



Monitoring Report

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

January 1 – April 30, 2020

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Introduction and context. From January 1 to April 30, 2020, 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 than 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, and so on. By appealing to the Moldovan Journalist’s Code of Ethics and specialized academic works, we could identify information manipulation techniques used in the news stories of the media outlets concerned.¹

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, so, regardless of the media owners’ political views, news must present exclusively facts and not journalists’ opinions. Also, they should be presented in 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 opinions, 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 Ethics 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 2016-2019 (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;
- Language – Romanian and Russian;
- Impact – circulation and audience.

Monitored media outlets:

Television: Moldova 1, Jurnal TV, RTR Moldova, NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Prime TV, Publika TV, Televiziunea Centrală.

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 January 1 and April 30, 2020, and analyzed how these events were covered by the 12 media outlets. The monitoring was based both on the **quantitative method** (e.g. the airtime given to the monitored topic in newscasts, the most often

¹ Bogdan Ficeac, *Tehnici de manipulare*, Editura Nemira 2004; Radu Herjeu, *Oglinzi mișcătoare. Tehnici de propagandă, manipulare și persuasiune în televiziune*, București 2000.

used sources and the time given to them for direct interventions, 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 presentation were analyzed by referring to the Journalist’s Code of Ethics² and to the notions of **manipulation** and **propaganda**, as defined in the Dictionary of Sociology³.

- **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 January 1 and April 30, 2020:

- President Igor Dodon’s speech in the plenum of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (January 29, 2020);
- The withdrawal of six MPs from the Democratic Party of Moldova (February 19, 2020);
- Protest of the Transnistria War veterans (March 2, 2020);
- Adoption of the decision on declaring the state of emergency (March 17, 2020);
- Constitutional Court decision on the law regarding the Government assuming responsibility (April 13, 2020).

I. GENERAL TRENDS

- A. Some media outlets covered events of public interest in a tendentious manner, based on political preferences. For example, the televisions **NTV Moldova**, **Accent TV**, and **Primul în Moldova**, as well as online platforms **Sputnik.md** and **KP.md**, supported the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM) in news; **Prime TV** and **Publika TV** supported the Pro Moldova parliamentary group; **Televiziunea Centrală** supported the Shor Party.
- B. Some media outlets showed preference for certain sources and provided them with excessive airtime for statements and opinions. For example, the main sources of news for **NTV Moldova**, **Accent TV**, **Primul în Moldova**, **Sputnik.md**, and **KP.md** are representatives of central authorities – president Igor Dodon, Prime Minister Ion Chicu, and representatives of PSRM; for **Prime TV** and **Publika TV** – MPs from the parliamentary group Pro Moldova, Andrian Candu, Sergiu Sirbu; for **Televiziunea Centrală** – representatives of Shor Party.

² Moldovan Journalist’s Code of Ethics, <https://consiliuldepresa.md/ro/page/codul-deontologic-al-jurnalistului-din-r-moldova>

³ Cătălin Zamfir, Lazăr Vlăsceanu, Dictionary of Sociology, Bucharest, 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>

- C. The most frequent deontological violations committed by the monitored media outlets were **lack of the right to reply, mixture of facts with opinions, generalization, labeling, tendentious headlines, irony, suggestion, and change of accents in a news story**. The media outlets that committed the most of such violations were **NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Kp.md, Sputnik.md, Prime TV, Publika TV**.
- D. The most frequent disinformation and manipulation techniques used by the monitored media outlets were **internal enemy technique, “National Savior” technique, blurring, omission, and manipulation by means of video**. The monitored media outlets that used such manipulation techniques the most often were **NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, and Kp.md**.
- E. Some media outlets used topics of public interest to disfavor and/or present in a negative context the political opponents of the parties that they support: **NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Kp.md**.
- F. If the topic of a news story was contrary to political preferences (the preferred authority, politician, or political entity) of the media outlet/author, it was either blurred (i.e. its importance was intentionally downplayed by means of information being presented partially or selectively), or the media changed accents, intentionally focusing on less important aspects of the event/news.

II. DATA ANALYSIS

Topic 1. Igor Dodon’s speech in the plenum of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Context: *Between January 29 and February 3, 2020, President Igor Dodon made a working visit to Strasbourg, where he spoke at the plenary meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). In addition, the head of state had meetings with the leadership of the Council of Europe (CE), the Venice Commission, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and with the diplomatic corps accredited to the CE.*

General conclusions: *Only one of the 12 monitored media outlets failed to cover this topic in newscasts (Televiziunea Centrală). Several outlets dedicated to this topic very much airtime, sometimes even more than half of the newscast (Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, NTV Moldova, and Moldova 1). Others, on the other hand, blurred the topic, thus downplaying its importance (Prime TV and Publika TV).*

[NTV Moldova](#) and [Primul în Moldova](#) focused on Igor Dodon’s statements, presenting him in an exclusively positive light and in a laudatory manner (“**National Savior**” / “**Messiah**” technique). For example, in the 11 minutes 30 seconds of the three news stories on this topic **NTV Moldova** presented Igor Dodon with seven direct inserts of over 6 minutes (**imbalance of sources**). It also committed other deontological violations, including:

- Used **generalization** and the **internal enemy technique** in the news story about “*several pro-European parties,*” which were accused of benefiting from the EU support to the detriment of the state: “*The head of state noted that several pro-European parties enjoyed the trust of European leaders in recent years. It helped them do political PR and take credit for the support of EU partners.*”
- Although **NTV Moldova** did not name any parties, it had the obligation to ensure the right to opinion to some entities that “*declare themselves pro-European*” (**lack of the right to reply**).
- **Tendentious and manipulating headlines:** “*Full powers at PACE.*”

[Accent TV](#) had the same approach and used the same videos as **NTV Moldova** and **Primul în Moldova**, committing a number of deontological violations:

- **“National Savior” / “Messiah” technique:** *“Dodon addressed MEPs in four languages”; “The president focused on five topics of major importance...”; “From the PACE rostrum, the president said he had managed to make important steps in the fight against corruption... (...) Igor Dodon dedicated a part of his speech to interethnic relations and cooperation with regions”; “Dodon: Balanced foreign policy is the only way to save the country.”*
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“The head of state offered a gift of immeasurable value, a carpet on which the Tree of Life is woven.”*
- **Generalization:** *“Igor Dodon’s speech ... pleasantly surprised the local political analysts.”*
- **Lack of the right to reply:** Igor Dodon accused *“pro-European parties”* of the poor situation in our country, claiming they protect their *“criminal interests.”* **Accent TV** had the obligation to provide the right to reply to those concerned, which it failed to do.

[Prime TV](#) and [Publika TV](#) covered this topic identically, using the same footage and committing the same violations, such as:

- **Blurring of information:** **Prime TV** did not cover the event as such, but only details referring to the event, downplaying its importance and impact. At the same time, media consumers were deprived of objective, fair, and complete information. **Prime TV** in this case selected a detail (the language spoken) so as to present facts disfavoring Igor Dodon in order to influence viewers. Media consumers were not informed about the event as such, but learned about less important details that did not reveal its essence.
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“A non-existent language is spoken at PACE. President Igor Dodon’s speech at the event was translated from Moldovan...”; “It is unclear who asked for this and why PACE promotes an artificial language. The state language of the Republic of Moldova is Romanian. In 2013, a decision by Constitutional Court confirmed it.”*
- **Publika TV used tendentious and ironic headlines:** *“PACE speaks Moldovan.”*

Moldova 1 broadcast three news stories on the monitored topic, with 9 minutes 20 seconds of airtime, i.e. a quarter of the [Mesager newscast of January 29, 2020](#). The public television presented Igor Dodon in a laudatory and positive light and included eight direct statements by him, with over 3 minutes of airtime total. At the same time, **Moldova 1** placed emphasis on President Dodon’s statements/accusations addressing *“pro-European parties that governed over the past ten years”*, but **did not ensure their right to reply**.

[Jurnal TV](#) and [RTR Moldova](#) presented information in an objective and impartial manner, without deontological violations or manipulation techniques. At the same time, **Televiziunea Centrală** broadcast no news stories on the monitored topic, which can be qualified as manipulation by means of **omission**.

Unimedia.info published five news stories on this topic, presenting Igor Dodon in a positive and laudatory light: *“[President Igor Dodon held a speech](#) from the rostrum of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, where he announced about the priorities of Moldova and spoke about the political, social, and economic situation in the country. The head of state opened his speech in English, and then switched to Romanian”; “[The original gift](#) offered by Igor Dodon to the Council of Europe on occasion of the 25th anniversary of Moldova joining the CE.”* At the same time, [in one news story](#), **Unimedia.info failed to ensure the right to reply/opinion to the people concerned/accused** (MPs from the opposition) by one of the sources of the story (Igor Dodon).

Sputnik.md published three news stories on the monitored topic, the sole source of which were Igor Dodon’s statements. **Kp.md** also published three materials on the monitored topic. In [one story](#), the journalists **failed to ensure the right to reply/opinion** for the people concerned.

Topic 2. The withdrawal of six MPs from the Democratic Party of Moldova

Context: On February 19, 2020, at a press briefing held at the Parliament, six MPs from the parliamentary group of the Democratic Party (PDM) announced their withdrawal from the PDM and intention to create a new parliamentary group. The six MPs were Andrian Candu, Sergiu Sirbu, Vladimir Cebotari, Eleonora Graur, Corneliu Padnevici, and Grigore Repesciuc.

General conclusion: The majority of deontological violations were found at NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, and Kp.md. These four media outlets covered the topic similarly and used labeling, tendentious headlines, mixture of facts with opinions, and changed accents in news.

NTV Moldova covered the topic tendentiously, focusing more on opinions and value judgments than on facts. In the news story on the topic, **NTV Moldova** committed the following violations:

- **Tendentious headline:** “PDM has been left by ‘Plahotniuc’s group.’”
- **Labeling:** “Split in the Democratic Party. A group of six MPs close to the runaway oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc...”; “The separatist group is led by Vladimir Plahotniuc’s godson, Andrian Candu.”
- **Mixture of facts with opinions / Suggestion:** “...the decision came after a few days ago they lost their leadership positions in the party”; “Besides Candu, Sergiu Sirbu is also close to the oligarch Plahotniuc, who is on an international wanted list for several serious crimes...”
- **Manipulation by means of video / Negative image transfer:** **NTV Moldova** insisted more on the video with Vladimir Plahotniuc attending previous events and less on the video from the press conference of the six MPs: two thirds of the footage in the news story had Plahotniuc in the foreground, not the main actors of the news.
- **Change of accents:** The news story on **NTV Moldova** focused more on the “runaway oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc” than on the six MPs from the PDM who had left the party.

Accent TV presented the six MPs in an unfavorable light and committed several deontological violations and manipulation techniques, such as:

- **Tendentious headlines:** “‘Plahotniuc’s clique’ left the PDM.”
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “Six MPs from the PDM, known for being close to Vladimir Plahotniuc, left the PDM’s parliamentary group and the party itself.”
- **Generalization/Labeling:** “MPs from Plahotniuc’s group, as they are called by journalists...”
- **Change of accents:** “It should be noted that Candu later confirmed that he had coordinated the decision on the group’s withdrawal with the former PDM chairman Vladimir Plahotniuc.” Andrian Candu, both at the briefing and in other public speeches said he had “spoken with and announced about his decision,” and did not “coordinate the decision,” as **Accent TV** journalists said.

Primul în Moldova covered the news about the six MPs’ withdrawal from the party according to the same scenario and mostly with the same text and video as **NTV Moldova**. This television committed the following violations:

- **Labeling:** “Split in the PDM. Several MPs who are close to the runaway oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc announced their withdrawal from the PDM.”
- **Mixture of facts with opinions / Suggestion:** “MPs close to Vladimir Plahotniuc expressed discontent with the PDM decision to hold talks with the PSRM’s parliamentary group, although in the summer of 2019, when they were leading the PDM, Sirbu and Candu supported the idea of a PDM-PSRM coalition.”

[RTR Moldova](#), [Jurnal TV](#), and **Moldova 1** broadcast two news stories on the monitored topic each. These media outlets covered the topic in an objective and impartial manner, offering airtime, implicitly the right to reply, to all those concerned.

Televiziunea Centrală broadcast one news story on the monitored topic. This station did not ensure the **right to reply** in the information presented. At the briefing, Andrian Candu said there were several PDM members who were going to join the six MPs, but they had been *blackmailed by the PDM leadership.* **Televiziunea Centrală** journalists had the mission to offer/ask for the opinion of the PDM leadership, but failed to do it.

Prime TV presented the six MPs' decision to withdraw from the PDM in a favorable light. This station dedicated to this event almost three quarters of the [newscast of February 19, 2020](#) (32 minutes 50 seconds out of the total), airing two news stories and one live interview with Andrian Candu (24 minutes). The violations committed by **Prime TV** included one case of the **lack of the right to reply**. At the briefing, Candu said that some members of the PDM had been blackmailed not to join the six MPs' group. The station had the mission to ensure the right to reply/opinion to the party's representatives in connection with the accusation, either in the same report or in the next one, which presented Pavel Filip's reaction to the withdrawal of the six MPs from the party. **Prime TV** journalists, however, did not ask him for opinion about the alleged blackmailing.

Publika TV in its newscast [presented information about the withdrawal of the six MPs from the PDM](#) using mainly the same text, [scenario, and video](#) as **Prime TV**. At the same time, **Publika TV** did not ensure the **right to reply** when Ion Harghel, the former vice-president of Democratic Youth, accused Pavel Filip, saying he *"is not a fighter ... but an executor."*

Sputnik.md published eight news stories about the MPs' withdrawal from the PDM. In one of them, **Sputnik.md** committed [generalization/reference to sources that cannot be verified](#): *"Political observers consider that this group of MPs is close to the former PDM leader Vlad Plahotniuc."*

Unimedia.info published seven news stories about the split in the PDM. No deontological violations were found in this outlet's coverage of the monitored topic.

Kp.md covered the topic in a tendentious and biased manner and committed the following violations:

- **Labeling/Suggestion:** ["The six great and a surprise: A group of MPs from the Democratic Party left the parliamentary faction"](#). Thus, the outlet suggested that the six MPs are vassals of Vladimir Plahotniuc [six in the Russian language has the connotation of *servant* – author's note].
- **Irony:** *"Candu has just announced this at the briefing. He also promised surprises. Will Plahotniuc come back and head all this? Or will he head, for instance, from behind the scenes?"*

Topic 3. Protest of the Transnistria War veterans

Context: *On March 2, 2020, veterans of the Transnistria War organized a protest at the Great National Assembly Square. The protesters' demands and claims included the resignation of the entire Cabinet of Ministers and of President Igor Dodon. They also demanded the Government to provide them with a minimum social package and with free health insurance policies.*

General conclusion: *Some media outlets resorted to blurring the information by ignoring or vaguely mentioning the protester's demands and claims, instead presenting in detail the negative nature of the protest and, implicitly, officials' statements about it (Accent TV, NTV Moldova, Primul în Moldova, Sputnik.md, Kp.md). The main deontological violations committed in the coverage of this topic were lack of the right to reply, mixture of facts with opinions, labeling, generalization, and tendentious headlines, and the disinformation techniques included blurring, internal enemy technique, and video manipulation.*

[NTV Moldova](#) covered the veterans' protest in six news stories with a total airtime of over 18 minutes. The information was presented in a tendentious manner, giving a negative accent to this event. **NTV Moldova** committed the following violations:

- **Lack of the right to opinion/reply:** The MPs Grigore Repesciuc and Andrian Candu were accused of involvement in the organization of the protest, but they were not given the right to reply.
- **Internal enemy technique (referring to a social group):** *"Violent protesters"; "After several aggressive acts, protesters blocked the roads..."; "Traffic in the capital has turned into a real ordeal for drivers... because violent protesters have blocked it"; "...The inhabitants of the capital condemned the chaos caused by aggressive protesters."*
- **Biased selection of facts/information:** Both the protest and the protesters were presented in a negative light, without mentioning the concrete demands of demonstrators.
- **Labeling:** *"According to the head of state, behind those people are people from the entourage of the runaway oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc."*
- **Internal enemy technique (referring to a party/politician):** *"Some political forces want blood, said the head of state"; "Chicu commented that behind those who protested are political forces interested in destabilizing the socio-political situation in the country"; "The socialist MP Grigore Novac described these actions as an attempt by the Plahotniuc-Shor tandem to destabilize the country."*
- **Generalization:** *"The Government supports veterans."*

[Accent TV](#) covered the event in a negative light. It committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *"Many protesters were drunk"; "The purpose of the protest remained unclear, as well as the participants' demands"; "While some pretended to be listening to the minister's speech, others came to this protest exclusively to be part of the crowd and take pictures."*
- **Manipulation by means of video: Accent TV** repeated three times the video in which Ilian Casu, a member of the party Partidul Nostru [Our Party], approaches several protesters and shakes hands with them. Thus, journalists suggested (**suggestion technique**) that the protest had been organized by certain political parties: *"...Ilian Casu, deputy of Renato Usatii from Partidul Nostru, threw himself into the crowd of protesters..."*
- **Change of accents:** *"In his turn, the political scientist Bogdan Tirdea said that, according to some reports, Vasile Sinigur, one of the leaders of the protest ... is a man of Renato Usatii."* Bogdan Tirdea is first of all an MP of the Party of Socialists, and only then a political scientist. **Accent TV** first placed the title "political scientist," using this technique to give legitimacy (by the presence of an expert) to the information presented in the news.
- **Lack of the right to reply: Accent TV** did not ask for or offer the right to reply to those targeted/accused in news: Grigore Repesciuc, Andrian Candu.
- **Generalization:** *"The action displeased the people of Chisinau..."*

- **Biased selection of statements and information:** **Accent TV** did not include any statement by protesters regarding the reason and purpose of the rally. Instead, it included detailed statements by President Igor Dodon, Prime Minister Ion Chicu, Minister Victor Gaiuciu, and socialist MP Bogdan Tirdea.

Primul în Moldova presented the information using mostly the same images, scenario, and text as **Accent TV**. The station's violations included:

- **Tendentious headlines:** *"Democracy is foreign to them"; "Protest led from behind the scenes."*
- **Mixture of facts with opinions / Internal enemy technique:** *"...The protesters, urged by the representatives of the opposition parties, decided to mark the date of March 2 by an attempt of abusive entry into the Government building."*
- **Generalization:** *"Although they claim that their intention is to defend the honor of those who fought on the Dniester, none of the protesters went to commemorate their comrades who fell in this conflict... Instead, the protesters did not hesitate to warm their souls with a glass of alcohol."*
- **Labeling:** *"The protest was allegedly paid by the runaway oligarchs Vladimir Plahotniuc and Ilan Shor."*
- **Lack of the right to reply:** **Primul în Moldova** did not ensure the right to reply to those targeted/accused in news (MPs from the parliamentary group Pro Moldova, Vladimir Plahotniuc, Ilan Shor).

Prime TV broadcast four news stories, in which it committed **generalization** (*"...Hundreds of veterans of the War on the Dniester"*) and **mixture of facts with opinions** (*"The prime minister did not appear in front of the protesters to listen to their demands. Instead, the country's leaders competed in statements far from the eyes of veterans"; "After the veterans were ignored all day, Prime Minister Ion Chicu invited them to talks"*). **Publika TV** presented the information about the veterans' protest using the same images, scenario, and text as **Prime TV**.

The public television **Moldova 1**, **Televiziunea Centrală**, **RTR Moldova**, and **Jurnal TV** presented the information in a neutral and impartial manner, did not commit deontological violations, and did not use disinformation techniques.

Unimedia.info published eight news stories about or referring to the veterans' protest. In one of them, the outlet failed to ensure **the right to reply**: *"Igor Dodon implied that Plahotniuc's people are behind the veterans' protests."*

Sputnik.md published 11 news stories about the protest of the group of veterans, committing **mixture of facts with opinions** in one of them: *"It seems that the protesters' actions went out of control."*

Kp.md broadcast 10 relevant materials, covering the topic in a tendentious and biased manner. The portal presented protesters in a negative light, without mentioning in any of the 10 articles the demands and claims of the protesters in an impartial and fair manner. **Kp.md** committed several deontological violations in its articles, including:

- **Change of accents / False information:** *"The protest in front of the Government building was organized on Monday by the participants in the warfare on the Dniester and the representatives of unionist movements";*
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *"However, the protesters let the car with the composer Eugen Doga pass. They explained this by saying, 'He is one of us!' Of us who? Combatants? Unionists? Grown-up men daring to flutter their clubs?"*
- **Irony/Suggestion:** *"Those who gathered today in front of the Government building did not have slogans; they had toasts."*

- **Lack of the right to reply:** In one of its news stories, **Kp.md** cited the socialist Grigore Novac, who said that Vladimir Plahotniuc and MPs from the Pro Moldova group were allegedly behind the protesters. However, the journalists of this media outlet did not offer the right to reply to those concerned.

Topic 4. Adoption of the decision on declaring the state of emergency

Context: On March 16, 2020, at a press conference President Igor Dodon called on the Government to install the state of emergency following the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus. The Government met on the same day at 19:00 in a session, where it decided to ask the Parliament to vote for the establishment of the state of emergency. On the next day, March 17, the draft decision was adopted by the Parliament.

General conclusion: Some media outlets (*NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Sputnik.md, Kp.md*) tried to present the Government and/or some governing parties in a positive light. Others tried to present the Government in a negative light and the opposition parties in a positive light (*Prime TV, Publika.md*).

NTV Moldova broadcast one news story, in which it treated the topic superficially (**the blurring technique**). The news was based on a single source – Prime Minister Ion Chicu, whose opinion took 100 seconds out of 150 seconds total of the story. This media outlet did not present other opinions (e.g. representatives of parliamentary parties, experts, etc.), which can be qualified as **biased selection of statements and sources**. **Accent TV** broadcast a news story based on two sources: Prime Minister Ion Chicu and President of Parliament Zinaida Greceanii. **Accent TV** did not include in its story statements and/or opinions of the other parliamentary parties (from the opposition), which can be qualified as **biased selection of sources**. At the same time, **Accent TV** admitted a **fake** when it said that according to Zinaida Greceanii the draft law on the state of emergency was voted “unanimously,” although at least one MP (Dumitru Alaiba of the PAS party) did not vote for it.

Primul în Moldova presented the information in an unbalanced manner. Representatives of the Government (Ion Chicu), the PSRM (Vlad Batrincea), and PDM (Pavel Filip) were presented in an exclusively positive light, while the opposition parties (PAS, PPDA, the parliamentary group Pro Moldova/Andrian Candu, Shor Party/Marina Tauber) were placed in a negative context. At the same time, **Primul în Moldova** committed:

- **Manipulation by means of video:** Over the inserts with Prime Minister Ion Chicu, the authors superimposed images with hospitals from around the country, which presented a perfect situation: hospital rooms with one bed, high-performance medical equipment, perfect cleanliness, etc. On the other hand, the opinion of the Shor Party representative Marina Tauber was accompanied by footage from a protest organized by this party.
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “Some MPs stood out due to gloomy predictions about the country’s economy after the state of emergency. Ion Chicu, however, asked them to calm down, because different scenarios were being analyzed.”

Prime TV dedicated 10 minutes of airtime to the monitored topic. On the one hand, **Prime TV** presented the actions of the Government, the PSRM, and Prime Minister Ion Chicu in a rather negative manner. On the other hand, the outlet presented in a rather positive light the opposition parties (the parliamentary group Pro Moldova, PAS, PPDA). At the same time, **Prime TV** also committed **mixture of facts with opinions**: “Despite the criticism, the draft decision on establishing the state of emergency was adopted. However, the period over the past 24 hours changed. The Government stammered on this issue yesterday. Initially, the Minister of Justice Fadei Nagacevschi

spoke about 30 days. The proposal was voted by the Government....” **Publika TV** broadcast [one story about the establishment of the state of emergency](#). The information was presented according to the same scenario, with the same text and images as the news on **Prime TV**.

Televiziunea Centrală broadcast two news stories about the approval of the state of emergency in the country. In the coverage of this topic, the outlet’s journalists committed one **generalization**: “After the head of the Government was asked questions, MPs said he had come to the Parliament unprepared.”

Jurnal TV, **RTR Moldova**, and **Moldova 1** presented the information in a neutral and impartial manner, without deontological violations and/or disinformation techniques, allocating airtime to all those concerned.

Unimedia.info published six news stories about the adoption of the state of emergency in Moldova. [In one of the stories](#), **Unimedia.info** admitted a **fake**: “MPs voted unanimously for establishment of the state of emergency. The recommendations and measures proposed to the Government.” Although the President of Parliament Zinaida Greceanii said that the draft decision was “adopted unanimously,” at least one of the MPs did not vote for this decision. **Unimedia.info** had the mission to verify information before publishing it. **Sputnik.md** also published six news stories on this topic. Like other media outlets, [in one of the news stories](#) **Sputnik.md** mentioned, “the Parliament’s decision was adopted with the vote of all MPs present in the plenary meetings room” (**false**) – incorrect information, because at least one MP abstained from vote.

Kp.md published two articles, in which it showed its tendentiousness by means of **ironic accents** towards the opposition MPs: “The sitting of the Parliament has been taking place for three hours. At this moment, Perciun [Dan Perciun, MP from PAS party - editor’s note] woke up and asked which laws were at the basis of the decision”; “Ticu [Octavian Ticu, independent MP - editor’s note] came up with questions, too. Oh, it started. Weddings, Plahotniuc... everyone has their interests”; “Slusari didn’t understand quite everything. He is asking for clarifications....”

Topic 5. Constitutional Court decision on the law regarding the Government assuming responsibility

Context: On April 2, 2020, the Government assumed responsibility for a draft law (No. 56), which provided for several measures to support citizens and businesses during the state of emergency and for amendment of several laws for this purpose. On April 7, 2020, several MPs from PAS, PPDA, and the parliamentary group Pro Moldova filed complaints to the Constitutional Court (CC) to annul three provisions of the law. Based on these applications, on April 9, 2020 the CC decided to suspend the entire draft law by which the Government assumed responsibility, and four days later, the CC decided that the law is unconstitutional.

General conclusion: Some media outlets used this topic to disfavor and present in a negative light the opposition parties that filed complaints to the CC, by not offering them the right to reply, among other methods (NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Sputnik.md, Kp.md). Moreover, these media outlets presented the information selectively and blurred it.

NTV Moldova presented the information in a tendentious, unilateral, and biased manner, committing several deontological violations, including:

- **Tendentious and manipulative headlines:** “The people lose and the Pro-Shor group wins.”
- **Change of accents / Blurring:** In one of the news stories, **NTV Moldova** presented the opinion of some sources (PCRM’s MP Corneliu Furculita) without initially presenting factual

information (details about Law No. 56; who filed complaints to the CC; what the CC decided) and only then opinions about the decision, i.e. contrary to the rules for writing news stories.

- **Lack of the right to reply:** Maia Sandu and Andrei Nastase were targeted/accused directly, but **NTV Moldova** journalists had the obligation to offer to them the right to reply, which did not happen.
- **Generalization:** *"...This is what the complaints of the opposition MPs were based on, according to political analysts. More precisely, appeal to the high court had the purpose to protect the personal interests of Ilan Shor, experts say."*

Accent TV broadcast two news stories about the CC decision, in which it committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *"Politicians around the world are giving up fights to strengthen forces in the fight against the coronavirus. In Moldova, however, the situation is different. Here, the opposition intends to launch large-scale political battles...."*
- **Generalization:** *"Experts are convinced that there is little chance that the High Court will play to the opposition's script, but rather the opposite – their image will be tarnished, and in the end ordinary people will have to lose."*
- **Lack of the right to reply:** The opposition parties, as well as Maia Sandu and Andrei Nastase, were accused/targeted directly in the news, but they were not offered the right to express their opinion on the topic or on the accusations made by some sources against them.

Primul în Moldova presented the information mainly in the same manner as **NTV Moldova**, using the same sources. **Primul în Moldova** committed the following violations:

- **Labeling:** *"...the runaway oligarch Ilan Shor would win."*
- **Lack of the right to reply:** Opposition parties (PAS, PPDA, and the parliamentary group Pro Moldova) and some politicians were targeted directly, but were not given the right to reply.
- **Generalization:** *"The political struggle will affect businesses and ordinary citizens. This is how political scientists and economists comment on the actions of opposition parties that filed complaints to the CC."*
- **Internal enemy technique:** Opposition parties and politicians were presented in a negative light, being accused by some sources of fighting against citizens.

Prime TV and **Publika TV** covered the topic according to the same scenario and with the same video. One of the violations on both televisions was imbalance of sources, and another one was **mixture of facts with opinions:** *"The decision of the High Court upset Prime Minister Ion Chicu."*

Moldova 1, **RTR Moldova**, **Televiziunea Centrală**, **Jurnal TV**, and **Unimedia.info** covered the topic in a neutral and impartial manner, without deontological violations or disinformation techniques.

Sputnik.md published four news stories on the monitored topic. [In one of them](#), the outlet **failed to offer the right to reply** to the opposition parties targeted and directly accused by President Igor Dodon and Prime Minister Ion Chicu.

Kp.md published three articles about the CC decision. The portal presented the information in a tendentious manner, portraying the opposition parties (PAS, PPDA, the parliamentary group Pro Moldova, Shor Party) and/or their representatives (Maia Sandu, Andrei Nastase, Alexandru Slusari) in a negative light. The violations committed by this media outlet include:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *"The Constitutional Court of Moldova has ruled: Airport taxes remain in the pocket of Ilan Shor (...) The CC has decided in favor of Pro-Shor: Airport taxes will not be transferred to the state budget."*
- **Lack of the right to reply:** In one of the news stories, opposition parties were accused of *"propaganda and speculation"* without being offered the right to reply.

CONCLUSIONS

During the reporting period (January 1 – April 30, 2020), the majority of the 12 monitored media outlets committed violations of deontological rules. The main violation was failure to offer the right to reply to those targeted or accused, followed by the mixture of facts with opinions, generalization, labeling, and selective presentation of facts, opinions, and statements.

Tendentious and ironic headlines are often used by some media outlets (**NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Kp.md**). At the same time, some televisions had a preference for labeling (**NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova**). Some media outlets resorted to **change of accents in a news/event**, which led to distortion of information and to favoring and/or disfavoring of a political entity (**NTV Moldova, Accent TV, and Kp.md**). **The information blurring technique (Prime TV, NTV Moldova), the manipulation by means of video technique (NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova), the internal enemy technique and the “National Savior” technique (NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova)** were the most often used as manipulation methods. At the same time, in the coverage of some topics, some media outlets used **fakes (Accent TV, Unimedia.info, Sputnik.md, Kp.md)**, generalization (**Televiziunea Centrală, Prime TV, NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Sputnik.md, Primul în Moldova**), or failed to cover certain topics of public interest (**Televiziunea Centrală**).

Many of the monitored media outlets politicized the topics by presenting them from the perspective of political preferences. Thus, the televisions **Prime TV** and **Publika TV** broadcast mainly the same content, favoring the parliamentary group Pro Moldova and its representatives. On the other hand, **NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Primul în Moldova, Sputnik.md, Kp.md** had a pro-PSRM approach and favored President Igor Dodon in their news stories.

Sputnik.md committed such violations as mixture of facts with opinions, lack of the right to reply, fakes, generalization, and reference to sources that cannot be verified; and **Kp.md** – mixture of facts with opinions, lack of the right to reply, irony, change of accents, and labeling. **Jurnal TV** and **RTR Moldova** covered the majority of topics in a neutral and impartial manner, without violations of deontological standards. The public television **Moldova 1** and **Unimedia.info** presented information generally in a neutral and impartial manner, and both outlets showed slight favoring of President Igor Dodon.

Therefore, the key conclusion of this report is that media outlets must inform correctly and impartially and must present information in its entirety, without approaching it selectively or blurring it in line with political preferences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Audiovisual Council (AC), based on article 75 (*Responsibilities of the Audiovisual Council*) and article 86 (*Cooperation with civil society*) of the [Code of Audiovisual Media Services of the Republic of Moldova](#), should take note of the findings and monitor the televisions, the content of which has been reported to deliver manipulating information.
- The editors of TV stations are urged to 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 are encouraged to 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 are advised to seek information in several media sources, in order to avoid the risk of receiving wrong and manipulating information.