

# mass - media

December 2019



in Moldova

**Efortii  
internationale**  
Remarcabil  
din R. Moldova  
până cu aprilie 20  
de "consolidare  
protecție a martor  
de trafic de fiint



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# The Failure of Media Demonopolization

*The Broadcasting Council (BC) boasts on its official site about “being, the representative and guarantor of the public interest in the broadcasting field.” Grotesque! For several months, we have been witnessing the migration of media power from Plahotniuc to Dodon with the direct agreement and involvement of the BC which remained intact after the fall of the regime in June 2019. The famous nemëpkë (Russian for five) simply passed to the control of another political master. I allow myself to use this Russian word because this is how we know this “group” of members of the BC that is able to vote for, in my opinion, even moving the Himalayan Mountains to Park Valea Trandafirilor [Valley of Roses] in Chisinau.*

First, at the end of October 2019, the BC approved the change of the name of Accent TV, a television broadcaster affiliated with the socialist party, to Primul in Moldova which was to retransmit the content of station Pervii Kanal from Russia. When asked during a TV show about the reason for taking the channel from Plahotniuc, Dodon said, “Do you think it would have been better to leave it to him?,” a reaction that must be transcribed and engraved on the occasion of Press Freedom Days. Then, at the beginning of November, the BC issued a broadcasting license for station Accent TV. Thus, the holding that served Plahotniuc has been weakening while the holding of Dodon is gaining positions with the help of the BC which pretends to be the “representative and guarantor of the public interest in the broadcasting field.” For now, the holding of Dodon comprises four TV stations, but probably a few more will join. The BC has announced a contest for two state frequencies released by stations Prime and Canal 2. Naive people still think that the frequency of Canal 2 will be returned to TVR (Romanian TV). I don’t believe it, but I would like to see how, under the leadership of Dodon (after the dismissal of the government led by Maia Sandu), this frequency will be managed by TVR.

What has changed in the landscape of audiovisual media in the Republic of Moldova after the entry into force of the obligation to publish the names of the owners of media outlets in March 2015? Did the limit of “no more than two” broadcast licenses per owner (February 2016) force Plahotniuc in a certain way to give up control of his famous propagandistic holding by June 2019? Do these restrictions

prevent Igor Dodon in any way from strengthening his media empire today? No. The amendment of the legislation didn’t have the expected results. By using political leverage, the media owners did nothing but pass the licenses on to intermediaries, some of whom are fake owners. For example, Vlad Plahotniuc gave his counselor Oleg Cristal two of the four television stations with national coverage that he owned. In other words, these measures, designed to bring more transparency have proved to be insufficient given that we have politicians who cheat. Good faith in Moldovan politics provokes laughter.

The audiovisual space has to all intents and purposes been divided between the great wirepullers. Let’s not forget that in September 2018, Ilan Sor, who was convicted in the first instance, obtained a media trust. He would allegedly control Orhei TV and Central Television—formerly Alt TV and Euro TV. Private ownership in media is necessary and good when there are rules that are observed, not evaded. Otherwise the effect is evil, and the media is transformed into a kind of annex of political interests and journalists are paid to generate or maintain political battles that have no connection with their true mission.

And now, how do we get out of this closed circle? The state has the necessary tools, but we cannot rely on the fact that it will apply them. The state will not apply them precisely because the interest of the politicians who press the buttons of power is to make journalists as dependent on media owners as possible and the owners as dependent as possible on them, the politicians. Who, under these circumstances, can assume the difficult task of convincing journalists that they do not have the same interests as the owners? NGOs, journalism faculties and external funders do not have that much power. All of them provide opportunities for those who want to continue to be journalists; however, they do not offer any protection against the temptations coming from the politicians and their “moguls.”

An EU report on media concentration and pluralism has come up with some solutions. One of them would be to appoint an ombudsman to protect the media. The authors also suggest adopting an editorial handbook that would, “prevent external owners, shareholders or bodies, such as governments, from influencing the content of the news.”

Another solution would be to define conflict of interest in such a way to prevent media moguls from holding political positions. Would these recommendations function at present in the Republic of Moldova? In the absence of good faith, it's less than likely.

The only solution that we have is to educate the public, and this is a long-term process. It may take decades for people to get used to consuming quality journalistic products and boycotting lies that are beautifully packaged. The question is how do we do this given that people are used to consuming products based on their packaging, to listening for beautiful lies and to being told what they want to hear? The solution that has been tested by all developed democracies is pluralism—a market that is not obstructed by political factors using administrative leverage (such as the BC and the Competition Council) and that provides as many people as possible with access to quality journalistic products that they enjoy. In one way or another, we should educate the taste of the public for quality media products and make those who offer subjective packaging use their propagandistic charms on their politically affiliated owners.

This process has been started by NGOs through projects that benefited from external support, but there are no premises that allow for its extension. Prime Minister Maia Sandu criticized Igor Dodon at the Media Forum for subordinating old and new media outlets and condemned the precarious state of the free media and was dismissed. We have to be prepared again for tough days! Freedom will be limited, and frustrated politicians will try to punish the free media and journalists. They do not need a mature and diverse media because the way they understand democracy is the opposite of democracy itself.

The members of the Broadcasting Council will not resign. Someone there on the inside personally sent me this message. They are ensured political protection. These people have become useful to their new godfather. The loyalty of those five members (in fact, six) was tested when the licenses migrated from Plahotniuc to Dodon. The next step is to transform the trust in “consent factories,” a curve ball that was thrown at Plahotniuc and his “little moguls” who were seduced by the illusion that their master would

leave them a quota of his shares when chased from power and out of the country.

After the fall of the former regime, it was a mistake to leave the broadcasting field to the discretion of people still waiting for a hidden offer from their new boss. The offer was not long in coming. This “lethal weapon” which shapes the minds of people in the long run was left in the hands of Igor Dodon. At present, “the guarantor of sovereignty” with the help of the “representative and guarantor of the public interest in the broadcasting field” is beginning to build the infrastructure that is necessary to maintain power in the long run. The back office staff have also begun to jump off the sinking ship of the former regime and make themselves useful on the new ship which has readily taken them on board. They manipulate, and their style is unique. The statement of EU spokesman Maja Kocijancic after the dismissal of the government led by Maia Sandu summed the situation up nicely: They are ready-made propagandists. They are not even waiting for censorship. They anticipate it.

Another aspect that was ignored by all of us until now is the concentration of rural media. This is a new trend for us. In this case we are talking not only about television stations, but also about online portals and radio stations. The situation of these media outlets is worthy of a thorough analysis. What is known is that many of these media outlets exist thanks to grants from various external donors; however, there are media barons at the local level who use these institutions primarily during election campaigns. This is not about normal electoral advertising but rather about backstage games that tip the balance. The latest campaign for local elections highlighted this phenomenon. The argument of those media owners is their poor financial situation and the, “need to get on the good side” of the future mayor or president of the district. But at what cost? An office or two in the building of the District Council paid for with a symbolic payment or not paid at all? This is the price of independence? It is not bad to be a media owner, but it is harmful, even at the local level, to turn the institution into a propaganda tool or to subordinate it to a little local baron.

*Vitalie CALUGAREANU*



# It Seems that in Moldova It Is Possible “to Postpone the Future” in the Field of Media Legislation

*As a state with a democracy in transition, the Republic of Moldova has had its international ranking of „partially free” in terms of the freedom of press and of expression for the last decade; one of the reasons is the inadequate and inefficient legal framework for media activity. The last Moldovan Press Status Index carried out by the Independent Journalism Center also stated that this framework was not in compliance with international standards. The Ombudsperson also found that the state of affairs regarding the observance of the right to free expression did not improve in 2018, and the outdated legal framework remained a challenge for the media sector as in previous years. In recent years, the authorities (both governmental and parliamentary) have made several attempts to improve the situation; nevertheless, media reforms are dragging on and are constantly „in the throes of birth.”*

## **Attempt No 1: Developing and monitoring compliance of National Human Rights Action Plan with international commitments**

A working group composed of representatives of central public authorities, civil society and development partners was set up to develop the 2018–2022 National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP) by an order of the Minister of Justice in 2016. In May 2018, the NHRAP was passed by Parliament as a basis for observing the international human rights recommendations for the Republic of Moldova developed by monitoring bodies of the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and other international organizations. By accepting the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review on the independence of media, Moldova committed, inter alia, to ensuring the freedom of expression for journalists inclusively as well as access to information and transparency in decision making. The complexity of developing the policy document led to dividing the working group into thematic subgroups, among which was the subgroup *Transparency, access to information and freedom of expression*.

This subgroup was responsible for reforms in the press and proposed several actions to ensure media independence and pluralism which, however, have not led to concrete actions. The government was responsible for monitoring the implementation of these actions and in February 2019 set up the National Council for Human Rights composed of 30 representatives from different state structures and non-commercial organizations. The chairman of the council was to be the Prime Minister, the Vice-President was to be the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, and five members of the council representing non-commercial organizations were to be selected through a public contest organized by the National Council for Participation.

The nominal list of members has not been made public so far. The current work of the council is supposed to be documented by the responsible subdivision of the State Chancellery, but the web page of the State Chancellery does not contain any information in this respect which makes us believe that this important human rights entity is not functional and may no longer be a priority even though the government decision has not been repealed.

## **Attempt No 2: Setting up a parliamentary group to improve media law**

Again, in order to improve media law, in June 2017 at the initiative of the Speaker of Parliament with the support of the Joint Project of the European Union and the Council of Europe, a working group was set up. For the first time it comprised representatives of parliamentary factions proportionally represented; MPs from the Committee for Culture, Education, Research, Youth, Sport and the Media; members of the Broadcasting Council and representatives of media outlets, international institutions and relevant NGO experts. Several priorities for improving media law were identified. We were glad that finally there was both the political will and common concern for media

independence and pluralism. There were many meetings with debates, proposals and expert recommendations.

The four laws drafted by the working group were passed in their final readings: the Audiovisual Media Services Code, the National Concept on Media Development of the Republic of Moldova, the Law on Attracting Foreign Investment in Film Production and Other Audiovisual Works and the Information Security Concept of the Republic of Moldova. The Law on Advertising and the Law on the Protection of Personal Data were adopted in the first reading. Although they have been registered with Parliament, the drafts on amendments and addenda of seven laws, including the Law on Access to Information and the Law on Freedom of Expression, have not yet appeared the MPs' agenda.

The working group focused specifically on two documents of strategic importance for the media: the National Concept on Media Development in the Republic of Moldova (2018–2025) and the new Audiovisual Code. The concept on media development is a new document for the Republic of Moldova and of major importance. It outlines the current state of the media from the perspective of the regulatory legal framework, the management of the field and media outlets, as well as the professionalism and responsibility of the media. At the same time, the Concept lays down the reference points for public policies aimed at strengthening the role of the media in ensuring citizens' constitutional right to information and in strengthening a democratic society. Immediately after the adoption of this Concept, the following actions had to be initiated:

- Set up a representative council composed of decision makers and representatives of civil society to coordinate, monitor and report on the implementation of the provisions laid down in the Concept;
- Develop, adopt and start a time line for the implementation of action plans for conducting the national media policy.

What has happened in practice? The representative council has not been set up and the action plan has not been developed/adopted thus far. The initiatives were instead postponed for an indefinite period. The fact that there was no political will at least in the field of advertising and improving the law on access to information has given rise to many doubts. In this regard, during a concluding

conference on the results of the working group held at the end of last year, the Council of Europe media representative Silvia Grundmann stated the following: “The provisions on advertising and access to information are important parts of law that have been postponed, but postponement is not an option. You cannot postpone the future.”

As soon as the Council of Europe and EU Joint Project was completed, the parliamentary group ceased to function. Note that according to the regulation, the working group had to complete its mandate only after the goal it set had been achieved.

It seems that in case of Moldova it is possible “to postpone the future”!

### Attempt No 3. Recent initiatives

Following the change of government, in June 2019 the Parliamentary Committee for Mass Media chaired by its new head, MP Adrian Lebedinschi, participated in a meeting attended by MPs, media experts, journalists, representatives of the Broadcasting Council and of the Teleradio-Moldova Supervisory Board as well as those from relevant civil society organizations. Again, the discussions on the old issues were resumed including the need to depoliticize the broadcasting regulator and the need to re-launch the work of the Parliamentary Working Group on improving media legislation, access to information and the situation in the advertising market.

On a positive note, Chairman Lebedinschi emphasized that MPs plan to collaborate (again!) with the journalistic community to identify challenges and amend the media law in order to improve the media situation. The question is: Why shall we re-identify issues that have long been identified and why has Parliament not passed the draft laws developed by the previous working group composed of current MPs? Why not develop, adopt and implement the Mass Media Action Plan provided by the Concept on Development in this sector, a policy document adopted and undertaken by Parliament? Why do we „erase everything and start over” as a media expert queried? It's been half a year, but we are still going round in circles.

Also in June from a governmental perspective, then Prime Minister Maia Sandu met with media representatives and discussed the problems encountered by the media and the necessary solutions to ensure the operation of a free and independent press. The event was attended by

representatives of the Chisinau press, the local press, investigative journalists and media organizations. The prime minister highlighted the most important problems in the system that have perpetuated over the last few years including the inefficiency of the Broadcasting Council (BC), restrictions on access to information of public interest, the monopolization of the advertising market and the neglect of public interest by the national public television station financed by public funds. The 2019–2020 Government Action Plan was later drafted and approved,<sup>[1]</sup> and the State Chancellery (a structure that had already proved to be inefficient in implementing the NHRAP) was in charge of its implementation. The actions proposed in the media field related partly to the amendments previously proposed to the legislation (not adopted and/or not approved by the government/Parliament) and did not cover a broad approach to solving the problems existing in the media field both from a regulatory and an operational point of view.

The need to continue the reforms in the media field was reiterated in the fifth edition of the Mass Media Forum that was held in November 2019. Prime Minister Sandu stated then that certain interventions aimed at improving the current state of affairs in the media were under preparation. “I have three priorities regarding the media. The first is to support free media and to create conditions so that it can exist without interference and be able to develop in the Republic of Moldova. The second is about strengthening the independence and the creative capacity of public media outlets. The third refers to strengthening the capacities of advertising and media regulators to keep the market stable, to protect the information space from internal and external interference and to sanction abusers.<sup>[2]</sup>”

The Sandu government resigned and its ambitious plans remained unfilled. Initially, the Activity Program of the Chicu Government did not include any chapters dedicated to media<sup>[3]</sup> containing solutions for the problems

existing in this sector. In response, media NGOs urged the government to include a separate chapter dedicated to media in the Governmental Program thus committing it to identifying solutions for media sector problems also mentioned in the Resolution of the 2019 Media Forum. Eventually, the executive approved the Government Action Plan for 2020–2023<sup>[4]</sup>, and the revision of the legal framework to improve media legislation is one of the priorities undertaken by the new government. It is certain that Parliament will be responsible for the adoption of most of the proposed amendments by complying with legislative procedures and transparency in decision making, even if at the government level more actions could be taken to improve the media situation from an operational point of view.

It appears that media reforms have had the bad luck to be at only the action-plan level for the last governments. No specific actions have followed which has aroused a certain mistrust that things will reach a logical end this time. So many times various explanations and excuses including objective and subjective factors and other reasons that have prevented or delayed the adoption of some amendments and initiatives have been cited. Moreover, previous experience has shown that good, earlier initiatives have often been denied only because they were promoted by political opponents, even though new ones are often merely copies of the old ones.

We are waiting for concrete, not illusory changes in media law. It remains to be seen how much political will the current government officials have for them to take place.

*Tatiana PUIU*

[1] [https://justicemoldova.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/subiect02\\_1\\_2.pdf](https://justicemoldova.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/subiect02_1_2.pdf)

[2] <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/forumul-mass-media-2019-despre-concentra-rea-mass-mediiei-%C3%AEn-m%C3%A2nile-politicienilor-%C8%99i>

[3] <http://parlament.md/Actualitate/Comunicatedepresa/tabid/90/ContentId/5577/language/ro-RO/Default.aspx?fbclid=IwAR318WXUjZD0ZJP1j9YoKS06SMt6F564vUyRaBkWv6rrwBC6GsqNhMuxmc>

[4] <https://gov.md/ro/content/fost-aprobat-planul-de-actiuni-al-guvernului-pentru-anii-2020-2023>



# Who Defends the Journalist? About a Trade Union Protecting Against Professional Shocks

*My fellow journalists were overwhelmed at the end of this year by a plethora of diabolic surprises. In this article I will only tackle two of them: one about some of my colleagues having their phones tapped, and the other one – about staff cuts at the state-owned Moldpres Information Agency.*

On 22 November, Chiril Motpan, the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on National Security, Defense and Public Order announced at a press conference that the democrats' administration ordered to tap the phones of some mass-media and civil society representatives and that their conversations were listened in by the Security and Intelligence Service and by the Police Inspectorate. The MP also provided a list of actual names of renowned journalists whose phone conversations went straight into the ears of SIS. I cannot question, in this case, the responsibility of a parliamentary committee chair, particularly since RISE Moldova – in its investigation entitled 'The Ministry of Wiretapping' – proved that a campaign of wiretapping and stalking opponents of the democratic government and journalists was going on. It goes without saying that several journalists and media organisations took a very dim view at state law enforcement agencies interfering with their private lives in that fashion. For instance, Tudor Darie, founder of the Agora.md portal, said that it is the way in which we respond now that will have an impact on whether journalists will keep being stalked and harassed in the future. The journalists at TV8 called on their media colleagues to unite against the illegal stalking and wiretapping of journalists: 'We urge you all to sign a joint request to the General Prosecutor's Office demanding a criminal investigation into the circumstances under which we were wiretapped and stalked. It is time to join our efforts to have those who ordered and those who executed the order on our abusive and illegal wiretapping criminally punished.' Remember: it is time to join our efforts...

The second case. On 11 November 2019, several employees of state-owned Moldpres Information Agency were given prior notice that they would be made redundant because the founder had approved a new staff structure and

staffing limit at Moldpres. The hard-working and talented photojournalists Andrei Mardare and Mihai Vengher, who spent most of their lives working at Moldpres, were among those who got the notice. Vengher claimed that he had worked there for 30 years, that he didn't do politics, but was forced to sign for the layoff even though it's absurd for a national news agency not to have photojournalists.

My fellow journalists commiserate with their colleagues at Moldpres, they provide moral support, but no more than that. As it is often the case in such situations – when someone is subject to an act of injustice, it sows the seeds of discord among comrades, it brings about wickedness, strife and slyness, and rivalry for job retention. Unfortunately, this is what reality looks like in our guild of journalists.

Over the last 15 years, I have often hailed at official and unofficial meetings and in debates about the fate of journalists: Alas, how much we miss the good old Union of Journalists! Although a few years ago I still kindled the hope that its last Chair, Valeriu Saharneanu, would breathe new life into it, for a while now I have accepted that it was buried without any ceremony.

Nevertheless, we still hope a professional corporate association will be established that will support and promote our journalistic brotherhood. I suggested, I supported what other colleagues started with participation of foreign experts, nurturing hope for establishing a trade union that would defend the freedom of journalists, put some pressure on mass-media employers violating the Labor Code, support and encourage responsible, quality journalism and respond to crises affecting journalists or media organizations. I am aware that some of my colleagues have even gone so far as to establish for this purpose a collaboration with the MediaSind trade union from the Romanian Federation of Journalists that also has an online platform – MediaSind TV, where the members of the trade union can share their views online, find out about journalists' rights, the Code of Ethics. It also has a video section where one can upload information on journalism and the work of the trade union.



Employer abuses can also be revealed on this platform, and journalists can post their 'inconvenient' productions that were not allowed to go on air. An important aspect is that MediaSind, the Romanian Journalists' Trade Union, has branches both for state-owned TVR, Radio Romania, AGERPRES and for online media and freelancers. Ever since it was established 18 years ago, MediaSind has won in court dozens of trials related to recovering the salary rights of its members and has publicly rebuked several cases of abuse by managers of public media institutions who demonstrated dictatorial tendencies.

It is plain to see that neither the support of our foreign partners, nor of our brothers from across the Prut River has resulted in success for the Moldovan mass-media where poverty and political schemes forced journalists to forget what is professional solidarity and corporate spirit. Divided by political criteria and by group interests, in the absence of a professional union and, in particular, of a professional trade union, the journalists are no longer a force to command respect, with the press standing far from being the fourth power in the state. What is more, journalists are dealing more and more with frustrations, neglect and being blamed and turned into slaves of mass-media patrons.

The logical question is: who defends the journalists now? Who is going to defend Andrei Mardare and Mihai Vengher, two professionals with undeniable merits in photojournalism? Who defends Nicolae Roibu, their colleague from Moldpres, who wrote on a social network that he goes daily in the field and makes news by attending events, while being paid two to three times less than other journalists who write their news only on the basis of press releases? What comes next after the TV8 journalists' call to join our efforts?

Traditionally, in such situations, the main media NGOs respond: the Independent Journalism Center, the Association of Independent Press, the Association of Electronic Press, the Center for Investigative Journalism, the Press Freedom Committee, the Association of Independent TV Journalists, the 'Acces-Info' Center... They have recently requested that Chicu Government would include in its Activity Program an action aimed at improving the mass-media situation. I think that this request has a trade unionist side to it. The encouragement made recently at the Mass-media Forum by journalists had trade unionist tendencies as well, since the journalists were urged to show solidarity in cases where the authorities, parties and other social actors did not demonstrate proper conduct; to observe strictly the ethical norms and professional standards; to

refuse participation in denigration and media lynching campaigns, regardless of their purpose; to keep developing their professional skills to be able provide readers and viewers with quality journalistic products and to organize professional development courses. This was confirmed by another urging of journalists to look into the opportunity of establishing a trade union of theirs that would deal with the social protection of journalists.

The organizers invited a foreign expert to the forum – Claude Robillard, former Secretary General of the Professional Federation of Quebec Journalists, Canada – who spoke about journalists' trade unions in terms of protection and accountability in the mass-media sector. This way I learned that in Quebec there is a Professional Federation of Journalists, a Press Council and the Press Trade Union. They were established when the society was going through a crisis, and the journalists understood that they had unite to defend their rights, including the social ones. The Federation defends the freedom of the press, the Council – professional deontology, and the Union – the social rights of the journalists: working conditions, wages, leaves etc. For instance, during the crisis, the journalists' trade union in Quebec got involved and got half of the journalists' salaries to be paid by the government, in another case – it found sponsors to save a magazine from going bankrupt. They managed to have a law passed that prohibited media owners from using strikebreakers if the journalists went on a strike.

Now, imagine we had a good and well-functioning journalists' trade union, which would have called its members on a general strike when it found out about the phone tapping of several media representatives by the Security and Intelligence Service and by the Police Inspectorate, with the media owners not having the right to use strikebreakers. Then everybody, including the SIS, would have understood that the mass-media is a force.

The state of the mass-media over the last years makes it clear that a journalists' trade union needs to be set up. This initiative could be introduced by a media NGO, which, with support from development partners, would lay the groundwork for such a union. I am certain that many of my colleagues would agree to join and even pay for its operation, let's say, 0.5% of their salary through a centralized system, via the accounting departments of the media organization they work in. This would be something to expect if we want to become a force and to build a civilized society.

*Gheorghe BUDEANU*

*analytical magazine*

# The relationship Between the Press and the Authorities: How Should We Reform It to Exclude Selective Communication?

*Since independence, the press has been and is always regarded as a basic tool through which politicians “of any color or orientation” fulfill their ultimate dream: to push the buttons. Often they do not aim to contribute to citizens’ welfare or to the development of the economy but rather to climb as high as possible and to present themselves as minor dieties loved by the people. This is a sad story that is unfortunately repeated every three to four years.*

Without exception, politicians, especially, the more ambitious political leaders, have devoted their energies to controlling the media or, more precisely, the media information flow. Almost every civil servant and high-level official wants to appear as attractive, smart and good as possible on the screen, in headlines or in pictures. They usually have money and advocate both left and right and think they do it with great success.

Most often the communicator is the closest to the civil servant. The number one goal is for the boss to appear in the press as often as possible and at his/her best. The communicator will do everything to achieve this goal, especially since the boss becomes very generous when the boss looks good and loved.

Recent years have shown a growing development in these trends. Few communicators remain in an outlet for years. Even if they are civil servants, they are only representatives of the boss. Many times, however, if they do their jobs properly, they become well-known and appreciated, sometimes better known to the public than the boss. Anatol Golea, Igor Volnitchi or Vlad Turcanu are obvious examples. However, most of the communicators who serve the boss fall into oblivion. They disappear after a change in power.

Today, we are witnessing a new change of government. As usual, new spokespersons, consultants and names appear, and the first question is, will the former institutional communications also change?

The last two years were probably the saddest in the history of Moldovan public communication. The Plahotniuc holding took over all the official information flow. For the first time in history, ministers actually fled from the press entering and exiting through back doors at government meetings. A draconian rule was imposed through which any request for information had to be made in writing. That would not have been a problem if the answers were given immediately, but this was not the case. Instead, the Law on Access to Information was invoked which gives an official the right to respond within two weeks or even within one month.

And we had some absurd situations. Experienced communicators who previously had reacted in an exemplary manner began to ask for written requests from journalists for answers to simple questions.

All communication had to pass party censorship. I know this for a fact. An official command center was set up within the party composed of local and Romanian advisors. That mastodon scarcely reacted and communicated poorly and with delay.

In addition to the strictly controlled information flow, public appearances were also very few. Ministers and high-level officials were prohibited from appearing in the free and independent media; instead public communication occurred on Facebook where they created official pages.

But censorship was imposed here as well. Colleagues from *Ziarul de Garda* showed clearly how unfavorable comments were deleted from the page of former Prime Minister Filip. Government communicators and civil servants were transformed into executors of party orders. In principle, a big bubble with only good and beautiful opinions was created, so it is not surprising that it suddenly burst.

We also had some situations that were difficult to understand. For example, we found out that the press service of the executive branch created a closed group on



Facebook to send simple information to the press like the Prime Minister's agenda and other technical details. I was very surprised when I saw that only the journalists of the Plahotniuc holding and journalists who were "friends" with the communicators or the advisors of the former Prime Minister were invited to join the group. This group distributed elementary, basic information like the public program of the Prime Minister and issues from the executive's work program. Why was it closed? So the information could reach only "trustworthy" people?

The first major reform that needs to be carried out concerns the exclusion of such selective communication thus ensuring the transparency of government actions. The agenda should be published on time and distributed to everyone, not just to a secret group or hidden community based on interests and consisting of docile and controllable journalists. It is time for this separation between *ours* and *yours* to disappear.

The second step that needs to be taken in the relationship between the press and government officials is much faster communication. Technology allows immediate reactions using a huge number of applications. I would like any press service to act like that of the Swiss prosecutor's office. When information emerged that Vladimir Plahotniuc would undergo criminal prosecution in the country of the Cantons, we requested a reaction by email. We received their answer in less than an hour. Later we requested more information, and they answered just as quickly.

Third and, perhaps most important, we must forget about preferences, friends and affections. Communication must be the same to any journalist regardless of the name or the media he/she represents. As I said before, the dichotomy between *ours* and *yours* must disappear.

This is not only in the interest of journalists and citizens but also in that of officials as the events of the last few months have shown perfectly. What is the point of controlling the entire official information flow and of holding all means of communication and, theoretically, the most important news stations if you lose power and leverage in the country?

Voters and citizens expect results, not PR. Fair and honest communication is the only thing that matters, but it depends on the professionalism of the communicators. Therefore, they must be given the freedom to do their jobs in compliance with its rigors, not as the boss wants or demands.

Even if we are witnessing all kinds of revolutions in the media in terms of new technologies and social networks, journalism is essentially content oriented. "Content is the King" said Bill Gates. Create or contribute to creating truthful, real and solid content, dear communicators, not soap bubbles that burst easily and hurt a lot.

*Cristian JARDAN*

# Moldovan televisions: post-election metamorphoses

*Both the beginning and the end of 2019 found us in electoral campaigns, each with its own peculiarities. Nevertheless, few people could have anticipated the political events of June 2019 though these events had a direct and almost immediate impact not only on the political configuration of the Republic of Moldova but also on the media sector. Despite being considered the most powerful owner of media outlets in recent years, the fact that Vlad Plahotniuc fled the country and the Democratic Party gave up power significantly weakened the strength of his holding company which had been built continuously and systematically for years. While it initially seemed that we might actually witness the demonopolization of the media sector and the creation of fair and free conditions for the development of a pluralist and balanced press, new media monopolization trends emerged very soon, especially in relation to the audiovisual sector. In other words, the transfer of power at the political level occurred in the media too. Subsequently, the two election campaigns of 2019 have made it clear that The Party of the Socialists (PSRM) will seek to strengthen its own media holding company rather than ensuring media pluralism and taking measures against concentration of media ownership.*

## General information

On the whole, the ten TV stations monitored by the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) in Moldova during the autumn election campaign provided air time to all candidates and broadcast their activities. Even though most election items were quotations of what candidates had said without in-depth analysis or the provision of relevant background information, we could say that in general the audience had access to a plurality of voices. However, taken individually, the number of television stations that clearly revealed their political sympathies thus limiting the pluralism increased from one week to the next. Several important national stations got involved in political partisanship during the campaign for general local and new parliamentary elections. The analysis pointed out that the closer the election date was, the stronger was the bias, favor and/or disfavor of some audiovisual media service providers towards certain electoral contenders.

## PSRM builds up its aedia Arsenal

To be precise, monitoring data showed that two TV stations affiliated with the PSRM (NTV Moldova and Accent TV) heavily promoted the candidate of this party for Mayor of Chisinau, both through quantity of air time and portrayal in an only positive context. At the same time, other candidates were either ignored or mentioned briefly in neutral or negative lights on these stations. Last but not least, during the second round, the PSRM opponent was repeatedly disparaged on both TV stations which proves bias and prejudice. It is important to note in this context that on 21 October 2019 the National Broadcasting Regulatory Authority (BC) approved the request of *Accent TV* to change its name to *Primul în Moldova* subsequent to signing a contract to rebroadcast Russian station *Pervii Kanal* programs from Moscow. At the beginning of August, the BC included *Accent TV* on the list of “must carry” stations to be broadcast compulsorily by all cable operators in the country. At the same time, *Prime TV* continues to broadcast certain products of *Pervii Kanal*; it is not clear so far if this is legal or not.

## Sor Political Party and the Democratic Party do not give up

TV station Central Television was also biased during the election campaign. It is affiliated with the Sor Political Party according to the monitoring reports of civil society. In this case partisanship was obviously in favor of this party’s candidates, especially disfavoring the two candidates who made it into the second round of elections for Chisinau City Hall.

According to the same reports, two TV stations closely related to the Democratic Party (PDM)—*Prime TV* and *Publika TV*—were not so involved in political partisanship though they particularly disfavored the ACUM Bloc candidate for mayor of the capital city by selecting a negative context for any news that targeted him even though the number of attacks decreased considerably compared with previous election campaigns. During the second round, the two stations concentrated on PDM candidates running outside Chisinau and reported only briefly on their Chisinau candidate’s activities with no



obvious bias. At the end of October, the current president of the PDM, Pavel Filip, explained this change during a TV show stating that the party had no more influence on any television station: *“Unfortunately, we have no media resources. It is an issue that we will have to solve and see what media package we could have.”* (TVR Moldova, 28 October 2019, ‘*Punctul pe Azi*’, min. 38).

### From the camp of the (more) balanced broadcast

At the same time, the coverage of the candidates for Mayor of Chisinau by two other media service providers (RTR Moldova and Jurnal TV) was close to balanced; however, sometimes they did slightly favor or disfavor one of two contenders with the best chances either with expanded coverage or presenting their activities in a positive light.

As for the national public channel, monitoring data showed that it oscillated from balanced, quantitative coverage to slightly favoring the socialist candidate or ignoring several candidates in the first round.

At the same time, the IJC reports show that two regional TV stations (TV8 and ProTV Chisinau) were balanced in covering the election campaign, coming closest to meeting deontological standards and legal provisions.<sup>[1]</sup>

### What should be done?

The authors of the monitoring reports recommended that TV stations cease appraising/commenting on election events and candidates in the news to ensure pluralism and diversity of opinion and that they should also offer the right to reply to all parties concerned in cases of conflict.

At the same time, the BC was urged to develop intervention tools and to apply them promptly and efficiently when media service providers deviate from the legal provisions and also to rule on penalties proportionate to the frequency and degree of infringements.

In its turn, the BC sanctioned seven stations, including five of those monitored by the IJC, for violations of electoral and media legislation; however, the authority monitored only the six national service providers during the election campaign: four TV stations and two radio stations. With a few exceptions, none of the six presented a real danger of contaminating the information space or the brains of their audiences with harmful products. The really important ones in this equation were left out of the broadcasting regulator’s monitoring, seriously violating both the legislation and media professionalism. Furthermore, when they were applied, the sanctions were disproportionate in relation to the number, frequency and degree of the violations committed. As a result, the penalties were rather ceremonial and were not taken seriously by the media service providers concerned.

### Lessons (still) to be learned

Thus, political partisanship, limited pluralism of opinions and the disfavoring of opponents continue to dominate the way election campaigns are covered by the TV stations that can shape public opinion. The change of dominant actors on the political scene seems to have deepened the bias of TV stations affiliated with these actors. We know in mathematics that one can change the order of the terms in a sum and the result will be the same. To get a different result, we need to change the terms, not just move them around.

Aneta GONTA

[1] <http://www.media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/raport-nr1monitorizarea-mass-mediei-%C3%AEn-campania-electoral%C4%83-pentru-alegerile-locale>; <http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/raport-nr-2-monitorizarea-mass-mediei-%C3%AEn-campania-electoral%C4%83-pentru-alegerile-locale>; <http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/raport-nr-3-monitorizarea-mass-mediei-%C3%AEn-campania-electoral%C4%83-pentru-alegerile-locale>; <http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/raport-nr-4-monitorizarea-mass-mediei-%C3%AEn-campania-electoral%C4%83-pentru-alegerile-locale>

# How Much Does Access to Information Cost In Terms of Years and Money?

*In the summer of 2019, journalists from Sudan, El Salvador, Cambodia and the Republic of Moldova engaged in a new fight for access to information. Why are we on the same list? These countries do not have an association agreement with the European Union; they simply face similar problems in terms of corruption and transparency. In Sudan, after lengthy protests that led to the fall of dictator Bashir, journalists asked the new authorities to review the Law on Access to Information. Cambodian authorities promised to adjust the law this September, stating that the recommendations of the UN and UNESCO were taken into account when drafting the new regulatory act.*

In El Salvador, the situation is the same as in the Republic of Moldova in June 2019 and after November 2019: their leader Bukele does not give any interviews to investigative reporters but instead uses several channels, including social networks, to promote his own point of view without accepting the need and the obligation to answer questions, especially uncomfortable ones.

In 2019, a serious attempt was made in the Republic of Moldova to change things, but progress has been minor. This year, investigative reporters from Moldova will mark a decade of struggle to get access to electronic databases. It is a continuous fight with battles won and lost, with compromises and with a new beginning that took place in June 2019 but now seems to be taking backward steps.

## 1991–2009. Personal visits, requests on paper

During this period, the databases needed for journalistic work were not available online. If journalists wanted to find out who the owner of a particular company was, they had to go personally to the Chamber of State Registration, submit a handwritten application and indicate what exactly they wanted to know. They also had to leave their personal data and pay a certain amount of money. Within a few days, the journalists had to come back and pick up the information printed on paper. After 2009, we began to believe in the possibility of a future democracy that combined with new technologies would ensure transparency that up to then had been almost non-existent.

## 2010–2011 First electronic databases

In the 2000s, the statements of assets of civil servants were managed by the Central Committee of Control of the Statements on Income and Property of Civil Servants created in 2002 and controlled by Vladimir Voronin, Moldova's former president. That year we wrote dozens of messages to all the authorities and to the leaders of the new government. Access to those statements, although it was public on paper, was limited in a very obscure way by political interests and the tradition of not exposing corruptible people from political parties and only rarely exposing rivals. A few years later, the NIA—the portal for the statements—would appear, but about that a little later.

## 2012–2014. Online access to the Chamber of State Registration, Cadastru and the web portal of courts

We requested non-stop online access to the databases of the Chamber of State Registration (CSR) and also to *Cadastru*, and we got it! Official contracts with these institutions followed along with monthly fees and fees for each company. It was not easy to pay these amounts, but it was revolutionarily comfortable to be able to access the databases online without the need for reporters to go back and forth between institutions. During that period, the investigative media launched a series of reports about the palaces, luxury houses and real estate holdings of officials.

I still remember that series of reports made by *Ziarul de Garda (ZdG)*. It started with the house of Anatolie Donciu, the first head of the NIA. In fact, it wasn't the *Cadastru* or CSR databases that served as incentives to produce the articles but rather the journalist's curiosity and public interest. Yet, without these databases, the integrity issues of civil servants would have never been properly addressed.

As a result of the curiosity of investigative journalists, during this period hundreds of articles and reports were published by *ZdG*, RISE Moldova, the Center for Investigative Journalism, and other portals and TV stations on abuses, conflicts of interest and money laundering involving the MPs, state presidents, ministers, judges, prosecutors, the metropolitan, bishops, mayors and party



leaders. Without such articles, the Republic of Moldova would have looked even less transparent. There is one important thing to note: The publications would not have been possible without the payments made by the editorial offices to the state treasury for access to the databases. These amounts would have been difficult to pay without the support of external partners offered to those editorial offices.

### **2015–2019. Limited access to the databases, bigger loss of money and time**

It is currently a bleak period in the history of access to information in the Republic of Moldova. Already in January 2015, we were informed by the CSR that the fees for accessing any information about a company would increase by 100 percent. Although we made numerous requests asking for justification concerning the price and why the price of public information sold to journalists would double, we didn't receive any answers. In fact, the authorities started to ignore the questions of investigative journalists. In a few months, the CSR's search engine of companies and owners was shut down. Then some search options were removed. To this day, it is not possible to make a search by patronymic. Then it was decided to subordinate these institutions to the Public Services Agency (PSA). Even higher fees and even more burdensome procedures followed. Journalists had to start all over again going in person to the agency with a power of attorney and a stamp. They had to file an application, wait for several days, provide proof of payment, face delays, stay in queues, etc. etc. My colleague Anatolie Esanu provided a detailed description of the loss of money and time: "Four truncated work days and MDL 896 for six A4 sheets and some notes." Any investigative journalist will confirm that obtaining data from registers does not actually mean getting accurate information about an issue. Investigative work means sifting through hundreds of pages of documents to obtain or not obtain proof of an abuse.

The difficulties do not end there. Recently, the PSA decided to complicate things even more. Mold-street explains point-by-point how obtaining public information has become practically impossible.

During the same period, the search engine on the web site of the courts was shut down. Then, the procedure XXX was put in place and court decisions were depersonalized in an abusive manner. It was necessary to organize protests in order to restore some access to these decisions.

At the same time, the statements of assets submitted to NIA remained "unscanned" for several years because of the institution's incapacity and changes that took too long.

We didn't give up and kept fighting. Countless meetings and committees were conducted with officials from the government, Parliament and PSA and with all of them at once. The government's position was clear as different pretexts were invoked and the databases became increasingly inaccessible.

The dissatisfaction of journalists was even greater now that despite the small victories won after a decade of struggle for electronic access to databases and that were used in the public interest, no one wants to go back to rock bottom, and it has become even more difficult to tolerate opacity.

### **June 2019. The fight continues**

As soon as the Sandu Government was formed, we sent a letter with the following content: "We request that you facilitate access to information from the databases for investigative journalists. Note that until 2015, the access to some databases was simpler and cheaper. Then the prices increased dramatically and the search engines were reorganized with limitations for identifying information."

### **The Chamber of State Registration (reorganized by merger with the Public Services Agency PI)**

#### **a. Online access**

We have online access only to information about the founders, the declared fields of activity, and data from the annual financial report. This information costs MDL 20, 50 or 100. In 2015, the prices were doubled without justification, and journalists did not get any answers to their requests for explanations and discounts.

Since that time, the information about the founders of a company no longer includes their patronymic which often creates confusion (there may be several managers of companies with the same name and surname). This can sometimes lead to regrettable errors by connecting a company with a person who has nothing to do with it.

**b. Offline access: information about the company's history and the procedure for getting access to the file.**

**The history of the legal entity or of the individual entrepreneur.** In order to get access to the file containing information about the history of the legal entity or of the individual entrepreneur, we have to pay MDL 245 per company, go to the Public Services Agency headquarters and write an application on paper. The requested information is issued within 3 days. We can neither request nor obtain information online.

**Getting acquainted at PSA headquarters with the file documents of the legal entity or the individual entrepreneur costs MDL 226 per company.** This service is of crucial importance for investigative journalists; however, there are huge difficulties such as high costs and extremely burdensome procedures.

If we pay by transfer, we have to go first to the office located at 42 Pushkin Street to get proof even if the money was transferred to them a few months before.

Then we go to the office located at 47 Pushkin Street (with the proof, the power of attorney, the proof that we are registered as a personal data operator, the identity card, the press card) and we write a request to get access to the file.

**We get the file, after three days at PSA headquarters.**

We study it and if we find something useful, we ask for copies of certain pages (power of attorneys, sales-purchase agreements, etc.), which again **costs money and again it takes three days until we receive them.**

**2. 'Cadastru' (reorganized by merger with the Public Services Agency PI)**

Currently, the access is fee-based: MDL 240 per month with a limited number of visits (200); however, this database has limitations. In some EU countries as well

as in Ukraine, the access to cadastral information is not restricted to search by address only. There, journalists can search information about all the properties owned by an individual or by a company. In Moldova this is impossible.

In July 2019 we submitted a list of requirements about how to use the databases in the best interest of citizens as journalists as well as government officials serve the citizens. A series of consultations took place and decisions and adjustment plans were made. Then the government that listened to us, heard us and tried to adjust things, was dismissed. We are currently trying to get free access to the Data.gov.md portal.

Since November 2019 with the formation of the new government in Chisinau, ministers answering questions from investigative journalists with the statement "send an official request for information" has come back into fashion. In the summer of 2019, the Sandu Government responded to the official request for information by the *ZdG* editorial office addressed to the Filip Government in December 2018 regarding the expenses for organizing the Christmas town. Who will be willing to give an answer to the *ZdG* editorial office in the summer of 2020 about the expenses of the Chicu Government for the holiday oddities organized in December 2019? The current databases do not provide answers to these questions.

In addition, we have one more request that we want to make public. Access to information is a constitutional right and is confirmed by international documents ratified by the Republic of Moldova. We ask the authorities of this country to provide easy access with token or no fees and with indestructible access mechanisms. We also request punishment for those who violate the access to information. We want real penalties for violating our constitutional right. We will fight for this right.

*Alina RADU*



## Loretta Handrabura: “The Observance of Gender Balance Regarding Sources, Protagonists and Topics Addressed Is Not Just Preferable but Compulsory for Journalists”

**Media Azi:** *Mrs Handrabura, as a specialist in the field of gender equality, you collaborate quite intensely with journalists and media NGOs. In your opinion, how “balanced” is the media in our country within the guild?*

**Loretta Handrabura:** Generally, media outlets lack balance as regards the share of men and women who develop media products. Although journalism, like other fields, is feminized, media management with a few exceptions is mainly represented by men though reporters who work in the field are mainly women. However, editorial policies, regardless of who takes the decisions and who is the owner, must ensure gender balance because equal treatment of women and men is a fundamental defining right. This right underpins the modern democratic society and is indispensable for its development.

Certainly, women journalists have sufficient knowledge to work as top media managers, manage an institution and take responsibilities. I think of Alina Radu, Director of *Ziarul de Garda*, one of the most-read periodicals in the Republic of Moldova. According to various recent studies, the problem lies in the difficulties in finding the balance between the time for work and the time for family. Women continue to spend more time on household chores and to take care of children and sick relatives at the expense of professional growth.

**M. A.:** *Besides the fact that there is an imbalance in the editorial offices, we note certain deficiencies in the content of journalistic materials, especially when it comes to sources. Speaking about this, the example of Male Experts vs Female Experts comes to mind. We can see with some exceptions that when it comes to topics related to internal or external politics, the economy, finances, and the so called ‘tough areas’, male experts are involved. When it comes to health, especially child health, education, etc., female experts are interviewed most of the time. Why do you think this is happening and what do we have to do to balance gender representation in media content?*



Photo: PNUD

**L. H.:** The argument that there are few female experts who can express their opinions or explain certain things to the general public on political, economic, and financial topics is false. Annually, there are more female graduates with Bachelor, Masters and PhD degrees. They are potential experts whose expertise, experience, and knowledge really matter and can be harnessed. We just need to identify them, include them in a database and put them on the map.

There is no reason to avoid taking into account the opinions of women even if the events are organized by men and the audience is primarily male. A male journalist and a female journalist can cover this event for both men and women who live in our country. In this case, it is very

relevant to find out the opinion of women, because any public event has an impact on men and on women as well. Thus, the observance of gender balance regarding sources, protagonists and topics addressed is not just preferable but compulsory for journalists.

**M. A.:** *To make this clear for everyone: Is the use of feminine forms in media a whim or a “cool trend”? Can we say this is one of the means that helps the media to ensure gender balance in society?*

**L. H.** The use of gender-balanced language and the use of feminine forms for positions, professions and occupations is by no means a whim and nothing fancy. It is proof of equal treatment from the point of view of language. Language that makes women invisible is the mark of a society in which they have a secondary role as language is a political issue. I proved this in the study entitled “The Non-Existent Language” published last year which I developed together with linguist Alexandra Gherasim and with the lexicographer Marin Butuc. It is a scientific work and contains practical recommendations based on the Classification of Occupations in our country. The use of the masculine forms as a generic norm for the names of professions or functions when the Romanian language allows and recommends the feminine form through lexicographic sources such as dictionaries, is a form of sexism or gender discrimination through language.

**M. A.:** *I am aware you promote strongly the use of terms in their feminine forms for professions, even by your own example. In 2011, when I was a political reporter and you were working at the Ministry of Education, someone there was making jokes about the fact that the Ministry was led by three women: a minister of education, a deputy-minister and a FEMALE deputy minister, that is, you. After that, at the Ministry of Youth and Sports you were also a “FEMALE minister.” In this context, when it comes to positions, especially political ones, many colleagues in the media say that they do not use the feminine forms of positions because either they are not correct or because they sound improper, and on the other hand, we don't have too many women in politics who make their voices heard and who promote gender equality. How do you feel about the interaction of the media and women in politics?*

**L. H.:** Ten years ago I started to insist on the use of feminine forms because I knew I was right. The great linguist Mioara Avram, in her work *Words of the Romanian Language Between Right and Wrong*, also published in 2001,

reminds me that she recommends feminine forms when they exist, and not the corresponding masculine or the heavy compound forms such as woman lawyer or woman counsellor.

Over the last five years, the media has been taking note of gender imbalances journalists were using that reinforced gender stereotypes regarding the roles of men and women in public and private life.

The analysis of the public discourse from the gender perspective of the candidates in the new Parliamentary Elections in the single-member constituencies No 17, 33, 48, and 50 of 20 October 2019, for example, showed us that all candidates had the opportunity to make themselves known through the debates organized by the audiovisual media. Unfortunately, some independent candidates (Emilia Ristic, Carolina Panico, Lidia Grozav) and Svetlana Popa from the PSRM did not appear in any debates. They, as well as other candidates like Vitalii Evtodiev, PSRM, constituency No 48, Ion Angheluta (independent candidate, constituency No 17), totally ignored the chance to make themselves known through media, to speak about their mandate priorities as women with expertise and to gain the trust of the citizens in the constituencies in which they were candidates.

As for the media that covered the elections, only the moderator of debates onTV8 naturally used the feminine forms in relation to the candidates who participated in the electoral debates.

**M. A.:** *You said language is a political issue and politics is something that is subject to the regulations. Are there any norms and standards for ensuring gender equality through language, for example in European countries, that would be examples of good practices?*

**L. H.:** Of course. You should know that there are regulations at the European level in this regard. In 2007, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe made a recommendation for member states, including for the Republic of Moldova, as regards the standards and the mechanisms for ensuring gender equality. When we speak about eliminating sexism, we explicitly mention the non-admission of sexist language, through which the principle of gender equality is violated.

Also, in March this year the Committee of Ministers made another recommendation for member states and



for the Republic of Moldova too. The recommendation is about preventing and fighting sexism. According to this recommendation, language and communications “must not enshrine the hegemony of the male model” and calls for the use of non-stereotypical communication to educate, raise awareness and prevent sexual discrimination. For example, it recommends ending the use of sexist expressions and using gender-sensitive language.

**M. A.:** *I understand what the law says, but what does science say about this?*

**L. H.:** The Academy of Science of Moldova has not given an answer yet. On the other hand, the French Academy, like the Spaniards, the Italians and recently the Ukrainians, has decided to emasculate their languages.

Language, according to scientists from these countries, must contain lexemes that allow expressions about women and men to be on an equal footing. Here I could come up with a very relevant example: the case of the “Chancellor of Germany.” Following a range of discussions among specialists in the field, in Goethe the word “chancellor” (“*kanzlerin*”) appeared, the feminine form of the masculine “chancellor” (“*kanzler*”).

Thus, the masculine standard in official documents such as the classification of occupations, job listings and specialties feeds the perception that women occupy the places that are “reserved” for the other gender and should fit into this standard considered to be “neutral.”

By recommending the use of the masculine form as a generic and the agreement between the referent, the position and the occupation in the masculine because it is grammatically correct, the fact that the linguistic norm is not timeless and is not permanent is overlooked. Like most languages, Romanian by its nature is permissive and admits both masculine and feminine forms. The problem is not a linguistic one but is a social one and consists in using them or not in speech. The increasingly frequent certification and use of feminine forms in public discourse proves that a good part of the Romanian-speaking population, consciously or less consciously, feels that the language is less mobile than the society itself and no longer tolerates the masculine forms of the language that are still “protected” by the rules of academicians who we hope will finally take the initiative in this respect.

**M. A.:** *How can journalists help improve the situation linked to gender balance in our society?*

**L. H.:** We need gender education that promotes the partnership between men and women and, of course, the adequate media education of media consumers. In another train of thought, this can be achieved through the correct understanding of the principle of gender equality by media producers. We need to train and raise the awareness of future journalists regarding this topic by starting with the faculties. Those who are already employed need appropriate training to promote the role and contribution of women and men in the construction and development of society in a proper way through the media. The training we have been conducting with various professionals from all types of media throughout the country since 2015 is already showing results. *Ziarul de Garda*, *Agora.md*, *diez.md*, TV 8 and *Unimedia.info* are among first gender sensitive institutions; they have proved everything is possible.

On the other hand, I should mention that not only the use of terms in the feminine form and the education of the media consumer are essential. The media can also contribute through quality material that addresses gender equality. We have to point out that there are several media outlets that have been producing quality products in this regard in recent years. For example, *Moldova.org* wrote about the history of “the moustache of a female nanny,” according to the title. It’s about a man who works in kindergarten as an educator. The editorial staff of *Oameni si Kilometri* reflects the condition of women in its articles, especially those in rural areas and how they face domestic violence, harassment, etc. Also, *Platzforma* covered the topic of gender equality in the multimedia report “The woman from the village of Moldova. Between equality and reality.”

Some time ago the Independent Journalism Center produced a series of shows entitled “*Impartit la doi*” [Divided in two] which covered in detail the topic of gender equality. Therefore, through the work they do every day, journalists can and should include topics related to gender equality on the public agenda.

*For Media Azi: Irina GOTISAN*

# Regional Print Media: Where Is It Going?

***Starting in 2020, the print versions of Jurnal de Chisinau and SP (Balti) will no longer be issued, two important newspapers that are both members of the Association of Independent Press of the Republic of Moldova. Earlier in 2018, the distribution area of Expresul was reduced from three districts (Ungheni, Calarasi, Nisporeni) to two (Ungheni and Calarasi). It is very likely that in the coming years more Moldovan periodicals will give up printing. The circulation of newspapers is continuously decreasing; nothing can stop this trend for now. This means less money in the accounts of editorial offices and less enthusiasm among editorial office teams.***

## What is happening?

People no longer want to subscribe to newspapers and magazines as they did before. All surveys show that the main sources of information of Moldovan citizens are TV stations and the Internet. Only the elderly who have not learned to use computers and have no access to the Internet and, implicitly, to many recent websites, have remained faithful to print media. At the same time, most of them cannot afford and do not want to subscribe to TV cable packages. Thus, they rely on the two or three stations they receive with a simple antenna.

A relatively high number of newspaper and magazine subscriptions are from business entities and people abroad who responded to the call of editorial offices to subscribe for their alma maters or their close relatives. In addition, they participate in the various contests announced by the editorial offices and post offices. If you give them prizes (many and valuable), they will do everything possible including by less than honest means to enter as many subscriptions as possible. As soon as such contests are no longer in operation, circulation drops dramatically. My statement is based on the experience of *Expresul* newspaper.

Some of my colleagues told me at the beginning that it would be a great idea to give prizes to the employees of the post offices if we wanted circulation to increase. I followed their advice and, indeed, circulation increased significantly.

I announced contests for one, two and three years, but I finally decided it was enough because people already knew about *Expresul*, they read it and we had received many comments from readers, most of them positive. Thus, I reasoned, readers would not wait for the postwoman to ask them to subscribe. The result, however, was sad: Circulation decreased by one third.

Those who go to post offices and subscribe on their own initiative, knowingly and willingly are fewer and fewer. We must admit that Moldovans lack a reading culture, including the culture of reading newspapers and magazines.

In my opinion, the lack of financial resources, low salaries and pensions are not an obstacle to subscribing to a periodical. The cost of a subscription is actually very low, especially for regional newspapers. For instance, a monthly subscription to *Expresul* costs only MDL 10 and over 12 years it has increased by only 30% from MDL 7. Unfortunately, most teachers do not receive a newspaper even if they can afford a subscription to their favorite publication. I asked some teachers from Ungheni why they didn't subscribe. The answer was basically the same: "Well, I read *Expresul*, *Timpul*, and *Ziarul de Garda* online."

Probably, young people would answer the same way as they can no longer imagine their lives without the Internet. In the era of information technology such a response is somewhat logical and natural.

It would seem that even for the editorial office teams of many newspapers it would be easier to give up printing which requires heavy expenses (for paper, printing, distribution) and to focus only on the online versions.

Still, there is a problem. Websites cannot exist or develop out of sheer enthusiasm. They need financial resources. How to get them? Currently, the only sources are grants and external funding. No matter how much they want or how good they are, no site in the Republic of Moldova, especially outside Chisinau, would be able to earn enough money from views and advertising to maintain an editorial office.



Since we are a country with a very small population, it is impossible to get tens of thousands views daily let alone hundreds of thousands. In addition, we don't have much advertising and people are used to newspaper advertisements so for now, very few accept website advertising despite the high number of views.

A website that aims to address only local topics in a certain region of Moldova is condemned to fight for survival from very beginning. Those who still keep a print version hope to survive with advertising, which is increasingly less but allows publications for now to stay afloat, to maintain a site and to hope for better times for the media in the Republic of Moldova.

### What can be done?

The Resolution of the 2019 Media Forum contains solutions for the revival of the print media in the Republic of Moldova. I will mention only few of them:

- improve media legislation;
- develop and promote laws necessary for the long-term development of independent media outlets in the Republic of Moldova;
- implement the National Concept of Mass Media Development;
- include media outlets in the list of potential beneficiaries of percentage designation so that individual taxpayers can direct 2% of their income taxes to support media outlets;
- develop strategies to support independent periodicals, including by focusing on distribution channels and tax incentives.

The question is whether the authorities really want free and independent media in the Republic of Moldova and whether they are willing to help improve the media legislation and support periodicals.

### What do readers want?

Recently, the editorial office of *Expresul* conducted a survey among our readers. The question was simple: What would they like to find in the publication they read?

The answers were varied and included the following:

- a poem, an essay, an analysis written by people from Ungheni, Calarasi;
- rules for adequate behavior in society, description of situations concerning district life as examples for children and youth;
- a health section to inform citizens about the treatment of different diseases with advice and topics about the health sector;
- information about occupations and customs of the local residents in the past and now;
- information about local residents that we are proud of—successful people;
- a section for children and youth because they are our future (maybe a funny section where they answer various questions);
- a regular section titled Agenda of Local Public Authorities in order to keep citizens continuously informed and consulted on the most important decisions/activities;
- interviews with mayors, councilors, representatives of state institutions and active citizens.

Do you think that addressing these proposed topics and implementing the sections in question would increase the circulation of the newspaper? Actually, this is a rhetorical question.

### In conclusion

A few years ago during an internship in the USA, I talked with a lady about print media and its future. She told me then that many Americans prefer to read newspapers, not news from websites, even if access to Internet is 100% guaranteed. She also explained why: because reading a newspaper is an indicator of the intellectual level of any American and also of his/her position in society. The majority of middle-class Americans read newspapers. After a media crisis in the USA, newspapers have revived and circulations have started to increase again. For example, the circulation of the *New York Times* increased tenfold last year. Many other American periodicals registered a significant increase in circulation as well.

The situation is different in our country. All newspapers are experiencing a constant decrease in circulation, and if this trend continues, we risk having very few print newspapers. Only the newspapers that obtain grants and external funding and those affiliated with political parties will survive.

Currently, there is no middle class in the Republic of Moldova, no authorities are interested in media development, and journalists are not able to act together in order to claim their rights and fight for them. So, the closure of the print runs of *Jurnal de Chisinau* and *SP* is a logical decision. The fact that ONLY two newspapers are closing is a fortuitous circumstance—for now.

*P.S.:* At the beginning of November I said that I was retiring from the media after almost 30 years in journalism. It was a very difficult decision, but I thought it was the only one that I was able to accept because currently, I don't see how print media can develop and persist. My hope faded and disappointments increased.

In such circumstances, I couldn't and didn't want to continue. A part of the editorial office team led by Natalia Junghietu assumed responsibility for *Expresul*. I sincerely hope they will be more optimistic and will be able to continue to fight to keep the newspaper afloat and, perhaps, even further develop the publication.

*Lucia BACALU*



# Podcast: An Innovation That Has Transformed Journalism

*Moldovan journalism needs a boost. It needs topics discussed in depth and shows that address a topic from all perspectives. For example, what would you recommend that I watch today about marketing something created in Moldova in Romanian? There are shows that approach this topic superficially but no show that deals with it from all perspectives. More recently, there's a new global trend in this regard: inviting experts in specific fields and producing thousands of episodes on a certain topic. This innovative trend is called podcasting, a term that is less known in Moldova.*

It is interesting how we Moldovan journalists try to adopt innovations without understanding them fully. I say this because often, when talking with fellow journalists, I find that they have been doing podcasts for a while. However, when I want to listen to them, I can't find them on my mobile applications but only on their websites or personal blogs.

A podcast is not just an audio recording placed by journalists on their websites. It contains many innovative elements that make it different from an audio recording, such as having an image (artwork); placement on a hosting platform that allows it to be listened to on any mobile phone and also to be analyzed and having a podcast blog with descriptive notes explaining what we are listening to.

Various journalists all around the world have begun to adopt this media tool because there have been some major changes in this regard. First, the use of mobile phones has expanded a lot (over 60% of Europeans have a mobile phone), and they are portable and easy to use for listening to something including a podcast. Second, large media institutions (BBC, CNN, CNBC, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, etc.) that are global journalism trendsetters have begun to create such content and to promote it. Third, many radio programs have been developed as podcasts, and as a result listeners have migrated from offline to online space to listen to them.

## Why did I start a podcast?

For me, journalism was and still is a vocation and a hobby that facilitates my personal development. Over time, this hobby has become more and more difficult to pursue due

to other projects; however, since I can't give up on things that inspire me, I found an innovative way to practice journalism that is fast, interesting and easy to consume. Podcasting has thus proved to be the format that suits me.

While I was studying for my Masters degree in the USA, I did not understand how people there could have full-time jobs and have time for various activities after work and also be well informed. So, I found out that Americans wake up in the morning and listen to the news Alexa (voice command for Amazon Echo Speaker) reports or to that of any other system they have at home, and on the way to work or when they jog, they listen to podcasts. When I asked why they did so their motivation was also interesting: listening didn't take extra time, they learned something new that helped them even in their professional lives and they could do other things at the same time. The truth is that audio content coming through headphones as podcasts is the only content that can be consumed passively while you are doing something else.

According to the results of a survey that I conducted before choosing a name for the podcast I work on, over 60% of Moldovans interviewed did not know how to listen a podcast, did not know what a podcast was or did not think they had time for them. Hmm.. really? In my experience, Americans say exactly the opposite. In the USA, podcasts are so popular that over half of the country's population has listened to a podcast at least once. Actually, they set the trend for such audio recordings in 2008, and at present there are more than 700,000 podcasts with 29 million episodes worldwide. In the countries that we share the same history with like Romania and Russia, podcasting is a growing trend. Romanians have started to create their own podcasts; those made by public persons, radio presenters or well-known magazines are the most popular. Examples could include the podcast ESCA of Andreea Esca, a podcast about fears and concerns called Temeri pentru acasa (fears to deal with at home) or the podcast of Florin Rosoga titled Antreprenori care inspira (Entrepreneurs that inspire). On the Russian side, the interest in podcasts has increased fourfold according to research conducted this year by Brand Analytics. Most often, Russian listeners speak about the American podcast of Joe Rogan, podcasts of the publications Meduza and Life Hacker and that of

the educational program [Arzamas](#). In fact, most of them are listened to by people up to 35 years of age when they are driving or when they are on public transport, when they are working out or walking or when they are busy with household chores.

In Moldova, the concept of the podcast is rather new but is already in use by a few online platforms such as [Agora.md](#), [Moldova.org](#), [Locals.md](#) or by people interested in various fields. Examples would include Dumitru Ciorici with the podcast [PlayGround](#) or Nata Andreev with the podcast [Her Art](#). The podcast I am currently working on will be accessible at the end of October 2019 and will be entitled *Aprinde Becul cu Stella Jemna* (Light the Bulb with Stella Jemna). I have already recorded five episodes with people in different fields including IT, tourism and consultancy. The podcast will be about entrepreneurship, the future of jobs and the innovations that come to us. I will address a number of topics about international trends in various industries as well as the realities of Moldova. In addition, it will offer useful tips from guests for young people who want a profession or for those who have reached the limits of what they do and are looking for something else. The show will last up to 30 minutes, will be produced in Romanian and can be easily listened to on any mobile phone.

I'm saying this to encourage others because we need more podcasts. Statistics from Eastern European countries show that more and more people will start listening to podcasts, and people are already interested in producing them. In addition, if you are an expert in a particular field—marketing, psychology, IT, journalism, education—there is no better promotional tool than podcasting. You can express what you're passionate about; then you will be able to set trends, and consistency will help you make money.

Recording a podcast is easier than you can imagine. For example, if it is a monologue, i.e., a text on a specific topic recorded by the presenter, all you need is a phone and headphones. You must record it using headphones, then edit it on a free platform called [Audacity](#). Nata Andreev is one of those who produces such shows. For a discussion with a guest, you will need two microphones with a stand, but they also cost less than USD 100. Of course there are many aspects to consider when choosing the idea for the podcast and the hosting platform (for example, [Anchor](#), which is free), where you will place these recordings and the duration of the podcast. All these things are learned by doing.

I believe Moldovan journalists should start using this media tool more actively. Podcasting is a transfiguration of journalism and of audio media which until recently belonged mostly

to radio stations. While traditional forms of journalism (newspapers, magazines) are constantly declining, podcasting is gaining more and more momentum throughout the world. The narrator has the possibility to tell a story through an audio recording that can reach various listeners of different categories like children and adults with secondary or higher education who are very curious to learn certain information. Podcasts are relatively easy, low-cost products while the audience appreciates the feeling of a personal connection with the host of the show.

In addition, the podcast market is growing and has great money-making potential.

### Instead of a conclusion

Let us briefly summarize the advantages of this innovative tool:

- **Easy-to-digest media content.** Podcasts are easier to consume than other forms of media (such as videos and blog articles). Listeners click on PLAY while queuing at a store or cooking a meal in the kitchen. In addition, the voice of the presenter gives the listener a stronger connection than reading information on a web site. This increases the probability that listeners will become loyal to the show and develop a natural interest in the next episodes.
- **New knowledge from experts' stories.** Business owners or professionals can share their experiences on certain topics. Professionals get the opportunity to display their knowledge, companies get more visibility and listeners get more useful information and insight.
- **Focus on a certain information niche.** When you know your audience and the topics they are interested in, you can get closer to your consumers by using an environment that is deemed to be more intimate and personal. Thus, sending a message becomes more efficient and promotion becomes easier.
- **Money in the piggy-bank.** Statistical data show that podcast listeners do not skip the advertisements that are embedded in the show in order not to miss something important. Moreover the advertising in a podcast is integrated into the show as it is created by the presenter who listeners trust which makes the advertising more credible. Put all of these together and you get a product with earning potential that is interesting for local companies.

Stela JEMNA



# Searching for a New Economic and Democratic Model for Media

*“The information provided to citizens to clarify a democratic debate cannot be disseminated at the pleasure of the market.”*  
(Julia Cagé)

*Many people have been awaiting the death of print media for a decade. In fact, when radio appeared, the same thing happened. With the advent of television, everyone was expecting newspapers and radio stations to die. The current crisis affects all types of media throughout the world and forces journalists and researchers to seek reliable solutions to save the media. It is true that the form of the crisis varies from country to country, and yet phenomena such as mass dismissals of journalists in print media, the closure of media outlets, rebroadcasts and the free reproduction of information and loss of confidence in media controlled by all-powerful shareholders happen all around the world.*

The suggestive title of the book, Saving the Media. Capitalism, Crowdfunding, and Democracy, issued by the publishing house Comunicare.ro, creates a little skepticism but also a certain hope about finding solutions for reinventing the media. Note that the author of the study, Julia Cagé, a doctoral graduate of Harvard, is a French economist specializing in political economy and media economics, and she teaches this discipline at Sciences Po University in Paris. Familiar with both Western European and American media realities and drawing upon statistical data on the latest developments, the researcher is not limited to in-depth analysis but also proposes a new economic model for democratic media that aims to guarantee both its freedom and independence. The book was published by the prestigious publishing house Seuil in 2015 and has so far been translated into 11 languages for international circulation and in 2016 received the special prize of the Association of Journalism and Citizenship in France at Prix des Assises. An advantage of this book is its small size (134 pages) inviting those interested to visit the technical annex available online where the sources and methods used as well as other useful information are presented in detail.



## Crisis of information

It is known that independent and objective information is like oxygen for a healthy democracy. But today, information is in danger, and “not only the journalists but also the information only they can produce is in danger.”<sup>[1]</sup>

While employees are being dismissed in print media, online information sites are hiring all sorts of specialists. Of course, interesting links, online videos and animated

[1] Julia Cagé. *Saving the Media: Capitalism, Crowdfunding, and Democracy* Bucharest: Comunicare.ro, 2019, p.40.

graphics allow us to better understand topics, but these digital possibilities do not complement content based on quality information and can instead damage it. The author recalls that the Internet, like all the media before it, feeds primarily on print media. The fact that the evening news is presented with *Le Monde* on one's lap is almost proverbial in France. In the USA, about 80% of the links on websites, blogs or social networks send the reader to traditional media.

Reducing investments in print media leads to a decline in the quality of information and thus represents a danger to democracy. A media paradox is taking shape: "A small number of actors (0.14% of France's active population in 2013), with a relatively low share in the economy and based on an even smaller number of employees, reach an extremely broad public and can influence it in making decisions that are essential for the proper functioning of democracy."<sup>[2]</sup> Thus, the model of the joint-stock company and of self-financing through sales and advertising proved unable to meet the challenges the media faces today. This model in conditions of competition has led to a reduction in costs and to the replacement of information with *infotainment* and *entertainment* to the detriment of the public.

### End of illusions

In search for a new media model, we need to clarify the causes of the crisis as well as the new social and economic realities. Julia Cagé names these causes in a very suggestive way as *illusions*; one of the most important of them would be the *advertising illusion*. This becomes the guarantor of the freedom of the media in the Anglo-Saxon world, but at present the media can no longer live from advertising. The author makes an X-ray examination of the markets in the USA, France and Germany based on statistical data and shows us that the heavenly mana represented by advertising is decreasing and the share of the media in the total expenses for advertising has decreased. In France, for example, the share of advertising in newspapers since 2000 has decreased from 45% to 35%. Starting in 2006 in the USA, the share of advertising in newspapers has been decreasing even taking into account digital advertising.

We will analyze another one of the illusions mentioned by the author: the audience of millions of Internet users and state-supported media. Statistical research

[2] Ibidem, p.19.

shows that newspapers fail to make a profit from their digital audiences, even when they pay. The income from advertising generated by a print media reader is 20 times higher than that generated by an online reader. According to the author, emphasis should be placed on quality so that readers will be motivated to pay for content given that in the future most of the income generated by newspapers will be obtained from subscriptions and sales at the newsstand. Paid content is the future of an industry where advertising will occupy an increasingly smaller share (41% of USA newspapers are not freely accessible because they have limited access by payment).

Subsidizing the media by the state in order to maintain political pluralism is also an illusion. Even if in France the media gets many complex subsidies, the author believes they should be reformed. Currently, most of the print and online publications benefit from the super low VAT and preferential fees for mail, including for entertainment media, while a simpler and clearer system would be reserved only for general and political media.

The subsidies are a quite small share of the income of newspapers (in general, less than 5%). A faithful analysis of the taxes, fees and social contributions paid by the newspapers to the state shows that they greatly exceed state subsidies. At the same time, the researcher offers the example of universities and research centers that benefit from public funding that is significantly greater than the taxes they pay and also from other income obtained from public aid. She also believes that the media could take this as an example. We are witnessing the development of the idea that the future of the media is about the non-profit sector, and wealthy donors who invest millions in the media should be exempt from taxes.

### A new model for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

So, leaving aside the illusions, in the age of the Internet and of crowdfunding, the status of the media must be rethought. In France, as in other countries including the Republic of Moldova, newspapers continue to operate as joint stock companies that are concerned with obtaining profit more than with the quality of their information when the main goal of the media is namely to provide independent and quality information. The status of a media foundation also has its limits which Julia Cagé reveals to us based on the example of the Bertelsmann Foundation. She also proposes moving to a higher level and creating



a new model for the media with the status of non-profit company, an intermediary between the foundation and the joint stock company.

This model of a media company is inspired by great international universities that combine commercial activities with non-profit activities. It involves ensuring the funding of the media stakeholders by freezing the capital they have and, at the same time, by limiting the decision-making power of external shareholders by drawing up restrictive regulations. The author shows the advantages of this model with concrete examples, such as the case of media outlets in search of capital to get started, mentioning the importance of crowdfunding and referring to the status of the media company which would establish a threshold for participation beyond which additional rights do not progress proportionally to the contribution of capital.

The media company therefore aims to limit the power of very large shareholders and allow small and medium-sized shareholders to act and face challenges. A media company means more democracy, more readers and crowdfunding the author claims.

An important idea promoted in this study is that general and political media provide a public good similar to that offered by universities, so it is legal to benefit from state subsidies and through patronage or donations and tax exemptions. The media company is intended to be an alternative to the current system of subsidies granted

to the media, which is complex and sometimes based on arbitrary decisions.

This model is proposed for all political and general media outlets that produce authentic information (print media, innovative media, pure players<sup>[3]</sup>, radio and television) and could create preconditions “for a better future of the media,” Ms Cagé believes.

Saving Media offers an informative description of the challenges the western media faces today and is an essential contribution to debates on the future of informative media. It also provides specific solutions for a participatory economic model that would guarantee the independence and freedom of the media. The publication of the book in Romanian will facilitate access to relevant information for finding reliable formulas for saving local media. The book is of interest to journalists, media managers and all those interested in the proper functioning of the media in a democratic system.

**Ludmila LAZAR**

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[3] Company that operates only on the Internet; information website (editor's note).

# Monitoring Report

## “Elements of Propaganda, Disinformation, and Violation of Journalism Ethics in the Local Media Space” (July 1–September 29, 2019)

### CONCLUSIONS

In the reporting period, July 1–September 29, 2019, all 12 monitored media outlets committed violations of professional ethics and/or used at least one manipulation technique in the presentation of information. The main violation committed by editorial teams was still mixing facts with opinions followed by the failure to ensure the right to reply and generalizations. Tendentious and ironic headlines remain on the list of “preferences” of several media outlets (**Prime TV, Televiziunea Centrală, Canal 3, NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Kp.md**). While labeling and negative image transfer were no longer present, cases of false information returned (**Televiziunea Centrală, Prime TV, and Canal 3**), as did increasingly frequent references to sources that could not be checked (**Canal 3, Televiziunea Centrală, Kp.md, Accent TV**).

At the same time, ironic approaches were more intense (**TV8, Unimedia.info, Televiziunea Centrală, and Accent TV**). The most often used manipulation techniques for the 12 media outlets monitored were the “internal enemy” technique, which usually goes together with the “national savior” technique (**Prime TV, NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Televiziunea Centrală, Sputnik.md, Canal 3**), and the priority information technique (**Televiziunea Centrală, Prime TV, Canal 3**). Cases of generalization were

also more frequent (**Prime TV, NTV Moldova, Televiziunea Centrală, Kp.md, Canal 3, Accent TV**), as well as the blurring of information (**Prime TV, Accent TV**).

The politicization of topics and their presentation from the perspective of political preferences continued. Thus, television stations **Prime TV** and **Canal 3** mostly aired the same news content which favored the Democratic Party (PDM) and its representatives and presented in an exclusively negative light the ACUM Electoral Bloc and the Party of Socialists (PSRM). **NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV**, in their turn, favored President Igor Dodon and the PSRM in its news reports. At the same time, **Jurnal TV** sometimes politicized topics favoring ACUM and certain politicians (Andrei Nastase). The monitoring of **Sputnik.md** showed violations such as the lack of the right to reply and the “national savior” manipulation technique, while **Kp.md** used generalization, omission, and tendentious headlines. The public television station **Moldova 1** used suggestion and the “national savior” technique. **PRO TV Chișinău** overall covered the majority of the monitored topics in a fair, neutral, and unbiased manner. **TV8** slightly abused irony, and **Unimedia.info** several times “forgot” to ensure the right to reply to the accused.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Audiovisual Council (AC), based on Article 75 (Responsibilities of the Audiovisual Council) and Article 86 (Cooperation with civil society) of the Code of Audiovisual Media Services of the Republic of Moldova, should take note of the findings and monitor the television stations, the content of which has been reported to deliver manipulative information. These actions are necessary in order to identify violations of legislation and to apply sanctions.
- The editors at TV stations are urged to supervise their editorial content so that it complies with the mission of the media to inform the public and correctly present reality and not with the desire of political circles to promote their interests and attack opponents.
- Reporters are encouraged to report all relevant facts on events in an unbiased manner and after verifying information, not selectively or unilaterally.
- Media consumers are advised to seek information from several media sources in order to avoid the risk of receiving incorrect and manipulative information.

# Public Discourse of Candidates from a Gender Perspective in the New Parliamentary Elections in Single-Member Districts no. 17, 33, 48, and 50

## CONCLUSIONS

- The electoral discourse of both female and male candidates was mainly focused on geopolitical or general issues and solutions.
- Gender issues, by which we mean addressing specific, explicit issues that have an impact on women and/or only men in public life, did not appear in the questions asked by journalists and special guests on electoral debate programs.
- In the public discourse of candidates we found gender topics in three cases:
  - ▶ “Failure to comply with the 40% gender rate in the electoral lists of some political entities in the 2019 local elections registered by the CEC,” of which the candidate Vitalia Pavlicenco of PNL spoke repeatedly during debates and in two posts on her public Facebook account;
  - ▶ “Psychological support for women working as family assistants,” in the post on September 30 on the public account of Galina Sajin, the candidate of ACUM;
  - ▶ “Protecting Christian faith and family values,” a traditional topic from a gender perspective addressed by the independent candidate Petru Ursu.
- The dialogue between electoral opponents during debates where there were both women and men was based on differences in ideas, personal or party actions, and geopolitical issues. Labels and sexist attacks harming the dignity of the person were noted only in several situations. That was due to either the political maturity of the actors involved or to the fact that some media outlets (Radio Moldova, Moldova 1, Albasat TV) set up rules to prohibit inciting public violence, hatred or discrimination; harming the dignity or reputation of another person or committing a public offense. There was also a case when a male candidate refused to ask questions to a female candidate: Ion Țugulea said, “Ms. Gutu, I wish you success! To attack a lady with questions, no way to which Ana Gutu replied, “I am strong enough to answer!” (Albasat TV, October 8, 2019). The statements have a slight sexist hint reflecting the traditional perception that women are weak beings and should be protected even in debates.
- The language used by the majority of candidates and journalists, both men and women, was not gender balanced:
  - ▶ Masculine forms of words for jobs, the status of candidates, president and Members of Parliament were used instead of female forms when addressed to women;
  - ▶ Addresses were formulated through the masculine plural (dear citizens, dear voters, fellow citizens, friends), which excluded the female public;
  - ▶ Only the moderator of electoral debates on TV8 naturally used feminine forms in relation to the female candidates who participated in those debates.



**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. When drawing up electoral offers, candidates should take into consideration current gender issues. They should be included in everyone's programs, especially in the programs of female candidates standing for Parliament and facing gender-based discrimination in their private and public—including political—lives.
2. In debates and in other media products, candidates and journalists should use fair and appropriate, non-discriminatory language in relation to gender. In this context, we recommend consulting the guide "Gender Balance in Media Products", the study "Non-sexist Language," and the recommendations of the European Parliament.

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