



## **Monitoring Report**

# ***Elements of Propaganda, Disinformation, and Violation of Journalism Ethics in the Local Media Space***

*February 15 – May 15, 2021*

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*This report is made possible by the generous support of the American and British people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and UK. The contents are the responsibility of the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the UK, USAID, or the United States Government.*

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Introduction and context.** From February 15 to May 15, 2021, the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) monitored 12 media outlets – news portals and TV stations – to identify whether the published/broadcast journalistic materials contained any breaches of deontological rules or elements of disinformation. The monitoring was based on case studies that analyzed the manner in which the selected media outlets covered events of public interest in politics, economy, foreign policy, and in other fields, in order to see whether they complied with professional and ethical standards, such as verification of information through several sources, pluralism of opinions, balance in the news reports on conflicts, etc. By appealing to the Moldovan Journalist’s Code of Conduct and specialized academic works, we could identify information manipulation techniques used in the news stories of the media outlets concerned.<sup>1</sup>

Given the politicians’ control over some media outlets and the dangers posed by fake news, information manipulation, and political propaganda, it is important for journalists to do their job conscientiously in order to inform citizens in a fair and impartial manner. The monitoring was based on the assumption that news is the main media product where people search information; therefore, regardless of the media owners’ political views, news must present exclusively facts and not journalists’ opinions. Also, they should be presented in a neutral and accessible language, and should reflect reality as accurately as possible, observing the balance of sources. Furthermore, journalists must be accurate when they collect information, must separate facts from personal opinion, and must ensure the right to reply. Journalists’ failure to comply with these principles leads to disinformation and mass manipulation of the public.

**The purpose of monitoring** is to determine whether and how Moldovan media complied with the standards provided by the Journalist’s Code of Conduct in their coverage of topics of public interest. Starting from the findings of the monitoring reports produced by the Independent Journalism Center in the period of 2016-2020 (see [Publications](#) on *Media-azi.md*), this monitoring will follow the development of the media behavior in order to produce recommendations for journalists as well as for the general public. At the same time, the research aims to contribute to increasing the consumers’ awareness of the risks of disinformation that exist in the local media.

**Criteria for selecting** media outlets for monitoring:

- Coverage – national;
- Languages – Romanian and Russian;
- Impact – audience

**Monitored media outlets:**

- **Television:** Moldova 1, Jurnal TV, RTR Moldova, NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Prime TV, Publika TV, TV6;
- **Online media:** Unimedia.info, Sputnik.md, Kp.md.

**Methodology.** For this monitoring, we selected events of major public interest in the political, economic, and social spheres that took place between February 15 and May 15, 2021, and analyzed how these events were covered by the 12 media outlets. The monitoring was based both on the *quantitative method* (i.e. the airtime given to the monitored topic in newscasts, the most often used sources and the time given to them for direct interventions/quoting, etc.), and especially the *qualitative method*, which we used for content analysis – in terms of compliance with deontology and use of disinformation techniques – of the quantitative data collected during the monitoring. The language and images used by journalists, the correctness of source quoting, and the tone of

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<sup>1</sup> Bogdan Ficeac, *Tehnici de manipulare*, Editura Nemira 2004; Radu Herjeu, *Oglinzimișcătoare. Tehnici de propagandă, manipulare și persuasiune în televiziune*, București 2000.

presentation were analyzed by referring to the Journalist's Code of Conduct<sup>2</sup>, and to the notions of **manipulation** and **propaganda**, as defined in the Dictionary of Sociology.<sup>3</sup>

- **Manipulation:** *“Action taken to make a social actor (a person, a group, or a community) think and act in a way that is compatible with the interests of the initiator and not with their own interests, by using persuasion techniques that intentionally distort the truth, leaving an impression of freedom of thought and decision. Unlike influence by means of rational persuasion, **manipulation** aims not at a more accurate and deep understanding of the situation, but at suggesting a convenient idea by means of misleading through false arguments and by appealing to non-rational emotional levels.”*
- **Propaganda:** *“Systematic activity of transmitting, promoting, or spreading doctrines, messages, or ideas from the position of a particular social group and ideology, in order to influence, change, or shape certain concepts, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, or behaviors. Propaganda is practiced in such a way as to achieve the goals and interests of the group it serves, so there is no neutral or objective propaganda.”*

**The main topics monitored** between February 15 and May 15, 2021:

- Decision of the Constitutional Court (CC) on reappointment of Natalia Gavrilita as Prime Minister (February 23, 2021);
- Political consultations between President Maia Sandu and the parliamentary parties for determining a candidate for the position of Prime Minister (March 16, 2021);
- Declaration of a state of emergency (March 31, 2021);
- Decision of the Constitutional Court on dissolution of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova (April 15, 2021);
- Establishing the PSRM-PCRM electoral block (May 12, 2021).

## I. GENERAL TRENDS

- A. Some media outlets continued covering events of public interest in a tendentious manner and based on political preferences. For example, the televisions **NTV Moldova**, **Accent TV**, **Primul în Moldova** and online platforms **Sputnik.md**, **KP.md** were supporting the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM), and **TV6** was supporting the Shor Political Party.
- B. During this monitoring period, the amount of labeling incidents decreased. However, the incidence of cases of blurred information and/or statements, tendentious headlines, and selective presentation of statements increased significantly. The media where such ethical violations and manipulation techniques were most often detected are **NTV Moldova**, **Accent TV**, **Primul în Moldova**, and **Kp.md**;
- C. **Moldova 1** public channel and such channels as **Jurnal TV**, **RTR Moldova**, and **Publika TV** covered the monitored topics mainly in a neutral and unbiased manner. However, they committed some ethics violations, too;
- D. Some media outlets had a preferential approach to some sources and gave them excessive airtime for statements and opinions. For example, for **NTV Moldova**, **Accent TV**, and **Primul în Moldova**, the PSRM representatives (in particular, the leader of the political party, Igor Dodon) were the main sources in news, while the opinions of the opposition parties and/or politicians were almost completely ignored and not used as sources, especially when they were mentioned/accused (**lack of the right to reply**);

<sup>2</sup>Codul deontologic al jurnalistului din Republica Moldova, <https://consiliuldepresa.md/ro/page/codul-deontologic-al-jurnalistului-din-r-moldova>.

<sup>3</sup>Cătălin Zamfir, Lazăr Vlăsceanu, Dicționar de Sociologie, București, 1998, p. 332, p. 457. <http://vignette4.wikia.nocookie.net/nccmn/images/1/1c/Dictionar-de-Sociologie-Catalin-Zamfir-Lazar-Vlasceanu.pdf/revision/latest?cb=20150813042511&path-prefix=ro>

- E. The most common ethics violations committed by the monitored media outlets were **mixture of facts with opinions** and the **lack of the right to reply** (almost all of the 12 media outlets committed at least one of these violations), followed by **ironic headlines** and **reference to unverifiable sources**. The media outlets that committed such violations were **NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Kp.md, Sputnik.md, Prime TV, Publika TV, Unimedia.info, and TV6**;
- F. The most common manipulation techniques used by the monitored media outlets were **blurring, generalization, and internal/external enemy technique combined with national savior technique**. Such violations were committed by **NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, and Kp.md**;
- G. If the topic addressed in the news was contrary to the political preferences (preferred authority, politician, or political entity) of the media outlet/author, it was either blurred (its importance was intentionally reduced by selective and incomplete presentation of information), or emphasis in the presentation of information was intentionally shifted to less important aspects of the event/news.

## II. DATA ANALYSIS.

### Topic 1. Decision of the Constitutional Court (CC) on Reappointment of Natalia Gavrilita as Prime Minister

*Context: On February 16, 2021, the Constitutional Court (CC) took a decision on rejecting the application for suspending the decree of President Maia Sandu of February 11 on reappointment of Natalia Gavrilita as Prime Minister. The decision of the highest court judges is final and not subject to appeal. Besides, the Constitutional Court noted that, on February 23, 2021, it would examine the appeal filed by the socialist deputies Vasile Bolea, Grigore Novac, and Alexandr Suhodolschi regarding constitutionality of the decree of President Maia Sandu. At the meeting held on February 23, the Constitutional Court examined the appeal of the socialist parliamentarians, declaring the decree unconstitutional.*

**General conclusions:** Some media presented this information in a neutral and impartial manner (Moldova 1, RTR Moldova, Jurnal TV), whereas the others used certain manipulation techniques and committed deontological violations (Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, NTV Moldova, KP.md). Judging by used news scripts, wordings, and videos, a similar approach to the topic was noted on Primul în Moldova, Accent TV, and NTV Moldova, on the one hand, and Prime TV and Publika TV, on the other hand.

**Moldova 1** broadcast two news items on the CC's decision in connection with the decree of President Maia Sandu on Natalia Gavrilita's reappointment as Prime Minister, where it presented information in a neutral and impartial manner, offering the right to reply to all involved and/or mentioned parties.

**Accent TV** broadcast two news on the monitoring topic, presenting information in a biased manner. Several deontological violations have been identified, including:

- **Tendentious headlines:** "Maia Sandu Has Breached the Constitution";
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** "According to the decision, Maia Sandu is obliged to organize new consultations, taking into account 54 signatures in favor of the candidate within their framework. However, it is unclear at the current stage whether the head of the state would act this way";
- **Generalization:** "Constitutional experts have expressed their opinion of the decision of the highest court";
- **Lack of the right to reply.** Igor Dodon accused President Maia Sandu of "usurping the state power," and she was not offered the right to reply;
- **"Internal enemy"/"scapegoat" manipulation technique.** Judging by the way of providing information, including the lack of the right of reply to the mentioned persons (Maia Sandu and the Action and Solidarity Party), **Accent TV** attempted to vilify the head of the state.

[Primul în Moldova](#) broadcast three news on the subject, presenting information in a tendentious and biased manner. Detected ethics violations include:

- **Tendentious headlines:** “*A Lesson for Maia Sandu*”; “*The CC makes Maia Sandu Honor It*”;
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “*President Maia Sandu has learned a lesson of constitutionality from the highest court judges*”;
- **Blurred information/statements and selective and disproportionate presentation of opinions.** In the broadcast news, **Primul în Moldova** did not mention that the PSRM’s appeal to the Constitutional Court was accepted “*partially*.” The editorial board also emphasized the point of view of the PSRM representatives, yet also included some statements by the representative of the Presidency (Olesea Stamate) which were irrelevant to the topic. In addition, the PSRM representatives were given 5 times more airtime for direct quotes than other persons concerned: 3 speeches with a total duration of almost 2 minutes compared to the only presentation lasting 10 seconds;
- **Lack of the right to reply.** A statement by Igor Dodon was used the only source of one of the news in which he accused President Maia Sandu and the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) of “*usurping the state power,*” yet **Primul în Moldova** failed to offer the right of reply to any of the mentioned persons;
- **Generalization:** “*Constitutional law experts declare that the highest court has stated significant breaches of the Constitution committed by Maia Sandu...*”;
- **“Internal enemy”/“scapegoat” manipulation technique.** Judging by the way the news was structured, **Primul în Moldova** made it clear that Maia Sandu was to blame for the political crisis.

[NTV Moldova](#) approached the topic in the same manner as **Accent TV** and **Primul în Moldova**, committing basically the same ethics violations:

- **Tendentious headlines:** “*President Ignores the Constitution*”;
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “*The Constitutional Court has forced Maia Sandu to respect it... The Socialist deputies provided the necessary arguments to prove that the head of the state adopts the law on her own whim instead of being guided by the provisions of the Constitution*”;
- **Lack of the right to reply.** Igor Dodon accused Maia Sandu of usurping the state power, and she was not offered the right to reply;
- **Generalization:** “*The CC decision obliges President Maia Sandu to return to compliance with the constitution. This is how the experts comment on the court decision*”;
- **Borrowing videos without indicating the source.** **NTV Moldova** borrowed videos from another media institution (**Primul în Moldova**) without mentioning the original source.

[TV6](#) referred to **unverifiable sources** and admitted a case of **generalization:** “*The decision causes a wave of criticism. Politicians and analysts state that the head of the state has breached the court decision...*”

[Prime TV](#) covered the topic of the monitoring in three news using **ironic headlines:** “*The Court Says PASS to President*”.

[Publika TV](#) covered the topic of the monitoring according to a scenario similar to that used by **Prime TV**. However, unlike **Prime TV**, no ethics violations were detected in the case of **Publika TV**.

[RTR Moldova](#) and [Jurnal TV](#) covered the topic in question in 2 and 3 news, respectively, in the newscasts dated February 23, 2021. Both channels presented information in a neutral and impartial manner, without any ethics violations or manipulation techniques.

**Unimedia.info** published 11 news on the decision of the Constitutional Court regarding President Maia Sandu’s decree on reappointing Natalia Gavrilita as Prime Minister. In some of them, the

editorial board presented information in a biased way and demonstrated some preference to the PSRM, especially providing generous space for citing the statements of the representatives of this party and presenting it positively. On the other hand, President Maia Sandu and PAS were presented somewhat negatively. **Unimedia.info** admitted a case of [referring to unverifiable sources](#): “Some experts predict a constitutional crisis in addition to the political, healthcare, and economic ones already existing in the Republic of Moldova.”

**Sputnik.md** published 12 materials on the topic of the monitoring, where several violations are detected:

- **Generalization:** “The CC decision of February 16 was commented on by experts in the relevant sphere”;
- **Lack of the right to reply.** Igor Dodon accused Maia Sandu and PAS of attempting to usurp the state power, and they were not offered the right to reply;
- **Tendentious headlines:** “Domnica Manole Put Maia Sandu in Her Proper Place.”

**Kp.md** published 4 materials on the CC decision. The editorial board covered the topic in a tendentious, biased manner with several ethics violations, including:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “*Domnica Manole Put Maia Sandu in Her Proper Place*”; “*With the Air of a Prosecutor, President Sandu Visits the Briefing Following the Decision of the Constitutional Court*”;
- **Tendentious headlines:** “The President of Moldova Will Continue Struggling against the Parliament”;
- **“National savior”/“messiah” manipulation technique:** “The Party of Socialists as the largest faction in the Parliament is still ready to do everything necessary to rapidly find a way out of this crisis.”

## Topic 2. Political Consultations between President Maia Sandu and the Parliamentary Parties for Determining a Candidate for the Position of Prime Minister

*Context: On March 15, 2021, President Maia Sandu invited the parliamentary factions for the new consultations to determine a candidate for the position of Prime Minister. The consultations were held the next day, on March 16. During the discussions between the socialists and the head of the state, Mariana Durllesteanu, the PSRM-Pentru Moldova majority candidate for the position of prime minister, announced she was withdrawing her candidacy. At the end of the consultations, Maia Sandu appointed Igor Grosu, the interim head of the PAS, as a candidate for the position of Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova.*

**General conclusions:** Judging by the way the media approached this information their political “preferences” became obvious. Some media outlets presented President Maia Sandu and the PAS members negatively. On the other hand, the same institutions presented Igor Dodon and the PSRM members positively (Accent TV, NTV Moldova, Primul în Moldova, Kp.md).

**Moldova 1** public TV channel broadcast the news about the consultations between President Maia Sandu and the parliamentary factions and the appointment of Igor Grosu as Prime Minister, as well as another news about Mariana Durllesteanu’s announcement about her revoking her candidacy for the post of Prime Minister from PSRM-Pentru Moldova parliamentary majority. In both materials, **Moldova 1** presented information in a neutral and impartial manner without any breaches.

**NTV Moldova** broadcast two news items on this topic, in which the **airtime** for direct quotes was **unbalancedly distributed** among the sources. For instance, **NTV Moldova** offered Igor Dodon almost four times more airtime for his statements (about 2 minutes in 2 speeches) than other politicians/parliamentary leaders.

**Accent TV** presented information in a tendentious and biased way, admitting:

- **Blurring.** **Accent TV** did not mention Mariana Durllesteanu’s statement that she refused to remain the candidate for the position of Prime Minister from PSRM-Pentru Moldova parliamentary majority in any news;
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“At first, Igor Grosu, whose statements contradict each other, said that countering the pandemic crisis was a priority, after which he announced a period which, in his opinion, was favorable for holding advance elections.”*

**Primul în Moldova** approached this topic in a style in many aspects similar to that of **NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV**. The information was presented in a biased way, and the following violations were detected:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“The political situation and ways of resolving the institutional deadlock were discussed by the factions and the parliamentary groups with President Maia Sandu, who had kept silence for over a month...”*;
- **Reference to unverifiable sources:** *“According to some participants of the discussion, Maia Sandu’s recent gesture is meant to demonstrate she no longer insists on early elections, and even intends to appoint a functional government”*;
- **Suggestion/manipulation by means of video images.** Whereas in case of the leaders of the PSRM factions, the Shor Party, the PDM, and the Pro Moldova Group, the channel broadcast the footage of the briefings they had organized, in case of the PAS representatives, **Primul în Moldova** illustrated the text with the video footage of a long queue of ambulances to the Screening Center for COVID-19 Patients located at Moldexpo, suggesting that PAS was the political entity responsible for the situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**RTR Moldova** and **Jurnal TV** broadcast 2 and 3 news on the topic of the monitoring, respectively. Both channels reflected this information in a neutral and impartial manner.

**TV6** broadcast 4 news items on the topic of the monitoring, resorting to **tendentious headlines** (*“President Hits the Switch”*), and in one case, it admits **mixture of facts with opinions** (*“It seems, however, that Maia Sandu has changed her priorities. Officially, she claims that the pandemic crisis is more important, yet she does not abandon the idea of early elections”*).

**Prime TV** broadcast 3 news on the topic of the monitoring, where the following breaches were detected:

- **Tendentious headlines:** *“Prime Minister from the President’s Sleeve”*;
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“It is also curious that Alexandru Slusari canceled the press briefing scheduled for this evening...”*; *“Apparently, the politician had no idea of Durllesteanu’s statement...”*

**Unimedia.info** published 14 news on the topic of the monitoring. **In one of them**, the portal **did not offer the right of reply** to President Maia Sandu and the PAS representatives accused by Igor Dodon of *“continuously wreaking havoc in the country.”*

**Kp.md** published 4 articles, covering the information superficially, in a tendentious and biased manner, selectively presenting the opinions of those involved or mentioned. The editorial board presented the reaction of the PSRM and Igor Dodon to the events of that day in a detailed way, completely ignoring the comments by other parties or politicians. Therefore, **Kp.md** presented the information on the topic of the monitoring vaguely (**blurring**) and selectively. The editorial board also committed the following breaches:

- **Tendentious headlines and information presented out of context:** *“Sandu Appoints Igor Grosu, who Called the Transnistrian Residents Separatists, as Prime Minister of Moldova.”* During the first round of the presidential elections held in November 2020, Igor Grosu called the leaders of the region “separatists”, not referring to the residents of Transnistria;

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“Mariana Durllesteanu withdrew her candidacy for the position of Prime Minister, and Maia Sandu as President of Moldova nominated Igor Grosu, the leader of the PAS faction, as a candidate for Prime Minister... One can wonder why this is called a Prime Minister for everyone...”*

**Sputnik.md** published 15 materials on this topic. The editorial boards covered the events in some news in a tendentious manner, presenting the PSRM and Igor Dodon positively, and President Maia Sandu, PAS, and some representatives of this party (Igor Grosu) negatively. In this case, the following breaches are identified:

- **Generalization:** *“Experts: What Are the Chances of Grosu Becoming Prime Minister and Who Can Put Pressure for Voting for Him”;*
- **Reference to unverifiable sources:** *“Many experts consider that President Maia Sandu is trying to return to a regular constitutional position, judging by the fact that she invited the factions to negotiate again.”* This sentence appears in 3 news out of 15 published by **Sputnik.md**;
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“The leader of the Socialists was scant of speech and only clarified that he had held a conversation with Mariana Durllesteanu.”*

### Topic 3. Declaration of a state of emergency in the Territory of the Republic of Moldova

**Context:** *On March 30, 2021, the Government adopted a resolution urging the Parliament to declare a state of emergency in the state for 60 days. On the next day, March 31, the draft law on announcing a state of emergency was presented to the Parliament by three socialist deputies, included in the agenda, and approved by 52 votes of the parliamentary majority of the PSRM and “Pentru Moldova” Platform.*

**General conclusions:** *With the exception of the public TV channel Moldova 1 and such channels as RTR Moldova, Prime TV, and Publika TV, all other media outlets committed ethics violations and/or used manipulation methods. Most breaches were revealed in the cases of NTV Moldova, Primul în Moldova, Accent TV, Kp.md, and Sputnik.md: these are mixture of facts with opinions, lack of the right to reply, and selective presentation of statements. As for disinformation techniques, the most commonly used techniques were the “savior of the nation”, the “internal enemy” technique, and blurring.*

**NTV Moldova** presented this topic in a biased and unbalanced manner and from the only point of view – that of the PSRM. **NTV Moldova** committed the following violations:

- **Blurring.** The editorial board did not provide information fully and comprehensively. **NTV Moldova** prepared the news solely on the basis of the statements by Acting Prime Minister Aureliu Ciocoi made in his speech at the Legislative Assembly. At the same time, **NTV Moldova** did not mention the steps implied by the state of emergency and stipulated in the decision.
- **Selective presentation of statements.** **NTV Moldova** did not cite the views of any parliamentary faction, except the opinion of the PSRM represented by Igor Dodon.
- **Lack of the right to reply.** **NTV Moldova** Moldova included the statements by the PSRM leader Igor Dodon who accused President Maia Sandu of *“opposing the plenipotentiary government,”* and she was not offered the right to reply.
- **“National savior” and “internal enemy” manipulation technique.** **NTV Moldova** presented the PSRM as the party caring about people and doing its best for them. On the other hand, President Maia Sandu and PAS allegedly cared only about their political image, making decisions harmful to people. For example, *“[due to the pandemic – author’s note] the PSRM, even strongly supported in the ATU of Gagauzia, suggested postponing the elections to the National Assembly.”* In contrast, PAS and Maia Sandu *“insist on early parliamentary elections during the pandemic.”*



[Primul în Moldova](#) broadcast 2 news where the information was presented in the same way as on **NTV Moldova**, with the difference that the other parliamentary factions' opinions were included in them. However, in presenting this topic, the editorial board was biased, demonstrating a preference for the PSRM and presenting President Maia Sandu and the PAS members negatively. In this case, the following breaches were identified:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“The careless attitude of the PAS deputies offended their colleagues in the Parliament, who reminded them that every day, dozens of people mourned their loved ones killed by the virus”;*
- **Tendentious headlines:** *“Sandu Is Taking the Army to the Streets.”*

[Accent TV](#) admitted the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“The last drop in the cup of patience.” This is how the interim prime minister explained his decision to appear in the Parliament and demand declaring a state of emergency in the state. For greater persuasiveness, the official cited the statistics...”;*
- **Tendentious selection of statements/Blurring:** *“Ciocoi also responded to the deputies who sought to conduct political PR about an eventual lockdown.”* However, in none of the news, **Accent TV** presented any statements other than those of the interim prime minister;
- **“National savior” and “internal enemy” manipulation technique.** *“The leader of the socialists specifies that the PSRM deputies will not allow elections until the virus stops spreading,”* whereas *“Maia Sandu intends to organize elections.”* The PSRM is presented positively (**“national savior” technique**), while the PAS and Maia Sandu are presented negatively light (**“internal enemy” technique**).

[Moldova 1](#) и [RTR Moldova](#) broadcast one and two news on the declaration of a state of emergency by the Parliament, respectively, with which the news broadcast began. Both channels broadcast the information in a neutral and impartial manner, providing sufficient airtime to all the parliamentary factions. Similarly, [Prime TV](#) and [Publika TV](#) covered the information in a neutral and impartial manner, using the same script, texts, and videos.

[TV6](#) broadcast 4 news on the monitored topic, committing the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“The question used to be solved by coercion, and now they are doing just the same thing. Maia Sandu leads the army into the streets during the state of emergency, as ex-President Igor Dodon did last year”;*
- **Tendentious headlines:** *“Sandu Is Taking the Army to the Streets. Soldiers Will Patrol the Streets as in Igor Dodon’s Times”;*
- **Generalization:** *“New restrictions introduced with the declaration of the state of emergency frighten citizens. Many capital dwellers tell us they have no idea what they will get by on if a special regime is introduced...”*

[Jurnal TV](#) informed about the event in a neutral and impartial manner. However, the editorial board admitted one case of **mixture of facts with opinions:** *“One of the authors of the initiative, the PSRM deputy Vasile Bolea, also approached the tribune; among other things, he morally supported the deputies, showing a lightweight attitude towards his project.”*

**Kp.md** published 3 materials on the introduction of the state of emergency or mentioning it. The editorial board presented the information in a tendentious, selective, and insufficiently impartial manner, committing several violations, such as:

- **“Internal enemy” technique/suggestion.** In one of the materials, **KP.md** mentioned the initiative of declaring a state of emergency discussed at the March 13 SSC meeting, suggesting that Maia Sandu and the PAS, *“holding a full mandate, fail to take decisive action to manage the pandemic crisis”;*

- **Lack of the right to reply.** In another news, Minister of Justice Fadei Nagachevschi accused Maia Sandu and the PAS representatives of not taking specific steps to resolve the pandemic crisis, and **KP.md** did not grant the above persons the right to reply;
- **Blurring.** **KP.md** provided the information on the monitoring topic selectively and incompletely, without mentioning the discussions and debates related to the decision to declare the state of emergency.

**Sputnik.md** published eight news on the monitoring topic. The editorial board provided the information and statements selectively. Judging by their approach, on the one hand, **Sputnik.md** presented the Government, the interim Prime Minister Aureliu Ciocoi, the PSRM, and its representatives positively, and on the other hand, it presented the information on the other parliamentary parties unclearly, ignoring the statements by the representatives of these political parties (**selective coverage of statements and information/Blurring**). In addition, **Sputnik.md** admitted a case of **mixture of facts with opinions**: *“Acting Prime Minister Aureliu Ciocoi presented to the Parliament an apocalyptic scenario in case the MPs did not vote for declaring a state of emergency.”*

**Unimedia.info** published 5 materials on introducing the state of emergency by the Parliament **Unimedia.info** mostly examines this topic superficially, paying more attention to sensational moments (statements by the PSRM deputy Vasile Bolea) and presenting certain information vaguely – for instance, no news include the reactions of the parliamentary factions to establishing the state of emergency. In addition, Unimedia.info admitted **mixture of facts with opinions**: *“Earlier, Bolea lost his temper and used obscene language when speaking from the tribune of the Parliament”; “The chairman of the Legal Commission, Vasile Bolea, lost his temper and used obscene language when speaking from the tribune of the Parliament.”*

#### **Topic 4. Decision of the Constitutional Court on dissolution of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova**

*Context: On March 29, 2021, Maia Sandu, President of the Republic of Moldova, filed an appeal to the Constitutional Court (CC) to establish the circumstances justifying the dissolution of the Parliament. On April 15, 2021, the judges of the highest court examined the appeal, and a vote of 3 out of 5 judges established that there were circumstances for dissolving the legislative authority.*

**General conclusions:** *With the exception of Prime TV, Publika TV, and Unimedia.info, other editorial boards committed ethics violations and/or used manipulation techniques. Some media “forgot” to mention the views of certain political parties regarding this decision, and vaguely presented information, especially statements by some organizations, was one of the most frequently used methods of manipulation. Mixture of facts with opinions, lack of the right to reply, and selective coverage of statements were the most frequently identified ethical breaches.*

**Primul în Moldova** presented the information in a tendentious and biased manner, committing the following violations:

- **Tendentious selection of statements /Blurring.** The parliamentary lawyers were directly quoted thrice, and the total broadcasting time was one minute, while Maia Sandu was directly quoted only once, and her speech lasted for about 20 seconds;
- **Lack of the right to reply.** Igor Dodon accused the judges of the Constitutional Court Domnica Manole, Liuba Sova, and Nicolae Rosca of *“usurping the state power,”* and blamed Maia Sandu for *“adopting the methods of the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc.”* None of the persons mentioned were offered the right to reply by **Primul în Moldova**;
- **Generalization:** *“... constitutional experts affirm that today’s meeting was devoid of any logic.”*

[NTV Moldova](#) covered the monitoring topic superficially and presented the information selectively (**blurring**), in a tendentious and biased way. The following violations were identified on this channel:

- **Biased selection of statements.** **NTV Moldova** included in the news only Igor Dodon's reaction to the decision of the Constitutional Court, ignoring the reaction of the Presidency, politicians, and parliamentary political parties (**blurring**);
- **Lack of the right to reply.** Igor Dodon accused Maia Sandu of "*usurping the state power.*" **NTV Moldova** did not offer the head of the state the right to reply.

[Accent TV](#) favored Igor Dodon and the Socialist Party and presented President Maia Sandu and PAS negatively. **Accent TV** committed the following violations:

- **Lack of the right to reply.** Igor Dodon accused Maia Sandu of "*usurping the state power,*" and she was not given the right to reply;
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** "*Maia Sandu's 'Good People' showed their true colors. (...) Armed with the EU flag, the demonstrator praised Sandu, after which they focused their attention on the PSRM deputy Vasile Bolea...*";
- **Generalization:** "*Parliamentarians assert that Maia Sandu cuts the branch while sitting on it, and everyone else is sitting on it too...*";
- **"Internal enemy" technique.** Maia Sandu and the Presidency are presented by **Accent TV** as generating chaos in the country;
- **Irony:** "*The demonstrators greeted her with a smile and gathered around her (Maia Sandu – author's note), obviously ignoring the social distance of at least a meter.*"

[Moldova 1](#) broadcast 2 news about the Constitutional Court's decision to dissolve the legislative authority. The public channel used a **generalization:** "*President Maia Sandu cannot dissolve the Parliament due to the state of emergency in force in the state. This opinion is shared by the constitutional experts. Moreover, they declare that the decision of the Constitutional Court does not imply obligatorily holding early parliamentary elections.*"

[RTR Moldova](#) broadcast one news item on the monitoring topic, presenting the information in a neutral manner, but at the end of the material, they included only the reaction of the PSRM leader Igor Dodon to the decision, without balancing the news with the opinions of the representatives of other parliamentary factions (**tendentious selection of statements/blurring**).

[TV6](#) used **tendentious headlines** while covering the information: "*Elections during the Struggle against the Virus*" and allowed cases of **mixture of facts with opinions:** "... A number of reactions from the deputies followed. Most parliamentary factions criticized this decision and voiced their accusations against President Maia Sandu, simultaneously reproaching the Presidency. Only the former fellow party members supported her."

[Jurnal TV](#) allocated almost 1/3 of the entire news broadcast to the monitoring subject (4 news). The editorial board resorted to **tendentious headlines:** "*Anger in the Socialist Camp.*"

[Prime TV](#) and [Publika TV](#) covered the monitoring topic basically in the same way. Both editorial boards presented the information in a neutral and impartial manner, providing an opportunity to express opinions and make statements to all the participants in the events or parties concerned.

**Unimedia.info** published 14 news items on the CC decision, presenting the information in a neutral and impartial manner and avoiding any ethics violations.

**Sputnik.md** published 16 articles on the monitoring topic or related to it. The editorial board presented the topic in a tendentious and biased way, which was especially expressed in the sense that it supported those who oppose the idea of dissolving the legislative authority and organizing parliamentary elections. The following breaches were revealed in the materials published on the portal:

- **Lack of the right to reply.** In one of the news, the PSRM leader Igor Dodon accused Maia Sandu of usurping the state power and of acting according to the methods of Vladimir Plahotniuc, but the President and/or the Presidency were not offered the right to reply;
- **Selective presentation of statements.** Sputnik.md quoted the statements by the PSRM, the PPDP, the PDM, “Pentru Moldova” Platform, “Our Party”, and “Pro Moldova”, ignoring the reaction of PAS.

Kp.md published 3 articles on the monitoring topic. The editorial board presented the information superficially, in a tendentious and biased way, presenting Maia Sandu negatively, and the PSRM members positively. Kp.md committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “President of Moldova Maia Sandu personally came to the session of the Constitutional Court today, April 15, 2021. What is it called in a civilized society? Putting pressure on the court?” ;
- **Tendentious and ironic headlines:** “Sandu’s Satisfaction: The Constitutional Court Has Decided upon Early Parliamentary Elections in Moldova, Despite the Pandemic” ;
- **Reference to unverifiable sources:** “It is worth mentioning that Maia Sandu, President of Moldova, personally came to the CC meeting, which was regarded as putting pressure on the court.” KP.md did not mention who exactly assessed President Sandu’s participation in the CC session as interference with justice.

## Topic 5. Establishing the PSRM-PCRM Electoral Block

*Context: On May 12, 2021, socialist Igor Dodon announced in his post on Facebook that, after the meeting of the PSRM Republican Council, it was decided that the PSRM and the PCRM would join a common electoral bloc to participate in the election campaign and early parliamentary elections on July 11. Later that day, the PCRM leader Vladimir Voronin and the PSRM leader Igor Dodon signed an official document on establishing a political formation.*

**General conclusions:** Such TV channels as NTV Moldova, Accent TV, and Primul în Moldova, and Sputnik.md online platform shared a similar approach to this topic, demonstrating their preferences and presenting the PSRM and representatives of this political formation positively. The most common violations in other cases included tendentious and biased choice of statements and mixture of facts with opinions.

In its television newscast, [NTV Moldova](#) used “**external and internal enemy**” **manipulation technique**. NTV Moldova covered the event solely on the basis of the statement published on Facebook by the PSRM leader Igor Dodon who emphasizes that “... *the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova is threatened, and the interests of Moldovan people are less priority than those of the other countries, including the plans to transform the territory of our country in the area for military maneuvers. External factors... Foreign colony...*,” thus suggesting (**suggestion technique**) not mentioned specifically, are allegedly to blame for this state of affairs. At the same time, NTV Moldova published 3 more news on the monitoring topic on its online platform. This is where the editorial board used **manipulative headlines**, and also had a few cases of **generalization**: “[Youth welcomes the decision of the two parties, the PSRM and the PCRM, to establish an electoral bloc](#)”; “[The PSRM and the PCRM bloc can get a majority in the future Parliament, according to the analysts.](#)”

When presenting the topic, [Primul în Moldova](#) used the same scenario, text, and images as NTV Moldova. The editorial board committed the following violations:

- “**External and internal enemy**” **technique**. Primul în Moldova selected and emphasized only the statements by Igor Dodon and some of the interviewees, all of whom mentioned that “Moldova was in danger due to foreign forces” (“**external enemy**” **technique**), “*the right-wing parties promote the other states interests*” (“**internal enemy**” **technique**);
- **Generalization**: “*The politicians’ decision is welcomed by the residents of the state craving for stability in a neutral and independent country*”;

- **Tendentious selection of opinions.** During the interviews and a public opinion poll, **Primul în Moldova** journalists selected and broadcast only the opinions of those who, on the one hand, welcomed the creation of this electoral bloc, and on the other hand, emphasized “*danger and foreign aggression*”, fearing that “*some foreigner may come to my house and tell me what to do.*”

**Accent TV** broadcast the news about the creation of a bloc of socialists and communists, where it presented the information in a tendentious manner, openly supporting the PSRM and the PCRM and describing the representatives of the two parties positively. At the same time, the editorial board resorted to **generalization**: “*Creating the PSRM-PCRM electoral bloc at the stage of negotiations caused an outburst of reactions in the public space. Political analysts believe the left electorate can consolidate around this bloc.*”

**TV6** broadcast one news item on the monitoring topic which is also published on its website. The channel admitted **mixture of facts with opinions**: “*The agreement on founding an electoral bloc of the PSRM and the PCRM was signed by the socialist chairman Igor Dodon and the communist leader Vladimir Voronin, despite the fact that the later had criticized Dodon countless times for betraying the party.*”

**RTR Moldova** and **Moldova 1** public channel aired one news item each, presenting the information in a neutral manner without ethics violations.

**Jurnal TV** broadcast the news about establishing the PSRM-PCRM electoral bloc. Presenting this information, the channel on one occasion admitted **mixture of facts with opinions**: “*In the ten years that have passed since Igor Dodon left the Party of Communists, Vladimir Voronin harshly criticized him dozens of times, accusing him of lack of dignity, and scorned at him. Dodon was also known for making nipping remarks about Voronin. The leitmotif of their verbal duels was betrayal.*”

**Prime TV** broadcast one news item on the monitored topic. The editorial board presented the information in a neutral manner and without deontological violations. **Publika TV** published the **news** on its official website, accompanied by a video that resembled an election advertisement. It included images of signing the agreement on establishing an electoral bloc by the leaders of the PSRM and the PCRM. The video is accompanied by the background sound, and the PSRM logo can be seen both in the beginning and in the end.

**Kp.md** portal published three articles on the monitoring topic. The editorial board presented the topic in a tendentious and biased manner, presenting the PSRM and the PCRM positively. The following breaches were identified:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions**: “*Most likely, a common vision on many issues will be reached...*”;
- **Tendentious selection of applications.** In one of the articles, **Kp.md** mentioned in the headline that Vladimir Voronin would be the first in the list of the new electoral bloc, after which, the news is basically reduced to Igor Dodon’s accusations against the EU Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova Peter Michalko: according to the article, the socialist leader blames him for “*interfering with the internal affairs of the state*” (“**external enemy**” **technique**). In this case, **Kp.md** was supposed to offer the right to reply to the person concerned, which it failed to do (**lack of the right to reply**).

**Sputnik.md** published 4 news about establishing the PSRM-PCRM electoral bloc or referring to it, where it had a case of **mixture of facts with opinions**: “*Both parties are convinced they need to unite patriotic political forces capable of winning the elections and creating professional, reliable, and experienced government acting in the interests of the citizens of the country instead of those of foreign powers.*”

**Unimedia.info** published 5 news on founding the PSRM-PCRM electoral bloc and its registration with the CEC. The topic was presented in a neutral manner without deontological violations.

## CONCLUSIONS

During the monitoring period (February 15 - May 15, 2021), all the 12 monitored institutions committed at least one ethics violation. The most common violations remain mixture of facts with opinions and lack of the right to reply which had to be granted to those mentioned or accused. They are followed by selective presentation of information and/or statements, generalization, and reference to unverifiable sources.

On the one hand, tendentious headlines began to be used more frequently during the reporting period (**NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, and Kp.md**). On the other hand, labeling has almost disappeared from the list of ethics violations.

At the same time, during the 3 months of monitoring, the number of cases of blurring has significantly increased, which is caused by some media outlets' tendency to downplay the importance of a particular topic of public interest and/or to ignore statements by the politicians or political parties they do not support due to their shared political preferences (**Accent TV, NTV Moldova, Primul în Moldova, and Kp.md**).

The most frequently used manipulation techniques were “internal and external enemy” and “national savior” (**NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova**), as well as generalizations (**Accent TV, Kp.md, Televiziunea Centrală**). Biased selection of statements and news sources is one of the ethics violations still committed by many monitored media outlets. The next most frequent violation is the fact that editorial offices usually quote representatives of the political parties they prefer, almost completely ignoring statements by the representatives of the parties they do not support. For this reason, the topics covered are politicized. In particular, this is obvious at such TV channels as **NTV Moldova, Accent TV, and Primul în Moldova**, and **Kp.md** online platform which openly support the PSRM, and **TV6** which supports the Shor Party.

**RTR Moldova, Jurnal TV, and Moldova 1** public channel are the media institutions that committed the least number of ethics violations. However, in some cases, they also resort to mixing facts with opinions (**Jurnal TV**), generalizations (**Moldova 1**), or blurring (**RTR Moldova**).

**Prime TV and Publika TV** covered the information on the monitoring topics identically, based on the same scenarios and using the same video images or texts, while admitting mixture of facts with opinions and formulating tendentious headlines **NTV Moldova, Accent TV, and Primul în Moldova** covered the information in a similar manner.

As to **Sputnik.md**, such violations as mixture of facts with opinions, lack of the right to reply, tendentious headlines, and generalizations were reported, and in case of **Kp.md**, breaches included “internal enemy” manipulative technique, blurring, mixture of facts with opinions, lack of the right to reply, generalizations, ironic and tendentious headlines, and reference to unverifiable sources. **Unimedia.info** resorted to lack of right of reply and mixture of facts with opinions, whereas **TV6** resorted to generalizations, mixture of facts with opinions, tendentious headlines, and reference to unverifiable sources

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Broadcasting Council (BC), based on Article 75 (*Responsibilities of the Broadcasting 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 televisions, the content of which, according to reports, delivers manipulating information.
- The editors of TV stations should supervise the editorial content so that it complies with the mission of the media to inform the public and correctly present the reality, and not with the desire of political circles to promote their interests and attack opponents.
- Reporters should report all relevant facts on events in an unbiased manner and after verifying information, not selectively or unilaterally. At the same time, they should understand that the right to reply for the persons targeted or accused is mandatory and is one of the key rules in journalism.
- Media consumers should seek information in several media sources, in order to avoid the risk of receiving wrong and manipulating information.