23	13	11
Floresti	41	21	20
Glodeni	21	11	10
Hincesti	23	13	10
Ialoveni	19	5	14
Leova	19	10	9
Nisporeni	22	11	11
Ocnita	11	6	5
Orhei	40	14	25
Rezina	19	11	8
Riscani	9	4	5
Singerei	26	10	16
Soroca	24	11	13
Straseni	27	16	12
Soldanesti	10	6	4
Stefan Voda	29	15	14
Taraclia	11	5	6
Telenesti	22	13	9
Ungheni	28	13	15
UTAG	51	24	27

Table 1.8: General sample with representation by gender, N = 1138

	Total	Urban	Rural
Total	1138	509	629
Anenii Noi	28	0	28
Basarabasca	9	0	9
Balti	69	69	0
Briceni	29	0	29
Cahul	43	22	21
Cantemir	19	0	19
Calarasi	36	24	12
Causeni	22	0	22
Mun. Chisinau	276	252	24
Cimislia	33	20	13
Criuleni	32	18	14
Donduseni	7	0	7
Drochia	24	0	24
Dubasari	0	0	0
Edinet	36	25	11
Falesti	23	0	23
Floresti	41	26	15
Glodeni	21	0	21
Hincesti	23	0	23
Ialoveni	19	0	19
Leova	19	0	19
Nisporeni	22	0	22
Ocnita	11	0	11
Orhei	40	21	19
Rezina	19	0	19
Riscani	9	0	9
Singerei	26	0	26
Soroca	24	0	24
Straseni	27	0	27
Soldanesti	10	0	10
Stefan Voda	29	11	18
Taraclia	11	0	11
Telenesti	22	0	22
Ungheni	28	0	28
UTAG	51	21	30

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The opinions expressed in this publication
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