



# Media NGO Sector in the Transnistrian Region: Current Situation and Perspectives for Development

The study has been produced as part of the project titled *“Contribution to development of free press in the Transnistrian region by strengthening the NGO sector”*.

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## Introduction

This study, conducted between July and September 2014 by the Independent Journalism Center (IJC), Chisinau, is perhaps the first attempt to evaluate the potential of public associations in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova that work with media and journalists, as well as the degree of consolidation of the journalistic community. Previous studies known to us covered either the general development aspects of public organizations on the left bank of the Nistru or the work of media associations in the general context of media evolution.

This work covers a rather specific topic, and its authors from the very beginning were aware that they would have to deal with quite a limited number of organizations. But these very organizations have an important influence on the development of media and journalists and are indicators of freedom of speech and press freedom, as well as the voice expressing the interests of the media community. The analysis of the specificity of their work provides a clue to understanding the problems of the region's media and civil society.

The project's experts sought to broaden the range of the studied associations, by including into analysis not only the organizations strictly focused on journalists, but also organizations providing services for the professional development of journalists and working on issues of freedom of speech, access to information, etc. The authors of this report found it essential to not only examine various sources of information, but also find the opinions of relevant public organizations' representatives and journalists as beneficiaries of their activities. The researchers are expressing thanks all those who were open and participated in the survey that was used as basis for this work.

We sincerely hope that the information and conclusions we are publishing here will be of interest and use to civil society activists, journalists, media experts, international organizations, and donors, and that they will help improve the situation in this field.

## Research Methodology

### Goals and objectives

The researchers formulated the following main goals of their work: to create a picture of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Transnistrian region that work in the field of media and freedom of speech and to identify problems in their work and journalists' needs in their services.

The project's team faced the following objectives:

- 1) To identify non-governmental organizations in the Transnistrian region that work in the field of media and to determine the level of self-organization of the journalistic community;
- 2) To determine the legislative and institutional framework governing the work of media NGOs and their level of development;

- 3) To assess the interaction of the above NGOs with government institutions, funding organizations, other NGOs, and, especially, beneficiary journalists;
- 4) To determine how journalists appreciate the work of the existing associations and the level of their own consolidation;
- 5) To identify the main problems and needs of media NGOs;
- 6) To produce recommendations aimed at improving the situation in the media NGO sector of the Transnistrian region.

#### The object of research

The objects of research are the public associations of the Transnistrian region, regardless of their form, which work in the field of media and freedom of speech.

#### Methods of research

To prepare the analytical report, authors used primary and secondary information.

*Primary information* was received from NGO representatives and journalists by means of questionnaires. Two types of questionnaires were produced for this purpose: 1) for interviews with NGO representatives; and 2) for interviews with journalists. The questioning was conducted by two interviewers: the author of the analytical report and a Transnistrian expert.

*Secondary information* was gathered from the analysis of legislative acts, researches, publications in media, and other literature.

#### Questionnaires and respondents

The questionnaire for NGO representatives consisted of 56 questions, mainly of closed type, divided into the following sections: general information, legislative framework governing NGOs, organizational and financial stability of NGOs, external relations, NGO services and their needs.

The questionnaire for journalists consisted of 15 items and three sections: general information, the self-organization of the journalistic community, and assessment of services provided by the media and freedom of speech NGOs.

The questionnaires were created based on the questionnaires used in the *Media Needs Assessment for Transnistrian Region* research, conducted in 2012–early 2013 by the Independent Journalism Center (Chisinau), and in the *NGO Sector in Numbers and Facts* research (Association of Civil Society Support Centers, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 2006).

The survey involved 17 respondents: employees of six non-governmental organizations and 11 journalists.

For NGOs, questions were answered by representatives of the Union of Journalists of Transnistrian region, Media Center, Apriori information and legal aid center, Social Aspect information agency, Interaction public organization, and an NGO that participated in the research on condition of anonymity.

Respondent journalists represented media of all types of ownership (public, private, publications of civil organizations) and of all areas of distribution (national, regional and local) – a total of 8 media outlets. Two of the respondents in this group were independent journalists. Three media workers filled in the questionnaires anonymously.

#### Stages of research

- 1) Collection of information, analysis of legislation and publications on the topic;
- 2) Development and refinement of questionnaires;
- 3) Creation of the list of respondents and schedule of meetings;
- 4) Interviewing;
- 5) Analysis of data, drafting of the analytical report;
- 6) Refinement of the research, preparation of the final version.

## Media Landscape and Freedom of Speech NGOs

The development of media NGO sector in the Transnistrian region is influenced by a series of important factors. On the one hand, it is the difficult situation of civil society and human rights and freedoms, and on the other hand – poor development of the media market and serious problems in the area of freedom of speech.

#### Situation of civil society

International structures give low marks to freedoms in the Transnistrian region. Thus, Freedom House in its annual *Freedom in the World* rating for 2014 attributed to the overall level of freedom in the Transnistrian region 6 points (the *Not Free* status) on a scale where 7 points is the worst result and 1 point – the best. Civil freedoms and political rights received the same marks. These results have remained unchanged since 1998, when the region was included into the rating for the first time<sup>1</sup>.

According to Freedom House, freedom of assembly and freedom of association in Transnistria are severely restricted by authorities. “*All nongovernmental activities must be coordinated with local authorities, and groups that do not comply face harassment, including surveillance and visits by security officials,*” it says<sup>2</sup>.

The existence of problems in relations between NGOs and the de facto Transnistrian authorities was also mentioned in the Report on Human Rights in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova, prepared by UN Senior Expert Thomas Hammarberg in 2013: “[...] *some of them felt that their activities were looked upon with suspicion by the authorities and that they had met*

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<sup>1</sup> [http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/transnistria-0#.VBqRt5R\\_veI](http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/transnistria-0#.VBqRt5R_veI)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

*bureaucratic barriers. This point was made in particular by groups which had cooperation with NGOs on the right bank.*”<sup>3</sup>

Authorities on the left bank are suspicious of the NGOs that implement projects by means of grants offered by international donors, especially from western countries<sup>4</sup>, implanting the opinion that it is wrong to receive such grants, and that NGOs are “defenders of color revolutions”<sup>5</sup>. Some NGOs occasionally invite representatives of special services to their events, so as to show their loyalty and the safety of those events for the “foundations of the state”. The deficit of authorities’ trust in civil society organizations in the Transnistrian region also shows in the restriction of their access to public institutions, particularly to educational outlets<sup>6</sup>. There have also been cases when NGO activists were dismissed from their jobs in government institutions<sup>7</sup>.

The difficulties faced by Transnistrian public associations also include: problems of financial and institutional nature, weakness of the legislation governing NGOs, fragmentation inside the third sector itself, lack of state support or well-developed governmental policies, lack of a common development strategy, overall weakness of the civil society, while technically the number of NGOs in the region has been growing, etc.<sup>8</sup>

#### Situation in the field of freedom of speech

The media NGO landscape cannot be regarded apart from the situation of the region’s media. Transnistrian NGOs work in the context of an extremely small market (the population of the Transnistrian region, according to official data, is 505 thousand persons<sup>9</sup>) and a poor competition environment, which determines their economic weakness and dependence. Traditionally, the positions of Russian broadcasters are strong, as they have a better content that is difficult to compete with for the local production.

Transnistrian media are significantly controlled by the state: state-owned media (television, radio, newspapers) maintain their positions at the national and local level. The elite and part of

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www2.un.md/key\\_doc\\_pub/Senior\\_Expert\\_Hammarberg\\_Report\\_TN\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Russian.pdf](http://www2.un.md/key_doc_pub/Senior_Expert_Hammarberg_Report_TN_Human_Rights_Russian.pdf), page 41

<sup>4</sup> Media Needs Assessment for Transnistrian region. Independent Journalism Center, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> “Mass Media and NGOs – is collaboration possible?” // «СМИ и НПО — возможно ли сотрудничество?» — <http://ngointeraction.org/main/en/statii/1-latest-news/850-2013-02-22-14-03-40>

<sup>6</sup> “Proposal to allow NGO activists’ access into Transnistrian educational institutions with permission from the Ministry of Education” // «Активистов НПО предлагается допускать в приднестровские образовательные учреждения с разрешения Минпроса» — <http://news.pmrqid.com/news-pmr/5759-aktivistov-npo-predlagaetsya-dopuskat-v-pridnestrovskie-obrazovatelnye-uchrezhdeniya-s-razresheniya-minprosa>. Analysis of civil society situation and civil society development strategy in Transnistria. Independent Institute of Law and Civil Society. // Анализ состояния и стратегия развития гражданского общества в Приднестровье. Независимый институт права и гражданского общества — <http://law-civilsociety.com/otchet-o-npo-sektore.html>

<sup>7</sup> “The impossible become possible” // «И невозможное становится возможным» — <http://mediacenter.md/publikacii/231-i-nevozmozhnoe-stanovitsya-vozmozhnym.html>

<sup>8</sup> Analysis of civil society situation and development strategy in Transnistria. Independent Institute of Law and Civil Society. // Анализ состояния и стратегия развития гражданского общества в Приднестровье. Независимый институт права и гражданского общества — <http://law-civilsociety.com/otchet-o-npo-sektore.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.mepmr.org/gosudarstvennaya-statistika/informacziya/62-o-soczialno-ekonomicheskom-polozhenii-pmr/2051-soczialno-ekonomicheskoe-razvitie-pmr-za-2013-god-okonchatelnye-dannye>

the general public see state-owned media as “collective propagandists and agitators” rather than as objective sources of information<sup>10</sup>.

Several media outlets (television with national coverage, radio) belong to the largest business structure in Transnistrian region, *Sheriff*, whose interests are represented in the key sectors of local economy. And although these outlets are in private ownership, their editorial policy hardly allows deviations from the official agenda. The *Sheriff* holding de facto controls *Interdnestrcom* – the monopolist provider of mobile telephony, Internet and digital television<sup>11</sup>. The media have described cases when at the request of the de facto authorities of the region this provider blocked access to online resources of the opposition<sup>12</sup>.

There are several privately owned and relatively independent print and electronic media outlets at the national and local level. But only few of them take the liberty to criticize official structures. And even these limited attempts to an alternative coverage of the current situation are being thwarted by authorities: criticism is seen as an attempt to “undermine stability” in the region.

The above-mentioned Freedom House rating describes the situation of Transnistrian media as follows: “*The media environment is restrictive. Nearly all media are state owned or controlled and refrain from criticizing the authorities. The few independent print outlets have small circulations. Critical reporting draws harassment by the government, which also uses tactics such as bureaucratic obstruction and the withholding of information to inhibit independent media.*”<sup>13</sup>

Freedom House lowered the free speech rating in Transnistrian region in 2013 compared with 2012<sup>14</sup>. The Independent Journalism Center (Chisinau) in its report on the situation of Moldovan media in 2013 also identified worsening of the situation, having drawn attention to increased pressure by the local administration on the media outlets and Internet channels that are not under its control<sup>15</sup>.

Negative trends have been occurring after the period of positive expectations that people in and outside the region connected with the change of the de facto leader of Transnistrian region. Under the former president of the unrecognized PMR Igor Smirnov, the last loud case of violation of journalists’ rights took place in 2010, when journalist Ernest Vardanyan was sentenced to 15 years of prison on charge of “treason against the State”. The representatives of Transnistrian media admit in interviews that at the time journalists, except very few<sup>16</sup>, could not find it in themselves to make a stand for their colleague (“The journalistic community essentially

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<sup>10</sup> Media Needs Assessment for Transnistrian region. Independent Journalism Center, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> <http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/transnistria-0#Key>

<sup>12</sup> “Transnistria. Freedom of speech that does not exist” // «Приднестровье. Свобода слова, которой нет» — <http://dniester.ru/node/7872>; <http://img39.imageshack.us/img39/49/otvetlente.jpg>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Report on the situation of mass media in Moldova in 2013. Independent Journalism Center. Chisinau, 2012. page 23 // Доклад о ситуации в СМИ Республики Молдова в 2013 году. Центр независимой журналистики. Кишинёв, 2012. Стр. 23

<sup>16</sup> “15 years” // «15 лет» — <http://profvesti.org/2010/12/25/4546/>



remained silent”). In 2011, in anticipation of the election campaign, Ernest Vardanyan was released and left the region<sup>17</sup>.

At the turn of 2011-2012, after elections, the Tiraspol administration was taken over by Yevgeny Shevchuk. It gave to observers the hope of some “thaw” in the region’s socio-political life. However, already in 2013 policies became significantly tougher. That May, 10 websites at once were blocked, including the sites of one political organization of the opposition, two Internet publications and several forums that led discussions on political, social and economic topics<sup>18</sup>.

At the very end of 2013, during a press conference, head of the region Yevgeny Shevchuk said he wished “to have tea time” and “to chat” privately with the representative office of the Russian information agency New Region. Several days later, prosecution was already working on the premises of New Region, and on 31 December journalists learned that their accreditation for work in the region, which is issued for one year, had not been renewed. The publication that many readers saw as a source of objective information ceased its work<sup>19</sup>.

This trend continued in 2014. At the beginning of the year the service for communication, information and media of the Tiraspol administration issued a document that toughened accreditation rules for foreign journalists in the region<sup>20</sup>.

On 5 August this year the leader of the Tiraspol administration signed the decree “On some measures aimed at prevention of extremist activity, countering the spread of materials and calls for extremist activities and information containing incitement to mass disorders...”<sup>21</sup>. According to this document, institutions, organizations and citizens must notify the state security committee (KGB) whenever they come across “extremist materials” and calls for “extremist activity”. It refers to publications aimed at “undermining security”, “seizure and appropriation of authority”, “conduct of disorders”, incitement to “participation in events conducted in violation of order”, “defamation” against government officials, etc. Expert examinations must be conducted by the expert council under the KGB, which shall send the identified information of “extremist nature” to the prosecution office for the decision on restricting access to information resources. The decree is said to be aimed primarily at the Internet<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Report on the situation of mass media in Moldova in 2013. Independent Journalism Center. Chisinau, 2012. Доклад о ситуации в СМИ Республики Молдова в 2011 году. Центр независимой журналистики. Кишинёв, 2012. Стр. 22

<sup>18</sup> Press Freedom Report Republic of Moldova 2013. Independent Journalism Center. Chisinau, 2014. P. 23

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Full title: “On some measures aimed at prevention of extremist activity, countering the spread of materials and calls for extremist activities and information containing incitement to mass disorders, participation in mass (public) events conducted in violation of order, propaganda of human trafficking, pornographic content and information of sexual acts involving minors in information and telecommunication networks, including the global network Internet” — <http://president.gospmr.ru/ru/news/ukaz-prezidenta-pmr-no241-o-nekotoryh-merah-napravlenykh-na-preduprezhdenie-ekstremistskoy>

<sup>22</sup> “Transnistria entered an information war” // «Приднестровье вступило в информационную войну» — <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2540059>

Opposition journalists criticized the decree, especially its part referring to “public defamation against a person in a public office”, believing that the document might be used to censure and close publications undesirable for authorities<sup>23</sup>.

Earlier, in May, the Anonymous Transnistria (Anonimous Приднестровье) group posted on an anonymous YouTube account and in social networks a video where it accused opposition journalist and editor of the “Chelovek I Ego Prava (Person and Their Rights)” newspaper Nicolai Buchatsky of receiving the money of western donors via Chisinau “in order to conduct undermining activity in PMR against current authorities”<sup>24</sup>. The evidence they presented was the correspondence stolen from email accounts belonging to N. Buchatsky himself and to Luiza Doroshenko, the director of the Media Center NGO. It implied that the editor of the publication submitted applications to receive grants from international donors to support the newspaper.

A similar video appeared several days later. In it, Nicolai Buchatsky was accused of collaboration with the right bank special services<sup>25</sup>. Again, they used discreditable information from his email, but with signs of forgery<sup>26</sup>.

The journalist filed a complaint to law enforcement authorities claiming that his email had been broken in, but investigation ended in no results.

In late August, a video was posted on the Internet, shot in the style of the Russian NTV television, which revealed incriminating information about Transnistrian opposition members, including journalist Nicolai Buchatsky<sup>27</sup>. Methods of manipulation were used in the film, such as shots of civil unrest, somber music, tension in the narrator’s words, etc. Producers also used stolen materials about Buchatsky’s attempts to receive grants. The video, although professionally shot, is anonymous; its authors remained behind the scenes.

Finally, in September, not a single issue of the “Chelovek I Ego Prava” newspaper was published. Editor Nicolai Buchatsky said that several layout designers that he asked to format the newspaper were recommended by some “serious” people to not collaborate with the publication<sup>28</sup>.

#### Situation of the journalistic community

It is impossible for the above circumstances to not affect the state of the journalistic community and, as a result, the potential of the media NGO sector.

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<sup>23</sup> “A bolt from the blue”, “Chelovek i ego prava” issue no. 17 of 27 August 2014 // «Гром среди ясного неба» — «Человек и его права», № 17 от 27 августа 2014.

[http://mediacenter.md/proekti\\_seichas/posolstvo\\_niderlandi/348-gazeta-chelovek-i-ego-prava-16-2014.html](http://mediacenter.md/proekti_seichas/posolstvo_niderlandi/348-gazeta-chelovek-i-ego-prava-16-2014.html)

<sup>24</sup> <http://youtu.be/Tm7Dfw6CBkI>; <http://mediacenter.md/publikacii/257-zayadlye-patrioty-ili-naezd-za-kritiku.html>

<sup>25</sup> <http://youtu.be/QEUVmtk0QUU>

<sup>26</sup> “Transnistrian KGB continues exposing local publisher” // «КГБ Приднестровья продолжает разоблачать местного издателя» — <http://dniester.ru/node/10613>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yp-fu8EDHDk>

<sup>28</sup> “Transnistrian authorities intend to liquidate newspaper – editor’s opinion” // «В Приднестровье власти намерены ликвидировать газету, - мнение редактора» — <http://dniester.ru/node/11264>,

<http://mediafreedomwatch.org/ru-v-pridnestrovskom-regione-popytalis-likvidirovat-oppozicionnyu-gazetu/>

Employees of Transnistrian media outlets themselves note the low level of journalists' self-organization, their fragmentation, and the weakness of their attempts to stand up for their rights, interests, and freedom of speech<sup>29</sup>. Some people even believe that there is no Transnistrian journalistic community as such. An example when journalists could not act collectively against abuse aimed at their colleagues is the often mentioned case of Ernest Vardanyan, which we described earlier.

Journalists are often afraid to speak openly about their professional difficulties and needs. Notably, some employees of media outlets, both public and private, who participated in the survey for this study, agreed to answer the questionnaire only on condition of anonymity.

In 2013 and especially in 2014 journalists and civil society representatives made attempts to unite in order to solve their problems. Particularly, they conducted meetings to discuss the new draft law on media, proposed by the Service of Information, Communications and Media of the Tiraspol administration<sup>30</sup>. At these meetings, representatives of media and NGOs criticized the draft law and appealed to local legislators to not adopt it<sup>31</sup>.

Another initiative emerged after a number of websites was blocked and the representative office of the New Region agency was closed: in early 2014 political scientist and journalist Andrei Safonov issued a call to create a public committee for the protection of media freedom<sup>32</sup>. The idea was supported by a number of civil activists, politicians and journalists<sup>33</sup>. On 26 January, the committee published a declaration that was presented as proposals "of some measures to improve the situation in the information field of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic"<sup>34</sup>. De facto, Transnistrian authorities were proposed to restart the operation of the New Region office, to unblock the closed Internet resources, etc.

Here, we should mention that the creation of the public committee for the protection of media freedom did not become a manifestation of a joint initiative by the journalistic community: this group's appeal was not even broadly supported and disseminated by Transnistrian media. It is difficult to speak about any visible reaction from authorities towards this declaration; at any rate, New Region and other websites did not restart their work. Also, we could not find information about any other manifestation of the committee after its proposals in January.

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<sup>29</sup> "Are Transnistrian journalists consolidated?" // «Консолидированы ли приднестровские журналисты» — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PB9aRDsEKIk>

<sup>30</sup> "Draft law on mass media: perspectives" // «Проект закона о СМИ: какие перспективы» — <http://mediacenter.md/aktualno/224-proekt-zakona-o-smi-kakie-perspektivy.html>

<sup>31</sup> "Don't adopt the new law on mass media!" // «Новый закон о СМИ не принимать!» — [http://mediacenter.md/novosti\\_media-centra/282-novyuy-zakon-o-smi-ne-prinimat.html](http://mediacenter.md/novosti_media-centra/282-novyuy-zakon-o-smi-ne-prinimat.html)

<sup>32</sup> "Let's create a Public Committee for Protection of Media Freedom!" // «Создадим Общественный Комитет по защите свободы СМИ!» — <http://mediacenter.md/aktualno/48-sozdamim-obschestvennyy-komitet-po-zaschite-svobody-smi.html>

<sup>33</sup> "The Public Committee for Protection of Media Freedom has its first coordinators" // «У Общественного Комитета по защите свободы СМИ появились первые координаторы» — <http://goo.gl/0tVyRV> ([www.safonovpmr.com](http://www.safonovpmr.com))

<sup>34</sup> "Proposals by the Public Committee for Protection of Media Freedom" // «Предложения Общественного Комитета по защите свободы СМИ» — <http://apriori-center.org/news/48>

## Media NGOs

Previous studies about media on the left bank of the Nistru noted the vulnerability of the media NGO sector. *“The media support network is currently highly limited; media NGOs are weak and under high pressure from authorities. The professional and administrative potential of media and advocacy NGOs is usually very small, and many of them are a ‘one-person show’ or a family business,”* said the Media Needs Assessment for Transnistrian Region study, conducted by the Independent Journalism Center in 2012 and early 2013.

At the moment, media and freedom of speech NGOs in left-bank Moldova are still few. Only two public associations are aimed directly at journalists: the Union of Journalists and the Media Center.

The first congress of the Union of Journalists of Transnistrian region (UoJ) took place in May 1994. In 2001, it was registered in the registration body of the ministry of justice under the Tiraspol administration<sup>35</sup>. Currently, the organization, according to its leadership, has more than 100 members<sup>36</sup>. In 2012, the procedure for joining the Union was simplified – all journalists with more than five years of experience in Transnistrian media automatically become members of the UoJ, under the condition of filling in the registration file<sup>37</sup>. Despite that, clearly not all journalists and outlets are involved in the organization’s work<sup>38</sup>.

The organization was created according to the pattern of former Soviet creative associations, and about one third of its initial members were members of the former Journalists Union of the USSR. According to the statute, the Union aims to *“contribute to creation of conditions necessary for active work of its members in state-owned media and in other media outlets; contribute to strengthening the legal framework governing journalists’ work and their social and legal protection and to improving the material and technical infrastructure of media outlets.”* Important issues in the work of UoJ are discussed at congresses and plenary meetings.

Some Transnistrian journalists criticize the Union for insufficient activity, lack of reaction to violations of journalists’ rights and for other things, believing that it does not fully meet the professional support of media needs.

In its turn, the leadership of the Union of Journalists speaks about complete lack of funding and material resources. The organization has no sources of revenue, employees, office space, furniture, equipment, website, etc.

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<sup>35</sup> <http://president-pmr.org/material/128.html>

<sup>36</sup> “Union of Journalists of Transnistria celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary” // «Союз журналистов Приднестровья отмечает 20-летие» — <http://novostipmr.com/ru/news/14-05-21/soyuz-zhurnalistov-pridnestrovya-otmechaet-20-letie>

<sup>37</sup> “Problems and perspectives in the development of mass media discussed at the congress of the Union of Journalists of Transnistria” // «Проблемы и перспективы развития СМИ обсудили на съезде союза журналистов Приднестровья» — <http://www.olvia.idknet.com/ol39-05-12.htm>

<sup>38</sup> “We have been entrusted to write the history of our time” // «Нам доверено писать историю современности» — <http://www.pridnestrovie-daily.net/gazeta/articles/view.aspx?ArticleID=21292>

For the past several years, the Union of Journalists has been holding an annual contest of journalistic materials<sup>39</sup>. Other types of professional support for media workers, according to the organization's leadership, are round table discussions and debates. In 2013, the plenary meeting of the UoJ, which besides journalists was attended by the representatives of the region's de facto authorities, adopted the Union's Code of Professional Ethics<sup>40</sup>. The document is not large, containing only nine items – quite general principles for media workers<sup>41</sup>.

Attempts to fill the vacant niche in the media NGO sector are made by the *Media Center* public association. Its team began work in the media field in 2003, but the organization was registered in 2009<sup>42</sup>. In fact, it was created by journalists.

Media Center aims to contribute to “increasing journalists’ professionalism and achieving independence and freedom of media and freedom of expression.”

The organization implements various projects and events in the field of professional support for journalists, who are one of its target groups: press clubs, round tables, trainings, contests, education for young people interested in journalism and for civic journalists, professional consulting, dissemination of information, publications, analysis, freedom of speech issues, advocacy, lobby, etc.

Media Center cooperates with international donors and media organizations from the right bank. Its activities are mainly conducted by independent journalists, but not only. The organization became well-known and respected in the media community.

It should be mentioned that Media Center is not specialized exclusively on supporting journalists. Its beneficiaries also include representatives of NGOs. The organization tries to extend the scope of its activities in the field of human rights.

Media Center does not yet cover such professional services as legal support and program administration for journalists and media outlets, problems of access to information, labor relations in media, or representation of publishers’ interests.

Some types of activities for professional and civic journalists are conducted by such NGOs as Apriori, Interaction, Social Aspect Information Agency, Resonance, De Facto, Independent Institute of Law and Civil Society, etc. The management boards of some of these NGOs include journalists.

The activities for journalists, conducted by these organizations, include: round tables, debates, trainings (most of the listed NGOs); advocacy and lobby in the field of media and freedom of

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<sup>39</sup> “ Union of Journalists of Transnistria celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary” // «Союз журналистов Приднестровья отмечает 20-летие» — <http://novostipmr.com/ru/news/14-05-21/soyuz-zhurnalistov-pridnestrovyya-otmechaet-20-letie>

<sup>40</sup> “A code of professional ethics for journalists appeared in Transnistria” // «В Приднестровье появится Кодекс профессиональной этики журналистов» — <http://novostipmr.com/ru/news/13-04-27/v-pridnestrovye-poyavitsya-kodeks-professionalnoy-etiki>

<sup>41</sup> “The Code of Professional Ethics by the Union of Journalists of Transnistria” // «Кодекс профессиональной этики союза журналиста Приднестровья» — <http://mediacenter.md/biblioteka/120-kodeks-professionalnoy-etiki-zhurnalista-pridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki.html>

<sup>42</sup> <http://mediacenter.md/main/1-post1.html>



speech (*Apriori*); access to information (*Apriori, Interaction*); promotion of professional standards in journalism, ethics in journalism (*De Facto* and others); dissemination of information and information resources (*Apriori, Social Aspect, Interaction*); studies, analyses and publications (*Apriori, Interaction, Social Aspect, etc.*); contests and awards (*Interaction*); schools for young journalists (*Independent Institute of Law and Civil Society*).

NGOs become initiators of various projects that broaden the scope of their activities. For example, the Apriori information and legal support center created a civic club, “No.19”<sup>43</sup>, which positions itself as “*a platform for free expression of thoughts, ideas, discussion of contemporary problems, creative self-expression, civic education, including by means of contemporary art.*” The club conducts debates, photography exhibitions, film screenings and other events dedicated to human rights and freedoms. In 2013 and 2014, the club organized a Week of Free Speech and invited local and foreign journalists to participate in it<sup>44</sup>.

Attempts have been made to promote initiatives in the media sector at the local level. Thus, the Doctors for Ecology public association from Dubasari, initiated in 2014 a project titled “Center of Environmental Journalism”, designed to “*unite professional and amateur journalists writing on topics of environmental protection.*”<sup>45</sup>

Analysis of the information shows that the work of Transnistrian media NGOs is becoming increasingly active and diverse. However, the beneficiaries of this work are still reserved in their appreciation – the majority of the respondent journalists believe that the existing professional associations and media NGOs of the Transnistrian region overall insufficiently meet the needs of media outlets and their employees.

## Legal Framework Governing Media NGOs

The non-governmental organizations working in the media field and freedom of speech are governed by the same legal framework as other public associations of the Transnistrian region.

In addition to the constitution adopted by the Tiraspol administration, which guarantees freedom of association to citizens<sup>46</sup>, two documents regulating the work of NGOs are in force in the Transnistrian region: the law on non-commercial organizations of 28 December 2005<sup>47</sup> and the law on public associations of 16 July 2008<sup>48</sup>.

According to the first document, “*non-commercial organizations can be created in the form of public and religious organizations (associations), non-commercial partnerships, institutions, autonomous non-commercial organizations, social, charitable and other foundations,*

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<sup>43</sup> <http://club19.ru/>

<sup>44</sup> <http://apriori-center.org/news/114>; [http://nr2.com.ua/News/world\\_and\\_russia/grazhdanskije-aktivisty-pridnestrovja-provodjat-nedelju-svobody-slova-foto-24896.html](http://nr2.com.ua/News/world_and_russia/grazhdanskije-aktivisty-pridnestrovja-provodjat-nedelju-svobody-slova-foto-24896.html)

<sup>45</sup> <http://ecolife-dubossary.ru/?p=1148>

<sup>46</sup> <http://president.gospmr.ru/ru/news/konstituciya-pridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki>, Article 33.

<sup>47</sup> <http://zakon-pmr.com/DetailDoc.aspx?document=60908>

<sup>48</sup>

<http://www.justice.idknet.com/Web.nsf/767eb8a58ad76a2bc22574d5002acf15/fd57bed73f9886adc2257520002d2bb6!OpenDocument>

*associations and unions*”, etc. The second law defines the following organizational and legal forms of public associations: public organization, public movement, public foundation, public institution, body of public self-government, political party.

Out of the six NGOs interviewed for the study, four are registered as non-commercial partnerships (the first law) and two – as public organizations (the second law).

Due to the specificity of their work, media and freedom of speech NGOs also turn to the law on media<sup>49</sup>. Its current version has been in force since 2003. In 2012, the Service of Communications, Information and Media developed the draft of a new law, which was presented to the de facto legislative body of the region. However, local MPs detected in it violations of democratic principles and rejected the draft in May 2013<sup>50</sup>. In 2014, state-owned media announced about the upcoming proposal of a new draft law on media. According to the above-mentioned Service, it is based on the similar document of the Russian Federation<sup>51</sup>. The independent journalists and civic activists that discussed the draft law spoke against its adoption, having mentioned that it restricts the rights and freedoms of journalists and media outlets<sup>52</sup>. In their opinion, even the already existing law is in greater compliance with modern requirements, although it still needs to be corrected.

At the moment media and specialized organizations continue using the old law on media.

The NGOs interviewed for the study mentioned that they also use the law on citizens’ appeals<sup>53</sup>.

To receive the status of legal entity, public associations and non-commercial organizations must be registered at the specialized service under the ministry of justice of the Tiraspol administration. The majority of our respondents found the NGO registration procedure open and apolitical, and only one of them described it as “insufficiently open and apolitical”.

Previous reports about the situation of the third sector mentioned the weakness of the legislation regulating the work of NGOs in the region<sup>54</sup>. In producing this study, experts proposed to the associations’ employees themselves to assess the legal framework governing NGOs, particularly media organizations. Four out of six respondents characterized it as “satisfactory”, one – “poor” and another one was undecided. The question “How, in your opinion, the existing legal standards and mechanisms are applied in practice?” was answered with “satisfactory” by four respondents and “poor” by two others (Diagram 1).

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<sup>49</sup> <http://svyaz.gospmr.ru/smi-poligr/smi-poligr-zakony/101-zakon-prezident-pridnestrovskoj-moldavskoj-respubliki-ot-11-aprelya-2003-g-n-263-z-iii-o-sredstvakh-massovoj-informatsii>

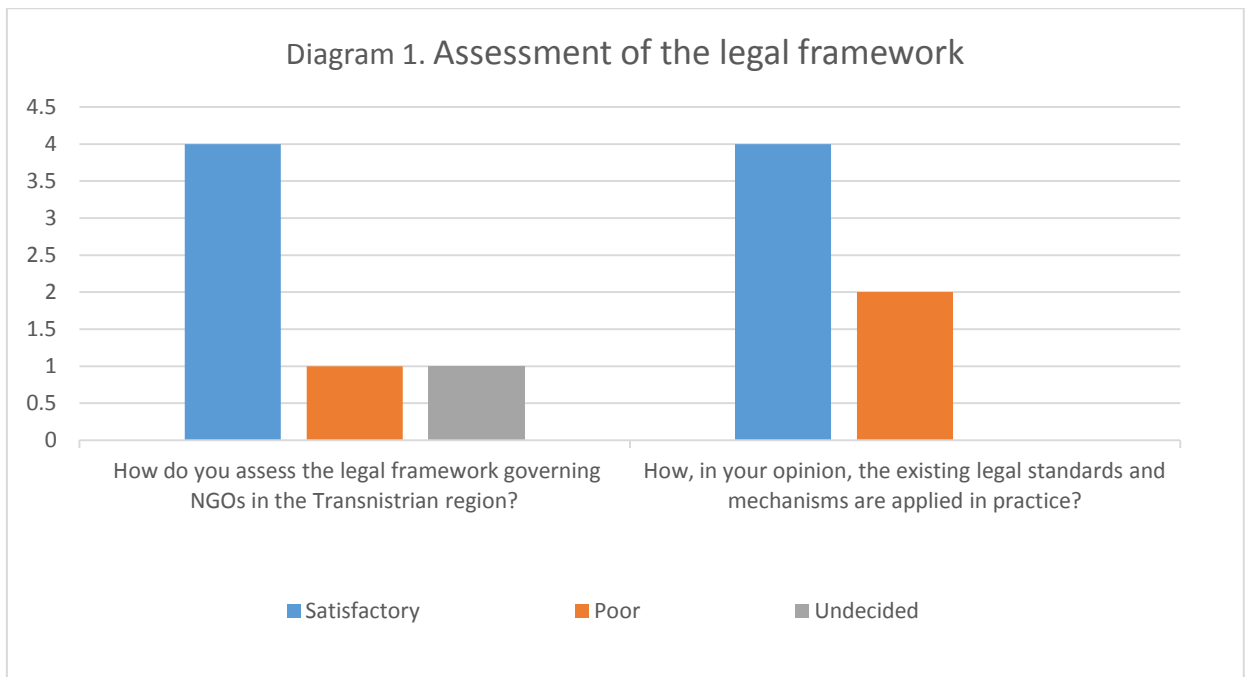
<sup>50</sup> “Draft law on mass media: perspectives” // «Проект закона о СМИ: какие перспективы» — <http://mediacenter.md/aktualno/224-proekt-zakona-o-smi-kakie-perspektivy.html>

<sup>51</sup> “Work on the law on mass media continues” // «Продолжается работа над законом ПМР "О средствах массовой информации"» — <http://pnrnews.org/11953-prodolzhaetsya-rabota-nad-zakonom-pmr-o-sredstvakh-massovoy-informacii.html>

<sup>52</sup> “Don’t approve the new law on mass media!” // «Новый закон о СМИ не принимать!» — [http://mediacenter.md/novosti\\_media-centra/282-novyy-zakon-o-smi-ne-prinimat.html](http://mediacenter.md/novosti_media-centra/282-novyy-zakon-o-smi-ne-prinimat.html)

<sup>53</sup> [http://mediacenter.md/zakonodatelnaya\\_baza/169-ob-obrascheniyah-grazhdan-redakciya-na-26062012.html](http://mediacenter.md/zakonodatelnaya_baza/169-ob-obrascheniyah-grazhdan-redakciya-na-26062012.html)

<sup>54</sup> “Report on the NGO sector” // «Отчет о НПО-секторе» — <http://law-civilsociety.com/otchet-o-npo-sektore.html>



It should be mentioned that respondents did not have a common and clear vision about what to do in order to improve the legal framework governing NGOs, media and freedom of speech. From the suggested options, some respondents chose the item “Adopt new versions of existing laws”, others opted for improving the existing laws by adopting amendments to them, still others thought it is important to properly comply with the existing standards, and some selected all these options. One of the participants in the survey formulated a concrete suggestion regarding adoption of new laws: to adopt *“fiscal loosening for businesses in case they conduct socially focused events.”* Another respondent was pessimistic about possibilities to improve the legal framework: *“Today, unfortunately, a significant part of suggested amendments to the existing legislation contributes not to development in these fields, but to application of new restrictions and impediments.”*

#### Summary

Both expert opinions and results of the survey conducted as part of the study indicate to the imperfection of legal framework governing Transnistrian NGOs overall and media associations in particular. In addition, civil society representatives, at least at the time of the survey, did not have a clear vision of what and how should be improved in the legislation (with the exception of the law on media).

### Organizational Stability of the Media NGO Sector

Studies about the situation of Transnistrian NGOs, conducted over the past years, indicated to the problem of institutional weakness of public organizations on the left bank. *“They face staffing, material, informational and organizational difficulties. Many NGOs have neither a*



*development strategy nor a survival strategy,” said one of these reports, published in 2012<sup>55</sup>. — “Training programs attended by NGO representatives are chaotic and unsystematic. Neither beginning nor experienced organizations can receive necessary training at the needed level on time. They are forced to ‘fish out’ courses, sometimes in different regions. As a result – low level of professional development of workers in many NGOs, very slow emergence of new civil leaders and involvement of active volunteers into organizations and projects.”*

We have already mentioned a similar assessment given by experts in late 2012 – early 2013 directly to media organizations, or, more exactly, to their professional and administrative potential (“as a rule, very low”)<sup>56</sup>.

Some aspects related to organizational development were touched upon while interviewing NGOs for our study. Thus, all respondents underlined that the organizations that they represent have a clearly formulated mission. Only two organizations – Union of Journalists and Media Center – have missions that refer to media.

The mission of the Union of Journalists of Transnistrian region says: *“To contribute to unhindered work of media under condition of observing legal interests, civil rights and freedoms; to increase the creative potential and public activity of journalists; to offer legal and social support to journalists and to ensure their social protection whenever necessary.”* In its turn, the mission of the Media Center says: *“To contribute to the development of qualitative professional journalism and civic journalism; stability and improved image of NGOs, consolidation of the civil society; promotion of ideas of observance and protection of human rights; development of the Transnistrian civil society, improvement of relations between its sectors.”*

The missions of the other organizations that participated in the survey cover such aspects as human rights, civil activity, social partnership and social help.

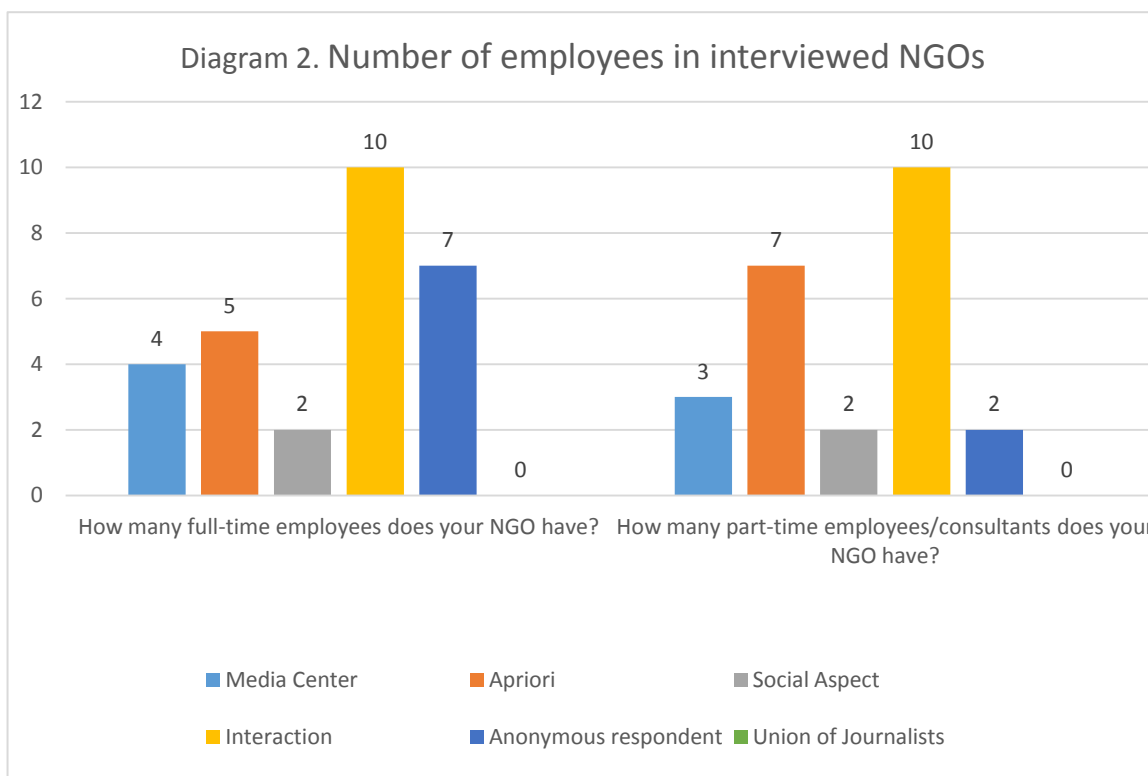
Five out of the six respondent NGOs have strategic development plans, and all six conduct assessments of their organizational development and of execution of the strategic goals and objectives set by the organization. Respondents consider that their NGOs achieve strategic goals in most cases, and only one respondent admitted that it only happens sometimes.

All NGOs claimed that they have clearly formulated administrative rules and procedures that govern their work.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Media Needs Assessment for Transnistrian region. Independent Journalism Center, 2013.



Three NGOs have a board as a governing body, one – general meeting of its members, and one – consultative council. The representative of one NGO indicated two governing bodies: board of directors and governing board. In three of the six associations, journalists are present in the governing bodies.

The number of full-time employees of NGOs varies between two and ten. The same numbers were indicated for part-time employees and consultants (see Diagram 2). When asked about how the number of organization’s members has changed since the previous year, three respondents said it has not changed, and two said that it has increased (one respondent did not answer this question).

The Union of Journalists is the only respondent that has no personnel, despite the fact that this professional association has more than one hundred members.

Judging by the answers we received, all NGOs actively involve volunteers into their work. An exception is the Union of Journalists. The number of volunteers varies, seemingly depending on the organization’s needs: from five-six to 50 and more.

### Summary

The majority of the NGOs interviewed for the study appear to be organizationally stable. They usually have few employees, up to ten, but on the other hand, the number of their members over the past year has not changed, and for some it has even increased, which is indicative of positive trends in their development. It is also important that all NGOs have a formulated mission and assess their organizational development, and the absolute majority has a strategic plan. The

Union of Journalists, which operates without employees, faces the most problems with organizational stability.

## Financial Stability

The report about the situation of NGOs in the Transnistrian region, published by the Institute of Law and Civil Society in 2012, mentions the following difficulties in terms of financial stability: “[...] *Government authorities provide no funding for the civil sector. Nearly all Transnistrian NGOs face instability in funding from domestic sources and from outside. [...] According to unofficial statistics, over 90% of budgets of independent NGOs in the Transnistrian region are formed from the sources provided by outside donors. [...] In addition, it [the problem of funding] becomes worse due to very limited capacities of organizations’ leaders when it comes to preparing project proposals and project management. According to participants in meetings [as part of the study], there are only several NGOs in the Transnistrian region that are capable, in their opinion, to prepare a serious project proposal and to implement a project for a large amount of money.*”<sup>57</sup>

Another aspect of the problem was related to the law on gratuitous aid that is in force in the Transnistrian region, which aims to regulate the “legal and organizational aspects” of financial and material aid coming from abroad. Under this document, a coordination council for technical aid was created, which includes two representatives of each the legislative and the executive branches of the de facto government of the region. According to the law, “the Coordination Council may involve the participation, in an advisory capacity, of representatives of republican public organizations.”<sup>58</sup>

The coordination council makes decisions concerning proposed projects of technical aid and enters them into a specialized register. The agreements concluded by participants of technical aid projects are subject to expert examination by the humanitarian aid committee. Based on the examination results, the committee issues certificates confirming the technical aid nature of goods, resources, works and services. This procedure is compulsory for the organizations that wish to obtain benefits<sup>59</sup>. “*Transnistrian banks, in their turn, according to heads of some NGOs, do not let them use the resources received from donors without a permit from that committee, even for the projects that are not in the category of technical or humanitarian aid,*” says the above-mentioned report on the situation of NGOs<sup>60</sup>.

Some more concrete aspects of financial stability of media NGOs could also be learned from the answers received in the survey.

The survey showed that not all NGOs (only two out of six) have a written plan of attracting funding for at least the following year. Moreover, organizations often attract funding based on

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<sup>57</sup> “Report on the NGO sector” // «Отчет о НПО-секторе» — <http://law-civilsociety.com/otchet-o-npo-sektore.html>

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.minjust.org/web.nsf/767eb8a58ad76a2bc22574d5002acf15/30cddb50166ba2ac225799e003e5716!OpenDocument>

<sup>59</sup> “Report on the NGO sector” // «Отчет о НПО-секторе» — <http://law-civilsociety.com/otchet-o-npo-sektore.html>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

their strategic plans or upon emergence of grant programs. Two of the respondent NGOs organize fundraising activities.

Between 80% and 100% of the funding in media and freedom of speech NGOs come from international grants. Other sources are usually only insignificant supplements to grants: for example, membership fees made up 0.5%, income-generating activities of the NGO itself – between 2% and 10%. Only one of the respondent NGOs could somewhat diversify its sources of funding: private donations, government subsidies/allowances, donations from businesses. But they still are under 20%.

The Union of Journalists is the only organization in the survey that has no funding at all.

Three organizations assessed their annual funding in the amount of over USD 50,000, one NGO – between USD 30,000 and USD 50,000. One respondent was not ready to answer the question about funding.

None of the respondents (except the UoJ) experienced a decrease in funding over the past year; on the contrary, the funding of the majority increased, and only one organization had the same level of funding.

The majority of the respondent NGOs have such material resources as rented office, furniture, computers, telephones, copiers and Internet connection. One organization has its own office and another one owns a car. The representative of the Union of Journalists said that the organization has no material resources.

All six NGOs have bank accounts. And nearly all (again, except the Union of Journalists) have a full- or part-time accountant.

## Summary

The analysis of these data leads to the conclusion that the financial standing of media NGOs, except the Union of Journalists, is quite steady. It is at least evidenced by the fact that organizations were able to increase funding or keep it at the same level. NGOs' dependence on international grants appears to be great, but big changes in the near future are not expected, given the socio-political and economic situation in the region.

## External relations

In this section we will examine the aspects of media and freedom of speech NGOs interaction with some stakeholders and the media channels they use to disseminate information about themselves.

We have already mentioned a number of problems in relations between public organizations and the de facto authorities of the region. As part of this project, researchers asked NGOs how they appreciate their collaboration with authorities. Estimations were different. The representative of one NGO found relations with authorities active and productive, while other two said they

maintained normal working relations. One other respondent indicated that collaboration occurs from time to time and that there is “unwillingness of authorities to have any contacts”.

One respondent mentioned that relations with authorities are not simple, and that the organization’s employees feel pressure. Another respondent wrote in the questionnaire: *“Relations are not simple; we don’t feel much pressure, but we can’t call them friendly, either. Special control and monitoring of our activities, pressure against our volunteers or friends of the organization.”*

The majority of respondents have a generally positive view of their collaboration with international donors. Assessments were as follows: active and productive collaboration – 2; normal – 2; occasional – 1; no collaboration – 1.

The organizations’ interaction with business structures is completely different: four out of six NGOs do not collaborate with businesses, one association has such collaborations, and another one, according to the respondent, has weak collaboration with businesses. Only one NGO actively and productively works with businesses.

Perhaps the best appreciation was given to the collaboration of public organizations with other NGOs: four respondents found it active and productive, and one other – normal. One organization, however, admitted that it does not collaborate with other NGOs.

All NGOs, with one exception, are part of some coalitions in the Transnistrian region, such as the “Transnistrian Social Partnership” or the “Platform for Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Women’s Rights”. Some NGOs are part of national (Republic of Moldova), foreign (Russia) and international coalitions of public organizations. None of the respondents indicated in their list any international associations in the media field and freedom of speech.

As expected of media and freedom of speech organizations, the respondent NGOs actively disseminate information about their work through various media channels, one of them being media organizations (mainly newspapers, television, and Internet publications). Most of these NGOs do even more, and communicate about themselves through their websites and the websites of other organizations and by publishing newsletters, distributing flyers and brochures, conducting presentations, etc.

Two out of the six respondent organizations (the Union of Journalists and Social Aspect) have no websites. The reason for the lack of a website is, according to them, the insufficiency of material resources for its creation, and the Union of Journalists added to that the deficit of human resources. These two organizations also have no profiles in social networks.

Out of the four NGOs that have websites, one organization fails to update its website regularly.

Three organizations issue newsletters: Media Center issues the “Civil Society” newspaper<sup>61</sup> (published monthly with a circulation of 999 copies), Apriori issues the “Infopost” newsletter<sup>62</sup> (quarterly in electronic form), and the Interaction NGO issues “Agora”<sup>63</sup> (monthly, 999 copies).

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<sup>61</sup> <http://mediacenter.md/nasha-dazeta/>

## Summary

The majority of the respondent organizations have quite developed external relations, but they still face difficulties. The situation in relations with authorities is rather ambiguous: assessments vary between “have active and productive collaboration” and “feel pressure”. The weakest relations NGOs have with businesses (it is probably related to the specificity of organizations’ work, which does not require frequent contacts with business circles), and the most active – with other non-governmental organizations. Questionnaires did not reveal contacts between Transnistrian NGOs and international associations working in the media field and freedom of speech.

The Union of Journalists, which indicated only collaboration with authorities in the section of external relations, faces the greatest problems in this regard. It has not even established collaboration with other public organizations, and its possibilities for self-promotion are seriously limited due to the lack of Internet presence.

## NGO Services and Their Assessment by Journalists

The analysis of this aspect in our study is based on the results of surveys involving two groups: six NGO representatives and 11 journalists, who assessed the existing services for media.

We asked the journalists to name the professional associations and media and freedom of speech NGOs that they know. The most often named were the Union of Journalists and the Media Center. Also, some media workers mentioned the Apriori and Resonance NGOs, and one of them remembered the school of young journalists (apparently meaning a project of the Institute of Law and Civil Society). Three respondents could not name any specialized organization.

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<sup>62</sup> <http://ru.scribd.com/dmarchkov/documents>

<sup>63</sup> <http://ngointeraction.org/main/gazetaagora/>

Table 1. Types of services in the media field, provided by NGOs

	Union of Journalists	Media Center	Apriori	Social Aspect	Interaction	Anonymous respondent
Advocacy (public campaigns and lobby in the field of media and freedom of speech)		✓	✓			
Trainings, courses, internships		✓		✓	✓	✓
Long-term education (schools of young journalists, etc.)		✓				
Professional consulting		✓	✓		✓	
Round tables and debates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dissemination of information, information resources for journalists		✓	✓	✓		✓
Legal support for journalists and media outlets						
Representation of publishers' interests						
Access to information			✓		✓	
Studies, analyses, publications		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Monitoring of conditions for the work of media, observance of journalists' rights and freedom of speech, abuses against media workers		✓				
Administration of programs for journalists and media outlets						
Contests and awards for journalists	✓	✓				✓
Promotion of professional standards in journalism, ethics in journalism		✓				✓
Labor relations						
Organization of press clubs, topic-based meetings		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Other						

Eight out of the 11 interviewed media workers believe that the existing NGOs insufficiently meet the needs of media outlets and journalists; two believe that organizations do not meet their needs at all; and one respondent gave no assessment to this aspect, having earlier mentioned that in his opinion there are no such associations.

To form a more detailed picture of the existing services for media and journalists, the authors of the study asked NGO representatives to indicate the directions covered by their organizations. These data are incorporated in Table 1. According to them, the greatest number of services for media and journalists is provided by the Media Center and Apriori, and the least – by the Union of Journalists.

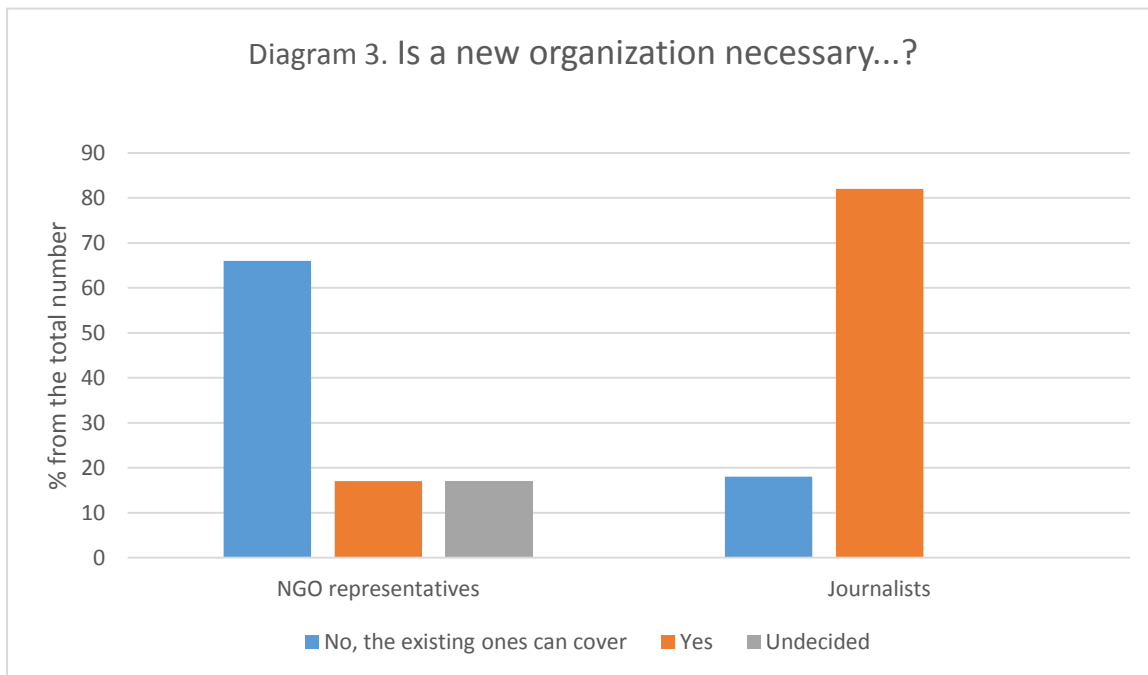
The most numerous are such activities as round tables and debates (all six NGOs), trainings, courses and internships, studies, analyses and publications, organization of press clubs and topic-based meetings. The existing NGOs provide no services related to legal support for journalists and media outlets, representation of publishers' interests, administration of programs for media and labor relations in media outlets. Insufficiently developed are such activities as advocacy and lobby, long-term education for young professionals, promotion of access to information and professional standards in journalism, as well as monitoring of working conditions for media and observance of the rights of journalists and freedom of speech.

Journalists are differently, though overall quite well, informed about the services provided by various NGOs. Some media workers believe that the above-mentioned activities are not provided by anyone. Sometimes respondents attributed to some NGOs the types of activities that the organizations themselves did not name.

The respondent journalists rated on a 5-point scale each of the types of activity conducted by NGOs. The lowest general marks were given to legal support to journalists, representation of publishers' interests, advocacy and lobby in the media field and freedom of speech and professional consulting. The highest marks were given to such NGO activities as organization of round tables and debates and organization of trainings, courses and internships.

Both journalists and NGO representatives were asked the question “What types of activity in the media field and protection of freedom of speech, in your opinion, are underdeveloped or not developed in Transnistrian region?” Analysis showed that the five most frequent answers among journalists are as follows: 1) Advocacy and lobby in the media field and freedom of speech; 2) Monitoring of working conditions of media, observance of journalists' rights and freedom of speech, abuses against media workers; 3) Professional consulting; 4) Legal support for journalists and media outlets; 5) Administration of programs for journalists and media outlets.





Among public organizations’ employees the rating of lacking services is as follows: 1) Advocacy and lobby in the field of media and freedom of speech; 2) Legal support for journalists and media outlets; 3) Access to information; 4) Studies, analyses, publications; 5) Promotion of professional standards in journalism, ethics in journalism.

Both groups of respondents were also asked the question “In your opinion, is it necessary to have a new organization (new organizations) that would conduct such activities?” It is notable that the opinions of civil society and media representatives differ. The majority of NGO activists believe that there is no need in a new organization, as everything can be done by the existing ones. At the same time, some journalists find a new organization necessary (Diagram 3).

The survey included one more aspect – the manner in which NGOs assess the needs of beneficiaries, particularly journalists. According to the survey, all public organizations, except the Union of Journalists, conduct assessments of overall needs of their beneficiaries. But only the Media Center assesses the needs of journalists separately.

### Summary

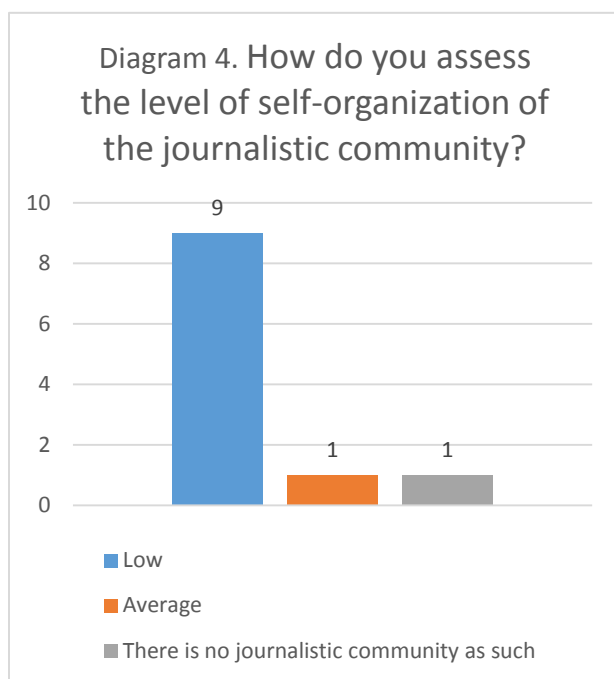
The majority of journalists believe that the associations existing in the Transnistrian region insufficiently meet their needs. The greatest number of services to media and journalists are provided by the Media Center and Apriori NGOs, and the least – by the Union of Journalists. Particular development is needed for the following NGO activities aimed at media outlets and journalists: advocacy and lobby in the media field and freedom of speech; legal support for journalists and media outlets; monitoring of working conditions for media, observance of journalists’ rights and freedom of speech, abuses against media workers; professional consulting; administration of programs for media; promotion of access to information and professional

standards in journalism. While journalists wished to see a new organization that would eliminate the deficit of these and other services, then civil society activists are convinced that the already existing NGOs can deal with them. Currently, only one organization assesses the needs of journalists as their beneficiaries.

## Assessment of Self-Organization of the Journalistic Community

A separate section in the questionnaire for media representatives was dedicated to issues of consolidation of the journalistic community.

Media workers were asked to assess the level of consolidation of their community. The majority of respondents (9 out of 11) found that it is low; one said that there is no journalistic community; and one other found the level of consolidation average (Diagram 4).



The question “Have you heard of cases when over the past five years Transnistrian journalists jointly stepped up to protect their rights and interests?” received negative answers from 9 out of the 11 media workers. One of the respondents remembered the isolated attempts to act in defense of freedom of speech: “*There have been isolated cases, attempts to speak up. When journalist Vardanyan was arrested and sentenced to 15 years of prison, the journalistic community largely remained silent. The situation with Vardanyan was followed and covered only by “Novaya Gazeta”, “Chelovek I Ego Prava” and “Profsoyuznye Vesti” [newspapers]. The Union of Journalists was speechless. The closure of websites also met silence. The Civic*

*Chamber (but, again, not all journalistic organizations) made an attempt to issue a declaration regarding the closure of websites, but not all members of the Civic Chamber supported it.*”

Two respondents mentioned cases when, in their opinion, journalists responded collectively. “*Yes [there were such cases]. In 2014, when the public administration of the Dubasari region and of the city of Dubasari (founder of the newspaper) forced the editor of the municipal publication “Zarya Pridnestrovia” to reduce workers, including journalists,*” said another respondent.

“*In May 2013, the plenum of the Union of Journalists adopted the Code of Professional Honor, which particularly referred to professional solidarity of the journalistic community. In 2014, when discussing the new law on media, the journalists of many media outlets criticized the proposed draft and by that, in my opinion, stood up for their rights and interests (although they probably did it in a random rather than organized manner),*” says another respondent.

The same division of opinions happened when the respondent media workers answered the question of whether over the past five years media outlets or journalists' unions issued public declarations or addresses to governmental, public or international structures concerning the work of media. One respondent remembered about the address of the Media Center to *“governmental, international and public structures concerning harassment against journalists Nicolai Buchatsky and Luiza Doroshenko”* and the address of journalists of the *“Zarya Pridnestrovia”* newspaper to the leader of the Tiraspol administration Yevgeny Shevchuk concerning *“the illegal attempt to reduce the staff of the media outlet”*. Another respondent named the open letter of the Transnistrian representative office of the New Region information agency, *“which implied that they closed down against their will.”*

Participants in the survey could not name any informal or unregistered journalistic associations in the Transnistrian region. An exception was the Center of Environmental Journalism in the city of Dubasari, named by one respondent, which is a project of the local non-governmental organization Doctors for Ecology. Sometimes respondents included among informal associations the ones that are actually officially registered.

Almost all respondent media representatives underlined that Transnistrian journalists rarely meet to discuss their problems, needs and achievements. Two respondents believe that fellow journalists do not meet for such purposes at all. Approximately in the same proportion respondents were divided when assessing the efficiency of such meetings: the majority is convinced that they are relatively useful. One vote was given to the usefulness of journalists' meetings: *“It is an opportunity to not only meet and ‘look into each other’s eyes’, but also a chance to discuss problems.”* Another respondent shared the following opinion: *“They would talk, complain and go back to their lives. No joint action, and not for the reason of not wanting it, but because they understand the pointlessness of such floundering in the current situation of Transnistrian media.”*

## Summary

The journalistic community of the Transnistrian region has for many years been weak. Journalists' attempts to stand up for their rights are usually shy and isolated, and their meetings, aimed to discuss their problems and needs, are inefficient.

## Obstacles in Development and Needs of NGOs

The obstacles in development and the needs of non-governmental organizations in this study have been examined under different angles, particularly, from the perspective of internal and external obstacles in development.

During the survey, NGO activists most often named among internal obstacles the insufficiency of funding and of qualified personnel. Some NGO representatives mentioned lack of collaboration with authorities and businesses, insufficient equipment, insufficient technical skills, weak skills of financial management, etc. One respondent phrased the problem as follows:

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*“Contribution to development of free press in the Transnistrian region by strengthening the NGO sector”*

*“Lack of mechanisms for protection of human rights activists, weak information space and non-operational legal framework. Lack of independent media outlets.”*

Among external obstacles, respondent NGOs usually mentioned poor interest of authorities and the general public towards the development of public associations, imperfection of the legislation governing NGOs, particularly fiscal legislation, and poor public image of NGOs.

Respondents were asked to choose from a list of types of potential aid the ones that their NGOs need in order to overcome internal and external obstacles. Most often, they marked financial support, equipment, their own office space, education and trainings for NGO employees, assessment of NGO programs/projects, access to NGO data base, information about donors and their programs, and collaboration with authorities and public organizations.

Both groups of respondents – NGO representatives and journalists – answered the question about the specific obstacles that hinder the development of professional journalistic associations and media and freedom of speech organizations. Participants were asked to choose from the following items:

- Poor development of the media market;
- Low level of self-organization of the journalistic community;
- Difficult situation with freedom of speech and media in the region;
- Passivity of journalists;
- Imperfection of legislation and non-compliance with it;
- Disinterestedness of the government;
- Pressure from authorities and other structures;
- Insufficient funding;
- Other (specify).

We shall mention that all these options could be to some extent found in answers. Somewhat more frequent were the following answers: poor development of the media market, difficult situation with freedom of speech and media in the region, passivity of journalists and insufficient funding.

Finally, all respondents were asked to share their views about the following question: “What, in your opinion, should be done for successful development of media and freedom of speech NGOs in the Transnistrian region?” It was an open question, and participants in the survey phrased the answer themselves. We shall quote the most representative, in our opinion, statements from both groups of respondents:

- “Authorities’ commitment to such changes”
- “To inform and educate consumers of information, to stimulate the creation of independent media and platforms, to promote public discussions, meetings, debates, lectures”
- “I believe that today it mainly depends on NGOs themselves. They need competent goal setting, education and resources”
- “To develop civil society”

- “First of all, journalists must themselves show initiative and interest. Now, however, everyone is ‘sitting in their own house’ and hoping that problems will pass them by. There is no leader among journalists that would be able to organize them. ‘The old ones’ don’t want it, the young ones can’t.”
- “To strengthen funding for education, internships, experience exchange and to provide support to the already existing professional associations and individual journalists in legal, moral and material aspects. However, ‘we are few, we are too few, but, most importantly, we are apart...’”
- “Experienced, spirited, unyielding, non-partisan, non-intimidated journalists; real, and not just declared, freedom of speech; money; journalists’ willingness to get away from computers and work for the entire media community (and this willingness is, again, very well stimulated with the help of finances – no one wants to spend their time for nothing); an active professional manager, who would take upon himself the task of creating such an organization, managing it and coordinating its members.”
- “To improve legislation on media; not only the interest of journalists, but also their solidarity, proactive attitude and ability to stand up for their rights. There is not enough legal literacy (today, hardly any lawyer would commit to defend a journalist’s rights).”
- “It is necessary to change the legislation; journalists must feel they are protected, which is not the case now; there is no developed competition on the media market; stranglehold of state-owned media; unequal play rules on the media market – all these things are not helping.”

## Summary

Professional associations of journalists and media and freedom of speech organizations in the Transnistrian region face many internal and external obstacles in their development, both ones that are common for all Transnistrian NGOs and some specific for media organizations. Specialized public organizations still need active financial, material and moral support. In conditions of limited freedoms and weakness of the press, the journalistic community experiences a strong need in some driving force – a well-organized representative of their aspirations and difficulties and an aid in solving problems.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Both expert opinions and the results of the survey conducted for the study highlight the imperfection of the legislative framework that governs Transnistrian NGOs.
2. The respondent civil society representatives did not show a clear vision of what should be improved in legislation or how to do it. An exception is the law on media: specialized public organizations contributed to the discussion of the draft new law and to identification of its flaws.
3. Organizationally, the majority of the respondent NGOs appear to be stable. The number of employees in public organizations is often small, not more than ten, but, on the other

hand, the number of their members over the past year did not drop, while in some organizations it even grew, which speaks of positive trends in their development. It is also important that all NGOs have formulated their visions and conduct assessments of their organizational development, and that the absolute majority has a strategic plan. The greatest problems in terms of organizational stability are faced by the Union of Journalists, which operates without personnel.

4. The financial standing of the NGOs that provide services in the media field, except the Union of Journalists, is quite steady. It is at least evidenced by the fact that organizations were able to increase funding or keep it at the same level. NGOs' dependence on international grants appears to be great, but big changes in the near future are not expected, given the socio-political and economic situation in the region.
5. The majority of the respondent organizations have quite developed external relations, but they still face difficulties. The situation in relations with authorities is rather ambiguous: assessments vary between "have active and productive collaboration" and "feel pressure". The weakest relations NGOs have with businesses (it is probably related to the specificity of organizations' work, which does not require frequent contacts with business circles), and the most active – with other non-governmental organizations. The Union of Journalists, which indicated only collaboration with authorities in the section of external relations, faces the greatest problems in this regard. It has not established collaboration with other public organizations, and it has no website as an important instrument of self-expression.
6. The most services for media outlets and journalists are provided by the Apriori and Media Center NGOs, and the fewest – by the Union of Journalists. Currently, only one organization, Media Center, conducts assessments of the needs of journalists as their beneficiaries.
7. Special development in the Transnistrian region is needed for the following types of NGO activities, aimed at media and journalists: advocacy and lobby in the field of media and freedom of speech; legal support for journalists and media outlets; monitoring of conditions for NGO activities, observance of journalists' rights and freedom of speech, abuses against media workers; professional consulting; administration of programs for media; promotion of access to information and professional standards in journalism, labor relations.
8. Although some organizations progressed over the past years, having managed to broaden the scope of their activities and diversify their services, the majority of the respondent journalists find that the associations existing in the Transnistrian region insufficiently meet their needs.
9. While journalists wish there was a new organization that would eliminate the deficit of the above-mentioned services, then civil society activists are convinced that the already existing NGOs can deal with the task.
10. The journalistic community in the Transnistrian region has been weak for many years. Journalists' attempts to stand up in defense of their rights are usually shy and isolated, and their meetings, aimed to discuss problems and needs, are inefficient.
11. Professional associations of journalists and media and freedom of speech organizations in the Transnistrian region are still few, and they face numerous internal and external

obstacles in their development, both ones that are common for all Transnistrian NGOs and the ones specific for media organizations. Specialized public organizations still need active financial, material and moral support.

12. In conditions of limited freedoms and weakness of the press, the journalistic community experiences a strong need in some driving force – a well-organized representative of their aspirations and difficulties and an aid in solving problems.

## Recommendations

1. International donors and journalistic networks should continue providing active support to the Transnistrian public organizations that work with media and journalists. Overall, these organizations achieved a certain progress in their development, but to secure success, they need further varied help.
2. The existing media and freedom of speech NGOs should broaden the scope of their activities, initiating new projects in the fields of professional support for journalists that are currently not covered or insufficiently covered (see previous section) and conducting careful assessment of media workers' needs. The study shows that public organizations have the necessary potential.
3. The existing model of the region's Union of Journalists proves itself inefficient; the organization needs to be reformed. One of the solutions might be its transformation into a trade union of journalists, following the example of some countries. The key to adequate development of such an association must be independence from government and other structures. However, given the current situation on the left bank, this option seems unlikely.
4. Despite the contradictory opinions of the different groups of respondents about creation of a new media organization, the author of the analytical report considers that establishment of an association in the form of a center for professional support for journalists or an independent media trade union would do good to the media community of the Transnistrian region. The work of such a structure should be aimed at non-affiliated media outlets and journalists, although, given the circumstances of Transnistrian media, the representatives of all media outlets need access to the services of such an organization. It is important that the initiative of creating such an association comes directly from active representatives of the journalistic community and that it becomes a representative of this community's interests.
5. Priority activities at the first stage of this organization's work might be the services aimed at the specific needs of local journalists, such as administration of programs and projects for media, legal support for media outlets, information resources about opportunities for professional development, protection of professional, social, economic and labor interests of media workers. With the increase of its authority, the association should explore such important directions as promotion of freedom of speech and media freedom (including advocacy and lobby) and professional standards in journalism, monitoring of observance of journalists' rights, access to information, training of new journalism workers, etc.

6. Improvement of NGO activities would be facilitated by the search for and training of local experts in various fields (legal support, execution of monitoring and studies, etc.), who would combine international and local experience in actions aimed at supporting journalists.
7. Media and freedom of speech NGOs and professional associations are recommended to guide themselves by the successful work of similar organizations on the right bank and abroad, especially in the countries with authoritarian and restrictive systems of government.
8. The work of media organizations and journalists of the Transnistrian region might be positively influenced by involvement into the activities of international media and freedom of speech organizations, journalistic networks, etc.
9. Specialized non-governmental organizations must make every effort to promote the interests of the public and of journalists in the process of amendment of the media legislation and participate in discussions concerning the flaws of the NGO legislation.
10. It is essential for non-governmental organizations in the field of media and freedom of speech to continue actively contributing to the development of the Transnistrian civil society, participate in promotion of civic rights and freedoms and in advocacy, encourage civic journalism, blogging, the culture of public discussions, etc. It is in the interests of these organizations to also prevent creation of stereotypes concerning the work of NGOs and their collaboration with partners on the right bank and abroad.