

mass - media

June 2019



in Moldova

Eforturi
internationale
Remarcabile
din R. Moldova
până cu aprilie 2019
de "consolidare"
protecție a martorilor
de trafic de ființe

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Retrospective on Press Freedom Days in Moldova

The celebration of Press Freedom Days conducted by the Independent Journalism Center of Moldova and its partner organizations this year included a number of media events that took place both on 3 May, World Press Freedom Day, and throughout the month.

The launch of the Memorandum on the Freedom of the Press

This year, the event started with the launch of the conventional Memorandum on the Freedom of the Press. The document analyzed the situation of the media from 3 May 2018 to 3 May 2019 and drew attention to the fact that the quality of Moldovan media had continued to degrade reaching alarming levels and that last years' issues had become even more serious. The guild has been further divided with even more visible political control over certain media outlets, de facto concentrations of media ownership and a lack of pluralism. These issues combined with difficult access to information of public interest, the lack of independence of journalists and the poor quality of media content along with an increase in cases of verbal assault, intimidation and harassment of the media led to a drop in Moldova's rating in international rankings. The most significant changes were in journalists' security which deteriorated dramatically in the past two years and in the economic environment which declined from a serious situation in 2017 to an extremely serious one in 2018.



Flash mob and the Installation of the "Press Enemies" Panel in Front of Parliament

Journalists organized a flash mob in front of Parliament and as in previous years and installed the "Press Enemies" panel. The panel shows the pictures of several government officials who during this period either physically or verbally abused media representatives, were intolerant of the press or restricted access to information. The journalists' flash mob had the following slogan: "The role of the press = to report on governance issues. The role of government officials = to solve problems, not... journalists!" In previous years parliamentary leaders had met with the journalists. This time, however, as Parliament had not yet elected its governing bodies, only a few members of the ACUM Electoral Bloc wanted to converse with the media.





Second Annual Media Policy Forum: Media, Elections and Participatory Democracy: How Free?

The second annual Media Policy Forum entitled “Media, Elections and Participatory Democracy: How Free?” was held on May 14 in Chisinau. It discussed such topics as the fight against misinformation in the media and on social networks and the role of the media in providing quality information, especially during election campaigns. The event was attended by journalists, media experts, political analysts and representatives of civil society. The speakers represented a broad range of stakeholders including media, state institutions and civil society and came from Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Russia, Latvia, Ukraine and other countries. During the first plenary session moderated by Corina Cepoi, Internews Chief of Party in Moldova, a number of foreign diplomats including Dereck J. Hogan, the Ambassador of the United States; Urszulla Pallasz, Chargé d’Affaires of Delegation of the European Union; Lucy Joyce, the Ambassador of the United Kingdom and Christopher Duggan, Representative of the Embassy of Canada in Romania, Bulgaria and Moldova urged journalists to promote media pluralism and freedom of expression in the Republic of Moldova.

This second edition of the Media Policy Forum in Moldova was organized by Freedom House with the support of USAID, UK Aid, Internews, The Black Sea Trust for Regional Development, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, Friedrich Naumann Stiftung für die Freiheit and the Embassy of Canada. It was part of the

broader program Media-M funded by USAID and UK Aid and implemented by Internews in partnership with Freedom House and local organizations.

New Journalistic Code of Ethics Published

The Press Council published the final version of the updated Moldovan Journalist’s Code of Ethics which includes a number of new rules on ethical media behavior in various situations. Viorica Zaharia, Chair of the Press Council, urged media representatives to get acquainted with the document and to comply with it. The document makes a number of new recommendations, such as that journalists should always take the public interest into account. Online outlets are encouraged to indicate their physical addresses, contact details, ultimate owners/beneficiaries, editorial policies and sources of funding in order to ensure transparency. To avoid conflicts of interest, the new code stipulates that journalists’ professional work is incompatible with work for state institutions and political organizations.

Proposals to supplement the Code of Ethics were developed by a group of national experts and an international expert from Freedom House in consultation with Moldovan media professionals, representatives of civic associations and other persons and interested organizations. It was supported as part of the broader program Media-M funded by USAID and UK Aid and implemented by Internews in partnership with Freedom House and local organizations.

Media AZI

Mass-media in Moldova

The political interests of owners impose the rules of the game in the media sector

The media environment in the Republic of Moldova is dominated by outlets connected to political parties, particularly the PDM. More than 80 percent of television stations are owned by people affiliated with political parties, and some 70 percent of the market is controlled by Plahotniuc. Reporters often experience political pressure from the government, such as denial of access to information, public institutions, and events. This contributes to self-censorship and the suppression of critical news coverage. Some independent journalists have reported suspicions of surveillance and claimed that opposition figures are reluctant to speak with them on the telephone due to fears of wiretaps (Freedom House Country Report for 2019).^[1]

In this assessment of the degree of freedom and independence of Moldovan media, Freedom House defined the Moldovan version of concentration of media ownership at present. More specifically, it referred to the essence of concentration and to its complexity by including both the ownership and the content of media products, the audience (especially in the case of television)^[2] and the advertising market in the discussion. This finding published in a report by an international institution is valid (still) three years after amending the legislation regarding media ownership and two years after the largest holder of broadcasting licenses officially relinquished those that exceeded legal norms. Currently in the Republic of Moldova, all owners of media outlets now comply with the legislation on the number of broadcasting licenses and transparency of ownership. Nevertheless, the media market is still or is even more concentrated as before in the hands of a small number of owners, all politically affiliated. The media outlets that are owned by politicians produce similar content and reduce the level of internal pluralism in a worrisome way while the advertising market is monopolized and financially suffocates outlets that are not under the influence of the monopoly.

Peculiarities of Concentration of Media Ownership in 2019

According to data on the beneficial owners of TV and radio stations available on the site of the Broadcasting Council, we can identify four groups of audiovisual media service providers with more or less obvious connections with the political world. The first group consists of several national and regional media service providers managed by companies and individuals with various official beneficial owners that have the same legal address. Thus, Vladimir Plahotniuc is the official beneficial owner of TV and radio stations Prime TV, Publika TV, Publika FM and Muz FM all of which have national coverage. Oleg Cristal is the beneficial owner of Canal 2 and Canal 3, which also have national coverage. CTC Mega and Familia Domashniy are owned by Victoria Rusu, and Maestro FM by Lilian Bustiuc. Legally, nothing is wrong; the only link between these media institutions is their legal address. All these providers have stated that their headquarters are in a building associated with the name of the PDM President.^[3]

The second group includes regional media service providers Accent TV (beneficial owner Vadim Ciubara) and NTV Moldova and Exclusiv TV (beneficial owner Corneliu Furculita). In this case, the legal addresses of the last two stations are identical, and PP Exclusiv Media SRL which manages the two stations also manages the newspaper *Aif Moldova*. Vadim Ciubara is close to President Igor Dodon, and Corneliu Furculita was a PSRM MP in the previous Parliament.^[4]

The third group includes regional media service providers Orhei TV and Central Television (beneficial owner Rita Tvic) managed by the same person at the same legal address. Rita Tvic is close to the Sor family, and the

[1] The Report is available on: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/moldova>

[2] See 'On Concentration of the Television' on: <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/d%CA%BCale-concentr%C4%83rii-%C3%AEn-televiziune>

[3] See: Who is the new manager of the company of Plahotniuc, Finpar Invest SRL, available on: <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/stiri-politice/cine-este-noul-administrator-al-firmei-lui-plahotniuc-finpar-invest-srl>

[4] See: The PSRM MP Corneliu Furculita established his own advertising company, available on: <http://newsmaker.md/rom/noutati/deputat-socialist-corneliu-furculita-si-a-creat-propria-casa-de-publicitate-34683>

manager of both stations is affiliated with the party named after the mayor of Orhei.^[5]

Jurnal TV, in its turn, represents the fourth group of media service providers with political connections as it is owned by Victor Topa, a businessman who lives abroad who has political sympathies with Andrei Nastase/PPDA.

Concentration of Content Grows More Profound

In recent years, various studies and observations have demonstrated that one frequent practice of media outlets owned by one person or by persons close to the owner is to broadcast similar content on all accessible platforms (including websites, blogs, etc.).^[6] Unfortunately, there is no research to support sanctions or at least warnings from the broadcasting regulator (Broadcasting Council) to media service providers about the imminent danger of limiting domestic media pluralism that may eventually lead to its elimination. Pluralism and a diversity of voices and opinions are of vital importance for the healthy development of the “free market of ideas” and for democracy. In all four of the above-mentioned groups, which include various audiovisual media service providers as well, the concentration of media content is an editorial strategy that is used constantly. More recently, the technique of recycling the same content in several media institutions was used extensively during the campaign for Parliamentary elections on 24 February 2019, both in news programs and in election debates. Television stations in the first group (6) either broadcast the same debates on two channels (at the same time or not), or produced shows based on the same scenario with the same guests, same questions and/or the same experts invited into the

studios.^[7] When two TV stations broadcast the same content and change only the logo of the station and no one sees a problem, it is clear that the owners/managers are not focusing on the interests of the beneficiaries of the information. Six TV stations could have organized debates with six times more candidates so we could have heard six times more opinions and ideas, but instead we had one idea broadcast six times. Thus, the concentration of media ownership is particularly dangerous if it is combined with the concentration of content. It is possible to avoid combining them. Internal pluralism can be ensured, if it is desired, but this desire must exist.

Concentration of Audience: The Indispensable Piece of the Same Puzzle

Let's go back to the four groups above and speak about television whose audience is regularly assessed (though only 17 channels are still subject to measurement). Between 27 May and 2 June, 9 out of the 12 stations mentioned were highly ranked by AGB Moldova, 5 of them in the top 10.^[8] Three were in the first group affiliated with the PDM, and two were in the second group affiliated with the PSRM. If we add the public TV station that broadcasts content similar to that of stations affiliated with the PDM, then 4 out of 5 TV stations with national coverage are among the top 10 most popular in Moldova. If they broadcast the same content in significant proportions, there is no point in speaking about a genuine “free market of ideas.” Can we avoid the risk of creating a dominant position when forming the opinions of the beneficiaries of information? Unlikely, in both cases. A citizen who supposedly has access only to national audiovisual media service providers will have repeated access to similar or identical content. That is, it will be easier for him/her to accept those messages, and they usually are one sided. When citizens have access to various TV stations but out of habit or out of preference watch those with the largest audiences, forming opinions is influenced in a single direction or at best in a limited number of directions.

[5] See: The ‘impartial’ TV channel affiliated to Sor, funded from ‘loans from partners’, available on: <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/stiri-politice/foto-televiziunea-echidistanta-afiliata-lui-sor-finantata-cu-imprumuturi-de-la-parteneri>

[6] See, for example: The four evangelists were three: Luke and Matthew. Again about the concentration on television, 6 December 2018// Media-azi, available on: <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/cei-patru-apostoli-erai-trei-luca-%C8%99i-matei-din-nou-despre-concentrarea-%C3%AEn-televiziune>; Balance and pluralism of the socialist ... voices at NTV Moldova, 1 November 2018// Media-azi, available on: <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/echilibrul-%C8%99i-pluralismul-vocilor-socialiste-la-ntv-moldova>; The TV channels affiliated to Sor rebuild the „communism island” in Orhei, 2 January 2019// Media-azi, available on: <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/televiziunile-afiliate-lui-%C8%99or-reconstruiesc-%E2%80%9Einsula-comunismului%E2%80%9D-la-orhei>

[7] See: Democracy in electoral debates, forgotten by some televisions or about a ignored journalistic responsibility, 26 February 2019// Media-critica, available on <http://mediacritica.md/ro/democratie-prin-dezbaterile-electorale-nevalorificata-de-unele-televiziuni-sau-despre-o-responsabilitate-jurnalistica-ignorata/>

[8] www.statistica.md

Monopolization of the Advertising Market: Slow Torture for Moldovan Media

At the beginning of 2018, four television stations in Moldova notified the Competition Council about an alleged cartel agreement between two companies with dominant positions in the domestic advertising market. Casa Media, which was allegedly affiliated with PDM leader Vlad Plahotniuc, and Exclusive Sales House controlled by the socialists would together allegedly share the advertising market and offer significant discounts, even 70%, to providers who decided to place their advertising with their companies. Profits would be shared 80%–20%.^[9] A year and a half later, the council still hasn't addressed the complaint by the audiovisual media service providers stating whenever asked that the case is under investigation. Meanwhile, though, several media outlets that have tried to play fairly in a market economy have been suffocated by unequal conditions that have forced them to fight for advertising, that is, for income. If the alleged cartel agreement is confirmed, the first two media groups, both of which are concentrated in the hands of owners with direct or indirect political connections and which have

significant audiences and high concentrations of content, will control the lion's share of the advertising market too. At this point, the phenomenon of concentration becomes truly alarming and harmful to the development of the press in the Republic of Moldova.

In Conclusion

The issue of media concentration in Moldova is thus directly and intrinsically related to the political world, something that appears in the first lines of international reports but that can also be seen with the naked eye. The political interests of *de jure* and *de facto* owners impose the rules of the game for amending laws—which can (also) be good—for setting limits for preventing concentration and for the *de facto* activity of media outlets and media markets in general. As long as this perception of the role of the media in a democratic society dominates and no public institution takes a stand, the “free market of ideas” has a very slim chance to truly develop in our country.

Aneta GONTA

[9] See: Market of television advertising and cartel agreements – waiting for an investigation of the Competition Council, available on <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/piata-publicitatii-televizate/28993650.html>

The Elections Are Over: Conclusions and Lessons to Learn

The elections are over but not the discussions about them. What went well? What didn't go well? What's next? These are questions to which we can find lots of answers.

About the Online Election Debates

My take is that these elections had their milestones, especially for regional media. Online election debates were organized for the first time, and while many of the editorial offices outside Chisinau managed to hold such debates, most of the candidates avoided participating in them.

Their reasons were various. Some of them didn't come due to health issues and others because they had planned meetings with citizens. There were also those who simply refused the invitation saying they weren't interested in debates and had their own strategies.

Two international observers from the International Republican Institute (IRI) also attended the four debates organized by the *EXPRESS* editorial office. It is gratifying that they appreciated both the conducting of the debates and the questions the guests were asked. They were also somewhat unpleasantly surprised by the refusal of certain candidates to take advantage of the opportunity to present their programs and their views on topical issues on the platform offered by *EXPRESS*.

It probably takes time for candidates to acknowledge the value of participating in any kind of election debate. Significantly, these debates were very good experiences for journalists outside Chisinau. Given that local elections were coming, they were expected to put all their knowledge into practice. In my opinion, these local elections were the main test for regional media both regarding the organization of debates and the development of the profile of each candidate.

Do We Publish Election Advertising?

Lately, there has been a growing number of intense discussions about whether or not we should publish election advertising in our newspapers. *Ziarul de Garda*, for instance, announced in the recent

election campaign that it wouldn't accept election advertising paid for with illicit funds. This gesture deserves applause; however, I think that this approach is almost impossible to follow in all editorial offices.

We have to admit that for many periodicals, especially regional ones, money from election advertising is a life saver. I don't want to say that they would abandon the principles and values that politically unaffiliated publications promote with such great fervor, but somehow they can take a backseat.

Anyway, I don't think there would be many current publishers who would turn this money down. That's because many regional newspapers always face financial issues since the cost of a subscription is relatively small and the availability of advertising is less and less. In addition, the development of online media has caused a decrease in print runs which inevitably leads to a decrease in revenue.

My solution would be to take a hard line against all those who are on the wrong side of the law, who cannot prove the source of money and wealth accumulated, and for whom political migration has become a norm.

Someone might say that if we criticize politicians, i.e. potential candidates, they will also try to punish the media source by refusing to offer them advertising, including election advertising. Of course, there is such a risk; however, I believe that impartiality, honesty and fairness in relation to all candidates will ultimately lead to increased confidence on their behalf and implicitly to a civilized relationship based on the principles of democracy that we all want. In this way, we'll all win.

Threefold Decrease in Requests to Publish Election Advertising in Newspapers

Under the current circumstances when most political parties have their own periodicals in which they publish advertising, including election advertising, politically unaffiliated media have to change their behavior. That's both natural and necessary.

Unlike during elections 5 or 10 years ago when the only limitation on periodicals accepting election advertising was available space, things are changing now. Or, better said, they're taking a normal path. It's a complex situation, so it will take time for regional media to adopt an ideal strategy during election campaigns. We need new knowledge, experience and financial resources. In 2019–2020, we can no longer operate with the methods we used a decade or even two decades ago when, as I mentioned, one expected a large number of candidates to present their advertising for which they also paid good money.

For instance, during the campaign for Parliamentary elections of 6 April 2009, six candidates wanted to place advertising in the newspaper *EXPRESS* which had appeared in the media market only half a year before, and the space provided for this purpose was 11,565 cm² in four editions. The situation was the same during following campaigns.

In 2019, however, another trend emerged. The candidates were less interested in publishing advertising in periodicals. During this campaign, only two candidates requested advertising in *EXPRESS*, and the space provided for this purpose was 5,900 cm². This was a three-fold drop in requests, and a two-fold drop in space.

I don't think that we, the regional media, have to expect that candidates in local elections will ask for much more space in our newspapers; instead, probably, most will make use of the party press, street advertising and social

media. They will go, as they have in recent years, from door to door to leave their material (leaflets, flyers, all kind of calendars and all printed on quality, colored paper). In addition, given that our districts, towns, townships and villages are small, people know each other, so most of the time the candidates don't feel the need to turn to newspapers.

What Else Has the Election Campaign Taught Us?

I think the time has come to put a stronger emphasis on multimedia development. With not only a newspaper but also with a well-designed website and the possibility to make shows, videos and audio spots, we will certainly benefit from election advertising that usually comes in large amounts and brings in, as I mentioned above, substantial income.

I also think that any politically unaffiliated media source outside Chisinau should specialize in conducting debates, and **not** just during election campaigns. I think every region has many issues and topics that deserve attention and need to be discussed regularly.

That's why, in the coming months, we are planning to set up a small studio at *EXPRESS* in order to hold regular debates. This will give us more experience, and we'll also create a devoted public of local citizens who want as much homegrown information as possible.

Lucia BACALU-JARDAN

Journalists as Face-Saving Instruments for Compromised Politicians

You will be at the top of the voter list, we will make people believe that we gave you the party, you will take us into Parliament then you will step down and you will receive what we agreed on and everyone will get on with their lives.

This is one of the offers that some poor, but honest and courageous journalists received several years ago from the leader of a small party that wanted so badly to increase its standing. All the journalists had to do was to say “yes,” and it was then I understood how cynical some politicians in Moldova are. They call these backstage games “business,” and it’s pointless to tell them about the sacrifices a journalist makes. They simply don’t care why you got an ulcer as a student or how much you love this job. That individual laughed out loud when I told him I was “borrowing” the flowers left by brides at the Eternal Flame and selling them at Docuceaiev Market to make enough money for tea and bread while living in the dorm. Such individuals aren’t interested in why you hadn’t sold yourself before they came up with this “offer.” When you try to explain the reason for your refusal, they have just one answer: “All right, what’s your price?” just like at a market in Istanbul. And when you get your last MDL 30 out of your pocket to pay for the coffee in the fancy café he invited you to and get up to leave, he looks at you in a puzzled way and humiliates you one more time:

Idon’t get it! Why are you so upset about this? Everybody does it! Let me explain it to you in your language: This attempt at facial saving has failed, bro!

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not against journalists working in politics. On the contrary, I think that a journalist feels the pulse of the public, knows the issues society struggles with, and knows how to do a quick investigation, so their presence in politics is necessary. I simply remembered this case when I looked through the election lists of the parties running on 24 February. And it goes the other way around, I know. Those who want to be on the lists pay: “It’s a contribution,” they say.

On the eve of the election, politicians who are hated because they are corrupt desperately look for public figures to bolster their images: well-known journalists, artists, top-rated athletes popular for their muscles, etc.

Obviously, that’s nothing new: Snegur, Lucinschi and Voronin were also accompanied by artists and presenters during their election campaigns. Some of them sang for a straight-ticket vote for Plahotniuc without having a clue about it but eventually applauded the split ticket for Dodon still without understanding what it’s all about. The human tendency to associate with well-known personalities is exploited. People at home vote for reputations, not for honesty, and political operators have understood this.

I’ve always said that the marriage between politicians and journalists is obsolete. One reason would be the fact that it has become impossible to live off journalism in the name of truth. Politics is the place where money and power go hand in hand. And, at a certain age, some people no longer think that such money stinks, or they simply no longer care. At a certain age, it probably doesn’t even matter how much of a sacrifice you made during university years in order to practice this profession. And you allow, either for money or for other benefits, an individual to hack into your necrology for just a single day during an election campaign. This view is very similar to that at the flea market near the railway station where poor elderly people take their belongings to sell. The wealth of a journalist is his/her honor, integrity and reputation. The moment he/she decides to give up and sell them is a terrible one. Several years ago, I met an old lady at the flea market. She was selling an old but well preserved turntable. I wanted to buy it for a museum we have in a small room in our house. I looked in the eyes of that lady while they filled with tears. She told me it was a gift from her husband right before their wedding and was the last memory of him she had in her house. I gave up and bought a teapot in which I planted flowers.

It is not, however, a sin if a journalist enters politics as long as the one who makes that step ends up with a journalistic career and announces in a clear way about taking sides. It is self-evident that one cannot be on both sides at the same time. Moreover, no one can do this “under cover,” although some talented ones have managed to combine them especially during the first period after the “divorce” or until the elections.

I don't believe people who say they have migrated from journalism to politics "to make things better for people" or to change things from the inside because on "the inside" things are decided by those with strategies and with lots of money—usually stolen—and Moldova has no honest journalists with a lot of money. I also don't believe that there is a more appropriate field than journalism for guarding the public interest (i.e. to work in an efficient way for people) without having a lot of money. I do believe, however, that a good journalist can have a successful political career. It doesn't have to involve daily scandals and hideous speeches during meetings in Parliament. One can achieve this by being a statesman. There are a lot of positive examples: Al Gore and Viviane Reding are politicians who started with a career in the media. Pascal Canfin, former Minister for Development in France, began with economic journalism.

Romania has also had several journalists in official positions: Claudiu and Adriana Saftoiu gave up journalism for temporary political positions at Cotroceni Palace; Gabriela Firea is mayor of Bucharest; Olguta Vasilescu was a journalist; Teo Trandafir was a PD MP. There are also a lot of examples in Moldova: Corina Fusu, Dumitru Ciubasenko, Iurie Rosca, Constantin Staris, Alexandr Petkov, Vitalia Pavlicenco, the everlasting MP Dumitru Diacov, Vlad Cubreacov, and Stefan Secareanu among others.

At the beginning of this election campaign I tried to convince a colleague to think twice about migrating from

journalism to politics. I wouldn't have dared if I didn't feel someone wanted to use him, to transform him from an award-winning journalist to a simple election agent of a satellite political party with no chances. I failed.

The decision to migrate from journalism to politics must be weighed ten times because there is almost no way back. Maybe there is, but only in theory, and I know of just a single case in Moldova when a journalist left a political position and started to work again as a successful journalist. I am talking about ex-Presidential Advisor Anatol Golea. One must answer several questions before making the step into politics: Will I be able to live on the salary of an MP, mayor, counselor without stealing? It's not a secret that in Moldova, the salary of certain journalists is higher than the salary of MPs. What will I do if I lose the election? How much credibility will I have as a journalist? Is there any free media outlet that will hire me, or will I be forced to edit press releases for different parties for the rest of my life? Or, in the best-case scenario, what will I do after my mandate expires? Will I manage to be good enough to be re-elected?

Of course, there are more options: It is never too late learn how to install terracotta or pavement, and farms in Denmark always need workers. But journalist that you are, you went into politics to save your country, didn't you? Or was it to work on a farm or for your own comfort?

Vitalie CALUGAREANU

Victor Mosneag, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Ziarul de Garda: “Court Cases Were Initiated Following Some Articles that I Wrote, but there Were Cases when these Articles Were Used for Score-Settling”

The role of an investigative journalist is huge, especially in a country like the Republic of Moldova that is in transition to democracy. On the other hand, it is the most expensive form of journalism. It has endured and even developed in recent years thanks to financial support from outside the country. What will happen if one day journalists do not have access to this money? The following is an interview with investigative journalist Victor Mosneag, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Ziarul de Garda.

“If grants disappear, i do not rule out the possibility that citizens might mobilize to support a media project”

M. A.: *Victor, what path will investigative journalism take in the absence of grants?*

V. M.: Definitely at present, without external support for independent journalism in the Republic of Moldova, not only the investigative genre, existence would be almost impossible. Investigative journalism especially requires more resources because official information has to be paid for. In addition to the effort involved in documentation and to pressure, gathering public data often requires quite considerable amounts of money. For example, in order to officially obtain basic information on the owners of an enterprise, you must pay 100 lei. Sometimes you have to analyze dozens of enterprises for one investigation. The same is true with information from the real estate register or from foreign databases. I believe that no independent editorial office would be able to cover these expenditures from the income it earns without foreign grants.

In fact, if foreign funding disappears, several independent media outlets still in the market could disappear too. There is a great risk that they may fall into politicians' hands who, probably, can't wait for that to happen.

M.A.: *The notion of crowdfunding has become increasingly widespread. Since its launch, ZdG has managed to form its own community. To what extent would this community*



mobilize to help the outlet when, supposedly, external funding decreases or even disappears?

V. M.: Yes, crowdfunding is that optimistic option for independent journalism in the Republic of Moldova, but this opportunity is not ripe yet. Even though we are at the beginning of this era, I believe that there is hope that in the near future we will have an editorial office in the Republic of Moldova maintained by readers' donations. We already have some media projects like this including some at *Ziarul de Garda*. They offer readers the opportunity to donate and thus support the remaining fragments of independent journalism. Unfortunately, those who read the press in the Republic of Moldova have not fully developed this spirit yet, so donations currently are mainly sporadic and cannot contribute to the integral funding of a publication as happens in Romania, for example. If grants disappear, I do not rule out the possibility that citizens may mobilize in order to support a media project.

M. A.: *ZdG has increased subscriptions to the printed version although the worldwide trend is to give up printed newspapers. To what extent can money from subscriptions cover the expenses of ZdG investigations?*

V. M.: Over the past years *ZdG* has consistently increased the number of its subscribers, even as print media worldwide and in Moldova has tended to disappear. We still believe in print media, and we hope that this will continue in coming years as well because there is still room for growth. In villages in particular, there are hundreds of thousands of people who do not have access to independent and accurate media sources, so a newspaper that costs monthly the same as a pack of cigarettes or a cup of coffee is an excellent alternative for them. The money from subscriptions and sales certainly is not enough to maintain an editorial office, but it should not be neglected because every penny counts, especially in a small market like that of the Republic of Moldova. Unfortunately, although I cannot give an exact figure, much of the money paid by subscribers for subscriptions does not reach media outlets as one would normally expect. Instead, money is paid to *Posta Moldovei* or to printing house for the services these institutions provide.

“Any investigation provokes discussions and sometimes changes that may be invisible to the public at large because there is protection in the system”

M. A.: *Victor, in a democratic state in which state institutions are functional, an investigation can result, among other things, in resignations at the highest levels. To what extent does the “deafness” of the authorities to journalistic investigations discourage reporters from further investigations of corruption?*

V. M.: For starts, I do not write in the hope that someone will be dismissed. I do not set this objective when I work on an article. Yes, certainly when an investigation has an impact and it leads to internal investigations, court cases, or resignations, you acknowledge that you did not work for nothing and that your work is appreciated. However, I repeat, this is not my objective.

Since I have been a journalist, court cases and workplace investigations have often been initiated following articles I have written, and some people have left office. However, I have often observed that journalistic investigations have been used for score-settling. I remember a case about five years ago when I conducted an investigation about

the house of a prosecutor that was not indicated in his declaration of property. The article was prompted by a message published by a reader on the *ZdG* website that targeted an acting head of an important prosecutor’s office. So, I began the investigation, I wrote the article, and soon after that a criminal case was opened. What happened next? Competition for filling the position of head of this prosecutor’s office was next. The person who was the acting head could not participate in this contest because he/she was involved in the said criminal case. After another prosecutor became the head of the institution, the criminal case of the “hero” of my investigation was closed. The position was taken by someone who was probably protected by the system. I had the impression then that people within the system had achieved their goal by using an article in the media.

I’d rather see no reaction from institutions than settlements of internal accounts or smoke and mirrors. However, I am convinced that although it is not publicly announced, any investigation provokes discussions and sometimes changes inside the system that may be invisible to the public at large because they all protect one another.

My satisfaction is much greater when I see ordinary people’s reactions or when the article is appreciated and discussed in society. I would prefer such reactions instead of those lacking honesty from law enforcement bodies or the subjects of the investigations.

M. A.: *In certain situations, however, some people would ask you what the good of investigations is if things do not change and if officials, the “heroes” of journalistic investigations, successfully retain their positions. What would you say to them?*

V. M.: Any well-written and documented investigation changes something, even if it is not publicly visible every time or does not have an immediate impact. Everything that has been written remains somewhere in the collective and Internet memory, and at some point information from the investigation will make it difficult for the person concerned to achieve certain purposes. Examples are numerous. For instance, the general impression is that Chiril Gaburici was not punished for using a fake Baccalaureate diploma; on the contrary, he was promoted. In reality, I believe that this disclosure has tarnished Chiril Gaburici’s career, although currently he is doing well. I believe that one day, sooner or later, everything will fall right into place.

M. A.: *How should one respond to a civil servant who is trying to “bribe” him or her?*

V. M.: Through deeds. I cannot say that there have been any real attempts to “bribe” me, despite the general perception in society that journalists are biased and paid by someone. We often get insulted as in when you call someone for a reaction to your article and one of the first questions is: Who ordered the article? or Why now? When you write about a sensitive subject, you are always asked these questions because it is easier for those concerned to shrug off the deeds described in the article and try to clear themselves in the eyes of society. To avoid any proposals, at the very beginning of the discussion I say that I am writing an article on that subject and reject any possible insinuations related to money or other benefits. If there are any attempts or hints, I either publish the discussion or at least warn that the insinuations will be fully published. It helps to calm them down. Sometimes, the most common forms of influence are intermediaries. As in any system, the people mentioned in an article quickly find your relatives, friends, or persons close to you and contact them asking them to come to you or to ask you an “innocent” question. These attempts do not work, at least in my case. The best-case scenario for such a person is that if he or she proves that we have common friends or relatives, I give the information to a colleague who continues the article. But I never give up. At *ZdG* such attempts at influencing us make us only more eager to publish, overcoming any barriers.

“The wish to live in a country where transparency is paramount fuels us”

M. A.: *The latest events have shown that Moldovan journalists are still subject to danger. Previously I challenged a number of colleagues in the guild to answer the question: How do we ensure a balance between public interest and the security of journalists in the field? How would you answer?*

V. M.: I proceed from the premise that in a country based on democracy journalists must always be safe in the field when they do their jobs in good faith. All journalists, regardless of their preferences, places of work, whether they are independent or work for a politician, should demand the observance of this right: to be safe anywhere, to be respected and treated with goodwill. A press card should be a “weapon” against those who try to limit our

rights. Unfortunately, we live in a country where journalists are not respected, and all people, including those of good faith, suffer due to corrupt and influential ones.

M. A.: *To what extent are trials still a form of pressure on investigative journalists?*

V. M.: I believe that anywhere, any trial is extra trouble for a journalist and, why not, a form of pressure, especially in the Republic of Moldova where justice is so unpredictable and, even worse, politically and economically controlled. Even if justice is on your side, anything can happen.

In recent years since investigative journalists have had access to several local and international databases, everything has become simpler; self-respecting editorial offices write text only on the basis of documents or evidence that nobody can deny. Needless to say, they can present that evidence in a possible trial. In such circumstances, only a malevolent judge would not rule in a journalist’s favor.

M. A.: *What fuels an investigative journalist?*

V. M.: I will begin the answer with the clarification that I am not necessarily an investigative journalist. In addition to investigations, *Ziarul de Garda* also publishes news, interviews and reports. It is probably the most complex media outlet in the country. Maybe it sounds a bit pretentious, but the wish to live in a country where transparency is paramount really fuels us—a country where prosecutors, judges and policemen do justice for the sake of the people and not for their pockets or for a certain party, and MPs and ministers draw up and implement laws for the country’s good, not for the good of their families or the clans they represent and that propelled them into Parliament or government. I am fueled by conversations with ordinary people who call or write every day telling about injustices they face when they deal with our system. When you hear them, you understand that they believe in you more than they believe in a judge or prosecutor; they have come to you hoping that you will provide them justice. Of course, this is not possible, but you talk with them and after that you realize that we have a decaying system and that without investigative journalism a lot of things would not be known and would never change and that people would lose any last shreds of hope they might have had.

Interview carried out by Anastasia NANI

Peasants, Newspapers and Crowdfunding

The uncertain situation in the Republic of Moldova creates a series of grave challenges for printed newspapers: the lack of a dialogue between the distributors of newspapers and the editors; the price increase for printing services, newsprint and electricity; various issues related to election campaigns and political instability; new waves of migration and new problems for people left behind. In any case, people need quality newspapers. Those left behind will try to subscribe at the post office (Posta Moldovei) or will be glad to receive a newspaper donated by those who have left.

The contracts sent by distributor Posta Moldovei to editorial offices during the previous year contain conditions too complicated for teams of journalists with no politicians or businesses to back up them. The post office gets 30–40% of the cost of a newspaper for very limited distribution as many villages no longer have mail delivery. The government has also rejected the recent requests of journalists, but those who don't fight don't live through governments.

What's the point of having newspapers?

Subscribers are the first sign of a newspaper's viability. If there is a critical number of readers who go to the post office and subscribe to a newspaper, there is a chance for this editorial to exist or even to prosper. Why do people subscribe to newspapers? Do they lack Internet connections? Some have them, and most also have a TV and a radio. Nevertheless, they keep subscribing to newspapers. Despite the number of TV stations broadcasting, they don't find anything to trigger their interest, and the Internet provides a full range of information but is not structured. A newspaper, in contrast, has limits including noise pollution limits.

That is to say that newspapers have survived and go hand in hand with television and online editions. Meanwhile, online news portals are engaged in harsh competition among themselves, and some of them will shut down the way certain newspapers and television stations have. Do they lack money? Do they lack audiences? More and more often the causal link between funding and readership pops up.

Money or readers: which is more important?

The modern press still relies subscriptions, the oldest way that communities have used to finance the media. It's just that now it has a modern name: crowdfunding.

The term “gazette” comes from the Venetian currency (*gazette*) used to pay for newspapers. A couple of hundred years have passed since then, but the payment method—a few USD, EUR or MDL for a newspaper—is still in practice throughout world, but the method has changed to recurring payments (crowdfunding) and the form has changed to electronic.

In the past century people had to go to the post office or to the printing house in order to pay for a subscription to a newspaper. Nowadays, an individual with a bank card can get an online subscription without leaving the house. Both then and now, a reader who wants to buy a subscription to a newspaper says, “I will pay X per month for a year to get Y publication regularly.

The newspaper *Ziarul de Garda (ZdG)* has provided the platform abonare.md for three years on which it offers online subscriptions. In Moldova it's complicated to develop crowdfunding models. At present, only three state banks offer e-commerce services and accept connections with online payment platforms. For this service, they charge a substantial commission to donors and recipients of 3% + MDL 2 per transaction. For expenditures of MDL 1,000 or even better of EUR 1,000, all parties might feel comfortable with that, but subscriptions to newspapers cost MDL 20 to 200, so 3% + MDL 2 added to MDL 20 makes the transaction a lot less palatable. In addition, the banks that accept e-commerce services charge the editorial office a monthly fee of MDL 200, regardless of whether or not there are transactions.

Crowdfunding for Moldovan newspapers?

Is e-commerce in Moldova for a subscription to a printed newspaper profitable or not? Given the 3% + MDL 2 fee per transaction and the monthly MDL 200 fee and all the taxes and bank fees payable to state authorities when you try to withdraw or transfer money, you feel squeezed not only monetarily but also emotionally.

There are days in the editorial offices in Moldova when everything looks bleak, events are complicated, democracy is in free fall, access to information is limited, the behavior of the authorities is abusive and there are tens or hundreds of incoming emails, one more annoying than the other. But among those e-mails we receive one that

provides a little optimism. Several times a month the bank sends us files listing the transactions on the [abonare.md](#) page, informing us about the number of people who have subscribed and the amount they have paid. Obviously, that file also shows the amount collected in commissions, but let's look at the bright side: There are people who subscribe to *Ziarul de Garda* newspaper every month, and they pay online. This means a lot. Even if only 10 people subscribe this month and each of them pays us MDL 100–200, they make a big difference by joining the few thousands who subscribed in the past months. This way, they decide that this newspaper will continue to exist.

Who subscribes? Or who is subscribed?

Those of us at *ZdG* claim that [abonare.md](#) is worth the effort and that the future still belongs to print newspapers, especially those with online payment systems that have evolved from the model reader-to-wallet-to-post office to the model reader-to-bank card-to-Internet. It is true that we have never covered all our expenses with that money, but without those funds, existence would have been a lot harder.

All these difficulties have taught us several lessons. We learned that those who opt for subscriptions are not necessarily people with money. They are people who are interested in what we do and who want us to continue to do it.

After speaking with thousands of readers over the years, we understand that they value *ZdG* for several reasons, all of them related to quality: our investigations and our commitment to a range of values like fighting corruption, promoting transparency and human rights and last but not least, our perseverance. They trust that this year, as in the past year and in all the past 14 years, we will not change; we will maintain the same focus. We will criticize the government in the interests of ordinary people. Whether they use the wallet-to-post office method or the bank card-to-Internet system, when they contact us our subscribers don't say "your newspaper," they say "our newspaper" or even "my newspaper." For us, this feeling that our readers are a part of us or consider us a part of them means much more than the money we receive, because if readers feel this way today, they will subscribe tomorrow. That's why we don't let them down: We don't want to cut our legs off from underneath ourselves.

A person with a wallet in hand doesn't necessarily subscribe to everything. A subscription doesn't work like contracts entered into with the government when a ministry takes funds from everybody to donate to one of its companies.

An individual with a wallet in hand takes care not to spend his/her hard-earned money on rubbish. Yes, he/she may occasionally buy some inappropriate things, but he/she won't subscribe to something over time if he/she doesn't get the quality expected. If quality is lacking, subscribers will leave and won't come back. Having loyal readers is just as important as attracting new subscribers or donors. If ordinary people with just a little money in their wallets get a good service for a reasonable price, they will bring their friends. Ordinary people with few resources can thus make a big difference.

What kind of newspapers have a future?

I recently re-read some 10-year-old articles on the Internet predicting the imminent death of newspapers except for those that could survive morally. For example, an article entitled "The Future of Newspapers. Who killed them?" in *The Economist* in 2006 said, "Only the few titles that invest in the kind of investigative stories which often benefit society the most are in a good position to survive, as long as their owners do a competent job of adjusting to changing circumstances." Since then 13 years have passed, and globally there is plenty of evidence that editorial offices that opened or developed investigative departments have increased the numbers of subscribers who have since become loyal readers. That happened because individual subscribers found in these newspapers exactly what benefits society the most and decided to continue to support the publications no matter how large or small their incomes.

Today as I re-read this article in *The Economist* on their website, an invitation to subscribe popped up immediately offering me a whole package of alternatives—printed edition, electronic edition, printed edition plus electronic edition—all with the bank card-Internet subscription model. This was one of the adjustments predicted in 2006 that editors should take into account in 2019.

At present it is very easy to leave Moldova; in fact, it is easier than it is to stay. It is also very easy to donate a newspaper subscription to a peasant who has decided not to leave even though the wonderful apples and tomatoes he grows don't bring in enough money to buy a pair of shoes. Newspapers are difficult to grow, like apples. While they can be quickly consumed, it is even quicker to use a bankcard to buy a subscription on [abonare.md](#). Crowdfunding has a future; so do newspapers.

Alina RADU

How Can We Make Online Space Normal?

Virtual Space: Politicization, Trolls and Fake Websites

Online space in Moldova is like everywhere else: full of quality information, of communities where analyses and objective interviews are shared, of constructive discussions and of fruitful exchanges of ideas. Of course, just as in the rest of the world, it is full of lies, semi-truths and ineptitude, both well and bad intentioned. It is full of fake profiles and dozens of websites from the same source with the same hidden agendas. One can say that the online environment in Moldova reflects the situation in the media and in the traditional public sphere, that they complement each other. Thus, the same phenomena in media are visible online too:

- Concentration of media ownership (of course, we speak of General Media Group); experts and commentators that appear only on those TV stations, trolls, a number of “news” websites that simultaneously promote the same ideas and communities on Facebook, or links that usually limit themselves to, “It’s unbelievable what Leader X or Y did.”
- Media outlets owned or influenced by individuals or organizations from Russia, for instance the well-known site Sputnik.md. Its news is also promoted by trolls and specific groups on Facebook.
- Media outlets trying to promote a balanced editorial policy. More recently, they have created their own communities on Facebook where they share news and invite people to debate with them.
- Media outlets, websites or communities that create entertainment, sometimes qualitative but often not, that indirectly continues to encourage the acceptance of information as it is without questioning it.

The question is: What can we do to clean up and make online space normal?

Constant Uncivilized Discourse

It is difficult to define normal since what is natural to some may be offensive to others, and what is offensive to some may be exaggerated political correctness for others. Besides, any medium where a message can be shared can be used with both good and bad intentions. For instance, in 1450, Gutenberg invented a printing press that worked with movable type that produced a large print run at a fast speed. In a time of growing inequalities, given this new opportunity the first political pamphlets were printed

leading to a campaign of public purification by burning books, jewelry and musical instruments.

Centuries later, the same thing can be said about newspapers. Although they contribute to the development of the public sphere, many criticize them. For example, some commentators say that Brexit is a follow-up to a campaign of hatred promoted by British tabloids.

The online environment has further liberalized access to information; people have become not only consumers but also creators of news and of new content. At the same time, it is full of speech that defies the limits of common sense and that attacks or even threatens individuals. Many would say that today we have the most uncivilized discourse of all time especially as it is so visible and everyone is either directly or indirectly involved.

Freedom of Speech or Regulation?

Much of the information online is posted anonymously or under pseudonyms without any censorship, without editing, without cost and instantaneously. Online content and the way it multiplies and spreads has offline effects. “Innocence of Muslims,” a 12-minute video uploaded onto YouTube in July 2012 is an example. In September, it was dubbed in Arabic. It was immediately perceived as denigrating the prophet Muhammad and resulted in demonstrations and violent protests in Egypt that spread to other Muslim and to western countries. The protests led to hundreds of injuries and to 50 deaths. This has sparked debates about freedom of speech and Internet censorship. Despite requests by a number of states, YouTube initially said that it wouldn’t delete the video because it didn’t violate its terms and conditions and was considered as a debate about ideas. Later, YouTube blocked the video in Egypt and Libya on its own initiative. A simple video dictated the agenda of the US President and Secretary of State, led to arbitrary censorship by a corporation and led to violence that resulted in death.

Discussions about regulating the Internet quickly expand to include statements about attacks on freedom of speech. The most recent case comes from the UK where the government is trying to enact a law against causing harm online. The law allows websites to be fined, managers to be held criminally liable, or a website to be completely blocked if harmful but not necessarily illegal information is posted. Activists reacted and said that government

regulation of the speech of millions of UK citizens could lead to a North Korean style censorship regime.

According to the historian T. Ash, there are three ways to address this problem:

- Governments need to limit what they believe to be offensive.
- The Internet needs to remain relatively free and, without doubt, offensive.
- We have to admit that there is a great deal of offensive speech online and to manage the situation through various rules.

Over time, philosophers have drawn attention to the need for civilized speech. John Stuart Mill in "On Liberty" said that there is hope when people are forced to listen to both sides; when listening to only one side, mistakes turn into prejudices. He insisted that the morality of public speech, rather than the law, should impose customs and behaviors.

What Can We Do?

Although already a cliché, the solution to many things is still education. School is the place where competitions among ideas should take place and where critical thinking should be practiced in all subjects, not just in civic or media education. Professor Stephen Coleman has even proposed that there should be newsgroups, rather like book clubs but only for media products. Pupils and students should be taught not only how to distinguish untruth from truth, but also how to process and handle this vast information space. They should be guided by teachers who also know how to handle digital space, especially teachers who can explain the impact of fake news and hate speech. It is, however, difficult to talk about media education as part of all subjects when a large part of the upper-secondary and university education systems are based on reading information rather than questioning or retelling it. As long as we are taught that "Romanian is the sweetest and best spoken language" or "We didn't invade anyone," and as long as those who repeat this information are the most respected, it is difficult to imagine an education system that would fight online manipulation and lies.

Another thing is to promote civilized speech especially among politicians, opinion leaders and other public figures. It's no coincidence that with the emergence of populist politicians whose statements challenge common sense, readers feel more entitled to adopt the same kind of speech. When Ilan Sor takes off his belt and threatens journalists or any other people who don't think like he

does, another thousand of his supporters will follow his example while drinking a beer in the garden or chatting online.

Speaking of more specific actions, greater cooperation among NGOs, and not just in the media education realm, is needed in this regard. If media ownership tends to concentrate, then civil society rather tends to divide. Wide coalitions and actions that complement each other with long-term goals are needed. Media education cannot stand alone without civics and human rights and anti-corruption education. In fact, the mission of each NGO is to promote more points of view and to call on citizens to distinguish between untruth and truth and not to take everything at face value but to ask more questions.

Identifying and cleaning up fake profiles on the Internet is a short-term effect that will tidy up virtual space. It shouldn't be discriminatory, i.e., all those who promote fake news or half-truths should suffer the same consequences. Every citizen has the right to report fake or denigrating posts on Facebook. Just as we sometimes collect the garbage made by others, we can also do a *subbotnik* on social media.

Moldovans continue to listen to relatives, friends or colleagues more than media outlets. Anyone can promote useful tips on how to avoid intoxication on the Internet. One of the simplest is to check all websites contacted (email, address, phone number and team), to monitor how they are funded (if a website doesn't provide this information a person should have the opportunity to ask) and to verify whether an angry person commenting on Facebook is a troll (his/her profile picture, the number of friends he/she has, the latest links posted, link history).

For people to get quality news, media outlets could choose to invest more time in attracting members and creating communities.

There are no "one size fits all" effective means to establishing civilized online speech. Fake news traveled before the Internet was invented (the most well-known was the news created by the KGB about the AIDS epidemic). Now, however, spreading it involves a growing number of people, and it is monetized more easily. Bubbles full of hate speech and untruths will continue to exist, and attempts to regulate them may lead to further limitations on freedom of expression. All we have to do is to prevent them from spreading and becoming relevant via education, collaboration and communication among people.

Vlada CIOBANU

Building Connections: Influencers as Agents of Change

Influencer /ɛfˈlyʌs/ – an individual paid by companies to promote a product or a service on his/her webpage.

This is the general public's perception of the term *influencer*. Though they are well known, their power is not tapped into when it comes to partnerships for media, NGOs, and social campaigns. Most often on social media, an influencer is a popular individual in society or is easily recognized in a particular niche who can influence, via his/her activity or the content he/she creates, the thoughts, behavior and decisions of his/her followers and may further inspire the community he/she has created to undertake certain actions. Influencers are leaders or opinion makers. They may be celebrities, professionals in certain areas, or content creators (bloggers, vloggers, instagramers, etc.).

In Fact, What Power Do Influencers Have?

Independent media is going through a rough patch. Several media outlets have been taken over by political or oligarchic groups that try to promote the political and economic interests of some categories of citizens. There is a great deal of noise in the information space and a need to strengthen the voice of trustworthy media. Currently, traditional media has become less popular, and more and more people, especially active young people, prefer to get their news from the Internet or on social media. According to the [Pew Research Center](#), majorities in most European countries get news from social media with Facebook the top site.

Meanwhile, NGOs and initiative groups face difficulties in attracting the greater public and in bringing their voices to decision makers. Their information is often provided in reports that do not always trigger discussions and actions. Hence, when trying to make ourselves heard, we should pay more attention to social media and to influencers. Though their power hasn't yet been used to its fullest potential to form public opinion, promote democratic values and create the media agenda, they significantly shape communication. According to a 2016 [Google study](#), 7 out of 10 subscribers said that influencers on YouTube changed and shaped culture.

Since they know it very well, influencers have a close, tight connection with their public and thus become more powerful. They are seen not only as a source of information about daily issues, news, values, and recommendations but also as a nucleus of the community they represent. Working with such individuals on social media does not limit information to certain geographical regions as is the case for traditional media; rather it spreads it and can mobilize a larger public, including a diaspora.

How Can Influencers Help Us?

Influencers' involvement in projects or social campaigns, including media campaigns, can be a powerful tool for making positive changes in society, i.e., the concept of social media for social good. Once trained and guided in topics and issues they are interested in, influencers can address the world challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environment, education, peace and justice.

Partnerships between influencers' online communities and civil society or media can be incubators for cross-sector projects and innovative digital products. In this way, influencers are not only a means of achieving positive change, they are active participants in this change.

Partnerships can bring:

- Access to the leaders of communities that have a strong voice and message;
- New, innovative and attractive content created by influencers;
- Access to a wider, active and involved public;
- Projects and products tailored to the target public provided by people who know and have access to it;
- The creation of communities with common visions and interests;
- Pressure on decision makers for changes the community wants.

Why Are We Reluctant?

If this all sounds so good, why are we still reluctant? We are aware that influencers are not a magic tool to quickly solve all problems. Even if they have great power that has not yet been tapped, influencers' involvement in social projects is still an experiment. Thus, NGOs and media don't have the resources, knowledge or time to invest in this.

We are afraid of changing the traditional manner in which we communicate with the public, of the fact that the effort will not bring the expected results, and that when the results are visible, the pioneering work in this area will be easily used by others. After months of effort and experiments, this work will be taken over and replicated by those who didn't invest in the process of creating and educating a community of influencers.

At the Beginning of the Route

In Moldova, we have begun to speak relatively recently about influencers. Regarding commercial aspects, the rules are quite clear and the messages not too complicated. Nevertheless, when we want to change society's mindset, we face a lack of experience. It's true that working with influencers on social campaigns isn't a new concept. Opinion makers, celebrities, and famous people in the community have always been involved, but they were using this megaphone to send a message that was prepared for them rather than one they created or initiated.

Influencers Hub Moldova, the organization that aims to create and educate a community of local influencers, conducted a survey among influencers to identify social issues (based on the UN Sustainable Development Goals) that are important to them. The results showed a high level of interest in participating in social campaigns and, surprisingly, in most cases a willingness to get involved not motivated by financial remuneration.

Nevertheless, working with influencers, even with those who are very interested and motivated, implies certain risks. Interest in or passion for a topic doesn't mean they will convey an accurate message. Before involving them in projects or campaigns, influencers need to be educated, especially on topics that require special language and the correct use of terms. Influencers have a potential to both educate and mobilize their followers, but, before that, we need to make sure they are well informed about the topics they address.

Communication doesn't stop. It changes day by day, and it is our duty to adapt to new trends in order to reach our public as efficiently as possible. By amplifying influencers' voices and power by creating partnerships and providing them the necessary education and tools, we can contribute to positive changes in society, to ensuring pluralism of opinions and to diversifying sources of information.

Stela ROMAN

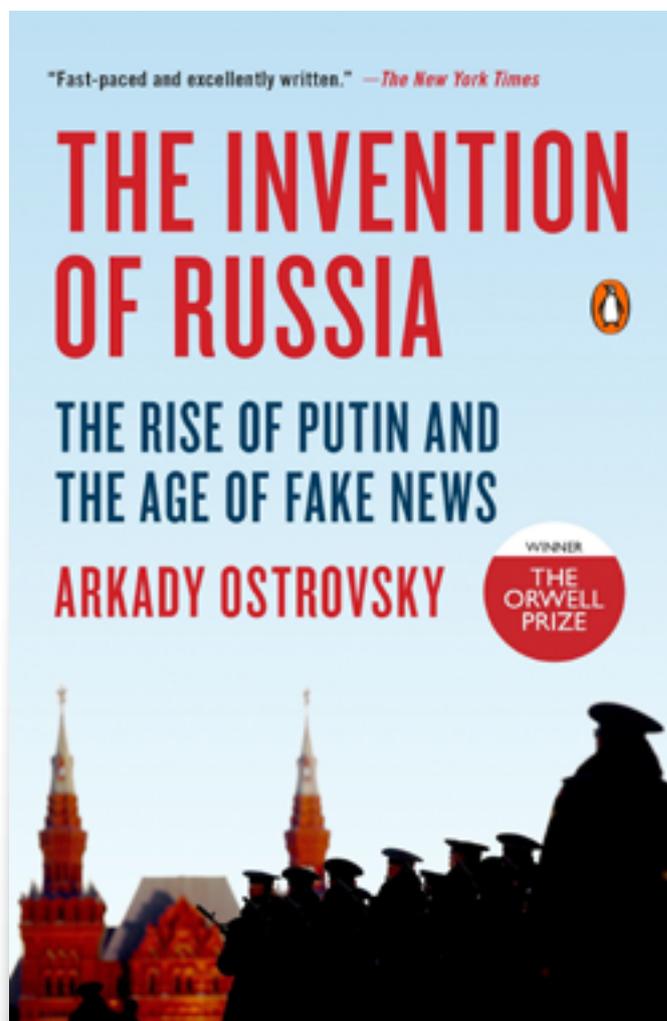
A History of Russian Media, Written by a Journalist

In order to understand the history of Russia, watching how the political, cultural and economic situation have developed is not enough: It is rather absolutely imperative to analyze what the media in this country says. Over the last 30 years, Russia has confirmed the saying that who controls the media in a given society controls everything. Alexandr Yakovlev, “the godfather of glasnost” and the Director of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union propaganda department for quite a long time, at some point said that if someone, “...wants the Kremlin’s leadership, he/she must and is obliged to control television (the media by extension),” otherwise he/she has no chance of retaining power.

Storylines of the Book

Arkady Ostrovsky’s book *The Invention of Russia. The Rise of Putin and the Age of Fake News* is precisely a history of Russia from the perspective of the history of the media of the country. The plot has three storylines: the first about Soviet-era media with concrete examples, names and titles though not all that many, honestly speaking; the second about the high spirits and upheavals in Russian media between 1991 and 1999, implicitly about the dethronement of the “tsar”; and the third beginning in the 2000s with the war between Putin and the media magnates ending in 2015 with the hybrid war in Ukraine. The author does not pursue all three storylines linearly; rather, they are entwined with one another dynamically and harmoniously. Thus, the book tells the history of Russia over the past three decades during which Russian media experienced various changes and “reforms” in order to return right back where it started: its Soviet cradle when the media was (and still is) used as a weapon to control the masses from the inside and currently from the outside. Khrushchev said, “As soldiers cannot fight without ammunition, so the party cannot start a war without having the press on its side.” For the Russian Federation, in the years after the 2000s the party has been the state, and the wars have been in Chechnya (two), Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014 –...).

Each chapter of the book describes a period in Russian political history, highlighting the emergence or disappearance of certain media outlets. Each period (or



power) has its favorite “journalists” who rank as cult figures (“spin doctors” according to Ostrovsky) standing next to national leaders with the same influence they have. There was the period of *The Moscow Times*, another of *Kommersant*, then came public TV station ORT, then NTV, then ORT again till currently we find stations Russia 24 and Russia Today and the news agency and platform Sputnik. The celebrities include Alexandr Yakovlev, Dorenko or Nevzorov, Yegor Yakovlev, Yevgeny Kiselyov, Konstantin Ernst and Dmitri Kiselyov.

Referring again to the timeline, during the Soviet period and post-2000, the purpose of the media in the Russian

Federation was to defend the “image and foundations of the state,” not to communicate objective, accurate information. In other words, it was a tool of control. Ostrovsky actually provided some examples in this respect: he recalled the year 1968 and the Prague Spring when Brezhnev panicked more about media liberalization than about Dubcek’s economic reforms. In the USSR, watching TV was meant to be a way to calm people down; there was no negative news, only positive. Everything was fine. It was a way to convey the message, “Sleep peacefully, the state is taking care of you” (page 198). The same has been happening in the recent history of the Russian Federation where the fight for people’s minds, the export of fake news and the pollution of the media environment in post-Soviet countries are some of the most important priorities—if not the most important ones—on the Kremlin’s agenda.

From 1991 to 2000 when Boris Yeltzin was in power, the media was somewhat independent from the state and the party, but not from oligarchs and media moguls. On the contrary, in those times media moguls dictated the political, economic, and cultural agenda of the country.

Regarding the third period (post-2000s), the author loudly and clearly states that Russian media is guided by the ideology that loyalty and cynicism are more important than morals and ethics. Russian political and media elites are convinced that there is no truth anywhere, neither in Russia nor, especially, in the western countries. This is the main narrative, promoted and imposed by Kremlin media. It is at this point that Russian propaganda via the media takes the form of a state policy with fake news promoted as a model/genre of journalism to be exported.

Ostrovsky notes that after nearly 30 years, Russian media has returned to its origins; today it looks just like a reincarnation of Soviet media with some minor changes or “improvements.” It has passed from the hands of oligarchs into the hands of the state (we might as well say into the hands of the Kremlin or of Putin).

One thing did not change: Even though the media has undergone a number of “reforms” over the last three decades, the media has always been with the government which has always controlled it directly or indirectly through moguls. Before the 2000s, however, the media controlled politics while during the Putin era, politics have started controlling the media. After 2004 (starting with Putin’s second term), the media became a product to be exported to ex-Soviet countries (hybrid war). At that

stage, the “tsar” (again) became aware of the importance and mission of the media to (re)establish the old empire and (re)impose control over the surrounding territories.

The Role of the Media in the Putin Era

The most interesting storyline of the book is, of course, the post-2000s when a former KGB agent comes to power. In just a few months, Russian media transformed him from a little-known character into a national hero (page 27). Later, the media would pay for its naivety: moguls Berezovsky (owner of ORT) and Gusinsky (owner of NTV) would be exiled, and media outlets that really did quality journalism would be brought under state control (NTV for example) and would become true political mouthpieces for the “tsar.” When he came to power, Putin well understood that the power of oligarchs lay in their control over the media sector, a toy that was taken away from them like it or not, peacefully or forcefully (page 307).

During Putin’s mandate, journalism was done in the Kremlin’s laboratories, not in the editorial offices of media outlets. Starting in 2000, politics were replaced by political technology or political marketing, citizens were replaced by spectators, and reality was replaced by television (page 276). Gleb Pavlovsky, another “Kremlin *eminence grise*” in an interview told Ostrovsky that after 2004 Russian media became a branch of the state power structure.

Exporting Propaganda and Fake News

As mentioned before, in the USSR watching TV was a way to calm people down. The news was always positive. Everything was nice and pretty. Media was the channel through which the state told ordinary people that everything was under control, that they could “...sleep peacefully, the state is taking care of you” (page 198). But during those times as well as today, television created/creates realities and exported/exports them to the outside world (page 326). The Kremlin’s media does nothing but project the illusion of stability domestically and distorts reality abroad.

The war in Georgia was the first one broadcast by Russian media with the aim to celebrate both victory and television. In this case, the target was not Georgia and its citizens but rather citizens of the Russian Federation to show them how strong the country was. The media thus became a tool/weapon of war (page 337). Exactly the same scenario was followed in the Ukrainian hybrid war and the invasion of the Crimean peninsula (page 28). Thus,

Putin's primary weapon was television and, by extension, the media as a whole. The role of the army was just to help the media which actually started and led the war: A mass-media that created simulacra as Baudrillard would call it. Not only did it distort reality, it also made it up without breaking stride using fake information, images, actors and statements. It was like a clear and well-directed performance or film in which the media played not the role of informing people, but the role of director, screenwriter and producer (p. 359). In this context, Ostrovsky provided the example of the propagandist Dmitri Kiselev and his show on Russia 24 (page 353).

Russian media works as a psychoactive and hallucinogenic agent both internally and externally. Television in Russia acts as a drug, alters the senses, destroys judgment and intelligence and suppresses fear and inhibition (page 360). On the role of domestic propaganda, the author claimed that the popularity of the "tsar" depends on the skill of the TV station to keep citizens in front of their TV screens (page 366). In order to control the state and the region, the

Kremlin has four weapons available: money, the police, the army and most importantly, the media (page 372).

Final Notes

Arkady Ostrovsky's book was written by a journalist, not by a scholar. For this reason, it is easy to read and keeps you in suspense from beginning to end. It is not a book with a happy ending, but we can learn a lot from it, namely what media and journalism should NOT be like, that is, subservient to those in power/to the government. Ostrovsky has won prizes (the Orwell Prize, the Cornelius Ryan Award, the *Financial Times* Book of the Year to name only a few), and just three years after publication, the book was ranked among the select books on this topic alongside those written by Masha Gessen, Mikhail Zygar, Piotr Pomerantsev and Karen Dawisha. It is a must-read book for those interested in the history of "modern" Russia, its media and especially in the informational war conducted by the Putin administration in the former Soviet republics (and not only there).

Victor GOTISAN

Memorandum on the Freedom of the Press in the Republic of Moldova

(3 May 2018–3 May 2019)

From 3 May 2018 to 3 May 2019, the freedom of the press in the Republic of Moldova continued to degrade to an alarming degree. The problems from previous years intensified: The guild was further divided, and there was even more visible political control over certain media outlets, de facto concentration of media ownership and lack of pluralism. These issues along with difficult access to information of public interest, the lack of independence of journalists and the low quality of media content along with an increase in the number of cases of verbal assault, intimidation and harassment of the media led to a drop in Moldova's rating in international rankings. Thus, the international organization Reporters without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières or RSF) placed Moldova 91st out of 180 countries monitored in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index. It is the lowest rating registered since 2013; Moldova has been downgraded 36 positions in the past 6 years in the RSF ranking.

This is also supported by a national study on the 2018 Moldovan Press Status that found that the media in our country worked and developed under critically difficult conditions last year. The biggest changes were in journalists' security which has dramatically regressed over the last two years as well as in the economic environment which evolved from a serious situation in 2017 to an extremely serious one in 2018.

Working Conditions: Verbal and Physical Assault, Seizure of a Print Run, Censorship and Restrictions on Access to Information

The steady decrease in the level of journalists' security in recent years is due to increased attacks, threats and intimidation against them by politicians and civil servants and to the lack of an adequate response by public institutions. Thus, journalists do not enjoy effective protection, and impunity for transgressions can encourage new attacks on media professionals. The following are examples that indicate that the situation in general cannot

be rated as completely safe for journalists to do their jobs in Moldova.

- In May 2018, the print run of the regional newspaper Cuvantul was seized by the local police on the grounds that it had been transported without accompanying documents. This incident was rated as serious abuse at the hands of the police and as an attempt to intimidate the journalists of the weekly newspaper who had published various investigations about the personal assets and interests of district leaders. Following the reaction of civil society, the seizure of the print run was rejected but disciplinary sanctions against the police were subsequently cancelled. The editorial office of the newspaper took the case to court asking for the punishment of those guilty.
- In July 2018, Orhei mayor Ilan Shor made a number of threatening statements against journalists in a video published on Facebook. The politician promised that once he came to power he would enforce a potential lustration law in relation to journalists, "paid to write nasty things about people" («проплаченные журналисты, которые позволяют себе писать гадости про людей»). "Stop, you turd. I'll fix you!" he said, labelling journalists with the depreciatory term *jurnaliughi* (journos). Ombudsman Mihai Cotorobai filed a solicitation with the Orhei Municipal Prosecutor's Office that called for, "...taking necessary measures against persecuting and intimidating journalists for publishing criticism." However, this institution replied that Ilan Shor wouldn't be held accountable because his statements did not represent a criminal offence.
- In August 2018, Deputy Chair of the Shor Political Party Mariana Tauber behaved aggressively and verbally assaulted journalists from Radio Orhei preventing them from reporting on a demonstration organized in Orhei by the party she represented. In addition, she instigated a protest by the participants against the director of Ra-

dio Orhei. Armed with brooms, some of them followed Marina Tauber's suggestions and shoved the journalists.

- In October 2018, the staff of station TV 10 announced that they had resigned in corpore because their management prohibited them from publishing a news item on the statement of a Member of the European Parliament criticizing the government in Chisinau because of the decision to expel Turkish citizens from Moldova.
- In December 2018, Socialist MP Oleg Savva reacted to a post about his income, verbally attacking a journalist from the Anticoruptie.md portal. The dignitary called the reporter "liar," "scum," and "illiterate girlie" on a social network, threatening her with physical abuse and a lawsuit.

A decrease in transparency at public institutions and limitations on access to certain categories of information of public interest also plagued journalists' working conditions. State institutions rarely organized press conferences preferring briefings in which journalists were unable to ask questions. Also, several cases of limiting journalists' access to public events were reported last year. Thus, TV 8 and Jurnal TV reporters were denied access to a number of briefings and events of the ruling party and to the press conferences of the Shor Political Party. Their access to the Orhei mayor's public meetings was also denied. Dissatisfaction with the editorial policies of these TV stations was the reason invoked in these cases. The day before parliamentary elections in February 2019, journalists from Ziarul de Garda were not allowed to film a concert sponsored by the Shor Political Party, and their access was also restricted in October 2018 to a meeting organized by the Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) in the Great National Assembly Square.

Political Context and Legal Framework: Insufficient Developments

The political context in 2018 tolerated pressure and discrimination by politicians towards media outlets or journalists at both the central and regional/local levels and favored the widening war between media outlets belonging directly or indirectly to politicians. Through the latter, orchestrated attacks were launched against a number of non-government media organizations and also against independent media and journalists inconvenient to

those in power. The politically affiliated media published a number of articles during the year that could be classified as harassment and denigration.

Various amendments to the media legal framework were enacted during the reporting period. Following the recommendations of the Working Group on Improving the Media Law of the Republic of Moldova, the Audiovisual Media Services Code and the National Concept on Media Development, the Law on Attracting Foreign Investment in Film Production and Other Audiovisual Works and the Information Security Concept were developed and approved in the final reading in Parliament. These developments were, however, insufficient to foster or stimulate the proper functioning of the media in our country. Although government officials promised to adopt all the amendments developed by the working group, the Law on Advertising that passed in the first reading, the Law on Measures to Support Periodic Publications of Social Importance and other laws providing tax facilities for local media remained at the draft stage. The Media Forum in Moldova held on 29 and 30 November 2018 condemned the lack of transparency and MPs' selective attitudes toward the draft laws developed, some of which have not been adopted yet.

Parliament's vote after the final reading of the amendments to the Law on Access to Information ultimately didn't take place. These amendments were considered a priority in the media community. On the other hand, new legal provisions came into force in October 2018 excluding media outlets from the list of entities with access to information on people who submit declarations under the Law on Tax Amnesty. Thus, the provision of the new Law on Voluntary Compliance and Tax Incentives limits journalists' access to information.

The topic of personal data protection was also on the Working Group's agenda in several proposals that would remove barriers encountered by journalists when requesting information. Although Parliament failed to review/vote on a draft law on this topic, during its last weeks of activity it debated and voted in the first reading a draft law on the protection of personal data that may threaten freedom of expression and impede access to information of public interest. The draft is considered inappropriate by experts from the Council of Europe and from the Moldovan media community.

An Economic Environment in Continuous Regression

The monopolized advertising market, an alleged cartel agreement between two advertising sales houses, the rise in the price of newsprint, the insufficient funding of public providers for audiovisual media services and the amplification of media concentration all contributed to an extremely serious economic situation.

The market is dominated by a large number of media outlets owned or controlled by politicians that benefit from their protection and financial support. Most independent media outlets do not have enough financial resources to develop and deploy new technologies and pay decent wages to employees. Under such conditions, the mechanisms that proved to work the best for obtaining additional funds were collaborations, projects and co-productions. When they failed to attract them, certain outlets suspended their work such as TV 10, which announced in May 2018 that it would cease broadcasting for an indefinite period of time, “due to the acute lack of financial resources.” It started working again in June. Similarly, in January 2019 IMPACT TV announced that it was suspending its work for half a year because, “It did not have enough funds to support this media project.” It was indeed a critical year for independent media outlets in Moldova with some independent newspapers near bankruptcy after a rise in the price of newsprint in June 2018.

On the other hand, in November 2018 the new TV stations Orhei TV and Televiziunea Centrala, both affiliated with the Shor Political Party, were launched in the Moldovan media market. Note that in July 2018, Radio Orhei filed a lawsuit against the Broadcast Coordinating Council (BCC) after that authority issued a broadcasting license in April to a radio station with a similar name: Radio Orhei FM, also affiliated with the Shor Political Party. The administration of Radio Orhei demanded the cancellation or amendment of the BCC decision since it had considered neither the fact that Radio Orhei had been operating with a well-known name for 12 years nor the legal provisions on intellectual property and competition rules, “...giving way to confusing program consumers and to unfair competition.” The BCC failed to respond to this request.

The concentration of media ownership and the monopolization of advertising resources are the key factors in the vulnerable situation of the press. The reduced scale

of the advertising market and the unwritten, cartel-like agreement between the two big players in the market deny independent media outlets free access to large advertising companies. Although in January 2018 a group of media outlets (PRO TV Chisinau, RTR Moldova, Jurnal TV and TV 8) filed a joint complaint with the Competition Council about the conclusion of a cartel agreement between the two dominant sales houses (Casa Media and Exclusive Sales House), the Council has yet to provide an official reply.

Although the new Audiovisual Media Services Code assigns the BCC a special role in audience measurement, its first attempts to address the issue of the accuracy of these measurements failed. In March 2019 following a tender it organized to grant the right to measure audience size, the Tender Committee selected the same company that had measured audiences of TV stations until 2018 and whose data were repeatedly questioned by some broadcasters and civil society experts. A number of broadcasters criticized how the tender took place since only one bidder participated and the Tender Committee included representatives of five television stations, four of which sold advertising through the two sales houses accused of having entered into a cartel agreement.

Print media’s economic and financial problems grew when the state enterprise Posta Moldovei imposed further arbitrary conditions for the distribution of periodicals by subscription and retail. Non-government organizations and a number of press managers asked the authorities to intervene and to oblige Posta Moldovei not to abuse its dominant position in the postal distribution market.

Monopolization vs Media Quality: Political Commitment, Misinformation and Manipulation

Although no single media owner can possess more than two broadcasting licenses after the law was amended, this legal norm has had a negligible impact. In recent years, a number of broadcasters have de jure changed their owners, but de facto there has been no change in their editorial policies; they have continued to promote the agenda of the parties they are affiliated with. The owners themselves are obliged under the law to declare their properties while the BCC just collects the declarations stating that its duties do not include verifying their accuracy.

Currently, the media market is dominated by two large trusts: one owned by the leader of the PDM ruling party and people close to him (Prime TV, Publika TV, Canal 2, Canal 3, Publika FM, Muz FM, Maestro FM) and one belonging to people close to President Igor Dodon and the Party of Socialists (Accent TV, NTV Moldova, Exclusiv TV, Aif.md). In 2018, a new trust affiliated with the Shor Political Party (Orhei TV, Televiziunea Centrala, Radio Orhei FM) emerged in the media market. Note that all Independent Journalism Center (IJC) monitoring reports on propaganda, information manipulation and violations of journalism ethics showed that the politically affiliated media favored the politicians and parties behind them both directly and indirectly. As a consequence, the public had access to almost identical editorial content that lacked diversity and pluralism of opinions and in some cases was manipulative and propagandistic.

The Media Forum in Moldova expressed concern about the ongoing decrease in the quality of the media products offered by multiple media outlets and their involvement in political partisanship by promoting certain political parties and discrediting their political opponents.

The behavior of the media during the 2018 early local elections in Chisinau and the 2019 parliamentary elections demonstrated the political commitment of many media outlets. IJC and Association of Independent Press monitoring under the Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections revealed that some of the most influential media outlets, including national broadcasters, engaged in political partisanship replacing journalism with propaganda. Political patrons were extensively involved in the editorial policies of media outlets and encouraged self-censorship, and media outlets disseminated biased, incomplete and often manipulative information to media consumers.

Despite the restrictions imposed by the so-called Anti-Propaganda Law that came into force at the beginning of last year and the sanctioning of certain media outlets for infringing the law, foreign-based propagandistic media continued to exert its negative influence on Moldova's information space. Fake news was routine in 2018, and the accounts of a number of public figures as well as the pages of certain media portals were cloned and used for misinformation.

The BCC, the broadcasting regulator, offered an anemic and late response to the inappropriate behavior of certain broadcasters thus failing to fulfil its role as guarantor of public interest. For instance, during the campaign for 2018 local elections, the BCC failed on its own initiative to monitor the broadcasters that had announced that they would not report on the campaign. Only after notification by a group of civil society organizations did the regulator start its own monitoring eventually applying minimal sanctions for non-compliance with the law by these broadcasters. For the 2019 parliamentary elections, the BCC published only two monitoring reports during the campaign and issued warnings to several TV stations. The third BCC monitoring report was reviewed after the elections, and the authority decided to apply no sanctions to broadcasters who had violated the law. This behavior by the institution that should represent the public interest in the broadcasting sector creates dangerous precedents: It can discourage good-faith broadcasters on the one hand and encourage those who don't observe the law when reporting on election campaigns on the other hand.

Recommendations:

In order to ensure the true freedom of the press in line with the principles of a democratic society, the authorities in the Republic of Moldova should:

- react and sanction all those who assault and intimidate media representatives, violate their right to expression and restrict their access to information of public interest;
- ensure full observance of the Law on Access to Information by penalizing/discouraging refusals to provide information of public interest;
- cease the use of the media in narrow, party or personal interests and patrons' involvement in the editorial policies of the media outlets they finance;
- abandon the selective approach to reforming the legal framework regulating media activity by adopting in due time the draft laws developed by the Working Group on Improving Media Law in the Republic of Moldova;
- ensure the development, adoption and implementation of coherent public media development policies stipulated by the National Concept of Media Development of the Republic of Moldova;

- require the Broadcast Coordinating Council to effectively monitor media outlets to prevent concentration of media ownership and to identify and sanction cases of information manipulation and the dissemination of fake news;
- require the Competition Council to exercise its regulatory function in an efficient and impartial manner and ensure the re-establishment of fair terms in the advertising market by penalizing cartel agreements.

Independent Journalism Center
Association of Independent Press
Association of Electronic Press
Association of Independent TV Journalists
Center for Investigative Journalism
Association of Investigative Reporters and Editorial Security
Access-info' Center
Media Center for Youth
Press Freedom Committee

The Human Rights Information Centre Report: Minorities in Elections. Promoting the Inclusion of Minorities in Elections

The Human Rights Information Centre (HRIC) conducted step-by-step monitoring of certain TV stations from November 2018 to February 2019. During the first stage (November–December 2018), the informational-analytical shows of three stations with national coverage—Moldova 1, PRIME TV, and Jurnal TV—and of regional channel GRT were monitored. During the second period (1–27 January 2019) and the third (28 January–24 February 2019), the four TV stations, the main news portals and the websites of certain political parties that participated in Parliamentary elections were monitored. The main conclusions and recommendations of the monitors are listed below.

General Conclusions

During the monitoring period, the TV shows in the majority of cases did not broadcast direct hate speech against ethno-linguistic or religious minority groups. For the most part, the terminology used on TV complied with the standards of coverage for minority groups. Nevertheless, at times cases of non-compliance and disrespect were identified.

Although certain TV stations, especially GRT and during the last period Moldova 1 made visible efforts to cover ethno-linguistic minorities, the stations with greater coverage overwhelmingly tended to cover Moldovans/Romanians almost exclusively.

When they addressed ethnic issues, they were influenced by stereotypes and stigma. For example, when well intentioned stations covered a minority ethnic group, in most cases they did it via traditional cultural activities like dances, songs, crafts or traditional dishes. There was little information about the contributions of representatives of different ethnic groups to other types of activities in Moldova like medicine, economics, or education.

In the worst cases, stations like PRIME for example, still resorted to the vicious practice of labeling people suspected of committing crimes by specifying their ethnicity (Syrian, Turk, Armenian). Such practices feed prejudices and discriminatory views toward these groups, and for this reason they must be stopped immediately.

The number and position of Russian shows in the broadcasting grids of Moldova 1 and Jurnal TV are insufficient and inadequate.

The use of settlement names in minority languages is still a problem. Also, the designation of settlements in Moldova in Romanian, including on Russian shows, is wide spread.

The coverage of religious diversity and of minority religious groups remains a major problem for all the TV stations monitored. The monitors noted an exclusive focus on promoting the Orthodox Christian religion on these stations and a total disregard for other religious groups in Moldova.

The analytical shows, especially the ones broadcast on Jurnal TV, showed a strong gender imbalance to the detriment of women.

Minorities and Elections

The pre-election and election periods were noteworthy regarding ethno-linguistic and religious minority coverage in the media. First, during the parliamentary election campaign of January and February 2019 just as during the 2016 presidential election, an attempt to introduce xenophobia about refugees took place. In 2016 the alleged arrival of “30,000 Syrian refugees” in Moldova was widely broadcast while in 2019 an attempt was made to launch the potential for a large number of refugees from Bangladesh. Fortunately, this story was not widely broadcast on the stations monitored, and no major deterioration in media discourse on this issue was noted.

The pre-election campaign did, however, provide the opportunity to intensify negative comments about Muslims (Islamophobic speeches). For example, on the informational-analytical shows broadcast on Jurnal TV

we heard a number of speeches promoting the idea that Muslims are terrorists, mostly as part of criticism of the initiative of the government to offer Moldovan citizenship in exchange for investments in the country.

Also, during the pre-election period an attempt was made to revive linguistic conflict in the public and in the media. The linguistic incident between a Gagauzian driver stopped by a traffic officer in Cimislia for allegedly speeding was widely broadcast by the media. Many media outlets, including those monitored, adopted a one-sided, biased position when covering the topic. The lack of a human-rights based approach in broadcasting this case and other similar cases is a major problem that must be solved.

A third issue directly linked with the pre-election campaign was the increase in media attention to Orthodox Christian issues. The idea seemed to be that connecting religious topics with government representatives and certain political figures would create a favorable media and election image for them. PRIME TV especially stood out during the monitoring period because it produced over 40 news items on Orthodox topics including the orthodox experiences of PD candidates and the “close collaboration” between state institutions led by PD members and the Orthodox Church. The promotion of an Orthodox Christian agenda in the media visibly increased during the pre-election period.

Recommendations

- Additional training for TV employees in using respectful and correct terminology with regard to minority groups is necessary.
- All TV stations need to seriously reflect on their coverage of ethno-linguistic minorities. They also have to develop and adopt human-rights based policies in this respect.
- TV stations, especially PRIME, need to study the decisions of the Council on Ensuring Equality for eliminating the vicious practice of labeling criminals and suspects according to their ethnicity and to stop doing so immediately.
- It is necessary to review the broadcasting grids of national TV stations to provide better coverage of the speakers of minority languages.
- All TV stations need to seriously reflect as institutions on religious (and non-religious) minorities. They also have to develop and adopt human-rights based policies in this respect.
- The three TV stations with national coverage have to review their policies regarding the use of settlement names during shows broadcast in Russian and in other minority languages in line with international best practices (UN, OSCE, Council of Europe).
- A gender balance policy should be developed and adopted, especially by Jurnal TV.

Independent Journalism Center

ISSN 1857 – 002 x

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The opinions expressed in this publication
do not necessarily reflect the views of the IJC.

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The June edition 2019 of the Mass Media in Moldova magazine was supported financially by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency through the Swedish Embassy in Chisinau

