



ENP East Media Freedom Watch

MOLDOVA

Fourth Reporting Period

January—March 2014

The Media Freedom Index, report and expert recommendations are edited within the project ENP East Media Freedom Watch implemented by the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) in partnership with Internews Ukraine, with support from the European Union.

This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of its authors and do not reflect the views of the European Union.



Contents:

- 1. Introductory Note**
- 2. Panel of Experts**
- 3. Brief Overview**
- 4. Media Freedom Index**
- 5. Conclusions**
- 6. Roadmap**



1. Introductory Note

The Media Freedom Index and expert recommendations provided in the report are the product of ENP East Media Freedom Watch project implemented with support from the European Union. The two-year project focuses on rating media freedom in the six Eastern Partnership countries (EaP) based on quarterly questionnaires on four broad topics (politics, practice, broadcasting and Internet and new media) completed by media experts in each country. The experts score 55 indicators from 0 to 30 for a possible total of 1650 points. Based on the total, each country is ranked from 1 to 7 on the index. The project is intended to contribute to media freedom and to freedom of expression by increasing regional and international awareness about the state of press freedom and journalists' rights in all EaP countries.



2. Panel of Experts

1. **Petru Macovei** Director, Association of Independent Press
2. **Ludmila Andronic** Chair, Press Council
3. **Ion Bunduchi** media expert
4. **Nadine Gogu** Director, Independent Journalism Center
5. **Olivia Pirtac** media law expert
6. **Doina Costin** media law expert
7. **Lucia Bacalu** Director, *Expresul* newspaper
8. **Vladimir Soloviov** Editor in Chief, *Kommersant.md*
9. **Alina Radu** Director, *Ziarul de Garda* newspaper
10. **Ion Terguta**, Director, Mir TV station



3. Brief Overview

This analysis of the general political, economic and legal conditions influencing mass media is organized by the chapter headings in the questionnaire.

Chapter 1: Policy

In terms of political circumstances, the first months of 2014 were marked by the approach of two events of major significance: Moldova's advance to signing the EU Association agreement, initially expected to take place in early September, but then gradually advanced to early June, and the parliamentary elections in autumn 2014. On several accounts these two events competed against each other and gave rise to opposite effects.

On the one hand, the larger geopolitical context accounted for a more careful attitude of authorities towards the observance of democratic values such as freedom of speech and freedom of information, especially as the conflict in neighboring Ukraine unfolded and journalist and civil rights at large were the first "casualties" in the political fight. Moldova's Government continued to implement its program of digital governance, and various agencies and public administration bodies published open data.

On the other hand, the start of the pre-electoral period generated additional pressure on political parties both from the governing coalition and the opposition, with certain politicians, whether or not holding public offices, trying to fortify their positions by using legal leverages. Thus, the issue of restricted media access to Parliament plenary sessions, which ended the past year, remained open throughout the first quarter of 2014, with numerous debates among deputies, media professionals and non-government organizations (NGOs) and no solutions yet. After the Government's decision of last July to suspend online broadcasting of its sessions, this is the second step taken by authorities with a view to further limit direct contact of higher officials with mass media.

Also, after the national broadcasting regulator (Broadcasting Coordinating Council, BCC) postponed the selection of candidates for the Supervisory Board (SB) of the national broadcaster Teleradio Moldova last December, it was slow to involve in mediating the problem of TV stations excluded by cable operators from their offers—something that was interpreted by experts as signs of BCC's lack of genuine independence (see chapter 3. Broadcasting). The prevailing political interests in retaining power over regulatory bodies in order to control broadcasting by were confirmed by the fact that the Parliament also postponed appointing the candidates to the SB of Teleradio Moldova. To the date of writing this report, SB was still nonfunctional, with only three members instead of nine.

Another cause for concern with possible restrictions of media freedom with electoral purposes arose from the issue of political propaganda coming from Russian media. Taking in



consideration the latest events in Ukraine, and the decisions of other post-soviet countries to ban or suspend Russian TV channels, there have been calls from some local politicians to protect Moldova's information space, and authorities subsequently started debating such proposals. However, some of our media law experts regarded them as creating a background for potential abuse under the guise of ensuring the country's information security.

For the public opinion, the mix of the above-mentioned facts and trends created an increasing awareness of the importance of civil rights and freedoms as enshrined in the rule of law. Thus, media freedom and accountability, along with public participation, became more important than ever in civil society's efforts to balance Government policies as the country gained momentum in its advance to European integration.

In terms of legal framework, no significant changes regarding media freedom were registered compared with the previous quarter. The constitutional and other legal provisions ensuring freedom of speech and media freedom were considered sufficient, earning 26 points out of 30 possible.

The Law on Access to Information, adopted in 2000, is regarded as increasingly outdated, despite complying with democratic norms existing at the time. As previously noted in last year's Media Freedom Indexes, the legal definitions of state secret, commercial and fiscal secret, as well as the restrictions applied to information containing personal data have not improved during the reporting period. Some state bodies, such as the public register on real estate (State Enterprise Cadastre) or the State Registration Chamber (registering legal entities in Moldova) have retained their fees for releasing information of public interest, despite having been deemed abusive and lacking justification by some experts in the previous Media Freedom Indexes (see chapter 2. Practice). This resulted in 21 points for the indicator on the quality of the law on access to information and 15 points out of 30 for the indicator on justifying areas where access to information can be restricted.

Defamation is decriminalized as of 2004, and a ruling by the Supreme Court of Justice recommends courts to apply reasonable damages in defamation cases. There is no official censorship in Moldova. The two related indicators received steady scores of 28 and, correspondingly, 30 points—same as in the previous Index.

As before, print media are only required to register as legal entity having publishing as one of its activities, while TV stations rebroadcasting by cable should apply for rebroadcasting license issued by BCC on non-competitive basis. Currently, these licensing and registration processes are not used as tools to repress media freedom.

Officials have not adopted any decisions encroaching upon media freedom, nor have they made direct statements to that effect. However, when discussing the possibilities to ensure the access of media professionals to plenary meetings of the Parliament, some members of Parliament (MPs), including Speaker Igor Corman and Vice-Speaker Liliana Palihovici expressed their doubts about the need of the press to attend Parliamentary sessions. These



statements were perceived by some journalists as inadequate and promoting a public message of intolerance towards media freedom.

Additionally, two draft laws were registered in Parliament in early January after the conflict between some TV stations and a number of cable operators (see chapter 3. Broadcasting). The first one proposed amending the Broadcasting Code and the second one proposing an entire new Broadcasting Code. However, as the situation came to resolution, the legal initiatives have not been taken further and many media professionals concluded that the draft laws did not reflect a genuine intention to reform the Broadcasting Code, being merely politically motivated actions.

Hence the insignificant variation in score for the entire chapter—175 points compared to 173 in the third index—explained the constant rating of 6 out of 7.

Chapter 2: Practice

- *Assaults, threats, arrests*

No cases of arrests or apprehension of journalists have been registered in the first quarter of 2014; hence the indicator received maximum scores of 30 points for the first four aspects related to killing, kidnapping, arrest or apprehension of journalists due to their job. The aspects related to beatings and assaults of media professionals, as well as those related to surveillance and wiretapping improved and received 28 and 27 points respectively.

Nevertheless, psychological pressure and threats are still used by public figures to attempt influencing editorial policies, as experts have given 12 points out of 30 to this indicator. Unlike in the previous Indexes, no unjustified summons by law enforcement authorities have been reported in this period, which led to another high score of 28 points for the related indicator.

Since no cases of severe pressure on journalists have been recorded, the remaining indicators related to the authorities' possible involvement were assessed by experts as irrelevant for the current situation in Moldova and received maximum scores of 30 for killings, kidnappings, assaults and harassments). Nevertheless, the existing doubts about the sustainability of these improvements in the event of a change in power remained, and the 28-point score of the last indicator on diligent reaction by authorities in cases of violence and threats against journalists should not be interpreted as a practical improvement, but only as a hypothetical one.

- *Prosecution*

Besides the above-mentioned rights guaranteeing freedom of expression enshrined in the Constitution, The Law on Freedom of Expression adopted in 2010, and the more recent



2013 amendments to the Criminal Code punishing censorship in public media and interference with journalistic activity are intended to offer additional protection for media professionals when it comes to prosecution.

Despite the still numerous defamation suits being filed against journalists and media institutions, and which accounted for a score of 10 points for this indicator, it is increasingly uncommon for courts to issue final rulings against the latter. Among the outlets most frequently sued for defamation lately are Russian-language weekly Panorama, investigations weekly Ziarul de Garda (ZdG) and Romanian-language weekly Adevarul.

In January 2014, Balti Court of Appeals dismissed Moldinconbank's claim against Adevarul, in which the former requested damages in the amount of over EUR 11,000. The conflict arose in 2012, after the newspaper published an investigation on bank loans taken by Chisinau Court of Appeals chairman Ion Plesca. In 2013, Chisinau District Court also dismissed the case but the bank challenged its decision in a higher court.

Also, in February journalist and talk-show host Lorena Bogza of ProTV Chisinau won a lawsuit on defamation against editorialist Mihai Contiu of the former state-owned daily Moldova Suverana. This was one of the rare cases in which journalists took each other to court in Moldova. Lorena Bogza, the anchor of one of the most popular political shows in Moldova, filed a lawsuit because of a pamphlet written by Contiu in 2012 and also posted on the newspaper's website. The journalist demanded EUR 5,390 as moral damages from the newspaper and EUR 2,700 from the author personally. Following the court's decision, Moldova Suverana was obligated to publish a retraction on the same page where the pamphlet was published more than a year ago and established the amount of damages at EUR 1,670 to be paid by the media outlet and EUR 270 by Mihai Contiu.

Thus, the perception of the experts has improved due to consistent decrease in the level of fines on media institutions and journalists in cases of defamation, consequently rating the respective indicator at 25 points, even though many cases are filed either by public figures or by business people (19 points for this indicator).

No cases of arrest have been recorded in the reporting period, while law enforcement authorities have abstained from pressuring journalists to reveal their sources of information. The general opinion of media professionals is that the judiciary has distanced itself from the former practice of biased approach in lawsuits involving media.

- *Access to information*

There are problems with access to information of public interest both because of the insufficient transparency of public institutions and bodies, on the one hand, and the low level of digital literacy of some journalists, on the other hand. Mainly, chief editor of Kommersant.md Vladimir Soloviov reported a relatively steady trend of civil servants and



officials reticent to replying to requests for information, with media experts rating the indicator with 16 points (a 2-point drop compared to the previous Index).

Sometimes public authorities and agencies refuse to release information of public interest under the pretext of commercial, fiscal or—less commonly—state secret. In fact, journalists and editors, especially from independent and investigative media, have mentioned several earlier cases when national authorities and state-owned enterprises declined their requests for information on one of these grounds. Also, the director of the Association of Independent Press (API) publishing stories on governance on their project website Moldovacurata.md recalled a 2010 refuse by the state-owned press distribution company *Posta Moldovei* to submit data regarding its financial statement on grounds of commercial secret, even after a court decision was issued to this respect. According to API director Petru Macovei, *Posta Moldovei* only agreed to release the data after API described the case to then-PM Vlad Filat. Even though no such cases took place in the reporting period, the expert believes that the situation has not changed since.

Also, ZdG director Alina Radu stressed the disproportionate policies of some bodies such as the Cadastral Office and the State Registration Chamber, offering information charge-free within a three-week period, but immediately for a fee. Thus, the practical aspects of access to information were assessed to 18 points, a 4-point increase.

After the 2009 change in power no foreign journalists were banned or expelled from the country and the indicator received maximum 30 points. However, in February journalists of the First Transnistrian TV Channel (the official broadcaster of so-called authorities of Transnistria, Moldova's break-away region) claimed they were not allowed to enter Gagauzia (autonomous region in Southern Moldova), on grounds that the staff didn't have accreditation and were escorted back to the check point. Journalists stated they were on their way to Gagauzia to cover the local referendum on foreign policy in the autonomy, which the court found illegal. However, the incident was not confirmed by local police, nor by officials at the Bureau for Reintegration under the Government.

Accreditation is not used as a tool for pressuring journalists or restricting their freedom of access to information. However, in 2012 the Gagauz local authorities have adopted regulations with disregard to the national legal framework, requesting online publications to register as media, in spite of requests of national and regional NGOs to exclude this provision. Thus, experts considered it as a potential tool of local authorities to limit free access of some journalists to the local Assembly sessions.

- *Censorship and self-censorship*

The indicators on censorship retained the previous high scores (28 points for censorship and 30 points for confiscation), but self-censorship is still commonplace in the Moldovan press as most experts rated the respective indicator with 1 point ("exists in all state-



owned and many private media”). Self-censorship thus received 10 points, and is viewed as one of the main problems plaguing Moldovan media and ultimately affecting its freedom.

Concerning the existence of forbidden topics, experts noted that Moldovan journalists face no such issue, as traditionally understood in other post-soviet countries such as Azerbaijan. The indicator received 30 points. Nevertheless, the approaches to certain topics are manipulated and frequently journalists from media owned by or affiliated to politicians will avoid covering sensitive subjects related to the properties or conflicts of interests of the latter. Nor will they be allowed to rebroadcast or reprint such stories covered by other media.

- *Monopoly*

Monopoly remained yet in this quarter an aspect dominated by obvious discrepancies. As previously mentioned, there is no state monopoly on media (27.5 points overall), nor on printing facilities (28.5 points overall). Still, there are three important fields that need to be addressed: monopoly of the print distribution market, concentration of the advertising market (see below at Economic conditions) and media ownership transparency.

While there is no state monopoly on print distribution, the state-owned enterprise Posta Moldovei de-facto dominates the market and is still the only major distributor of print press with nationwide coverage. It is seconded by the formerly state-owned and currently private Moldpresa. Despite repeated complaints voiced previously by numerous newspapers editors, such as Adevarul, ZdG, or Timpul, the managers of Posta Moldovei continue to establish the company's policies without taking into account the needs of the print press. The indicator received 12.5 points.

Opposition parties (parliamentary and extra-parliamentary) have a great deal of access to airtime, both on the national public broadcaster and on commercial televisions. Seeing that 2014 is an election year, the situation requires constant monitoring, but as far as the first quarter is concerned, the indicator received 27 points.

Ownership transparency is still one of the main problems of the Moldovan media, as during the reporting period the legal framework did not suffer any changes and continues to operate with the terms "founder" instead of "owner". Thus, it does not allow for the transparency of media owners and ultimate beneficiaries, or for transparency of funding. The issue especially concerns broadcast media. Nevertheless, it is notable that the overall picture of the television market is heterogeneous: on the national level the ownership structure of large television stations (such as Publika TV or Prime) almost invariably features fictitious founders and offshore companies, while the owners of local broadcasters are known to the public and coincide with the ultimate beneficiaries. Considering the weakness arising from this legal gap and the situation on the market, experts rated this indicator with 8.5 points, the lowest score in the entire study.

- *Economic conditions*



In terms of economic conditions for Moldovan media, authorities have managed to refrain from directly interfering with the activities of the press. In the reporting period, as in the previous ones during 2013, the damages set by courts have not constituted a leverage to control media, even as some experts retained some skepticism about the sustainability of this change, given the longtime habit of courts establishing abusive compensation preceding the recommendation of the Supreme Court Plenum on the reasonable amount of compensation in defamation cases.

As for inspections of the tax authority and other similar agencies, during the last quarter there have been reports that on a local level their frequency has increased. In this respect, the experts quoted Albasat TV from Nisporeni district, and Impuls TV from Soldanesti district. In Chisinau, media professionals reported that the labor inspection authority started assessing work conditions in some media institutions, including work contracts. The checks ensued in a number of penalties for the institutions, but most of our experts did not consider them a threat to media freedom, but as an improvement of the rights of journalists working under copyright agreements. Both indicators were rated with high scores of 27 and 29 points.

Although the advertising market is not controlled by state authorities, its state is heavily influenced by businesses, which most frequently either belong to politicians or are otherwise associated to people with political interests. The market share of Casa Media, the largest sales house in Moldova, according to press reports owned by politician and businessman Vladimir Plahotniuc, accounts for half of the advertising market. It is seconded by Alkasar Media Services, co-owned by Chiril Lucinschi, chair of the parliamentary media committee, and Gazprom Media Holding. However, no research has been carried out so far to assess the level of concentration or the distortion of the advertisement market by the existing political ties. There is virtually no advertisement from central state authorities, but on regional level local authorities tend to privilege some media over other. As a result, the respective indicator scored 22 points.

Apart from advertisement, sales and direct funding by the owner, Moldovan media do not have other means of funding. Authorities discontinued the programs to assist media in the late 90's and since, the situation has not changed. Thus, the issues of protectionism and selective funding through budget money remained irrelevant for the Moldovan media market.

No cases of confiscation, forceful takeover or pressure to give up media businesses were recorded in this period, so the respective indicators were rated 30 and 29 points, correspondingly.

The score for the second chapter increased somewhat compared to the 2013 Indexes, partly due to the fact that the authorities no longer pose a direct threat to media freedom, while political and business elites have switched to more subtle means of controlling mass media. Although the chapter overall scored 913 points compared to 874 in the previous Index and a



rating of 6 out of 7—constituting the most notable improvement in the entire study—the sustainability of the developments at the beginning of an election year is yet to be seen.

Chapter 3: Broadcasting

Concerning the national public broadcaster Teleradio Moldova (TRM), its state of affairs remained more or less unchanged, with experts assessing it with 22 points, despite the appointment of Ecaterina Stratan as director of the News and Debates Department at the public TV station Moldova 1 in late March. The election of a new director of TRM's newscasts ended the uncertain situation surrounding the news department since the appointment of its former director Vitalie Gutu was contested in court last year by one of the candidates. Moldova 1 airs the second most viewed newscast by nationwide audience ("Mesager"), according to the Public Opinion Barometer. However, the Supervisory Board remained further nonfunctional as the 6 new members haven't still been appointed.

No open political pressure has been brought to bear on private stations during these three months and experts assessed this indicator with 20 points (one point variation compared to the previous Index).

However, in January the national incumbent Moldtelecom excluded RTR Moldova (rebroadcasting the Russian channel RTR) and Accent TV (affiliated to the opposition Party of Communists, PCRM) from its cable packages and was shortly followed by other small cable operators. Almost at the same time, Jurnal TV (producing exclusively local content and critical to the current parties in power and especially to Democratic Party vice-leader Vlad Plahotniuc) was removed by Sun Communications, the leading cable operator in Chisinau, from its basic offer, but kept it available for clients of its two other more expensive digital TV packages, while other nine operators removed it altogether. The operators gave no specific reasons for these actions. As these decisions had a major outcry among the media community, stirring journalist protests and statements of media NGOs, they were also criticized by international actors: head of the EU Delegation to Moldova Pirkka Tapiola, U.S. Embassy and the OSCE Representative for Media Dunja Mijatovic. Subsequently, operators renewed broadcasting of Accent TV and Jurnal TV.

The national regulator (Broadcasting Coordinating Council, BCC) continued to carry out its policy and monitor broadcasters' compliance with the provisions of the Broadcasting Code. Experts assessed BCC's activities with 21 points and noted that their previous concerns about the questionable independence of BCC, expressed in the earlier Media Freedom Indexes, had found arguments as the issue of rebroadcast channels unfolded in early January. Specifically, the civil society considered it a warning sign that the BCC proposed a new draft regulation for cable operators at the same time as the above-mentioned TV stations were excluded by providers from their packages.



While civil society's reaction in the immediate aftermath of the events resulted in pressure on cable operators to reconsider their decisions, the provisions of the new draft regulation proposed by BCC were interpreted as potentially threatening to distort the TV market by limiting access to cable networks for major Moldovan broadcasters with regional coverage. The draft regulation would make it compulsory for all cable operators to include in their packages the terrestrial broadcasters with national coverage and, for local providers, to include the local stations broadcasting within the range of the same administrative unit. As such, it would favor national public broadcaster Moldova 1, but also privately-owned Prime, 2 Plus, Canal 3 and Publika TV that have either national or quasi-national coverage, and would be unfavorable for Jurnal TV (broadcasting through satellite), Pro TV Chisinau and TV 7 (two other important terrestrial broadcasters with coverage limited to Chisinau and a few major towns). The draft regulation was submitted to media NGOs and the civil society for debate and to the date is still being discussed.

Otherwise, the media community shares the general opinion that BCC showed a certain degree of bias when shortlisting 12 out of 24 candidates for the Supervisory Board of the public broadcaster. According to press reports, over the past months it became increasingly clear that the candidates representing media NGOs or the civil society (such as EMFW experts Ion Bunduchi and Petru Macovei) are less likely to be finally selected by Parliament, while other candidates with politically connected backgrounds (such as head of the former Prime Minister Vlad Filat's press service Lilia Gurez, or head of the Ministry of Information Technology press service Stela Nistor) would be preferred.

As to equal access to broadcasting during elections and political campaigns, the experts' general feeling was that the opposition has a great deal of access to the public broadcaster as well as to other private media, rating the indicator with a maximum of 30 points.

The adoption of the digital switch-over strategy was further postponed, as various officials and media experts (including Chair of the parliamentary media commission Chiril Lucinschi and EMFW expert Ion Bunduchi) voiced concerns over the necessary costs and the rapidly outdated technology, quoting the examples of countries having implemented the transition to digital terrestrial television and now looking forward to replace it with fiber optic technology. However, neither the Ministry of Information Technology and Communications, nor other interested agencies have brought the subject to public debate, even as Moldova is to transition from analog to digital television broadcasting by 2015.

The entire chapter on broadcasting scored 113 points overall, an improvement of 3 points compared to the previous rating period, and earned it a 6 out of 7 on the index.



Chapter 4: Internet and New Media

Regarding the freedom of the Internet and online media, it was assessed as satisfactory with high scores for most indicators. The number of websites continues to grow, and according to blogger Radu Lisita, a non-exhaustive listing of the knowledgeable online resources yielded at least 208 websites publishing information content as of mid-March 2014.

One of the most notable launches was that of Realitatea.md group in early March. The media platform comprises six new portals with various contents—from general news to economy, to gossip, to aggregation of media-related news. Dumitru Tira, who left Publika TV (allegedly controlled by Vladimir Plahotniuc) last September, manages the media platform, which he claims to be his own project.

Authorities have not resumed their intentions to restrict access to certain websites through the draft regulations proposed by the Ministry of Interior Affairs and the Prosecutor General's Office last autumn. Nevertheless, experts have not ruled out such possibility in the pre-election context, and rated this indicator with 25 points.

There is no state monopoly or market monopoly on internet providing services, which allows for a free development of online media and blogging. Arrests, assaults or harassments of online journalists, bloggers or digital activists are uncommon. This allowed a rating of 30 points for each indicator.

No cases of website blocking or suspended access to internet resources have been registered during the reporting period. The only relevant case concerned the website of Ziarul de Garda, an investigation weekly covering corruption, power abuse and conflicts of interest. In early March the management of the newspaper announced on social networks that their website had been inaccessible twice in two weeks during several hours. ZdG director Alina Radu was quoted by media that they suspected DDoS attacks might have been ordered by a public figure who was the subject of two of their investigations.

The indicator on the affordability of Internet connection services retained the same score of 25 as in the previous Index. While generally internet connection fees are accessible compared to average prices in Europe, the incumbent internet service provider Moldtelecom announced in late March their intention to increase fees for certain packages as of 1st May, motivating the decision by a general rise in prices on the domestic and foreign markets. While the data of the national regulator (National Regulatory Agency for Electronic Communications and Information Technology, ANRCETI) did not confirm such trends, representatives of the agency stated that the regulator does not have the right to impact the financial policy of the institution, despite Moldtelecom's leading position on the market.

The overall score of the chapter was 139 points compared to 136 points previously.



4. Media Freedom Index

According to the methodology, each indicator is assessed by experts on a scale of 0 to 30 point with 30 the highest level of press freedom. All scores are summed up for every chapter. The country's index for individual chapters is then calculated based on the ratings indicated in the following tables showing the scores for Moldova.

Chapter 1. Politics (8 indicators, 240 maximum points)

Rating (number of points)	Moldova's score	Index
0–49		1
50–79		2
80–109		3
110–139		4
140–169		5
170–199	175	6
200–240		7

Chapter 2. Practice (37 indicators, 1110 maximum points)

Rating (number of points)	Moldova's score	Index
0–179		1
180–329		2
330–479		3
480–629		4
630–779		5
780–929	913	6
930–1110		7

Chapter 3. Broadcasting (5 indicators, 150 maximum points)

Rating (number of points)	Moldova's score	Index
0–29		1
30–49		2
50–69		3



70–89		4
90–109		5
110–129	113	6
130–150		7

Chapter 4. Internet and New Media (5 indicators, 150 maximum points)

Rating (number of points)	Moldova's score	Index
0–29		1
30–49		2
50–69		3
70–89		4
90–109		5
110–129		6
130–150	139	7

Finally, the points for all four chapters are summed to calculate the overall index.

Overall Score (55 criteria, 1650 maximum points)

Rating (cumulative number of points for all 4 chapters)	Moldova's score	Index
0–250		1
260–470		2
480–690		3
700–910		4
920–1130		5
1140–1350	1340	6
1360–1650		7



5. Roadmap

These are the experts' recommendations for further developments in internet freedom and online journalism.

For state authorities:

1. An expert study of legal provisions and norms related to the Internet should be carried out in order to assess their compliance with European standards, with their subsequent alignment to the norms existing in developed European countries.
2. State authorities should refrain from regulating the Internet by establishing mechanisms and leverages aimed at filtering or blocking online content.
3. Should related laws be necessary, containing provisions aimed at improving the legal framework in order to fight child pornography, criminal and terrorist activity or illegal access to computer-stored information, the draft laws should:
 - a. be sent for public debate to the civil society prior to adoption;
 - b. contain clear terms and provisions compliant with European norms, and which would rule out the risks of censorship and self-censorship in online media, thus guaranteeing freedom of speech.
4. State authorities should ensure necessary security to bloggers and netizens reporting threats or assaults.

For the media and online community:

1. First and foremost, a clear definition should be given to online journalism—preferably within the media self-regulatory framework, so as to protect press freedom.
2. The online media community should either form a separate association or adhere to existing media organizations, while bloggers should rally to protect their rights.
3. The online community should acquire norms of market and media self-regulation by:
 - a. duly complementing the existing documents, or
 - b. signing and abiding by a relevant European or international code, and announcing it publicly



4. Media self-regulatory bodies should advocate journalists' adherence to the same professional and ethical standards (especially concerning copyright) in the virtual space as well as in the real world, taking into account the speed of information travel.

For local and international media organizations:

5. Independent monitoring of the online content should be carried out, in order to provide the public opinion with means to discern quality content and credible sources of information from non-credible ones, including explanations on the specifics of blogs.

6. Training should be organized for online journalists, bloggers and other internet users disseminating information of public interest on online platforms.

7. Conferences should be organized on regional, European and international levels to discuss regulation and self-regulation of online journalism, as well as norms for the cyberspace as a whole.

8. A policy of grant support for high-quality online journalism should be considered, to help avoid the risk of economic and then political dependency of such media.



7. Conclusions

These are areas of regress or progress on media freedom compared to the previous reporting period (October–December 2013).

Compared to the previous period, neither the legal framework nor the political circumstances registered significant changes regarding media freedom in January–March 2014; however, experts noticed that in practice journalism is becoming increasingly affected by the approach of parliamentary elections.

Certain developments, such as the restricted access of media in the renovated Parliament building, and the conflict between three TV stations and a number of cable operators suggested that the relationship between politics and media is likely to suffer changes in the pre-election period.

These two events, coupled with the Broadcasting Coordinating Council's propensity to lend itself to political influence and the Parliament's delay in appointing new members to the national public broadcaster's Supervisory Board were viewed as a cause for regress in the state of press freedom in Moldova.

Still, mass media's relationship with the judiciary continued to progress due to a decrease in the number of defamation lawsuits filed against journalists and, more importantly, due to the decreasing fines imposed by courts in such cases.

The freedom of the Internet and online media was also an important achievement: cases of blocking of Internet websites are no longer common, nor are arrests, assaults or persecution of bloggers or digital activists.