



**Monitoring Report
“Evaluation of Hate Speech in Online Media”**

Chisinau – 2015

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I. INTRODUCTION

There are 308 websites in the media sector of Moldova according to the www.top20.md web catalogue. They do not all publish information every day, and not all of them represent media outlets. Only several dozen websites specialize in the publication of news and other journalistic content and are updated daily. They are either media outlets as such or are the web components of television stations, newspapers or radio stations.

Most of these platforms publish news stories on sensitive topics on a daily basis such as relations between ethnic or religious groups, rights of sexual minorities and rights of persons with disabilities among others and allow their readers to leave comments. The way journalists approach these topics—the tone and language that they use—often influences the tone of reactions from readers expressed in their comments. The comments posted are naturally quite varied; they can contain information, suggestions and opinions but also insults or calls to hate some social groups.

The way in which 15 Moldovan news portals present journalistic content and manage readers' comments was monitored in a report produced by the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) in May 2015.¹ This report covers the October monitoring of the same websites six months later and offers a comparative study and analysis of any changes.

There are no legal or self-regulatory acts providing clear rules on moderating comments posted on media outlets' websites; this is supposed to be regulated by the internal rules of the outlets themselves. At the same time, comments fall under general rules on defamation, hate speech, insults and the like and under the Journalist's Code of Ethics.² Also, the European Court of Human Rights judgment of 10 October 2013 in the case of *Delfi v. Estonia*³ created a precedent according to which media outlets are responsible for the content they allow in their comment space; they can be punished if it is defamatory.

In Moldova, media outlets have twice been penalized for the failure to moderate comments with defamatory messages: the cases of *Oleg Brega v. privesc.eu* and *Gender Doc-M v. Pro TV Chisinau*⁴. Given these precedents, the majority of media outlets have gradually restricted their comment spaces in the last two years by excluding the possibility to post anonymous comments and by introducing the obligation for readers to post messages only from an open account on a social network.

Nevertheless, both this and the previous monitoring show that many messages in the comment section should have been moderated because they contained obscene, licentious words or hate speech.

II. ELECTRONIC COMMENT FILTRATION MECHANISMS AND THEIR EFFICIENCY

1 <http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/raport-de-monitorizare-%E2%80%9Eevaluarea-discursului-instigator-la-ur%C4%83-%C3%AEn-media-online%E2%80%9D>

2 http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod_d_rom.pdf

3 [http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx?i=001-126635#{"itemid":\["001-126635"\]} .](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx?i=001-126635#{)

4 <http://media-azi.md/sites/default/files/Raport%20evaluarea%20discursului%20de%20ura%20FINAL%20RO.pdf>

According to the previous report, 10 of the 15 monitored portals used electronic filters to screen words and expressions that the outlet considered unacceptable. This makes operators' work easier as problematic messages are then examined manually and are allowed or blocked depending on the operator's decision. At the other five outlets, all comments are screened by operators.

Electronic filters, however, are insufficient for the portals with a large amount of news that accordingly attracts the most comments. The operators at some of them do not manage to process all the content so that appeals to aggression, defamation, insults or obscene words can appear. Such situations were cited on unimedia.md, publika.md and deshide.md in the first monitoring report. Compared with the previous monitoring period, in October these portals had fewer comments and showed more efficient moderation; however, messages that should have been eliminated still continued to appear albeit in smaller numbers.

Every media outlet decides on its own comment moderation method. For example, esp.md does not use electronic filters and does not require users to log into Facebook. Operators can block comments and edit them, i.e. remove words that they consider inappropriate. Large media outlets such as CNN or *The New York Times* do not, however, encourage this practice. The heads of the online moderation departments of these two outlets recommend⁵ only two options: completely removing the comment or accepting it otherwise users could understand an editor's intervention as an attempt to change their messages. In addition, such interventions require greater effort from operators.

Professionals are also against the exclusive use of electronic filters which cannot replace manual processing. They see comments as encouraging "good" conversations, so processing by a team of moderators is indispensable for the outlets that care for their consumers. "Many intelligent and talented people visit the CNN website daily and have interesting insights on news. Our task is to keep conversations civilized and on the topic so that people can feel safe and speak freely," David Williams, Head of the CNN Comment Moderation Team, explained in an interview.

III. MONITORING METHODOLOGY

Monitoring period: 1–31 October 2015

Material monitored. All material published in any form and all comments that referred to persons representing groups vulnerable to discrimination and hate speech: ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, religious groups, refugees, graduates of residential schools (orphanages), persons with physical and psychosocial disabilities, HIV-positive persons, persons with tuberculosis and former convicts.

Purpose of monitoring. The purpose was 1) to determine the degree of correctness in writing journalistic material referring to groups that are vulnerable to hate speech and in moderating comments posted by the readers of news portals, and 2) to determine

5 <http://www.managingcommunities.com/2014/07/17/how-cnn-and-the-new-york-times-moderate-comments/>.

whether in either the content written by journalists or in readers' comments, information portals posted elements of hate speech: denigrating words, discriminatory phrases, labelling, stereotypes, appeals to aggression or other forms of expression promoting hatred and intolerance towards certain groups. This report comes six months after the first one during which the administrators of the websites monitored participated in training on comment moderation. It compares the data in May with that in October to see if any progress had been made.

Portals monitored. unimedia.md, publika.md, potv.md, jurnal.md, trm.md, moldova.org, deschide.md, stirilocale.md, realitatea.md, mirpmr.ru, dnestr.tv, newspmr.com, omg.md (only the content in the Russian language), esp.md and gagauzmedia.md.

Selection criteria. The portals that were selected:

- publish news and other information;
- post information daily;
- offer readers space for comments.

3.1. Definitions

Hate speech. In Recommendation 97 (20) of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe of 30 October 1997, "hate speech" shall be understood as covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism and discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.⁶

Law of the Republic of Moldova on Freedom of Expression⁷ (no. 64 of 23.04.2010). The law contains (in Article 2) the following definition of hate speech: "Any form of expression that provokes, spreads, promotes or justifies racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance." In addition to legal provisions, a reference point for identifying hate speech in comments and news items was the definition formulated by Kevin Boyle in "Hate speech – the United States versus the rest of the world" (2001): "Hate speech marks a problematic category of expression and related freedoms, such as freedom of association and assembly, and involves support of hatred and discrimination against groups based on race, color, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or other status."⁸

The term "groups vulnerable to hate speech" covers the following:

- ethnic minorities;
- sexual minorities;
- minority religious groups;
- refugees;
- students or graduates of residential schools (orphanages);
- persons with disabilities (physical or mental);
- HIV-positive persons;

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[http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/doc/translations/romanian/Rec\(1997\)020&ExpMem_ro.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/doc/translations/romanian/Rec(1997)020&ExpMem_ro.pdf).

7 <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=335145>

8 http://www.fdsc.ro/library/files/studiul_diu_integral.pdf

- drug users;
- persons with tuberculosis;
- convicts and former convicts;
- socially vulnerable persons.

3.2. Quantitative Indicators

- number of articles
- number of comments

3.3. Content Indicators

Tone of texts. This indicator will show whether journalists use the terms recommended by national and international organizations that protect human rights and non-discrimination. Also, it will show whether by means of the language they used journalists contribute to the posting of comments that are hostile or that instigate hatred.

Headlines. The study analyzes the headlines of news stories and articles in order to see whether they correspond to the text and to ethical standards.

Tone of comments. This indicator analyzes the tone and language used by persons who posted comments.

Presence of hate speech. This indicator will show whether articles and readers' comments contain messages/expressions that fall under the above definitions of hate speech.

IV. MONITORING RESULTS

Tone of texts. In the majority of the 213 articles posted on the websites, the authors used balanced, neutral language that is characteristic of news reporting. There were no cases of tendentious approaches or of discrimination through text or through the use of quotations or photos.

Unlike in the previous monitoring period, the texts published in October widely used the word “invalid” for persons with disabilities. It happened both on portals in Romanian and Russian: “RUSSIA: Two Moldovans sentenced to jail. They wanted to make a fortune at the expense of an invalid” (“RUSIA: Doi moldoveni, condamnați la închisoare. Au vrut să se îmbogățească pe spatele unui invalid” – stirilocale.md); “The feat of an undisciplined driver: he parked on the crosswalk, blocking the entrance to a parking lot for invalids” (“Isprava unui șofer nedisciplinat: a parcat pe zebra, blocând intrarea la parcare pentru invalizi” – jurnal.md); “A table tennis tournament for invalids took place in Tiraspol” (“В Тирасполе прошёл турнир по настольному теннису среди инвалидов” – mirpmr.ru).

In the journalists' guide on communication with and about persons with disabilities⁹ produced by Keystone Human Services International Moldova, the term invalid is mentioned among stereotypic words, along with “retarded” and “handicapped.” Also, the

⁹ <http://www.soros.md/files/publications/documents/ghid%20roman%20GATA.pdf>.

*Guidelines on style with ethical norms for journalists*¹⁰ recommends avoiding this word and replacing it with other, non-discriminatory words that instead describe the person's health condition: "We should use the word invalid in strictly medical terms (for example, second degree invalid)." In many cases journalists used correct language: "How an architect can design a house, a shop and other buildings and not include access for persons with disabilities" (*Как архитектор может спроектировать дом, магазин и другие здания, не предусматривая доступ людей с ограниченными возможностями* – gagauzmedia.md).

In one case, the word blind was used: "Publika TV EXPERIMENT: Being blind on the streets of Chisinau and passers-by reactions" ("EXPERIMENT Publika TV: Cum e să fii orb pe străzile Capitalei și cum reacționează trecătorii" – 8 October 2015). Specialists recommend replacing it with "visually impaired" otherwise, the focus is placed on the disability and on presenting information in a sensation manner. The news story also promoted stereotypes. Both the televised material and the text approached the topic as a sensation by using myths/stereotypes according to which persons with disabilities deserve pity and are helpless: "Young people showed compassion and helped the experiment's protagonist." In this case, the tone should have been neutral, and the word compassion should have been excluded.

In another case, journalists used the word "jailbirds" ("pușcăriași" in Romanian) instead of "convicts" ("deținuți" in Romanian) "The history of the people' for jailbirds. A novelty for Moldovan penitentiaries" ("Istoria neamului" pentru pușcăriași. Acțiune inedită în penitenciarele din Moldova" – moldova.org, 7 October 2015) contrary to the rules of ethical journalism which require using neutral terms and avoiding those with negative connotations. This term contributes to stigmatization and discrimination against this category of people. Paradoxically, the news article with this headline was shared on Facebook by the Department of Penitentiaries.

Headlines. Headlines mostly complied with journalistic standards according to which they must "catch the essence of the problem in several well-chosen words and present information briefly, completely, to the point, neutrally, without tone."¹¹ Examples: "At the beginning of winter, a family from Scorteni Village with 2 children 3 years and 9 months old are living in a hut" ("În prag de iarnă, o familie din satul Scorteni cu doi copii de 3 ani și, respectiv, 9 luni trăiește într-un bordei" – realitatea.md, 27 October 2015); "Moldova could receive up to 1,000 refugees" ("Moldova ar putea primi până la 1000 de refugiați" – trm.md, 30 October 2015); "People's Advocate: Design of buildings without access ramps must entail responsibility" ("Народный адвокат: За проектировку зданий без пандусов необходимо привлекать к ответственности" – gagauzmedia.md, 14 October 2015).

There were several exceptions when information was incomplete and the headline was built on elements of sensation: "A Syrian refugee gave birth on a beach in Greece, immediately after she got off the boat. Images are disturbing" ("O refugiată siriană a născut pe o plajă din Grecia, imediat ce a coborât din barcă. Imaginile sunt

¹⁰ <http://media-azi.md/ro/deontologie/ghidul-de-stil-cu-norme-etice-pentru-jurnali%C5%9Fti>

¹¹ <http://media-azi.md/ro/deontologie/ghidul-de-stil-cu-norme-etice-pentru-jurnali%C5%9Fti>

cutremurătoare” – protv.md, 14 October 2015); “A former convict, DETAINED while doing THIS over the wall of Penitentiary no. 9-Pruncul” (“Un fost deținut, REȚINUT în timp ce făcea ASTA peste zidul Penitenciarului nr.9-Pruncul” – publika.md, 27 October 2015). The first headline is slightly manipulative and aimed to inspire compassion while the second, in addition to being misleading, suggests that a convict committed an infraction (thus fuelling the stereotype that convicts are dangerous) even though later it became clear that this expression was used to attract readers and to convince them to view the news story. Overall, however, journalists maintained a neutral tone and placed strictly informative headlines.

Tone of comments. The articles monitored gathered a total of 264 comments, the majority of which were posted on those that referred to socially vulnerable persons and to news about conflicts with Russian citizens. Comments on the news about socially vulnerable persons or persons with disabilities were neutral or criticized the government. For example: “Plahotniuc, Filat and Ghimpu should live here” (protv.md, 9 October 2015).

Comments on news about conflicts with Russian citizens were more nuanced. On some portals the news about the conflict of 10 October between several Russian football fans and protesters in the Great National Assembly Square gathered few and mostly neutral comments: “We disgraced our country. What does sport have to do with politics? You can’t stay calm even here” (protv.md). However, Moldova.org, publika.md and unimedia.md allowed comments with discriminatory content: “You get sick already of these pigs’ faces and pigs’ language” (unimedia.md, 9 October 2015); “Welcome to Moldova. Pigs thought they are on the Red Square” (publika.md, 10 October 2015); “Pigs got it in the snouts” (moldova.org, 9 October 2015). Outlets should more carefully moderate comments about conflicts with representatives of minorities and vulnerable groups. When conflicts are the topic, opinions are polarized, netizens start arguing, and without proper moderation, discussions degenerate. Thus, the space for comments is transformed into a platform to denigrate persons or social groups.

Presence of hate speech. Discriminatory comments and comments that contain derogatory words and expressions or hate speech are usually found in news about conflicts. In addition to sharing their opinions for or against the protagonists on the facts presented, users often cross the threshold of decency and throw insults or even instigate aggression. Despite the fact that the internal rules on comment moderation used by the majority of administrators of the portals require blocking those that instigate aggression and hatred, such messages were found during this monitoring period though in much smaller numbers than in previous period. They referred to news about conflicts with Russian citizens who on 10 October 2015 were involved in a fight with protesters of the Dignity and Truth Platform in the center of Chisinau: “You’ve found what you were looking for, you, disgraceful, filthy Russophiles” (unimedia.md); “Russian-fascist hogs should’ve been skinned when they were warm!” or “Death to occupant pigs” (publika.md); “Impaled and deported!” (moldova.org).

Although a direct connection between calls for aggression and hatred and real aggression cannot be proved, the ongoing or periodic dissemination of such messages

through the media can come to be understood by the public as legitimate. Online discussions with this content, constantly perpetuated, fuel hostile attitudes between ethnic groups that can become dangerous in Moldova at a time when protests and protesters divide themselves into politico-ethnic groups. According to sociologists,¹² at the level of person and group, such discourse damages victims' dignity, affects self-esteem and isolates the groups that hate speech is addressed to. At the level of society as a whole, it leads to the exclusion and marginalization of groups and to the spread and rooting of stereotypes and prejudices. Also, the dissemination of messages instigating hatred increases the social distance between groups.

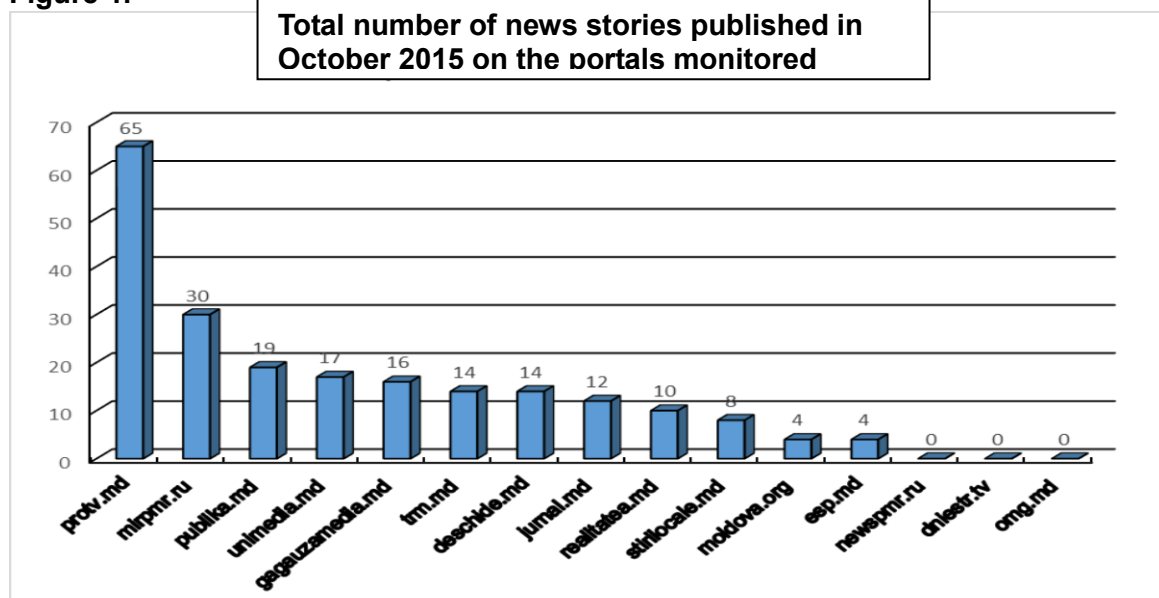
4.1. Quantitative Dimension

During the month of October 2015, the 15 information portals monitored published a total of 213 articles that referred to groups vulnerable to hate speech which was 33 more than in May 2015. The number of news stories grew on some portals such as protv.md and mirpmr.ru, and dropped to 0 on other portals such as omg.md or newspmr.ru. The most news stories—65—were published by protv.md. On the opposite pole were the three portals that published no relevant material: dnestr.tv, omg.md and newspmr.com. While in May omg.md and newspmr.com showed some interest in the groups monitored and published five and three news stories respectively, in October they did not publish any.

In May 2015, the large number of stories was explained by the festival for sexual minorities “Rainbow over Nistru,” while October was marked by news about the wave of Muslim refugees trying to get to Europe adding a new category to the general picture: refugees. During the previous monitoring period this category was completely absent. Although this social group falls under the categories “ethnic groups” and “religious groups,” in this study they were included in the refugee category.

4.2. Qualitative Dimension

Figure 1.



12 http://www.fdsc.ro/library/files/studiul_diu_integral.pdf.

During the monitoring period 213 news items were posted (Figure 1). Deschide.md posted 14 news stories on monitored topics: 12 about refugees, 1 about persons with disabilities and 1 about sexual minorities. Only one story had a comment. The outlet used a neutral tone and vocabulary for all these news items including the story published on 20 October under the headline “Refugee crisis: Slovenia appeals to the army and to the EU” (“Criza refugiaților: Slovenia face apel la armată și la UE”) which was followed by one comment showing disapproval and even hostility towards refugees: “It makes your Europe... ////.. For that we should join Europe, so that they give to us or to others immigrants and let France and Germany be all clean and beautiful...” Such a comment should have been moderated/blocked, because it discriminates against refugees and in addition contains licentious words.

Protv.md posted 65 relevant news stories: 38 referred to Asian refugees, 8 to religious groups, 7 to poor people, 5 to graduates of residential schools, 3 to sexual minorities, 2 to persons with disabilities and 1 each to convicts and drug users. Most of the comments were about the news items about the poor (52) and about religious groups (52). Also, reports about graduates of residential schools received eight comments, and two stories about refugees garnered another two comments. The content of messages posted by readers did not conflict with the rules on moderation. Although some comments were critical such as, “Maybe we should make a collective petition because it is unacceptable for the Metropolitan to get involved in public affairs and recently in justice. Let him pray to god to forgive him while he still can” or “People who see that the church is corrupt and full of riches and is doing so well shouldn’t support this church of money,” they did not contain obscene words or appeals instigating hatred (Annex 1).

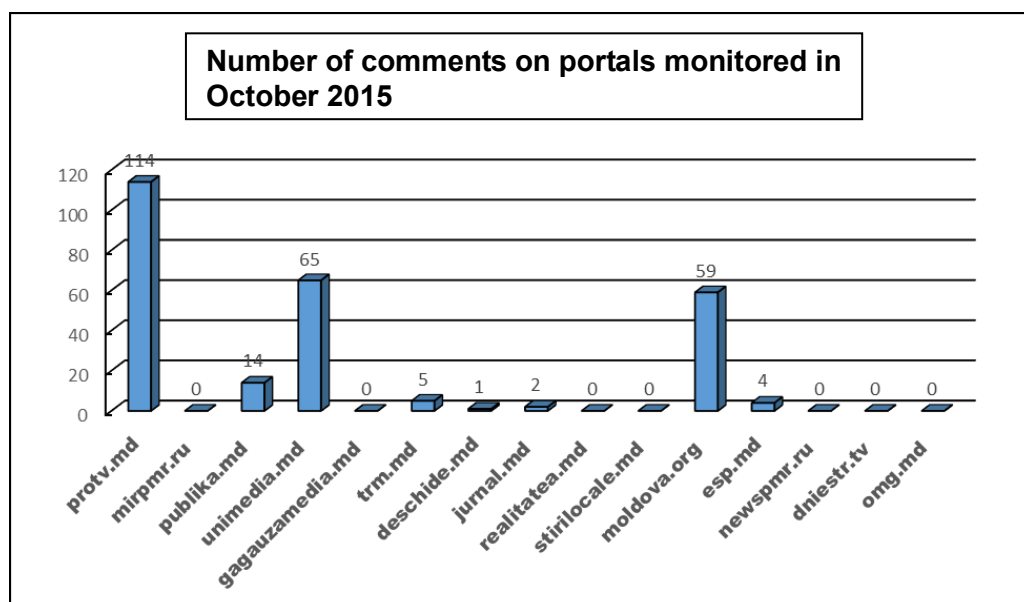
The administration of protv.md explained the decrease in the number of comments by the fact that although traffic on the website grew by 50%, they applied an internal policy that allowed comments from identified persons only. According to the administration, the moderators posted only the comments that met current legal rules.¹³

Stirilocale.md posted eight news stories on monitored topics: four about poor people, two about persons with disabilities and two about refugees. None elicited comments. The tone and approach were neutral and informative except the item under the headline “RUSSIA: Two Moldovans sentenced to jail. They wanted to get rich at the expense of an invalid” (“RUSIA: Doi moldoveni, condamnați la închisoare. Au vrut să se îmbogățească pe spatele unui invalid”) posted on 20 October in which they used the word invalid. The portal’s administration explained the lack of comments by the fact that since May they had dropped the Disqus system for comments through Facebook. When readers leave messages, they are moderated on the basis of requirements not to damage a person’s dignity and on other standards of professional ethics.¹⁴

13 Information obtained through an interview with the administration of protv.md.

14 Information obtained through an interview with the administration of stilocale.md.

Figure 2.



The total number of comments during the October monitoring was 264 (Figure 2). Publika.md posted a smaller number of news stories on monitored topics than in May at 19 compared with 21. Six were about persons with disabilities, five about ethnic groups, four about poor people, two about refugees, one about convicts and one about drug users. Overall, these stories elicited 14 comments which is many fewer than the 71 messages left by readers in May.

The most comments (six) were posted on a story about clashes with Russian football fans, three each were on stories about poor persons and persons with disabilities and two comments were on a story about refugees from Ukraine. Of the six comments on the story “They got drunk and provoked protesters. Closure on the MOLDOVAN ADVENTURE of some Russian fans” (“S-au îmbătat și au provocat protestarii. Cum s-a încheiat AVENTURA MOLDOVENEASCĂ a unor fani ruși”, 10 October), five contained the denigrating and even obscene words pigs, sows and hogs: “Russian-fascist hogs should’ve been skinned when they were warm!” (Annex 2). It is clear that the outlet did not moderate these comments but rather accepted them and posted them on the website. It should also be mentioned that all the unfavorable comments about the Russians referred to their behavior in a particular situation and not to their existence in general.

As in the previous report, publika.md used an electronic system for filtering comments with insults or licentious words; however, it proved to be insufficient in the case mentioned above which required manual processing. Nevertheless, the smaller number of comments on news items on this portal is indicative of the fact that administrators paid a great deal more attention to moderating comments in order to avoid messages that were discriminatory or insulting or that instigated hatred.

Unimedia.md published 17 stories about monitored groups, 7 about ethnic groups

(mainly about Russian football fans who came to a game in Chisinau and clashed with protesters in the city center),⁴ about persons with disabilities, and 1 each about poor people, religious groups, sexual minorities, convicts, graduates of residential schools and refugees. The number of comments greatly exceeded the number of stories at 65.

The story “They drank and insulted protesters in the GNAS. Five Russian football fans beaten bloody” (“Au băut și au început să insulte protestatarii din PAMN. Cinci suporterii ruși bătuți până la sânge”) gathered 34 comments which formed a discussion among readers who were trying to find out details about what happened: “I fully support the protesters,” “But where did the Russians get the pepper spray? I don’t think they got through the airport with something like that. Someone definitely expected them in Chisinau and gave them the spray and indicated where to go to instigate violence...” However, in seven comments the word pigs was used for the Russians which is disrespectful: “A Russian is a pig from birth” (Annex 3). As in comments on publika.md, readers insulted Russians in connection with their behavior in a particular situation: “With a pig you act like a pig, you found what you looked for, you filthy Russophiles, go home to your mother ‘Russia-outhouse’, where the father pig is waiting for you.”

On unimedia.md the 65 comments in October were significantly fewer than the 304 comments monitored in May. Another difference in this monitoring period was that there were no signs that a comment was posted but was then either blocked by the editors or by other readers because the website’s administrators blocked some comments from the start. It should be mentioned that the portal’s administration had not changed the method or rules for moderation since May. The smaller number of comments is explained by the fact that the period was marked by hot political topics that caught the attention of readers. The portal’s administration agrees that messages that qualify as hate speech are a problem, both a legal and an image problem, because many website visitors read comments as well as the news. According to the administration, unimedia operators sort out comments in order not to allow obscene words, calls for mass disorder and violence or discrimination of any kind and to stop the distribution of spam, advertising, pornography or links to other media sources.¹⁵

Jurnal.md posted 12 relevant stories, 7 about ethnic groups, 4 about persons with disabilities and 1 about poor people. There were only two relevant comments, both neutral, one on the news about persons with disabilities and one about ethnic groups. In the interview for this study, the portal’s administration said that overall the number of comments did not decrease but that some were blocked because they were posting advertising. Also, the outlet blocked the IP accounts of those who instigated hatred through comments, and operators made sure that the messages that appeared on the website contained no elements of hate speech, calls to violence, pornography, party propaganda or vulgar language.

The regional Russian-language portal of Gagauzia, gagauzmedia.md, posted 16 news stories, 6 about ethnic Gagauzians, 5 about persons with disabilities, 4 about poor people and 1 about drug users. As in May, none of the stories was followed by comments. The items posted were neutral or positive about cultural activities of Gagauzians and about

¹⁵ Information obtained through an interview with the administration of unimedia.md.

social support for poor people or for persons with disabilities. News stories were written in neutral, informative language. With the exception of the use of the word invalid, the text complied with the requirements on language and tone. The portal offers space for comments, but it was not used by viewers. Comments on this website are possible only through Facebook. According to the portal's administration, visitors usually post decent comments that do not require blocking.¹⁶

The Russian-language portal in Transnistria, mirpnr.ru, posted 30 news stories in October, 17 about persons with disabilities, 5 about refugees, 4 about poor people, 2 about persons with tuberculosis, 1 about graduates of residential schools and 1 about HIV-positive persons. As in May, there were no comments on these stories. The tone of presentation and the language used were neutral and appropriate for news stories. We shall mention only that in the majority of stories about persons with disabilities journalists used the word invalid which is not recommended by organizations that protect the rights of persons with disabilities.

Moldova.org published four stories on relevant topics, two about ethnic groups, one about refugees and one about convicts. Unlike during the previous monitoring period when there were no comments, one story elicited 26 on the first day alone; the number grew to 59 in the following days. The portal does not use electronic filters. Readers must log in through Facebook to be able to comment. An opportunity for debate and for insults was the story on 9 October, "Fight between Russian citizens and the people from Dignity Town after the former insulted Moldova" ("Bătăie între cetățeni ruși și cei din Orășelul Demnității după ce primii au insultat Moldova").¹⁷ Three young men from Russia came to Chisinau to support their national football team in the game with Moldova but before the game went to the protesters' camp in the Great National Assembly Square and insulted Moldovans after which a fight broke out.

Netizens commented on the actions of each side; the majority of negative messages referred to the behavior of the Russians in that particular situation: "Impaled and deported! I think and hope that they don't represent the entire Ru society." In other cases, however, insults and comments instigating hatred extended to all Russians: "Die already, you pigs, with all your kind, filthy animals, damn you"; "Death to occupying pigs"; "Wire to all pig kind" (Annex 4).

The abundance of obscene words, insults and hate speech directed at the Russians shows that the outlet did not moderate comments. In the interview for this study, the portal's administration recognized that these comments were not moderated although generally, messages with indecent words and hate speech are blocked.

The portal of the public broadcasting company Teleradio-Moldova, trm.md, posted 14 news stories, 5 about persons with disabilities, 4 about refugees, 2 about poor people, 2 about ethnic groups and 1 about convicts. Only the story about the fact that students in Gagauzia will learn the Romanian language drew comments; all five were neutral with

¹⁶ Information obtained through an interview with the administration of gagauzmedia.md.

¹⁷ <http://www.moldova.org/bataie-intre-cetateni-rusi-si-cei-din-oraselul-demnitatii-dupa-ce-primii-au-insultat-moldova-foto/>

readers arguing about the name of the language, i.e., Romanian or Moldovan.

In October realitatea.md published 10 news stories, 5 about persons with disabilities, 3 about ethnic groups, 1 about refugees and 1 about poor people. No story was followed by a comment. Overall, this portal's articles complied with the requirement of neutrality and presented information without nuances. Both the language of the stories monitored and their headlines complied with professional ethics. The lack of comments was not a consequence of the fact that readers' messages were moderated. The portal's administration said that readers preferred commenting on social networks on which realitatea.md news is shared and where it is easier to post messages because they are not required to fill in several security fields as they are requested to do in order to comment directly on the website. According to the portal's administration, persons responsible for the content are instructed to remove comments that contain attacks on a person, insults, hate speech, racism, etc.¹⁸

The Russian language website in the north of Moldova esp.md posted four relevant news stories in October. Two of them were about persons with disabilities, one was about ethnic groups and one was about poor people. The portal's operators moderated comments based on rules developed by the outlet itself that are published on the website.¹⁹ Esp.md is the only outlet of those monitored that posts their rules which prohibit the use of obscene and offensive words, hate speech and sharing links or advertising and authorize the outlet to edit messages with such content and to block readers who constantly violate the rules. The outlet supervises messages so that they will not conflict with the Journalist's Code of Ethics and with the current legislation.²⁰

The three remaining portals—omg.md, newspmr.ru and dnestr.tv— did not post any articles about the groups monitored probably due to scant interest in the topic.

4.3. Comparative Study

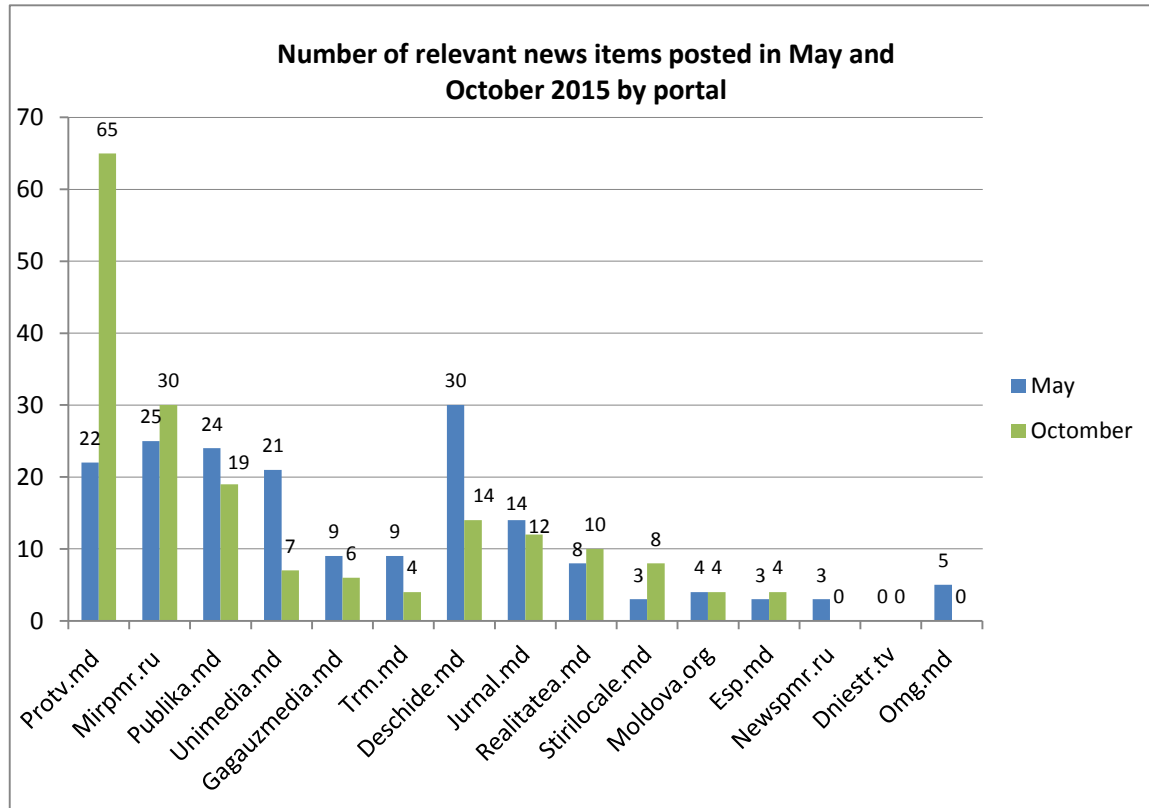
The monitoring of portals in October showed an increase in the number of news stories about the categories of people that are the subject of this study: In May there were 180 relevant stories while in October portals posted 213 (Figure 3). In May the large number stories was due to the Rainbow over the Nistru festival while October was marked by waves of refugees to Europe from various Muslim countries. News about refugees, however, generated the fewest reactions from readers. The most online conversations were generated by news about conflicts involving Russians.

18 Information obtained through an interview with the administration of realitatea.md.

19 <http://esp.md/2011/03/08/pravila-sajta-sp/>.

20 Information obtained through an interview with the administration of esp.md.

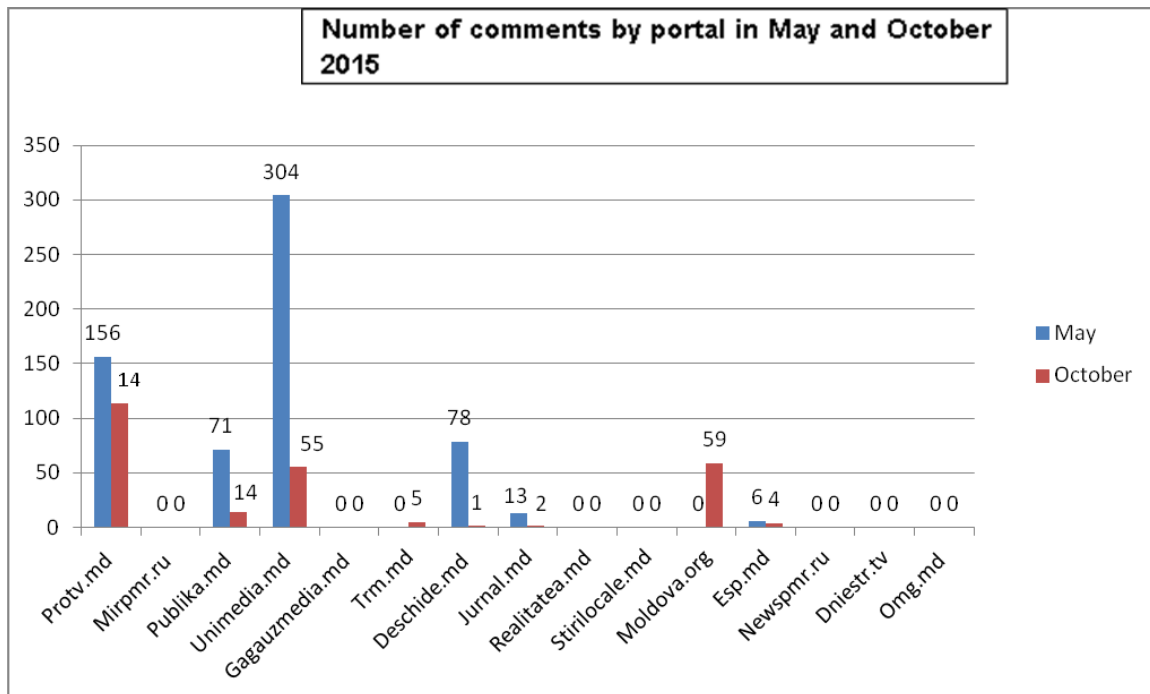
Figure 3.



The tone of the texts was similar in the two monitoring periods with the exception that the articles published in October more often contained three words that are not recommended by experts: invalid, blind and jailbird.

While the number of relevant stories increased, the number of comments decreased nearly threefold from 628 in May to 264 in October (Figure 4). The decrease occurred particularly on the websites that in the previous monitoring period had the most comments and the most problems moderating them: publika.md, unimedia.md and deschide.md. In October, comments on only one item were problematic: the story about Russian football fans who clashed with protesters. The problem can be explained by the fact that the incident occurred and was covered by websites late in the evening after operators' working hours so less attention was paid to comments. Also, such news stories usually elicit more comments than others, and because of the large amount of content there could have been lapses in moderation. Overall, however, the portals monitored had a much smaller amount of "harmful content" than in the previous monitoring period which is indicative of increased care that outlets took to moderate comments.

Figure 4.



During both monitoring periods, the most comments were elicited by news about conflicts that also had political connotations. In these cases, negative and discriminating discourse entwined with political preferences.

V. CONCLUSIONS

- For the most part, journalists complied with professional ethics in writing and editing news stories about the groups monitored. There were, however, instances on some portals (moldova.org, gagauzmedia.md, stirilocale.md, jurnal.md) when the language used in stories contained the stereotypical words and expressions invalid, jailbird and blind.
- With few exceptions, headlines were informative and corresponded to the text. There were only two cases (publika.md, protv.md) when headlines slipped toward sensationalism and were manipulative.
- Messages that can be classified as hate speech were present in October in readers' comments, but they were many fewer than in May. Overall, the quality of comment moderation has improved.
- Disrespectful and insulting language was directed at Russians in comments on the news in October.
- The group most vulnerable to hate speech in Moldovan online space remains

Russian nationals. There is no hostile feeling toward them in general, but negative attitudes appear whenever the media cover a conflict involving Russians or when the information presented is somehow connected with politics.

- Despite the large number of news stories about Muslim refugees seeking asylum in Europe that provoked various reactions, including hostility, from EU citizens, the portals monitored posted no negative or hostile expressions regarding this category of people in either texts or comments. The few websites that posted such stories took care to comply with professional ethics, including in moderating comments.
- Progress in moderation has been made since May on deschide.md as it changed the method for commenting to logging in through Facebook. While the previous report found comments instigating hatred, in October such comments were absent on deschide.md. The outlet has a list of about 500 licentious words and letter combinations in Romanian, Russian and English, the presence of which automatically blocks a comment. Between May and October, the outlet added to that list. The administration recognized that the number of comments had decreased since the previous report due to these actions by the technical team.²¹
- The gravest violations were found on moldova.org which did not moderate comments on its news, so obscene words, insults and hate speech did appear on the website.
- Publika.md and unimedia.md were still deficient in moderating comments with insults, obscene words and hate speech, although compared with the previous monitoring report there were fewer such comments. The significant reduction in the number of problematic comments could be a direct consequence of the implementation of the conclusions and recommendations in the previous report on evaluating hate speech in online media as well as of the training for moderators offered by the IJC.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Outlets should be more careful in writing and editing journalistic content referring to groups that are vulnerable to hate speech. Reporters and editors should know the words and expressions that specialists consider discriminatory and not use them in their texts.
- Persons responsible for the content in every outlet should know and take into consideration the provisions of the Journalist's Code of Ethics and the recommendations from the *Guide for style with ethical norms for journalists* when they write news or moderate readers' comments.
- It is necessary to periodically train journalists responsible for the administration of online content to help them identify hate speech in readers' comments.
- Following the example of media outlets in other countries, Moldovan websites

²¹ Information obtained through an interview with the administration of deschide.md.

with a large amount of news and comments should have persons especially employed to moderate comments and to maintain civilized discussions among readers.

- The owners/editors of information portals should continue their efforts to improve the quality of moderating readers' comments because website owners are responsible for the content of comments and can be responsible both for their publication and for the failure to moderate messages with hate speech, insults or defamation.