



# SUMMARY

## PRESS FREEDOM

- 1 Press Freedom Days 2017: a Retrospective of Events

## LETTER OF THE LAW

**Ion BUNDUCHI**

- 2 Domestic Media: the Opportunity for Real Changes

## POLITICAL JOURNALISM

**Victor MORARU**

- 5 Mediatization of Politics: Reflections and Findings

## ANALYSES

**Aneta GONȚA**

- 8 The Small Oases of Independent Media Struggle to Face Challenges

## EXPERIENCES

**Tatiana CORAI**

- 11 *Mariana Rata, Anticoruptie.md*: “I often wonder why journalists make so many allowances for politicians.”

## SOCIAL JOURNALISM

**Georgeta STEPANOV**

- 14 The Relationship between the Media and Society in Recent Decades

## MONETIZING THE INTERNET

**Tudor DARIE**

- 16 How Can Online Media Make Money?

## MEDIA ABOUT MEDIA

**Victor GOTISAN**

- 18 Journalists – Hostages of Politicians?

## NEW MEDIA

**Viorica ZAHARIA**

- 20 Blogs and Posts in Social Media: between Freedom of Expression and Abuse

## BOOK REVIEW

**Silvia GROSSU**

- 23 Encyclopedic Dictionary of Communication and Related Terms

## ANEXES

- 25 Memorandum on Press Freedom in the Republic of Moldova

# Press Freedom Days 2017: a Retrospective of Events

## Launch of the Memorandum on Press Freedom

Media organizations invited journalists to a press conference organized on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day during which the Memorandum on Press Freedom was launched. The memorandum points out that between May 3, 2016 and May 3, 2017, media in Moldova had mostly regressed as old problems persisted. Media concentration, a defective legal framework, limitations on access to information, the interference of politics with the work of the Broadcast Coordinating Council (BCC) and with the media in general and poor economic conditions were impediments to the development of the media.

## Journalists Picket Parliament

Journalists and representatives of civil society picketed the Parliament of Moldova on May 3 in order to raise the awareness of MPs about the imperfections in media legislation that negatively affect the activity of the media. Andrian Candu, Speaker of Parliament, appeared, and in the presence of the journalists who were picketing Nadine Gogu, Executive Director of the Independent Journalism Center (IJC), presented the main demands of the journalists: “By today’s action we have come to remind lawmakers that the media faces certain problems that we have been talking about for many years and that need to be solved once and for all so that journalists can work freely and so we have a free press.” The participants at the event wore T-shirts

saying “Freedom for the Press” and held banners with the messages: “We ask for protection of Moldovan media”; “No censorship”; “Free press—free society!”

## Study on the Needs and Problems of the Media

Press Freedom Days continued on May 4 with the launch by the IJC of a study on the needs and problems of the media. The greatest needs and problems included such issues as lack of financial resources, financial and/or political dependence and lack of qualified staff followed by lack of media freedom, unfair competition, unfair advertising and problems related to access to information among others. The study included several types of research, each responding to specific objectives.

## Protection of Personal Data vs. Freedom of Expression

In the context of Press Freedom Days, the IJC launched the study Personal Data Protection vs. Freedom of Expression and Information which found that the law on personal data protection restricts journalists’ access to information. This opinion was shared by representatives of both the media and of civil society who participated in a public debate on this study organized by the IJC on May 16. The study was prepared by lawyer Tatiana Puiu as part of the IJC campaign aiming to improve the legislation on personal data from the perspective of ensuring freedom of expression and access to information.

# Domestic Media: the Opportunity for Real Changes

On March 30, 2017, Parliament announced the initiation of work to establish a working group to improve media legislation<sup>[1]</sup> and on May 17 the actual establishment of the group and its nominal membership.<sup>[2]</sup> The working group includes representatives from important broadcasters, relevant international institutions (Council of Europe, Freedom House, Internews), specialized non-government organizations (NGOs), law experts, broadcasting experts, members of the permanent specialized Parliamentary Commission and members of the Broadcast Coordinating Council (BCC) among others. The Speaker of Parliament is also the chairman of the working group.

The initiative deserves all our appreciation if we recognize that the media is of crucial importance for building democracy and that the domestic media needs help if it is to rise from its knees.

*Grosso modo*, the working group has to improve national legislation so that it meets at least the following European standards:

- It supports freedom of expression in accordance with international law.
- It commits the media to promote pluralism of opinions.
- It ensures equal and general access to the media.
- It prohibits the state from restricting journalists' right to freedom of expression, including of those employed in media financed from the state budget.
- It provides proof that any limitation on the right to freedom of expression serves one of very few legitimate interests and is necessary to protect that interest.
- It guarantees the true independence of bodies empowered with regulatory or other functions in relation to the media.
- It ensures that financing for the public broadcaster is free from abusive state control.
- It ensures that financing for the public broadcaster is consistent with its aims and is sufficient, guaranteed and transparent.

The biggest challenge for the working group and for Parliament will not be drafting and voting on improved legal provisions in accordance with European standards but will rather be ensuring their functioning so they can promote the real development of the media sector that is currently severely degraded. When analyzing media legislation in the Commonwealth of Independent

States (CIS) at the end of previous century, American professor Peter Krug noted that, "Actually, there is a gap between the law 'on paper' and that in the real practice," and that in many cases, "The actions of authorities do not violate the provisions of the legislation; on the contrary, one can say that authorities have successfully adapted and adjusted to the legal systems seeking legal means to achieve their goals."<sup>[3]</sup> This conclusion, which is valid for Moldova even today, can be added to a number of other reasons as to why the current legal framework is inadequate including the following:

- the ambiguous nature of many legislative provisions;
- lack of clear and concrete mechanisms for implementing many legal standards which diminishes their functionality and efficiency;
- descriptive language that reduces the legal relevance of provisions and leaves room for arbitrary interpretations and ultimately for abuses;
- the lack of a clear, fair and transparent mechanism of state support for the media;
- the insignificant role of judicial bodies in promoting and protecting democratic values including freedom of the press, freedom of expression and access to information;
- the predilection of competent bodies for the letter of the law to the detriment of the spirit of the law and thus the frequent application of restrictive rules and the less frequent use of permissive ones;
- annual funding from the state budget of both the broadcasting regulator and the public broadcaster that erodes the independence of these bodies;
- broad possibilities for interference, especially of a political nature, in the activity of the media;
- defective practices in the application of legal provisions.

If we also take into account the new dangers that threaten the global information space and therefore the national one too, the challenge becomes even greater. Nevertheless, regardless of the impact and consequences of the information age, the media "is condemned" to assert, affirm and confirm, as before, its social utility and legitimacy; to capitalize on its freedom and to generate freedom and to pay tribute to overall human progress in order to remain a social institute and a professional domain.

The priority of the working group, it seems, will be broadcast legislation, although ideally the first document to be drafted

[1] <http://www.parlament.md/Actualitate/Comunicatedepresa/tabid/90/ContentId/2974/Page/2/language/ro-RO/Default.aspx>

[2] <http://www.parlament.md/Actualitate/Comunicatedepresa/tabid/90/ContentId/3072/Page/0/language/ro-RO/Default.aspx>

[3] Законы и практика средств массовой информации в странах СНГ и Балтии. М.: издательство «Галерея», 1999, с.212.

should be a development strategy for the entire domestic media establishment including online media which still has neither a definition nor any legal regulation. Such a strategy would mean a common, overall vision of the role and purpose of the media in Moldovan society and would establish our medium- and long-term goals and how we want to reach them to ultimately ensure both information security and media pluralism. The strategy would also mean a complex approach to the media field in general that is shaped and defined by many sorts of policies: legislative, economic, educational, managerial, etc. It should be noted that the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement for 2017–2019<sup>[4]</sup> provides for the development of a national media development concept, but the institution responsible for it is the BCC whose function, according to the legislation in force, is only to regulate broadcasting.

Even if the working group is busy mainly with regulating broadcasting, it won't be able to overlook other regulations such as the Law on the Press, the Law on Advertising, the Law on Competition, the Law on Access to Information or the Concept of Information Security among others.

The Law on the Press, which is the same age as the Constitution, has few functional provisions and, if it is not abrogated, could be amended, updated and completed with new provisions including for online media. In this context, it may be advisable to set up a single national body as a "one-stop shop" for media policies responsible for the entire field. The idea comes from domestic experience: When many are responsible, there is no one to hold accountable. Improving the laws referred to would in fact ensure the smooth establishment and proper functioning of all media outlets, the proper training for and the improvement of professionals in the field, improved economic and fiscal conditions and an environment of fair competition which leads us to the structure of ownership of outlets, the advertising market and the distribution market for traditional media.

Concerning broadcasting, there are several key points that require courageous interventions to make changes for the good but which, over the years, have led only to sterile discussions with either harmful or no effects.

A first key point is that the broadcasting regulator should meet specific requirements: representativeness in relation to society, competence and independence in decision making. Paradoxically, before the first law on broadcasting in 1995, the ad-hoc regulatory authority was more representative and more independent than the ones that followed. From the beginning, the law established its membership based on political criteria which in a country that had only recently emerged from a dictatorship could not ensure the regulator's independence. The current Broadcasting Code contains a golden formula: civil society delegates representatives to the BCC, and Parliament approves them with a qualified majority. In addition, the tenure of BCC mem-

bers is secure. In this world, it is hard to find a better written provision than this one. It is an iron-clad construction for any democracy, but it hasn't worked for us. It fell into ruins and is still in ruins today. So being aware of the failure of attempts so far, the working group shall propose not only good provisions but also mechanisms to ensure the genuine representativeness, competence and independence of the regulatory authority.

Another key point is the public broadcaster which in order to fulfill its mission shall:

- become a service of reference for the public and a factor of social cohesion;
- be a public discussion forum where the widest possible range of opinions and points of view is expressed;
- provide impartial and independent information and comments;
- develop pluralistic, innovative and varied programming according to high standards of ethics and quality;
- be interesting, through its programs, both to the general public and to minorities;
- reflect the various philosophical ideas and religious beliefs of society in order to strengthen mutual understanding and tolerance;
- promote inter-community relations in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society;
- contribute to a better understanding of the diversity of both national and European cultural heritage;
- ensure a significant proportion of original products, including by independent producers;
- extend the choice available to viewers and listeners by offering program services that are not usually provided by commercial broadcasters.

The public broadcaster shall comply with the rigors of its three distinctive characteristics: in the service of the public, funded by the public, controlled by the public. Domestic public radio and television have never met those rigors. In order to achieve the purpose for which it was created, the working group shall therefore seek viable solutions including most likely the establishment and functioning of a competent supervisory body that is independent in its decision making; a procedure for choosing senior managers in which merit and professionalism would be of importance; appropriate funding and accountability mechanisms for managing taxpayers' money and mechanisms to establish, maintain and develop an appropriate relationship between the public and the public broadcaster. Willingly or not, the working group can also find answers to many other questions such as:

- Should the public broadcaster have an owner or it is enough for it to have just a founder, as now?
- Should it also manage musical groups?

[4] <http://www.infoeuropa.md/rm-privind-ue/planul-national-de-actiuni-pentru-implementarea-acordului-de-asociere-republica-moldova-uniunea-europeana-in-perioada-2017-2019/>

- Should it remain under triple subordination (Parliament, BCC and Supervisory Board [SB])?
- What should the relationship between the SBs of the national and regional public broadcasters and the relationship between both SBs with the BCC be?
- Should it seek commercial advertising?

A third key point is private broadcasters which, as is well known, should be of all types: national, regional, local and community based. They should provide the full spectrum of programs: informative, educational, entertaining. They should operate under conditions of fair competition in both the media and the advertising markets. This is crucial because only an economically independent broadcaster can be independent editorially. Economic independence must be ensured first and foremost through unhindered access to the advertising market. The chances for economic independence would increase if there were specific legal and factual limits on the number of licenses allowed to a final beneficiary as well as the audience share or the share of the advertising market allowed to a broadcaster. In countries with experience, these limits constitute 25–35%; they protect both broadcasters and the public against the danger of monopolization, abuse or unfair competition. Therefore, adjust-

ments in related legislation—on taxes, competition, security or advertising—are appropriate.

Remedies will surely have to be identified to, for example, counteract propaganda and misinformation from the outside and the inside, to eliminate “penetrating advertising” (which is not paid for in the country), to protect copyrights or to purchase documentary or fictional films. This would mean in essence establishing normal procedures. Just think, for example, how a single, clear, functional legal provision could revolutionize the field: A broadcaster can place commercial advertising only in the programs it produces with its own staff and money. This provision would have at least two beneficial effects: It would stimulate domestic production and it would minimize freeloading information.

Essentially, both the working group and Parliament have two options: to actually reform the media for the benefit of all or to merely simulate reform to the detriment of all. “Parliament and civil society are working hard on media reform!” It sounds too good to be true after what we have experienced in the past and in the present. Perhaps, however, with determination, drive and reason we will choose the right direction at the historic crossroads we have come to between progress and regression.

*Ion BUNDUCHI*

# Mediatization of Politics: Reflections and Findings

Lately, studies devoted to examining the activities of the media attest to the increasingly obvious frequency of the term *mediatization*. This term seems to embrace an entire set of features that characterizes the mission of journalism in society. Elucidating the various contexts in which contemporary media operate highlights the somewhat ambiguous concept of mediatization which is understood at first sight to be either the basic dissemination of information or a set of specific media activities that considerably exceeds the limits of simply reflecting events, thus providing grounds for the ambivalence of the concept of mediatization and implicitly for the concept of the mediatization of politics.

The term mediatization in most cases tends to be understood as media coverage of reality (of politics in our case) and the presentation of this reality in the media. This is precisely the broad meaning of the term, i.e., its most common sense. A few examples of the use of the term from this perspective include the following:

- “Canada: Trudeau, la médiatisation de la famille comme arme politique.”<sup>[1]</sup>
- “Médiatiser la paix!” the title of an article by an author of the newspaper *Le Monde* appealing for more pro-active media promotion of peace-keeping actions.
- Moldovan authors often resort to the same interpretation of the term: “Mediatizarea în mai mare măsură a agenților puterii a atras după sine și reflectarea problemelor dorită de aceștia...”<sup>[2]</sup> (“Stronger mediatization of government representatives attracted the coverage of the problems they wanted...”); “Mediatizarea selectivă a evenimentelor și pseudo-pluralismul de opinii sunt elemente ale manipulării informaționale”<sup>[3]</sup> (“Selective mediatization of events and the pseudo pluralism of opinions are elements of information manipulation”); “Tendințe manipulatorii în mediatizarea inițiativei votului uninominal”<sup>[4]</sup> (“Manipulating trends in the mediatization of the uninominal vote initiative”),

In all these examples, it is evident that the term is related to the concept of coverage.

In such approaches, the circulation of messages in the media may tend to focus on quantitative aspects rather than adopting qualitative views which diminishes the consistency of conceptual representations. This observation, however, does not affect the appropriateness of using the term in an analysis of media practices: the mediatization of reality is undoubtedly and perhaps primarily the coverage of reality intensely and from multiple aspects if we understand by coverage providing the public with operative, pertinent and varied information—essentially, a peremptory aspiration of journalism.

We include in the first sense of the expression of *mediatization of politics* all actions taken by the media to cover the political aspects of reality; however, at the same time we find this only partially embraces the essence of the phenomenon in question as new meanings are discovered with the latest developments in the political sphere and in the media, marked by new relations between them. One thing is certain: Mediatization involves not only recording current affairs and basically informing the public but also evaluating, commenting on and interpreting facts, events, positions and phenomena both in articles intended to inform and in special presentations, programs or shows.

However appealing reducing the term mediatization to the production and dissemination of messages may be, media reality dictates the necessity to consider it also from the narrow perspective that it implicitly incorporates based on the persuasive potential of the messages produced. The very intention (sometimes even undisguised) of the media to persuade determines the frequency of characterizing journalists as “directors of social and political reality”<sup>[5]</sup> or even more incisively, “handlers, manipulators of images whose field of work should be no other than puppet theater.”<sup>[6]</sup> Criticizing journalists for the way they approach reality has become very common. (“What is it they are preparing society for and in whose name do they speak when they turn the republic into a virtual theater?” the French author E. Souchier quite reasonably wonders.<sup>[7]</sup>) Communication in this context is understood as a persuasive action (and vice versa, persuasion as communication). When understood as communication geared towards changing behavior, hierarchies of values or public preferences and choices, persuasion can manifest itself both directly, promoted and controlled by political actors in their political campaigns, as well as indirectly, presented as in-

[1] La Depeche (France), 17.10.2016. [online]: <http://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2016/10/17/2440902-justin-trudeau-la-mediatization-de-la-famille-comme-arme-politique.html>.

[2] Malcoci Ludmila. Mass-media și opinia publică în societatea de tranziție: interferențe. – Chișinău, 2000, p. 135.

[3] Mediatizarea selectivă a evenimentelor și pseudo-pluralismul de opinii sunt elemente ale manipulării informaționale / API, 17.12.2014. [online]: <http://api.md/news/view/ro-mediatizarea-selectiv-a-evenimentelor-i-pseudo-pluralismul-de-opinii-sunt-elemente-ale-manipulrii-informaionale-879>.

[4] Șaran Vladislav. Tendințe manipulatorii în mediatizarea inițiativei votului uninominal / Centrul pentru Jurnalism Independent, 18.04.2017 [online]: <http://mediacritica.md/ro/tendinte-manipulatorii-mediatizarea-iniatiativei-votului-uninominal/>.

[5] Halimi Serge. Les nouveaux chiens de garde. – Paris: Raisons d’agir, 1998, p. 9.

[6] Alvarez Luciano. Medios de comunicacion y trampas a la democracia. – Buenos Aires: Editorial Humanitas-Claeh, 1990, p. 14.

[7] Souchier Emmanuel. Le citoyen, le politique et le journaliste. In: Communication et langage, 1997, N 112, p. 75.

formation disseminated by the media. Thus, if by mediatization we understand all the actions performed via media channels in order to cover current events, it is natural to also include those specific actions (inherently abundant) aimed at persuasive media communication. The peculiarities of the second interpretation of mediatization (condensed in the term “intervention”<sup>[8]</sup>) are also indicated in the definitions of the term in specialized dictionaries such as the one quoted by M. Coman: “Mediatization refers to the act by which messages are transformed under the influence of the media system in the process of production and dissemination specific to mass communication.”<sup>[9]</sup> In the same sense of constructing/representing reality, this term appears in the following statement by American authors: “One of the main features of the current transition to the era of mass media is that we come increasingly into contact with mediatized representations of a complex physical and social world rather than with objective aspects of our environment.”<sup>[10]</sup> The creation of a *pseudo-environment* (Lippmann), a *second reality* (Lang) or a *virtual, symbolic reality* is the essence of mediatization (in the narrow sense). The fact that the media in the contemporary era not only disseminate conventional messages—strictly informative—or record opinions existing in society but further tendentially take on the role of genuine creators of reality is a cardinal premise for the proliferation of this type of action. This very gravitation of the media towards creating/constructing reality and towards imposing a specific vision of this reality raises the interest of researchers concerned with the analysis of political and media processes. Several authors have made efforts to explain and articulate the concept in question.<sup>[11]</sup>

The openness of politics to mediatization lies in the very mechanisms of political action coupled directly with the production of symbols. “Any event or political process also involves a symbolic register,” said Romanian researcher Grigore Georgiu.<sup>[12]</sup> It is by means of mass communication that political symbols are circulated. “For most people, politics is often a series of mental images generated by news on TV, in newspapers and magazines,

as well as daily discussions,” noted Murray Edelman who continued:

They create a panorama in motion, unfolding in a world with which the wider audience never comes into contact, a world that people nevertheless get to fear or to acclaim, making it most of the time with passion and sometimes with action. They are told about new laws, about foreign political figures who are a threat or with whom trade treaties are signed, about wars that are beginning or ending, about candidates who lose or win in the fight for public functions, about decisions to spend huge amounts of money to get to the Moon...<sup>[13]</sup>

Pierre Bourdieu, in his turn, revealed the specificity of political domination by linking it to the construction of the symbolic field, indicating that, “The ratio of objective forces tends to be reproduced in the ratio of symbolic forces in the perception of the social universe.”<sup>[14]</sup> In such a framework, the representation of the social universe according to Bourdieu is no longer:

...a given, or in the same sense, a record, a reflection, but the product of many constructive actions that are always made and that must always be made again. It is stored in common words, in the terms of performance which form the meaning of the social universe as well as register it, in slogans that contribute to the social order by informing the thinking of this world and in the production of the groups that it designates and mobilizes.

But in this world, the solution to controversies most often, “... is a magical one, and it changes nothing in the conditions that affect the level of tension in the community, but only allows distracting attention and redirecting it to another set of symbols, equally irrelevant. The number of laws passing through legislative bodies or the number of executive decrees that change nothing in the permanent practices of the society are a clue... of the role of magic in politics.”<sup>[15]</sup>

The pertinent analysis of the phenomenon of symbolization in politics (even if it includes few references to the role of mass media in this process) by the researcher M. Edelman in his work *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* allows the American author to ascertain that the virtual image of reality produced by symbolism is nothing more than a “simplified model or an appearance of reality.” According to the researcher, the sources of this situation must be sought in the fact that, “For most members of our society it is characteristic to think in terms of stereotypes, to personalize and simplify to the maximum, not to be able to recognize or tolerate complex or ambiguous situations, therefore, to react especially to the symbols that simplify to the maximum or distort.” In circumstances determined by political and economic events that affect individuals in the deepest and most intimate areas of their lives, the author explains, only the confidence in stereotypes and the flight from reality can psychologically atten-

[8] De la Mota Ignacio Hilario. Diccionario de la comunicacion / Vol. II. – Madrid: Editorial Paraninfo, 1988, p. 92.

[9] Coman Mihai. Introducere în sistemul mass-media. – Iași: Polirom, 1999, p. 20.

[10] DeFleur Melvin, Ball-Rokeach Sandra. Teorii ale comunicării mediatică. – Iași: Polirom, 1999, p. 258.

[11] Journalism Studies (Taylor and Francis Group). Special Issue: Mediatization of Politics: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives, 2014, Vol. 15, Issue 3; Frank Esser, Jesper Strömbäck (Eds.). Mediatization of Politics. Understanding the Transformation of Western Democracies. - Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2014; Thomas Birkner. Mediatization of Politics: The case of the former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. În: International Journal of Communication, 2015, Vol. 30, N 4, pp. 454-469; Jesper Strömbäck. Four Phases of Mediatization: An Analysis of the Mediatization of Politics. In: The International Journal of Press / Politics, 2008, Vol. 13, N 3, pp. 228-246; Stephen Cushion, Richard Thomas, Oliver Ellis. The Mediatization of Second-Order Elections and Party Launches: UK Television News Reporting of the 2014 European Union Campaign. În: International Journal of communication, 2015, N 9, pp. 1523-1543.

[12] Georgiu Grigore. Filosofia culturii. – București: SNSPA, 2001, p. 132.

[13] Edelman Murray. Politica și utilizarea simbolurilor. – Iași: Polirom, 1999, p. 14.

[14] Бурдьё Пьер. Социология политики. – М.: Socio-Logos, 1993, p. 71.

[15] Edelman Murray. Op. cit., p. 38.

uate the feeling of anxiety and uncertainty, giving the illusion of a certain type of intellectual security, the political symbolism fulfilling in this case a cathartic function.

The framework of reference suggested by these statements conveys an understanding of the mediatization of politics as a set of specific actions promoted by the media in order to build the symbolic space of politics. As a result of the emergence of a world increasingly receptive to the production and use of symbols, mass media more and more insistently appropriates not just the role of a usable platform for politics and its protagonists but also the role of a determining element in the political process claiming to influence and even manipulate it.

The principles of mediatization dictate that the media focus attention on constructing “virtual characters” by ensuring these protagonists maximum visibility through media channels. This, however, highlights their external aspects like correlating the facts and events related to these characters with political interests and the political lines of editorial offices which diminishes their reality. Detailed, explicit presentations and in-depth explanations of the real circumstances that put them in the journalistic spotlight (willingly or implicitly) remain outside this media frame. In fact, it is a law of the mediatization of politics—oriented toward exploring the surface layers of things—to very lightly cover the message, to highlight appearances thus offering a virtual image of reality.

A particular interest of this analysis is the systematic mediatization that is most eloquently illustrated in election campaigns. They are designed and organized (themes, slogans, types of discourse, means of presentation and dissemination), “...in a media style, i.e. attractive, although not quite exciting and spectacular, in forms that fall into the patterns of the media’s construction of reality.”<sup>[16]</sup> It is precisely in the virtual reality of the electoral field that the political option is cemented.

The experience of the Russian Federation is eloquent in this respect. The myth created by Russian mass media about Boris Yeltsin as a fighter against communism and the messianic myth of Vladimir Putin were successfully developed and implemented in the electorate’s conscience by the Russian media.<sup>[17]</sup> The same trends toward mythology can also be seen during election campaigns in Moldova.

The differences and similarities between propaganda and mediatization must be sought, in our opinion, in the specifics of the methods used. The propaganda method claims an open persuasive influence; it is unidirectional and oriented towards the organized implementation of a system of actions of ideological indoctrination. From a historical point of view it is related more to the totalitarian period and underwent essential changes once television established itself as a means of mass communication.

[16] Drăgan Ioan. Paradigme ale comunicării de masă. Orizontul societății mediatice / Partea I. – București: Șansa, 1996, p. 240.

[17] Zassourski Ivan. Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia. - Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004.

Mediatization, however, implies an essential distinction: the shift from the use of information as a (complementary) tool in political struggles to the application of manipulative technologies aimed at changing meaning manifesting itself increasingly as *information wars* between different political forces. Consequently, the rational interpretation of events intrinsic to propaganda is mythologized, transforming itself in mass representations that are irrational in substance and emotional in form. What brings the tools of mediatization and propaganda together is the manipulation of public opinion, a peculiarity of which is inserting into the conscience content in the form of objective information that is desirable for the producers of the message.

The opportunities for mass media in this vein are estimated by specialists to be very great as an average consumer of information, according to statistics, watches television shows and listens to the radio for about four hours every day. This is sufficient for a neurological programming specialist using sound and video sequences to formulate in the consciences of a part of the audience the representations desired by the customer, even if they contradict reality.<sup>[18]</sup>

Basically, the essence of the mediatization of politics is in the following: current political actions produced for dissemination via media channels show signs of subordination to media logic<sup>[19]</sup> in terms of deployment and dissemination. Laying political actions on media approaches is the basic feature of the current mediatization of politics.

It is clear that one may talk of the mediatization of politics as a phenomenon only when media become the main field of political communication, when the interests of media owners become the political positions of the media they control and finally, when the twinning of politics and media takes place.

Naturally, the proliferation of the mediatization of politics, understood above all as an intrusion of media into politics, is due on one hand to the primacy of actual media logic (subordinated to commercial interests that cannot be neglected, among other things) which dictates capturing the attention of as large an audience as possible by engaging media tools (sensational information, talk shows, personalizing politics, spectacular transmissions of messages) and on the other hand to the logic of the political action that finds in the media a convenient ally or an appropriate supporter with potential and resources that can be successfully used (although it is not rare when the media claims an autonomous role). At the intersection of these two tendencies when addressing politics, the media face the need for an increasingly pronounced inclination towards mediatization of politics as a way of life.

**Victor MORARU**

[18] Дубовский В., Бритиков С. Информационные технологии в национальном и мировом развитии. Ён: Общественные науки и современность, 2000, N 1, p. 148.

[19] Moraru Victor. Mass media vs politica. Chișinău: CEP USM, 2001, pp. 51-52.

# The Small Oases of Independent Media Struggle to Face Challenges

According to the study on the Needs of the Media in Moldova presented by the Independent Journalism Center as part of the events dedicated to World Press Freedom Day this year, “The vertiginous development of the media in Moldova is part of the country’s general socio-economic landscape.”<sup>[1]</sup> This statement referred in particular to the significant number of media outlets that has appeared in the market since 2009. The study includes a census of Moldovan media outlets (473), as well as quantitative and qualitative data referring to the problems and needs of the media (as provided by representatives from 200 outlets).<sup>[2]</sup> According to the authors, the research is an “X-ray” of the media field in the 10 years since a similar study was done in 2007 without, however, analyzing the situation comparatively. The authors of the study in 2007 mentioned that, “Growth was very rapid in the 1990’s, then it slowed, but since 2000 the number of publications has been growing by an average of 5 per year.”<sup>[3]</sup> It should be noted that the 2007 study did not take into consideration online media outlets which were poorly developed back then and that print media had the biggest share of the market (of 420 outlets identified and analyzed, 35% were newspapers). Unlike the 2017 study, the 2007 study included the Transnistrian region.<sup>[4]</sup>

As in 2007, in 2017 the experts and the journalists talked about the direct link between the socio-economic development of Moldova and that of the media. Although massive investments particularly in broadcasting came after the communists were out of power, external media pluralism had been developing even before 2009, albeit mostly quantitatively. Ten years later we are talking about even more media outlets, about the continuous and rapid development of online media including phenomena such as blogging or vlogging (which were not taken into account in the 2007 study), and also about the opportunities and traps that accompany these phenomena (portals that appear overnight and whose administrators cannot be discovered, false news, theft of content and/or identity, etc.).

Also, in 2007 there were three TV stations (Moldova 1, Pervii Canal and TVR 1) and four radio stations<sup>[5]</sup> with national coverage while in 2017 we have five TV stations (Moldova 1, Pervii Canal, Canal 2, Canal 3 and Publika TV) and eight radio stations<sup>[6]</sup> which cover more than 60% of the country’s territory. Therefore, it seems that we are witnessing a significant evolution in the local media landscape as well as wider and more diversified public access to information. At the same time, however, in 2017, like 10 years ago, our country is included by international organizations in the category of countries with a “partially free” media (Reporters Without Borders, for example, in 2007 placed Moldova 81<sup>st</sup> in the World Press Freedom Index, four positions higher than in 2006<sup>[7]</sup> and in 2017 in 80<sup>th</sup> position<sup>[8]</sup> down four positions compared with 2016). In addition, with the deepening of Moldova’s relations with the European Union and the signing of the Association Agreement, the practice of debates within EU institutions emerged, including about the situation of the media in our country. Each time, they end up with new recommendations and warnings regarding undemocratic developments in the field.

In 2007 the concerns of the media community and of experts were related in particular to (i) the lack of regulations on ownership transparency especially in broadcasting, (ii) some provisions of the new-at-that-time Broadcasting Code (adopted in 2006), (iii) the political subordination of the public media and of some private media, (iv) censorship and self-censorship, (v) difficulties encountered by journalists when collecting information, (vi) pressure on and harassment of journalists and (vii) access to the Internet or to a personal computer for every journalist. In 2017, however, concerns are more related to the implementation and effectiveness of provisions to make the owners of media outlets known to the public, to the need to adopt a new Broadcasting Code, to concentrations of ownership and audiences especially in broadcasting, to media politicization or to unfair competition in the advertising market.

Online media, investigative journalism, more employment opportunities for journalists, investment in the field, more regulations and multimedia products using the latest technologies

[1] *Study on the Needs of the Media in Moldova* (including the census of the media outlets in Moldova), available at <http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/studiul-necesit%C4%83%C8%9Bilor-mass-media-din-republica-moldova>

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 41;

[3] Sirbu, A. *Challenges and performances of the Moldovan media*, p.14, available at <http://ijc.md/Publicatii/provocari.pdf>;

[4] Angheli-Zaicenco, N. *The media landscape*, p. 1, available at <http://ijc.md/Publicatii/Peisajul.pdf>;

[5] Broadcasting Coordinating Council Decision no. 59 of 10.05.2007 on the Strategy on the Coverage of the National Territory with Broadcasting Programs (2007, 2010), available at <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=326607>;

[6] The list of broadcasters with national coverage, available at <http://cca.md/news/lista-radiodifuzorilor-cu-acoperire-națională>;

[7] Reporters Without Borders. *World Press Freedom Index*, 2007 and 2006, available at <https://rsf.org/en/worldwide-press-freedom-index-2007>, <https://rsf.org/en/worldwide-press-freedom-index-2006>;

[8] Reporters Without Borders. *World Press Freedom Index*, 2017, available at <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2017>;

have all developed in Moldova over the past 8 to 10 years. Also during this period, the broadcasting license of a TV station was withdrawn on the grounds that it was excessively politicized (NIT in 2012), but in a short time we witnessed the emergence and consolidation of a strong phenomenon of concentration of media outlet ownership in the hands of a few people fully involved in the political life of the country. Thus, in Moldova the terms *oligarchs* and/or *oligarchies* inclusively and particularly referring to the media are being used increasingly often and openly. Society apparently is also divided by the powers of persuasion of a few people, and having been divided ever since the founding of the state, it has become very divided and confused. The media have contributed to that, too. The small oases of independent media struggle to meet the challenge.

## Biggest Problems and Needs

### Financial Resources

Under these circumstances and at the distance of a decade, we notice some elements that are common to the two periods, although with changes in focus, intensity and characters. The first element relates to financial needs that are highlighted in both studies we have referred to. If in 2007 it concerned the difficulties of print media including wages, distribution costs, working conditions and printing houses, in 2017 the 46% of respondents who cited money as a need and/or a problem<sup>[9]</sup> pointed out the impossibility, especially for regional outlets, to invest in high performance equipment and in staff in order to compete with sufficiently funded outlets equipped with technology, human resources, transport, etc. The fact that financing continues to be a problem for the media indicates that it has not become a profitable business in Moldova. The retransmission of a considerable volume of content from other countries to the detriment of indigenous products and concentrations of ownership that in turn lead to the production and transmission of material over several channels and to unfair competition in the advertising market all create large discrepancies among those who profit from media activity and those who are barely scraping by. According to the study on the Needs of the Media, “Only 26% of media outlets are profitable while 38% are merely “afloat” meaning they only cover their costs from their revenues. For 36% of the outlets, however, the situation is more difficult including 16% for which it is critical because they cannot cover their costs with their revenues.”<sup>[10]</sup>

### Centralization of the Media

Though not the only one, the financial factor is closely related to another phenomenon that existed 10 years ago and is still true: the centralization of the media. Although the two studies used different methodologies and calculated different segments of the

[9] *Study on the Needs of the Media in Moldova* (including the census of the media outlets in Moldova), available at <http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/studiul-necesit%C4%83%C8%9Bilor-mass-media-din-republica-moldova>, p. 41;

[10] *Ibidem*;

media, they showed that in 2007 54.5% of all media outlets were concentrated in Chisinau<sup>[11]</sup> compared with 76.7% in 2017.<sup>[12]</sup> In the same vein, a study by the Electronic Press Association in 2015 revealed that almost 60% of the broadcasters under the jurisdiction of Moldova were concentrated in the capital city.<sup>[13]</sup> In addition, the remaining percentages were very unequally divided among the other regions with Gagauzia being the best positioned. The managers of regional outlets have major financial difficulties including a lack of interest in advertising, a shortage of equipment and technology, less attractive working conditions for journalists and the total indifference of authorities towards the field. Grants are a lifeline, but they do not solve long-term and structural problems. The situation thus created and perpetuated seriously jeopardizes the pluralism and diversity of media products in Moldova and should be a real concern for all stakeholders.

### The Influence of Politics

Politics continue to be massively involved in the activities of the media. If in 2007 the communist government influenced the content disseminated by several media outlets, in 2017 things are more polarized, more pluralistic. Until May 2017, the chairman of the ruling Democratic Party of Moldova (DPM) held the licenses of four TV stations out of the five with national coverage, and on May 12, the Broadcast Coordinating Council approved the transfer of two TV stations to the ownership of a company managed by an adviser of the leader of the DPM.<sup>[14]</sup> Two other TV stations are owned by an MP from the most important opposition party in Parliament whose leader is now the president of the country. The majority of important media outlets in the country are politically affiliated, but unlike 10 years ago, now we know who owns them. Over the past few years we have been constantly getting proof of the fact that this is not the way to develop a healthy, free and professional media landscape. Election campaigns continue to be the most obvious evidence in this respect; the latest campaign exceeded all the limits in terms of manipulation, misinformation and the denigration of opponents. If limiting the number of licenses held by an owner means replacing one name with another in ownership documents, the issue is not solved in the long run and does not contribute to the efficient functioning of the media system.

[11] Angheli-Zaicenco, N. *The media landscape*, p. 2, available at <http://ijc.md/Publicatii/Peisajul.pdf>

[12] *Study on the Needs of the Media in Moldova* (including the census of the media outlets in Moldova), available at <http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/studiul-necesit%C4%83%C8%9Bilor-mass-media-din-republica-moldova>, p. 41;

[13] *External pluralism of the media in Moldova* in 2015, APEL, 2016, p. 59, available at [http://apel.md/public/upload/md\\_2016.05.31\\_Pluralismul-extern-2015\\_ro.pdf](http://apel.md/public/upload/md_2016.05.31_Pluralismul-extern-2015_ro.pdf);

[14] BCC Decision no. 9/65 of 12 May 2017 on examination of cession requests, available at <http://cca.md/files/D.9-65%20din%2012%20mai%202017%20-%20%20Cu%20privire%20la%20cesiunea%20unor%20licente%20de%20emisie.pdf>; Vlad Plahotniuc ceded two televisions to a journalist, available at <https://www.anticoruptie.md/ro/stiri/doc-vlad-plahotniuc-a-cedat-doua-posturi-de-televiziune-unui-jurnalist>;

### Professional Education

The quality of staff training was another grievance identified 10 years ago that is still valid today. University journalism departments continue to be accused of not adapting their courses to market realities, i.e., the two—universities and media outlets—live in parallel worlds. On the other hand, the academic community listened, for example, to previous requests to specialize students in narrower areas and to bring more practitioners into classes. However, the specificity of the academic environment in terms of hiring lecturers and providing academic programs coupled with the lack of money for investment in audio or video laboratories for example and with low wages in relation to the often too bureaucratic and formal demands of higher education institutions separate the two worlds even more. It is shocking that in 2007 the priority area for journalists' training was "the basis of journalism,"<sup>[15]</sup> and in 2017 it was the news, followed by interviews<sup>[16]</sup> which suggests that things have not actually evolved all that much. Regardless of what can be said about

surveys or sociological studies, the problem of the gap between universities and practical journalism is real and should not be neglected. A solution would perhaps be that the managers of universities and their specialized departments come up with a differentiated approach to journalistic education taking into account the specificity of the field as well as more openness from media outlets to the academic environment.

So, the media in Moldova needs mainly money, independence from politics and qualified personnel in order to develop healthily. As long as funding comes mainly from politicians and as long as there is not enough investment in terms of financial, human and material resources in education in general and in journalistic education in particular, the media will be overwhelmingly used as a weapon in an unprecedented internal war in this country.

**Aneta GONȚA**

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[15] Angheli-Zaicenco, N. *The media landscape*, p. 12, available at <http://ijc.md/Publicatii/Peisajul.pdf>;

[16] *Study on the Needs of the Media in Moldova* (including the census of the media outlets in Moldova), available at <http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/studiul-necesit%C4%83%C8%9Bilor-mass-media-din-republica-moldova>, p. 18

# Mariana Rata, *Anticoruptie.md*: “I often wonder why journalists make so many allowances for politicians.”

**Media Azi:** *As an investigative journalist, do you feel that there is a lot of corruption in Moldova?*

**Mariana Rata:** Yes, a great deal. Unfortunately, investigative journalism in Moldova is still underdeveloped; there are few investigative journalists because an investigation is an expensive product. In countries with advanced democracies, media outlets have financial capabilities; they can afford teams of investigative journalists. And they have an impact: Outlets would not hire such journalists if their products didn't sell. Another important factor is that in such countries investigative journalists are not afraid of possible persecution by authorities or of reprisals from employers when they publish an investigation. We, unfortunately, do have such fears.

**M.A.:** *How do you perceive investigative journalism?*

**M. R.:** We are the people who work in the basements of governments rather like miners of society. We try to come across what is hidden behind official statements and to look beyond what is seen on the surface. The work is not very clean because you have to look up and down until you find a “diamond” in the mud. It's difficult, painstaking work involving the study of documents. To be sure it has a pleasant part, too, when you discover important facts about something that were previously unknown.

**M.A.:** *Have you ever seen yourself in the role of Columbo?*

**M. R.:** I haven't felt like Columbo, but it's true that some of a detective's qualities are required. Gut feeling is very important in investigative journalism. You can find subjects almost everywhere, but you have to feel the most important ones that are worth the effort to investigate...

**M.A.:** *How do you decide what topic to write about?*

**M. R.:** In general, public funds are the topic we start from, but most of the time topics just present themselves. For example, last year my colleague Anastasia Nani from the Journalistic Investigations Center and I investigated how businessman Veaceslav Platon was extradited to Moldova. This investigation, which I consider was successful, started from a rumor that he was brought to Chisinau on a charter flight. Such cases make you wonder: Why should a person, no matter how controversial, be brought on a charter flight? Anastasia suggested we appeal to the Ministry of Interior for an answer; everything started from that answer. We found out that it was not just an airplane, but the one on which Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko travels



frequently. Moreover, there were in fact two charter flights; the other one supposedly had the current chairman of the Democratic Party on board to supervise the first flight in order to be sure that the passenger on board arrived safely in Moldova.

Topics come up differently. Sometimes citizens tell us about cases. Often, however, they start from our feeling that there is a problem. Then we try to find sources, especially documents such as registers, official records, etc. We work with them in particular. If you are lucky enough to find them, it's perfect. If not, you start to search for people who might know more and who could possibly help you find documents. Sometimes you have to give the subject up until you manage to find someone who agrees to talk about it. There are many topics that I am sure need to be investigated, but everything is kept so secret that I have to wait until people holding certain documents want to talk about them.

**M.A.:** *In an investigation you have to analyze facts dispassionately. How do you manage to disengage yourself from a hot topic?*

**M. R.:** We generally work with lot of passion when investigating something. We have no fixed working hours; we do not look at the clock but work from morning until late at night. For example, during the investigation on anabolic steroids I would sometimes suddenly realize it was 4 o'clock in the morning and I had to try to sleep. Yes, it's very important to keep a cool head and take an unbiased look at the facts, to have proof for each word that you write. The good part is that an investigative journalist can spend more time on a topic. If you are too hot-headed when you write, you may look at it the next day and see it in a different light.

**M.A.:** *If you investigate a subject about a politician you possibly liked or even voted for in an election who became involved in a case of corruption, do you succeed in keeping a cool head?*

**M. R.:** Fortunately, in Moldova we are used to disappointments which has cured us of any kind of political partiality. After 2009, for example, politicians very quickly gave us occasions to criticize them. That is precisely why a journalist should not identify him/herself with politicians or go hand in hand with them, singing their praises, even if it's natural to have some political preferences.

**M.A.:** *What was the hardest investigation you worked on?*

**M. R.:** For me, the hardest in every aspect including documentation was the investigation about anabolic steroids, first of all because nobody had written about them before. For lots of people even now it is hard to understand what an anabolic steroid is. It's a substance that stimulates an increase in muscle mass but that also has many side effects. Everybody is interested in them: manufacturers, dealers, consumers. You may buy them in Moldova for 5 euros, while in Europe and the USA they cost 100 euros. In Moldova they are legal, but in most countries of the world they are prohibited. In Moldova, anabolic steroids are legally produced by a single company, but there are a lot of underground laboratories. I found it hard to research this subject due to a lack of information. I was helped somewhat to find the right path for my investigation by a professional athlete from the USA concerned about anabolics. I was shocked to hear from him that Moldova is one of the largest manufacturers of anabolics in the world. The findings of the parliamentary commission investigating the illegal export of anabolics via the Moldovan state postal company Posta Moldovei were also useful for me.

The fact that I was not sued following this investigation proves that everything I wrote was true, though some were upset.

**M.A.:** *And what followed after the investigation on anabolics? Are they no longer produced and sent abroad? What was the impact of the investigation?*

**M. R.:** It was followed by silence... the authorities didn't react at all. Anabolic steroids are still produced underground and exported illegally, including via Posta Moldovei. In fact, I have been recently getting signals that some of the underground manufacturers of steroids have begun to move their laboratories

to Ukraine. I know, however, that a criminal investigation has been launched in Germany in relation to the illegal export of anabolics, so my investigation has served as a source of information for German investigators.

**M.A.:** *This year, an article of yours served as grounds for a criminal case that prompted journalists to start a campaign for the right of free access to information...*

**M.R.:** The case of Botnari was utterly absurd, but the fact that the prosecutor launched an investigation alarmed us and we started to ring bells. Things could have degenerated even further because it could have meant criminal charges not only for me but for all the journalists who wrote about the capital's former commissioner who had held office since 2009. Botnari was involved in the events of April 7 and was convicted as a result. Did you realize that? All the media had written about him over the past years. The campaign was unleashed as it was not the first time journalists' right of access to information of public interest was affected on the grounds of protecting personal data. The same reason was invoked to eliminate the option of searching case files on court websites by name and surname. I am glad that in my case journalists from Moldova proved that they can be united and can achieve results. We can thus be a force when we want to be. Now, if we persevere, insist and call on the Ministry of Justice to restore the option to search case files by name and surname, we'll surely succeed.

**M.A.:** *What should journalists do to make the media a real fourth power?*

**M. R.:** I would rather say what they should not do. I often wonder why journalists are so lenient with politicians. Sometimes even those working in politically subservient media outlets can refuse to do some things they are asked to do. Let's say that a journalist from a TV channel is shown the door for "disobedience," but imagine a TV team in which three journalists deliberately refuse to do something that is in conflict with the code of conduct and all three suddenly leave the channel. It's bad for the image of that TV channel. In our country, however, such things don't happen because journalists are afraid. I believe that they have nothing to fear. I know from my own experience: There is life after television! Personally, I worked on television and I left. There is life beyond these holdings, too. Yes, it may be more difficult; maybe you won't manage to immediately find a new job in the media. In this case you can take a break, take some time off or try to work in other fields until things cool down. Information wars are extremely harmful, especially for journalists. If you get wounded in this war, will you have a future?

**M.A.:** *In other words, there is no journalism beyond professional ethics...*

**M. R.:** Of course not, but in Moldova the media consumer is also very tolerant. People often complain about manipulation and lack of journalists' professionalism. If, however, you ask them whether they complained to the BCC [Broadcast Coordinating Council] that a television station serves them toxic

products, the answer is: "No!" People don't even know that they have such a right. Believe me, when a thousand people appeal to the BCC and complain of a TV channel, the BCC will have to react. We should tell people that they have the right to ask. They are used to voting once every few years, electing the mayor, MPs, the President and... Here ends all their involvement in state life. Unfortunately, in Moldova civic spirit has atrophied. I don't support protests, especially violent ones, but I do plead for a stronger civic spirit.

**M.A.: *The media wrote that you will be involved in the project on the reorganization of TV7. What tasks will you have at the new TV channel?***

**M. R.:** I will have a show dealing with investigations and corruption. In fact, it will be a talk show with elements of investigation. I hope to start soon. It will have a very creative team and will bring out the best in us.

**M.A.: *Were you excited when your investigation about anabolics was nominated for the European Press Prize?***

**M. R.:** The nomination is another story. Actually, I hadn't thought about applying for this competition. My colleague Anastasia Nani, editor-in-chief of Anticoruptie.md, was the one to insist I did as she knew how much I had worked on the investigation. When I applied, I was on a list with over 500 persons, and I said to myself that in a contest of 500 investigations I had no chance! When I got a call and was told that after a pre-selection I was on

the shortlist of seven persons, I was really surprised. The prize went to Serbia, but from the explanations of the jury I learned that my investigation was among the three candidates to win the prize. Certainly, I was very excited, but journalists don't make investigations for prizes. I think I achieved something much more important in this competition. The fact that the anabolic mafia was uncovered and that at long last investigative journalists from Europe started to come to Moldova to write about it was my reward for the effort. Just now I said goodbye to some journalists from France I worked with who made a documentary about anabolics. It will be aired on the public TV channel France 3. Journalists from the BBC also have shown an interest in this subject. This is the best prize that you can ever get.

**M.A.: *In Moldova, as a rule, when a singer wins a prize at an international festival, they are decorated with an order, sometimes even with the Order of the Republic. When journalists write investigations that have an impact, what order do they deserve?***

**M. R.:** Speaking about myself and the colleagues I know, we don't address people in power; we address ordinary citizens. When you get a phone call from a doctor or a locksmith and hear "I read it, it was very interesting," it's the best appraisal, especially if you are lucky enough not to be sued in a criminal or civil case! I wouldn't be able to take an order from a president, because I don't think a politician can give an award or an order absolutely objectively...

*For Media Azi: Tatiana CORAI*

# The Relationship between the Media and Society in Recent Decades

The situation in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to significant changes in the social sphere and generated a volatile system that conditioned the limitation of state responsibilities in its administration and the increasingly active participation of citizens, civil society and the media in the building of social reality. "Constant attention to the role of the media in social life is fully justified, especially in a society in transition. Interpretations of media activities from a diversity of viewpoints converge in the recognition of the fundamental mission of the media in socializing the audience, expressing and forming public opinion, and integrating society."<sup>[1]</sup> Those times changed both the relationship of the media with authorities and society and media practices leading to new roles and functions for the media as well as to the emergence of new genres of journalism, including social journalism.

When social journalism established itself as a definite genre, the relationship of Moldovan media with authorities and society changed the content of journalism which determined its place in modern media space. Domestic media products diversified due to the emergence of a number of publications/programs that fell under the category of social journalism. Our print media was supplemented by new categories such as private press, advertising press, entertainment press, press of commercial companies and school press among others. We include community press—a sporadic phenomenon that still emerges periodically—in this context. It was the community press that first started to promote new social values and cultivate civic spirit—the goals of social journalism.

The categories of broadcast journalism products also changed as schedules included various shows specializing in social topics, including shows for most national minorities living in Moldova, new shows for children and teenagers and shows for people with special needs. Thus, the social, political and economic conditions of that time contributed to the launch of numerous, quite heterogeneous periodicals and broadcasts that opened new horizons for establishing domestic social journalism.

In early 1990s, domestic media focused primarily on issues that had recently been considered "taboo" and revived the history of the nation as well as issues reflecting new political realities with the intention to inform the public how to think and act on the basis of new democratic principles. As an instrument of struggle against the old regime and a pulpit for spreading and introducing new democratic standards, they expressed the need for liberation and solidarity. At that time and in the absence of serious competition from other elements of the media, print media had

an outstanding success fueled by huge public interest in the new realities.

In the second half of the 1990s, the state of euphoria in society and in the media generated by the restoration of independence, the return of the Latin alphabet and acquisition of political and civil liberties diminished over time. Severing economic ties, destroying old values and the deterioration of the social sphere significantly affected individuals in particular and the society as a whole and led to serious social problems. As a result, the agenda of the media expanded to topics about social problems that threatened economic wellbeing, social order and morality; that jeopardized people's health and that damaged the physical and ecological environment as well as to issues related to global actions with an international impact. In this context, talk shows on social issues and social investigations emerged.

The involvement of the media in social reality turned journalism into a very effective tool for disseminating information, forming public opinion and monitoring the social activities of decision makers and/or ordinary citizens. "The media is the foremost actor that exercises participatory civil rights [...] The media is the primary former of public opinion; it controls the public sphere and is, as such, the only entity entitled to be the main appraiser of events. The media not only communicates information but also controls it and guides public perception."<sup>[2]</sup>

In the social sphere, social journalism assumes certain roles, such as:

- Helping citizens in concrete situations;
- Introducing new problems and topics for discussion;
- Offering opportunities to express new opinions in traditional situations;
- Providing full information about the social sphere;
- Subjecting all draft laws and decisions to public opinion participating in the formation and implementation of social policies;

[1] Moraru, V.; Stepanov, G. *Mass Media in the Republic of Moldova, 2004* [Mass-media din Republica Moldova, 2004.] Chisinau: IMM, 2005, p. 5. |

[2] Lukacsi, C. *The Media and Social Change: Socio-Political, Legal and Organizational Aspects of Institutionalization of Spokesperson* [Mass-media și schimbarea socială: aspecte socio-politice, juridice și organizaționale ale instituționalizării purtătorului de cuvânt.] Summary of PhD thesis. Bucharest, 2010, p. 22. [quote 23.11.2016] [http://www.unibuc.ro/studies/Doctorate2010Iunie/Lukacsi\\_Claudiu\\_Mass-media\\_si\\_schimbarea\\_sociala/Rezumat\\_TEZA\\_doctorat\\_Claudiu\\_Lukacsi.pdf\\_\\_06591669](http://www.unibuc.ro/studies/Doctorate2010Iunie/Lukacsi_Claudiu_Mass-media_si_schimbarea_sociala/Rezumat_TEZA_doctorat_Claudiu_Lukacsi.pdf__06591669). .

- Channeling public action maintaining a balance among the social interests of different social groups;
- Providing moral appraisals of situations, actions, statements;
- Putting ideas of humanism and overall good above the interests of groups.<sup>[3]</sup>

In this context, it is necessary to specify one more role: managing the image of state institutions and non-government organizations. The frequency of media coverage of their activities, the angle of approach and the accents the media use in coverage as well as the contexts in which they are “placed” are decisive for the image of institutions.

The information circulated by social journalism should facilitate the understanding of problems affecting the majority of the population; therefore, it should be easily accessible, of general interest and intended “first of all for people.”<sup>[4]</sup> At the same time, it should contribute to building relationships between individuals and groups and between groups and the social environment, it should participate in regulating social processes and it should encourage social structures and institutions and decision makers to act in the interests of society in general and of individuals in particular. “Interrelations between individuals and groups lead to the creation of a social environment that in its turn establishes complex relations between organized and social groups and individuals.”<sup>[5]</sup> The interdependence of individuals, groups and the environment based on individual criteria and social rules is influenced by the accents that the media put on approaches to social reality given that individual criteria and social rules themselves are the products of various practices including those of the media. Thus, social journalism helps to build social relations and through various interactions to structure a new public space with more dynamic and at the same time increasingly complex social relations. Bringing the coexistence of various types of social relations to the forefront of media communications and public space:

...means understanding the need for the simultaneous management and control of differences specific to our society and for observing the principle of unity, so that in the future it would be possible to modify the characteristics of currently existing social ties. Through communication, social links are the miracle con-

necting and organizing individuals, groups, communities and social classes into a society.<sup>[6]</sup>

The bivalence of the social sphere that is the object of social journalism and at the same time the environment of its existence and development in a way determines the process of journalistic creation and the final media product. The social sphere—relatively independent, integral, functional, sometimes inert and personified—determines the approaches and the contexts in which the media covers social issues. Russian researcher N. Nazarov believes that the specificity of the social sphere determines and imposes certain requirements on the information disseminated: It should be of interest and of use to as many people as possible; it should be easily identifiable in the general flow of information; it should be understandable; and it should encourage citizens to social action.<sup>[7]</sup> From this perspective, information disseminated, “...should be contemplated as a social resource that can be converted into other types of resources.”<sup>[8]</sup>

The importance of social journalism lies in its ability to address problems affecting the entire population regardless of the social group or strata people belong to as well as to put into circulation functional information that is extremely necessary for a person as a social being. The functional nature of social journalism enables the participation of citizens in decision making, their integration into social life, the promotion of social strategies and improvements in relevant legislation. The functional pattern of social journalism is structured in such a way as to influence both individuals and society. The complexity of modern life imposes the need to regard it through the prism of society as well as to relate it to social reality because economic, political and cultural events gain value only if they are related to society.

In conclusion, due to its potential to constructively examine reality, social journalism affects society, changes the perceptions of individuals and educates their civic spirit and cultural participation and at the same time shapes the social sphere itself. The social sphere in its turn determines a certain organization of the professional activities of journalists that results in the creation of constructive media products. That constructive nature resides in the ability of journalistic materials to perform the functions and objectives of social journalism in order to ensure the perpetuation of the social sphere in particular and of the society as a whole.

**Georgeta STEPANOV**

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[6] Voliton D. *Information Doesn't Mean Communication* [Вольтон Д. Информация не значит коммуникация] Moscow: POLPRED Spravochnik, 2011, p. 8-9.

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[8] Dzyaloshinski I. *Integrated Processes In Modern Russian Media Systems, or What Happens in the Russian Information Space* [Дзялошинский И. Интегративные процессы в современных российских медиа-системах, или что происходит в российском информационном пространстве] In *My – sograzhdane* [Мы – сограждане] Moscow, 2002, p. 22.

# How Can Online Media Make Money?

**“A light purse is a heavy curse,” the proverb says. This is how one could describe the situation of the media in Moldova in relation to the advertising market. We are a poor country in which the media has no economic independence which in turn causes political dependence. Why? The advertising market is small. But what about online media? It is better, but not too good. How can online media become financially self-sufficient?**

## Description of the problem

The advertising market in Moldova in 2016 was estimated at 22 million euros. The Internet comes third after television and street advertising (billboards) at about 15% of the market or about 3.3 million euros. Is 3.3 million euros a lot or a little? Let's have a closer look. Half of this money goes abroad to companies like Google, Facebook and Odnoklassniki. The remaining 50% is distributed in approximately the following way: 20% to the online advertising site 999.md and all its related sites (e.g., play.md, point.md), and 30% to local media sites which is about 1 million euros per year. But that's not all. About 40% of that 1 million is the commission of advertising agencies and 20% is value-added tax paid to the state. Thus, the news sites receive a net profit of about 400,000 euros annually. In Moldova there are about 120 news sites (national and local), most of which don't even post advertising and are “funded” thanks to the enthusiasm of the founders, so over 90% of the available advertising proceeds is distributed among the top 10 media sites: protv.md, unimedia.info, agora.md, diez.md, kp.md, timpul.md, jurnal.md and three sites for women: unica.md, ea.md and perfecte.md.

## Even the top 10 are not very profitable

A simple calculation shows that to maintain an online outlet (wages, rent, servers, etc.) one would need a minimum of about 5000 euros for one website. Thus, the minimum annual budget would amount to 60,000 euros to cover operating expenses. If you invest in development, then the necessary amount exceeds 100,000 euros a year per site. Comparing this minimum budget with the approximately 400,000 euros earned from all advertising, it becomes clear that in fact, even the top 10 news sites in Moldova are not very profitable. Thus, to make money, site owners are looking for alternative financing.

## Experience of Agora and EA.md

Historically in every company, whether it is a small news site in Moldova or a big one in New York, two streams of interests collide: the interests of the readers and the interests of advertising clients. Readers want objective information while advertising clients are interested in promoting their images. Let's analyze an

example. How do we proceed if we have a generous advertising contract with a car company and this company is involved in illegally importing cars? Will we sweep it under the rug, write nothing and keep promoting the positive image of the car company? Do we break the advertising contract and publish criticism about the company? The truth is somewhere in the middle. At the Agora portal, we would post the advertising banner (in which the company is promoted positively since it has the status of “advertisement”), and in parallel we would write impartial news about everything the car company is involved in. We do the same during election campaigns when we promote all candidates via advertising banners and criticize them in news items. Content and advertising are two completely different worlds; they need to be separated. Thus, if things are not “put in order” from the very beginning, at a certain stage “cracks” appear and then we notice the outlet's political or economic affiliation.

At Interakt, the company that owns the Agora and EA.md sites, all activity is divided into two large sections: editorial and commercial. The editorial section includes the work of reporters in the two editorial offices and in the production control rooms while the commercial section includes sales, accounting and other aspects of company management. Each area is led by a different person: one daily thinks about readers, the other one about the money that the outlet needs for salaries, rent and development projects.

What is the sense of this division? It helps to balance the interests pressing on the media outlet and to serve those interests in the best possible way. Responsibility to the audience is critical as it is the only way to develop a trustworthy media outlet. Meanwhile, the quality of service provided to advertising clients helps achieve financial independence which is the foundation of editorial independence. Exactly as in Maslow's pyramid, it is necessary to satisfy basic needs first. In Moldova there are outlets that have a hard time finding the money for salaries and rent, but they still resist political pressure. Hats off to them! Agora hasn't yet reached the level of profitability either as it's a young project only three years old, but we work day by day to cover our production costs.

## Financing solutions

What can we do? There are several solutions. I will mention just the top five.

1. **Focus on content marketing.** Three years ago, news sites got about 80% of their advertising revenues from banners and about 20% from advertising news; however, mobile sites and social networks have been growing year by year which has inevitably led to a reduction in the number of banners. Thus, sites are forced to reinvent themselves and

to develop content marketing that in terms of revenue today equals or even slightly exceeds the revenue from banners. By *content* we mean advertising in the form of text and video material.

2. **Services.** The most relevant example of services in the domestic market is the live broadcasting site Privesc.EU which is self-financing due to the live broadcasting it offers to its clients. This service area is still not very well explored; there is enough space there to make it deserving of exploration.
3. **Targeted advertising.** Today, half of the advertising market goes to international operators such as Google, Facebook and Odnoklassniki due to the fact that they have better means for targeting advertising. If you want to advertise a new diaper, you need to address young mothers and not beer lovers. Will we keep just looking at that or will we start developing targeting solutions? Today, there is an interesting initiative to develop the data management platform for the domestic market that will be necessary for targeting advertising to different audiences.
4. **Subscriptions.** In the United States there are many large publications such as the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and others that receive significant funding from subscriptions. To what extent is this solution suitable for a small country whose population of fewer than 3 million is not at all wealthy? There is an initiative coming from mold-street.com to provide subscription-based access to content. Of course, this is just one source of income. The

population of Moldova has a limited ability to pay, and it would be naive to believe that subscriptions would be able to cover all the expenses of a media outlet, but of course there is room for experimenting.

5. **Crowdfunding.** Recently, the Agora news site launched a crowdfunding initiative. The idea may take root because it relies on small amounts of money donated by a large number of people. While subscriptions are more difficult to manage, the idea of crowdfunding is simpler and requires the editorial team to be as close to the public as possible and to be accountable to its readers. Is this a utopian idea or does it have legs? We'll see. One thing is sure: the direction is right if you depend on your readers and not on politicians' budgets.

Certainly, **grants** are also a solution for financing. Today, they are either the second source of income after advertising or, frequently, the main source. Without support from external donors, the media in Moldova would be nearly non-existent with the exception of the party press. At the same time, we should realize that European and American taxpayers cannot support us forever. If we want to develop a sustainable media outlet, it is necessary to think about medium- and long-term solutions for financing from advertising or from the direct support of readers. Otherwise, when the grant is finished, the project itself will die. The advertising market is too small to support everyone. Only the strongest will survive.

*Tudor DARIE*

# Journalists – Hostages of Politicians?

## Why did we get here?

Journalism has undergone a change of paradigm namely: Manipulation and propaganda have replaced the classical mission of *informing the ordinary citizen*. It is a global trend, not just a characteristic of our domestic media. There are several causes of this shift; the most “important” seems to be the *excessive politicization* of the field. In Moldova, the media has become an accessory for politicians, and journalists now are nothing more and nothing less than their hostages. The classic mission of the media—informing society—has faded into the background. Now, the creation of a reality imposed by owners is much more important than the classic values of journalism i.e., fairness, neutrality, plurality of sources and deontology in general. Media owners are the *newsmakers* in Moldova, and news is based not on events but on their individual agenda.

In this context, the interpretation of facts and adjectival journalism have become a sort of fashion for journalists. “The fugitive brothers ...”, “The criminal ...”, “The twaddler ...”, is how most news in our media begins. The journalistic profession is becoming increasingly discredited, and the media environment in Moldova has become a kind of battlefield for politicians. The big problem is that they use journalists as weapons in this war. The result of this process is the emergence of “*barricade journalism*.”

## What opinion polls say

According to the Barometer of Public Opinion (BPO), in November 2009 public trust in the media was 62%. In 8 years it decreased by half reaching 31% at the end of 2016 and thus losing second place (after the Orthodox Church of Moldova) to the institution of mayor.

In our opinion, the causes of this decrease are due to the following:

- **Connection of the media with politics.** Data in the same BPO show that the level of trust in political parties has fallen almost fourfold over the past eight years from 29% to 8%. As a result, this negative image has transferred to media owners who most often are politicians.
- **Growth of the media culture** (although many will doubt this hypothesis). Ordinary citizens can understand to a greater or lesser extent if they are presented with interpretations instead of facts. At the same time, people have access to more (and diverse) sources of information which to some extent allows them to form and develop critical thinking and the capacity to analyze. Important (!): The Internet has gained ground, and our politicians have gotten the idea and started “investing” in online space.

- **Loss of quality in journalism.** The causes range from those already mentioned, as journalists are following the agenda of politicians and not that of society, to journalism being poorly taught in universities, where at most faculties teaching takes place in classes and in libraries and not on site.

## Geopoliticization of journalism

The excessive politicization of journalism has transformed the profession into a media owners’ tool for manipulating society. Even though lots of media outlets have emerged over the past seven years, most of them have either been created as tools for manipulation or have in time turned into the trumpets of political parties. This negative process has also been reflected in the reports of international organizations. Thus, in just three years (2014–2017), Moldova lost 24 positions in the Reporters Without Borders’ Press Freedom Index, dropping from 56<sup>th</sup> to 80<sup>th</sup> place at the beginning of 2017 because according to the organization’s latest report, “... Moldova’s media are extremely polarized, like the country itself, which is characterized by chronic instability and the excessive influence of its oligarchs. The editorial lines of the leading media outlets correlate closely with the political and business interests of their owners. Journalistic independence and media ownership transparency are major challenges.” All this is supplemented by the lack of independence of regulatory authorities (the Broadcast Coordinating Council and the Supervisory Board of national public broadcaster Teleradio-Moldova).

These elements of manipulation and propaganda have led to the geopoliticization of journalism in Moldova as well as to that of elections. There are pro-Western and pro-Eastern media outlets. This hypothesis is also somewhat confirmed by the journalists interviewed for the study on the Needs of the Media in the Republic of Moldova recently conducted by the Independent Journalism Center (IJC): “... The media in Moldova is controlled and divided into pro-Western and pro-Russian. Meanwhile, controlled media are turning into a source of mass manipulation. This is done in order to be able to influence public opinion and to serve to the consumer whatever the employers want.”

## Adjectival journalism

One of the basic rules of journalism taught at a school of journalism (a sound one!), is that in journalism adjectives should be avoided because epithets have no place in the process of informing society. The media must provide information for the ordinary citizen, not interpretations and opinions. Otherwise, the most important values of the profession are affected such as credibility, neutrality and fairness. These values are, however, often affected for various reasons:

1. Firstly, the media is controlled by politicians and the people don't quite trust them. See, for example, in the BPO of April 2017 the 8% rating for political parties and politicians in this respect.
2. Secondly, many journalists have renounced these principles in favor of dividends, usually financial or "stellar" i.e., for the desire to appear "on the screen." So, if you want to make money (more, more easily, faster), you have only to work for politically controlled media outlets (I will not name names; they are perfectly well known). In the same IJC study, some journalists mentioned that they are somewhat forced to comply with the media owners' agenda. The reasons were multiple: they have families to support (everyone has this mission, not just journalists), lack of media alternatives (an argument that is also not well grounded) and convenience (that is, they adapt to a situation that above all brings them "stability" and most importantly, financial benefits). This way, most journalists (we are speaking about those who are employed) sacrifice the ethical principles of the profession in favor of material benefits.

Probably, most employed (and politically engaged) journalists in Moldova have forgotten about the main mission of journalism: to be *the watchdog of society*. Journalism as such must be rebellious and challenging; it must impose checks and balances in a democratic society. This is what the American journalist James Foley meant by saying, "If I don't have the moral courage to challenge authority... we don't have journalism."

### Conclusions ...

Correctness, independence, impartiality and neutrality are probably the most important values of truly independent media. To cover events in the media from the perspective of these basic norms of journalistic ethics is the professional duty of every journalist.

The role of the media in building a truly democratic society is vital because in addition to the function of informing the public correctly, according to professional and ethical norms the media also has the mission to educate citizens sometimes called *culturalization*. Only in this case we can speak of an information- and media-healthy society.

A country or a society can have free and independent media only when everyone wants it: the government, the politicians, journalists and society in general. In 25 years of independence (with few exceptions), Moldova apparently has not really wanted it. This is annually reflected in the reports of international organizations. According to them, the media in Moldova has always been "between" free and non-free, independent and dependent, East and West ... The media, just like the entire Republic of Moldova, is and has always been "between."

### ... and possible recommendations

Solutions are well known, and they are repeated at every step like a mantra by media organizations and independent media outlets. I have the impression that they have become banal, but let us run them through once again.

**One. Depoliticization of the field.** Everybody in the government must realize that democracy cannot be built (and this is what they claim they do) without independent, fair, neutral media that informs and does not manipulate. It will be hard, but the effort is worth the trouble, all the more so since the government established this desideratum (depoliticization, demonopolization, etc.) back in January 2016 through the famous "Roadmap" and does not tire of repeating that it wants these changes at any meeting with Western officials or when it seeks external grants and credits.

**Two. Transparency and demonopolization of the advertising market.** Advertising is the main source of funding of the media (independent media!). If you want a healthy media environment, then you have to create clear ground rules, conditions and equal access for all media outlets to this market.

**Three. Integrity of deontological principles and dignity** (correctness, fairness, honesty, etc.). These cannot be sold. Today, some (read *politicians*) are media owners; tomorrow there will be others. Journalists will have to continue their work, and they will need credibility.

**Victor GOTISAN**

# Blogs and Posts in Social Media: between Freedom of Expression and Abuse

The presentation in Chisinau in May of the study on the needs of the media in Moldova prepared by the iData Company at the request of the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) raised some questions about WHAT and WHO are considered media in Moldova. “You count doctors, but people seek help from old women. And there are plenty of these old women!” said journalist Vasile Botnaru in a discussion with the author of the study.

For example, when Iliu vlog calls children to a mall in Iasi or Pitratra Neamt where the police had to intervene to stop the action organized by Iliu ... So, Iliu’s influence, conventionally speaking, led to the Blue Whale [author’s note: an online game supposedly started by Russian bloggers and which, at the beginning of 2017, supposedly led to the suicide of several teenagers, including in Moldova]. We went with the tide because they created this problem. (...) Because we doctors know that it’s good for people to go to the pharmacy and we give prescriptions, but they, for various reasons, don’t visit just the sites you count. How would you classify, for example, Eugen Luchianuc or Balacci? But you have to admit that they have influence and sometimes they dictate the agenda for serious outlets. (...)”

The issue raised by Mr. Botnaru is not new, and for now there is no valid prescription. Until now, no one could count the exact number of platforms for free expression on the Internet (and I don’t think it’s necessary). However, some countries have tried to impose regulations.

New media forms which include blogs and vlogs are protected by international organizations in practically in the same way as journalists are in terms of protection of personal security and freedom of expression. As a consequence, like journalists, bloggers have access to development programs, innovations, summer schools, conferences and the like. According to the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Recommendations from the Internet 2013 Conference.

The Internet also brings along a new notion of media. Social media makes it possible for everyone to create, impart and receive news and information and to comment on and discuss ideas and developments. Bloggers have expanded the scope of classical journalism and added the new form of “citizen reporting” to the media landscape. Traditional professional journalism is also increasingly dependent on social media tools for researching and distributing their stories.

“Any effort to silence women online must be regarded as a direct attack on freedom of the media,” said a document on principles drafted in 2014 by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Bloggers are also protected by Council of Europe documents. A recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted in 2011 says that bloggers should be considered media only if they fulfill the criteria to a sufficient degree (item 41). At the same time, this document calls on states to provide protection to individual bloggers just like that provided to investigative journalists (item 71).

In the reports of UN special rapporteurs responsible for encouraging the right to opinion and freedom of expression, bloggers are included in the category of online journalists. It includes both journalists with relevant professional education and civic journalists whose roles are considered particularly important in times of crisis when it is necessary to express alternative opinions and to have more sources of information. That is why states are called to provide protection for online journalists as well as those “offline.”<sup>[1]</sup>

These forms of free expression on the Internet are protected as an alternative form of ensuring pluralism of opinion; however, experience in recent years shows that the lack of regulation in this field allows abuses such as the one pointed out by Vasile Botnaru—the game that led to teenagers committing suicide.

The fact that the blogosphere is non-homogeneous in terms of content (there are niche, general, advertising blogs, etc.) and in many cases ephemeral with authors who are not always identifiable makes it impossible to establish rules of conduct for this field. In addition, it has emerged as a result of the unlimited possibilities offered by the Internet, so it should probably remain so. Talks about possible regulation have always ended with the assertion that the only possible regulations are general legal regulations: prohibition of hate speech, defamation, discrimination, etc. In general, any regulations/restrictions related to the freedom of the Internet or freedom of expression are always viewed with caution precisely because the boundary between the author’s responsibility and possible abuses by authorities would be impossible to define. That is why the balance always tips in favor of freedom of expression.

A country that has tried to regulate blogging is Russia. Three years ago, the Russian Parliament adopted a law qualifying “successful” blogs as media. The amendments introduced in May 2014 into the Law on Information, Information Technologies and Information Protection stipulated that blogs and pages on social media that get more than 3,000 views in 24 hours are considered mass media and should be officially registered as media. This measure, seen as an attempt by the authorities to control the voices of the opposition, was strongly criticized at the time.

[1] *UN Policy in the Field of New Media and the Internet*, article from the scientific magazine “Mediascope” <http://www.mediascope.ru/node/1264>;

Most bloggers who are critical of the state's official policies as well as many niche bloggers announced that they would refuse to apply for registration in the Official Registry.

Referring to official data, however, Russian media has currently announced that 2,196 authors have since registered as media, but according to a news item on June 8, 2017, a group of MPs has proposed abolishing the Bloggers' Registry because the action has allegedly proven its inefficiency.

I asked Iuri Kazakov, a member of the Public Board for Press Complaints in Russia if anyone has yet complained about the content of a blog. Here is what he said:

We've examined 5 or 6 cases related to online media; as for bloggers, we've had no complaints yet. And we have no answer to the question "What will we do with such a complaint if it comes?" This is because the deontology we are talking about can be either professional or "customary," that is, corresponding to particular network etiquette if we could put it that way. Developing a "blogging ethics" without bloggers themselves (and they will never establish associations similar to those of journalists) is irrational.

### What is happening in the Republic of Moldova?

In the second half of the 2000s when blogs were just starting to appear in Moldova, there were several local projects to encourage blogging. Today we still have plenty of blogs, but we cannot compare our situation with the one in Romania, for example, where there are many visible blogs on tourism, cooking, fashion or other niche sections. In Moldova they are practically non-existent, or if they do exist, they are not visible enough. Some of the opinion blogs or blogs on general topics that originally emerged as a natural consequence of a person's need for expression have in time turned into platforms to support political leaders or into tools for political attacks.

The study *Seizing the Media and Other Means of Communication in the Republic of Moldova*<sup>[2]</sup> launched in May 2017 by the Association of Independent Press and Transparency International Moldova analyzed 13 blogs considered to be the most viewed because they are placed on the websites of some TV stations or because their authors appear quite often on TV shows and lobby for various interests. According to the study:

Blogs and social networks are intensely used as a means to influence public opinion and to support/motivate the actions of the interest groups that seek to manage and control public institutions. The public, in turn, is urged/convinced to accept this state of affairs ex officio because other political actors, in the opinion of the interest groups supported, are inappropriate, incapable and/or unworthy of governing.

[2] Study produced by the Association of Independent Press and Transparency International Moldova [http://www.transparency.md/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/TI\\_Moldova\\_Capturarea\\_Mass\\_Media.pdf](http://www.transparency.md/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/TI_Moldova_Capturarea_Mass_Media.pdf).

In the recommendations, the authors of the study note that in a democratic society freedom of expression is an undeniable value that needs to be defended and promoted, so bloggers and people active on social networks were urged to exercise this right, "...in full and true freedom of thought without the influence of certain interest groups or politicians." Also, the two categories of Internet users were encouraged, "...to use appropriate language, even when they criticize or accuse, so as to contribute to the progress and not to the degradation of Moldovan society."

Beyond political influences, there are many cases, perhaps more often during election campaigns, when blogs post offending and unverified text that is then taken over by some media outlets and turned into news. Thus, the public is misinformed and manipulated, and the people concerned in those texts are denigrated. Some Moldovan bloggers had and still have court trials pending with people they targeted in their posts.

So is there a cure for denigrating content and false or unverified information delivered by bloggers? I approached this topic through a short questionnaire with five bloggers with significant audiences writing on general topics whose posts have been taken over by the websites of other media: Corneliu Gandrabur, Veaceslav Balacci, Eugen Luchianiuc, Vitalie Vovc and Vitalie Cojocari. Only two responded to the questionnaire.

Eugen Luchianiuc answered the question "**How do you think bloggers could be held accountable for posting untrue, unverified and thus misleading information?**" in a blog post:

In no way. Just like the media. The only difference is that the media can yell that they are oppressed by authorities, and bloggers can't really do that. The example of the live broadcast on Free Europe from a protest of the so-called opposition is relevant. Or the example of Jurnal TV channel which closed because they didn't have money but to the public they were giving other reasons. Bloggers answer with their names. They sign their articles. Unlike the so-called media.

Answering the same question, Vitalie Vovc made a link between the popularity of blogs and the lack of independent media:

I will start from afar: societies where bloggers have great importance, at least sufficient to influence public opinion, don't mean, at least to me, anything other than this: There are big problems with the press and the media. Let's remember that in Moldova bloggers became really important during the time of the ruling of the Communist Party, most of them gaining fame by fighting against the government of that time. In a society where the media is truly free, independent, and something that shouldn't be ignored, professional, the blogger remains marginal and insignificant. Really, why read a blog if you have a credible media outlet with valuable editorialists? ... I don't think there should be a set of special measures for bloggers who misinform. They should be penalized the same as any media outlet is that is lying. Another thing is that mechanisms for information manipulation are becoming more and more sophisticated and are not limited to the dissemination of false news while measures

to combat them don't just see no development: they have never even existed..."

Asked whether including provisions related to bloggers in the Journalists' Code of Ethics could be a solution to make them accountable, Vitalie Vovc said, "Blogging is not a profession. Journalism is. That's all the difference. There can be no blogger's code of ethics. And artificial (moreover, public) assumption of responsibilities is ridiculous. The fact that there is a code of ethics for journalists doesn't stop many of them from lies and manipulation."

"I am ready to sign this Code of Ethics. I even try to abide by it. It's just that in most Moldovan outlets it is nothing but extra waste paper, and for NGOs it is a source to ask for money to republish it year after year," was the answer of Eugen Luchianiuc. He also noted that he had lost a trial related to the content of a blog post.

The opinions of these two bloggers are similar although they are based on different reasoning with different vocabulary and arguments. In fact, they concur with the opinions of specialists who say that establishing ethical standards for this category of authors is impossible because they do not represent a profession, while codes of ethics/deontology include and are assumed by the representatives of a profession.

"This journalism you don't count is not covered by law; the IJC cannot catch it; unfortunately, or maybe not, journalism as such needs to be changed," Vasile Botnaru pointed out referring to the study on the needs of the media.

Consequently, the only possible regulations are the general ones in the legislation: Deontological responsibility for the content of blogs or posts in social media can occur only if they are taken over/disseminated by media outlets that naturally fall under the Journalists' Code of Ethics.

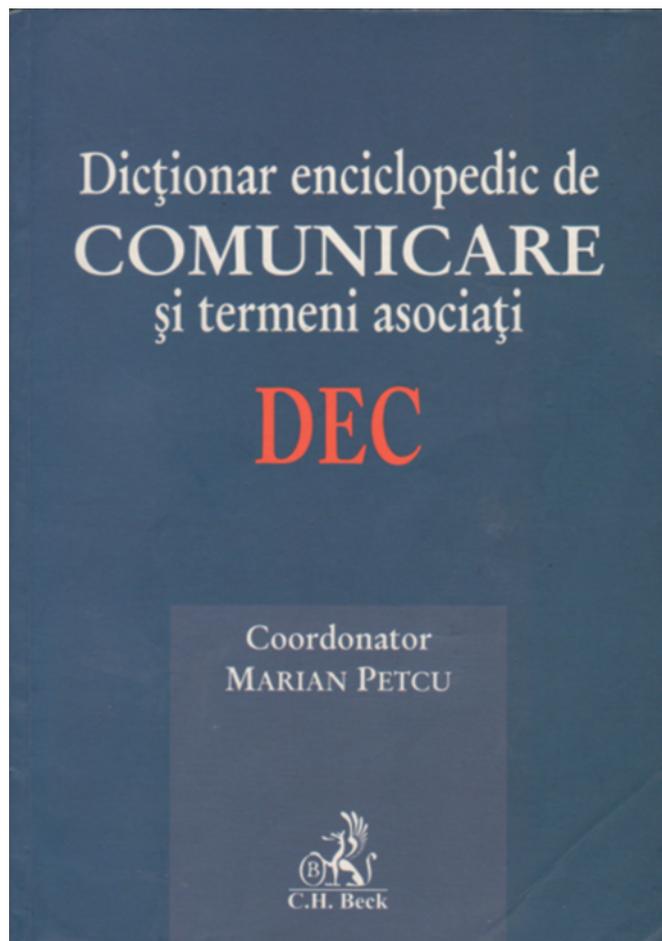
*Viorica ZAHARIA*

# Encyclopedic Dictionary of Communication and Related Terms

Coordinator Marian Petcu. Bucharest: Editor C.H. Beck, 2014, 546 p.  
ISBN 978-606-18-0362-0)

The need for a multidisciplinary volume addressing the numerous fields in communication sciences arose quite long ago. The idea of a dictionary of terms in communication was shaped about two decades ago, but it acquired concrete lines only in 2014 after years of persistent studies. Back in 1997, professor and researcher Marian Petcu was excited about this idea and began to edit communication definitions and terms, but it would have been unwise according to the author to start such a project at a time when this area was still blurry and undefined in Romania. The topic that in those days was “...difficult to unite in concepts and terms,” nevertheless developed very quickly over the next decade in various segments; demand far exceeded offerings and research became more consistent. The education of specialists in communication offering diploma/master’s/doctoral degrees gave rise to new requirements that needed unifying reference points. Professor Petcu pointed out a number of educational issues and challenges in the Preface that demanded solutions: What should graduates with diplomas know at the end of their studies? What about a graduate with a master’s degree? What knowledge should a trainer/professor in this area have? What are the requirements for a doctor in communication?

Questions needed answers, dilemmas would not go away by themselves and the education of specialists in communication sciences would not always meet the expectations and increased requirements of life. There was a need for a meaningful and judicious synthesis of training programs and concepts. To develop a uniform starting platform for training the increasing numbers of required specialists, a group was created of experts including teachers and researchers from academia and media outlets who could suggest concepts and terms in their areas of competence. Thus, the project coordinator returned to the concept for a chronological encyclopedia: *The History of Journalism in Romania by Dates (Istoria jurnalismului din România în date* [Iași, Polirom, 2012, 1240 p.]), a unique achievement in the history of Romanian journalism that engaged over 200 specialists and was rated as a truly encyclopedic work worthy of the decades-long effort by a specialized institution. Mr. Petcu succeeded in attracting over 50 specialists for this new project: representatives of 2 research institutes, 22 universities and numerous media outlets from 8 countries. To edit the 800 concepts/terms, over 1,500 bibliographical sources—monographs, studies, research reports, periodicals—were perused. Thus, the bibliography for the entire field was assessed, and the user was offered not just a basic tool but also a wide range of concerns in communication sciences from all over the world.



The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Communication and Related Terms (DEC) includes terms in journalism, mass media, advertising, propaganda, public relations, audience, speech, editing, social communication, persuasion, public communication, social influence, manipulation, sociology and the psychology of communication, political communication, marketing, new communication technologies, analysis, reasoning, rhetoric, studies in communication, models of communication, interpersonal communication and cultural studies. Connecting terms to a specific field in constant change and always exceeding the theoretical framework of a discipline is of special importance. Offering theoretical guidance that is both proven and practicable, the DEC provides solid support for the performance and

**Fact sheet**

Mr. Petcu holds a diploma in journalism and a doctor's degree in sociology and is a professor in the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Communication of the Faculty of Journalism and Communication at the University of Bucharest. He is the author of the courses Introduction to Communication

**Published books**

*10 teme de istorie a jurnalismului*, Editor Ars Docendi, Bucharest, 2012  
(ISBN 978-973-558-617-1; 230 pages).

*Istoria jurnalismului și a publicității în România*, Editor Polirom, Iași, 2007  
(ISBN 978-973-46-0788-4; 214 pages).

*Jurnalism în România - istoria unei profesii*, Editor Comunicare.ro, Bucharest, 2005  
(ISBN 973-711-052-8; 243 pages).

Theories, Methods of Research and History of the Romanian Press. He is also a member of the Historical Sciences Society of Romania, L'Union Internationale de la Presse Francophone and of the Balkan Cultural Institute among others.

*O istorie ilustrată a publicității românești*, Editor Tritonic, Bucharest, 2002  
(ISBN 973-8497-05-1; 205 pages).

*Sociologia mass-media*, Editura Academiei Naționale de Informații, Bucharest, 2001  
(ISBN 973-8297-03-6; 310 pages).

Second edition by Editor Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 2002  
(ISBN 973-35-1343-1; 184 pages).

*Tipologia presei românești*, Institutul European, Iași, 2000  
(ISBN 973-611-138-5; 298 pages).

facilitation of communication in public space in general and for professional development in particular.

Although the number of studies referring to mass media is constantly growing, such encyclopedic works are quite rare and extremely difficult to produce. The reader is hereby introduced to the first work of its kind in Romania.

Creating an international team of experts is a great achievement of the coordinator. The efforts of a numerous and valuable team of teachers and researchers from Romania, Greece, Bulgaria, France, the UK, the US, Mexico and India were coordinated and monitored with the well-known accuracy and perseverance that Prof. Petcu brings to such outstanding projects. The strengths of the DEC rest in a multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary approach, in the careful selection of relevant terms, in the definitions accompanied by relevant and useful explanations, in conceptual mini-studies and in numerous bibliographical sources. Its target audience is wide and varied. Intended primarily for students, the DEC may be useful for journalists, communicators, practitioners and educators in journalism, advertising, public rela-

tions, sociology, psychology, law, anthropology, philology and marketing. The varied approaches to communication it presents play an important role in educating new generations of professionals to whom this project offers viable theoretical answers to various questions in the field of communication and mass media.

Theories in this area of study are very young (the development of communication sciences started in the 1960s), so this project was stimulated by the need to constantly coordinate, optimize and fortify theory with practice and, first and foremost, by the need to respond to the dynamism and complexity of global society. It is extremely important to keep in mind these rhythms and to constantly adjust relevant tools among which the DEC occupies a place of honor. "Any dictionary is improvable, and encyclopedic ones especially need to be constantly updated," said prominent linguist Mioara Avram. Of course, the DEC will acquire new terms and concepts in further editions because in the era of new technologies, today is already yesterday.

**Silvia GROSSU**

# Memorandum on Press Freedom in the Republic of Moldova

## (May 3, 2016 – May 3, 2017)

The work of the media in the period of May 3, 2016 – May 3, 2017 denotes a clear tendency to regress. In the “Nations in Transit” report published by Freedom House on April 5, 2017, the “independent media” index for Moldova is under the country index, making up five points, and the overall performance is lower than in 2016. According to the Reporters Without Borders’ rating of April 26, 2017, Moldova has also lost four positions in comparison with the previous year, ranking 80<sup>th</sup> out of 180.

The concern of the organizations monitoring freedom of the press around the world is shared in Brussels. Thus, in December 2016, in a joint statement of the Heads of Missions of EU Member States in our country, Moldova was reminded about the “universal and European standards of democracy and human rights, which it has obliged to honor,” including pluralism and diversity of the media.

The challenges faced by the media in Moldova have been listed in the Roadmap of the second Media Forum<sup>[1]</sup> in December 2016 and in the Media Situation Index for 2016<sup>[2]</sup> published in February.

Media monitoring reports clearly show that old problems, such as concentration of the media or unfair competition, still exist, and that they are now accompanied by new forms of limitation of access to information, caused by abusive interpretation of the Law on Personal Data Protection, and by attempts to control the country’s online media. Other problems that intensified and affected the work of the media in the past year include: involvement of politics into the work of the broadcasting regulator; seizure of major and influential media – mainly broadcasting outlets – by politicians; imposition, de facto, of the political agenda on a lot of media outlets; use of the media for political purposes and imitation of cooperation between politics and independent media.

This situation occurred despite the fact that the Working Program of the current Government for 2016-2018 includes a separate chapter dedicated to the media, with ten provisions, including: “Elaboration of a National Media Development Concept on the basis of strengthening pluralism and freedom of expression”; “Adoption of a new Broadcasting Code”; “Creating favorable conditions for the development of advertising”.

[1] <http://mediaforum.md/upload/foaie-de-parcurs-pentru-dezvoltarea-mass-mesiei-din-rm-2016pdf-5891e98736791.pdf>

[2] <http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/indicele-situa%C8%9Biei-mass-media-ismm-din-republica-moldova-%C3%AEn-2016>

Below, we will examine in detail only some of the worst problems that marked the “journalistic year” of May 3, 2016 – May 3, 2017 and influenced the work of the media.

### Legislation remains imperfect

The draft law on amending the Law on Access to Information, aimed to solve some of the problems, notified in particular by investigative journalists – such as formal answers from officials, not always on the topic, or too long terms for provision of answers to information requests – was voted in the first reading in July 2016. Since then, it has not been returned to. The only act amended was the Contravention Code, Article 71, stipulating dozen times higher fines for violation of the Law on Access to Information.

Although the journalistic community and the civil society kept insisting on the adoption of a new Broadcasting Code, as stipulated in the Working Program of the Government, as of May 3, 2017 the media is still working according to the old Code, repeatedly “patched up”. In fact, in July 2016 the Parliament voted in the first reading on a new draft Code, but, since it had been developed back in 2011 and did not include provisions on digitization, advertising, or combating propaganda, it was clear from the very beginning that it needed to be reviewed and updated. Meanwhile, on March 30, 2017, the Parliamentary Commission on the Media proposed that the examination of the new Code “be postponed to a later date,” and on March 31, 2017, the Parliament announced about the creation of a *working group to bring the media legislation in line with European standards and, as a priority, to develop a new Broadcasting Code.*

The broadcasting legislation still does not contain specific provisions regarding development of business in the media. The provisions of the current Broadcasting Code (Article 66) are not enough to ensure fair competition on the media market and on the advertising market. There are no special provisions to limit the concentration of the audience. The economic legislation is not stimulating the media business, and inadequate regulation and imperfect management of this area by the Broadcasting Coordinating Council (BCC) stimulated the concentration of media ownership instead of discouraging it.

### Concentration and political polarization in domestic broadcasting

On March 31, 2017, after the third meeting of the EU-Moldova Association Council, which assessed the progress achieved in

the implementation of the Association Agreement, the European Union expressed its concern about the situation in Moldovan media, in particular with regard to the phenomenon of concentration of media ownership and its polarization.

Indeed, the adoption of Law No. 39, which provides for a reduction from five to two the number of licenses held by a media owner, has not radically changed the situation in terms of media concentration, as along with these amendments, a provision was introduced into the Broadcasting Code granting owners the right to keep holding their licenses until the expiration of their validity. In March 2017 the Parliament returned to this issue and removed this provision, and since April 14, 2017, when the Law came into force, holders of more than two broadcasting licenses must give them up and retain no more than two.

Although the Parliament seemed to intend to reduce concentration in the media, in 2016 new licenses were granted, which did not contribute to demonopolization of broadcasting. For example, at the end of previous year the BCC granted a license to the “Exclusiv TV” channel – the third license granted to representatives of the Party of Socialists of Moldova, implicitly to President Igor Dodon. On February 29, 2017, the ITV channel started working, whose general director was reported by many media to be close to the Party of Socialists. Previously, she ran the TSN online TV channel, controlled by socialists.

### Dissemination of foreign propaganda

The information space has remained fragile to the propaganda coming from the East, and recent modifications to the Broadcasting Code – obliging broadcasters to air eight hours of domestic products daily, six of which in prime time – put broadcasters in a difficult situation, as they have not enough resources, rather than solve the problem of Russian disinformation. It should be noted in this context that the majority of foreign media in Moldova are Russian, the products of channels politically controlled by the Russian Federation, and the language of broadcasting is usually not the state language – namely, it is Russian.

With regard to the torrent of Russian propaganda, the Parliament has repeatedly expressed its concern. Despite this, some of the new broadcasting licenses issued by the BCC in 2016 do not contribute to the security of the country’s information space. At the same time, a cause for concern is the expansion in the domestic broadcasting space, especially at some radio stations, of editorially unbalanced shows produced by Russian news agencies or agencies controlled from Moscow, with the anti-European and anti-Western content.

The proof of defective BCC policy in the granting of broadcasting licenses is a recent monitoring of Russian TV channels retransmitted in Moldova, conducted by media associations. It clearly showed that a large part of the retransmitted content is propagandistic and hostile to the interests of the European vector of our country.

### Fragility of media independence

All monitoring reports produced in the period of May 3, 2016 - May 3, 2017 showed significant interference of politics with the work of the media, affecting the editorial policy of media outlets. The effect of such decisions may be observed daily, and it was especially evident during the presidential election campaign in the autumn of 2016, when a too large part of the media was deeply politically biased, reflecting the preferences and even political commitment of the outlets’ owners or managers. Consequently, a significant part of the media failed to provide Moldovan citizens with correct information, and manipulation and misinformation of public opinion through televisions owned or controlled by politicians had a decisive influence on the election results.

Neither the legislation nor the state of the economy contributes to the financial independence of the media, on which their editorial policy depends. Both on the media market and on the advertising market dominant positions are observed, leading to unfair competition, but competent bodies de facto accept this state of things. Legislation does not ensure real competition between the media for access to commercial advertising. The media working on the money of political parties are in the best financial situation, but in such cases editorial independence remains an impossible goal. Thus, one may speak of editorial independence only with reference to the outlets that work based on projects supported by donors.

### Restriction of access to information

Despite amendments to the legislation, overall there is no significant improvement of the situation regarding access to information. Moreover, investigative journalists in particular report a worsening of the situation due to the fact that some electronic databases, after being open, were restricted, while for others the State fee has been doubled and there has been no reaction to the demands to reduce it. In addition, officials provide formal answers, not always on the topic, and the term for provision of replies to information requests is too long.

Drawbacks, which have become systemic, came into sight when journalist Mariana Rata from the investigations portal [www.anticoruptie.md](http://www.anticoruptie.md) was summoned by the Prosecutor’s Office in January 2017. Former police commissioner of Chisinau municipality Vladimir Botnari filed a criminal complaint on the grounds that the journalist accessed and disseminated, without his consent, personal data on him and his family members. Criminal investigation was not initiated, but the fact itself brought into view a new phenomenon faced by an increasing number of journalists in Moldova, especially those who do investigations: gaps in the legislation on personal data, consequently its abusive interpretation, and restriction of access to information.

The case of Mariana Rata caused a series of large scale solidarity actions in the media – from public debates on this issue to the campaign in which outlets published news and reports without giving the names or photographs of the people involved. Thus, they wanted to draw attention to the problem of the so-called

“depersonalization”, demanded from journalists by those who invoke “protection of personal data”. The campaign demonstrated that information of public interest cannot be depersonalized, but the problem still hangs over the heads of journalists like a sword of Damocles. In addition, there is a risk of decline in the quality of journalistic investigations, since, despite all those actions, the Ministry of Justice produced a “Regulation on Publishing Judgments on the Portal of Courts”, which directly provides for the depersonalization of court judgments.

It should also be mentioned that in April 2016, following repeated appeals by media NGOs and a media campaign conducted by them, journalists’ access to the Parliament’s plenary meeting room was restored. However, today it is possible under more restrictive conditions, as this process is controlled by officials.

### The economic situation of the media

The economic situation in the country does not contribute to the financial independence of the media. The dominant position on the broadcasting market of the companies belonging to the leader of the Democratic Party is reflected in the official documents of the BCC, but the problem is no concern for public authorities – the Parliament, the Broadcasting Coordinating Council, or the Competition Council of the Republic of Moldova.

Print media find it difficult to survive in increasingly precarious economic conditions, especially since the “Posta Moldovei” State enterprise is still the only distributor of print media with national coverage, providing services of poor quality to independent newspapers and refusing to discuss conditions to improve their delivery. In addition, last year newspapers were imposed a new distribution fee, without prior negotiation and approval by mutual agreement with the outlets. At the same time, “Posta Moldovei” distributes political parties’ newspapers under unknown conditions, since access to information on the work of this State institution is restricted, particularly with regards to its budget.

The period of May 3, 2016 – May 3, 2017 was marked by the appearance/ disappearance of media outlets, both national and regional, and by change of formal or shadow owners of those media outlets. This phenomenon, which is natural for market economy, in the case of Moldova raises a number of questions – especially if the breakup of a media outlet occurs is a result of disappearance from the public space of its political donor or when the change of the owner immediately triggers a change in editorial policy. A vivid example of this is the case of “Noroc” radio and television, which, according to the media, were taken over by persons close to the Liberal Party.

The most resonant cases were those of “Jurnal TV”/“Jurnal FM” stations. Formally, the “Jurnal Trust Media” group announced the change of its broadcast schedule due to the fact that the owner of the building where they rented offices for almost seven years ordered them to leave the premises within 35 days. According to the trust’s management, this demand was in fact caused by political reasons and the pressure of officials dissatisfied with the outlet’s editorial policy. “Jurnal TV”/“Jurnal FM”

returned with a new broadcast schedule almost two months later, due to a grant from EED – European Endowment for Democracy. However, they now get to work in other offices, with a smaller team and a more modest broadcast schedule.

The EED will also support the re-launch in the spring-summer of 2017, under a new name, of the former TV 7 channel, until recently owned by Chiril Lucinschi, MP representing the Liberal Democratic Party. TV 7 channel ceased broadcasting in early 2017 due to financial problems that arose after it lost the right to retransmit the Russian NTV television on the territory of Moldova, which had been taken over by persons close to Igor Dodon. All this is happening on the background of Prime Minister Pavel Filip’s recent invitation to foreign businesses to invest in Moldovan media, which he made through an editorial published on [www.euractiv.com](http://www.euractiv.com) portal.

### Other major obstacles

Along with the danger of legal harassment (during the monitoring period a number of Moldovan outlets were brought to court, being charged of defamation, damage to honor, dignity, and professional reputation<sup>[3]</sup>), physical or verbal attacks on journalists increased, starting from attacks or detentions of teams covering various protest actions, such as Today.md or Gagauzinfo.md, to defamatory posts in social networks, aimed at intimidating journalists and denigrating the outlet they work with.

In this context, a new phenomenon has been noted – clones of the Internet-versions of publications, which steal their content and mislead the media consumers. The first such attack was reported by “Ziarul de Garda” newspaper, soon followed by Deschide.md portal. Recently, Vladimir Soloviov, manager of Russian-language portal Newsmaker.md, reported that he had been for some time followed by an unknown car, and he believes that it is directly connected with his work.

In fact, in recent years, there has been a deliberate political creation of a climate that is hostile to independent media, media NGOs, and journalists who criticize authorities. The so-called bloggers, many of whom are members or even leaders of political units of the governing party, assault independent journalists and media NGOs that proved their consistency over time by using denigrating terms, lies, and verbal attacks. In addition, authorities more and more often issue opinions claiming that the media are no longer credible and that the entire press is compromised, and for this reason it is no use responding to journalistic investigations and to media coverage of cases of corruption.

[3] In November 2017, the Party of Socialists filed a lawsuit against RISE Moldova for the investigation Dodon’s Money in Bahamas. In July 2017, the chairman of the Parliament sued Jurnal TV, demanding 30 thousand Euros moral damage.

## Recommendations for authorities

### Parliament and Government of the Republic of Moldova:

- To de facto implement media-related provisions of the Government's Working Program for 2016-2018;
- To give up the vicious practice of using the media in political or personal purposes and engaging journalists into party-political settling of accounts;
- To responsibly and actively examine the major problems of the media, specified in the Roadmap of the Moldovan Media Forum 2016, and to take concrete measures to solve them;
- To urgently adopt the new Broadcasting Code, which would bring a modern vision into Moldovan broadcasting, in accordance with international and European standards on the media.

### Broadcasting Coordinating Council:

- As a guarantor of public interest in broadcasting, to make more strict decisions on granting broadcasting licenses, in order to avoid contamination of the information space by foreign or domestic broadcasters;
- To ensure monitoring of broadcasting outlets retransmitted from the Russian Federation and the outlets airing shows

produced by Russian news agencies in terms of their compliance with the national broadcasting legislation, and to apply sanctions in case of violations or deviations.

### Public institutions:

- Public institutions to ensure the safety of journalists and their access to information of public interest – key conditions for the media to contribute, by playing its role, to building a free and democratic society in Moldova.

*Independent Journalism Center*

*Association of Independent Press*

*Electronic Press Association*

*Press Freedom Committee*

*Union of Journalists of Moldova*

*“Acces-Info” Center*

*Association of Independent TV Journalists*

*Journalistic Investigations Center*

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