

**MEDIA**

**SUSTAINABILITY**

**INDEX**

**2005**



**IREX**

UNFORTUNATELY, THE NEWLY ELECTED PARLIAMENT STARTED ITS WORK BY REVIEWING TWO DRAFT LAWS THAT FURTHER CONTRAVENED THE RIGHT TO FREE EXPRESSION AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION: THE DRAFT LAW ON THE STATE AND PROFESSIONAL SECRETS AND THE LAW ON INFORMATION.

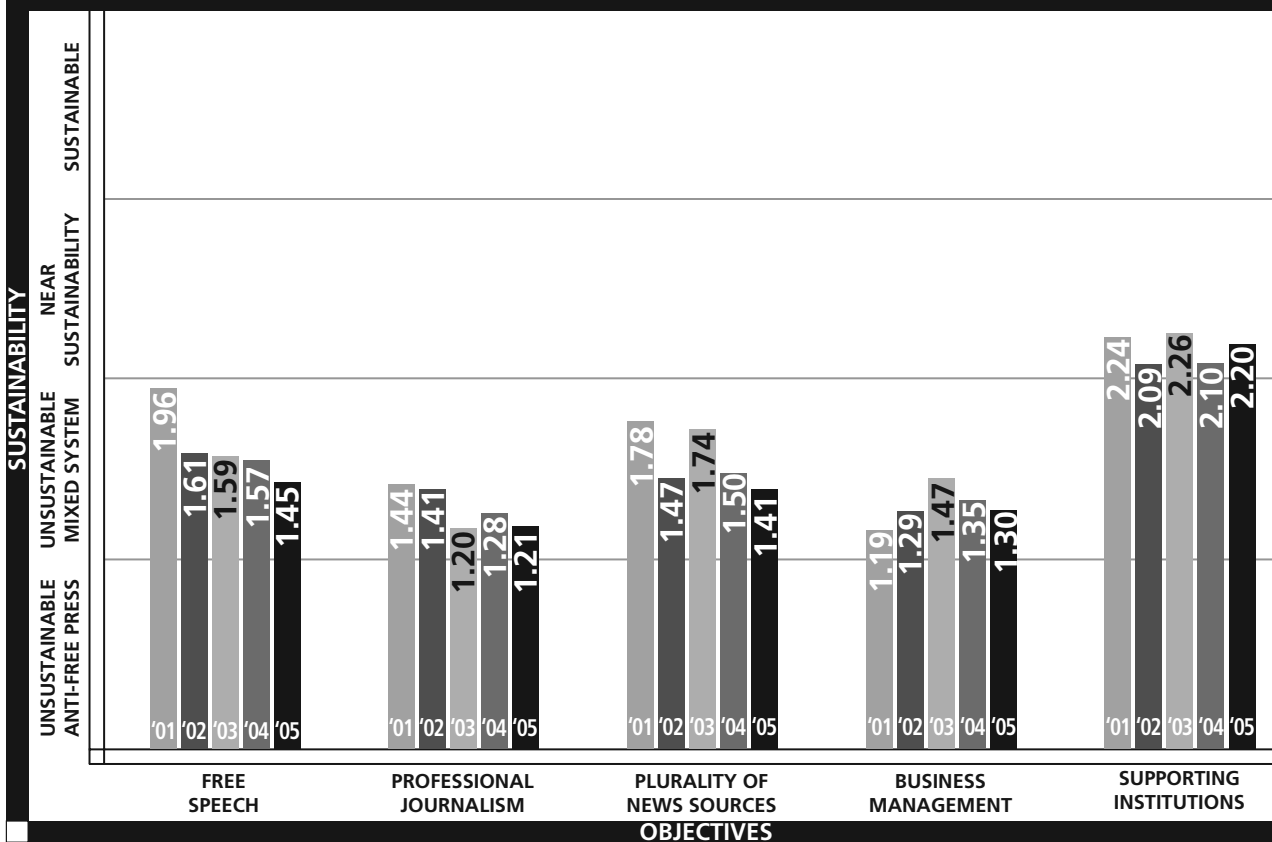


**I**n Moldova, 2005 was an election year, with voting for parliament and the mayor of the capital, Chisinau. The Communist Party managed to stay in power and form the government alone, although it received a smaller number of parliament seats than in 2001. To ensure parliament re-elected the party's leader as president, the Communists created a "political partnership" with the Christian Democratic Party and the Democratic Party. The coalition undertook a series of steps to democratize Moldova, in line with the Moldova-EU Action Plan that had been signed prior to the parliamentary elections. Among the media-related reforms were changes that would ensure the independence of the Broadcasting Coordination Council (BCC), the real (not only formal) transformation of the Teleradio Moldova Company into a national public broadcaster, and the elimination of state press.

Unfortunately, the newly elected parliament started its work by reviewing two draft laws that further contravened the right to free expression and access to information: the draft law on the state and professional secrets and the law on information. If these become law over the criticism leveled by Moldovan civil society, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) experts, and the international freedom-of-expression group Article 19, it would be a reorientation toward Soviet rather than European practices. Pending the outcome of this debate, the 2005 Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel recorded an essentially static situation in the Moldovan media sector, with the overall MSI for the country at 1.51 for 2005, compared with 1.56 in 2004.

The governing party not only continues to maintain control over the public company Teleradio Moldova, the MSI panel agreed, but also takes steps through the BCC that appear to be attempts to take over, through faithful intermediaries, the most influential radio and television stations. At the same time, again through the BCC, stations that are seen as disloyal or in opposition are harassed. Among print media, the "liquidated" state newspapers have done nothing but change their insignia, thus becoming "independent" but continuing the same editorial policy that serves

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MOLDOVA



**Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):** Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

**Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):** Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

**Near Sustainability (2-3):** Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

**Sustainable (3-4):** Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

the government. By contrast, after liquidation of Chisinau's news agency Info-Prim, seen as supporting the opposition, the journalists were simply thrown out onto the street. The district newspapers published by the local public authorities have not come under a privatization plan and thus continue representing unfair competition to independent local papers.

For various reasons linked to the yet underdeveloped advertising market, lack of investments and flawed management, profitable media are an exception rather than the rule. Their dependence on additional, nonbusiness revenues is fertile ground for journalists' self-censorship and partisanship.

The access to information, including to foreign stations and the Internet, faces no legal constraints but depends on geography and people's incomes. The rural population is the most disadvantaged from this point of view.

**OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH**

**Moldova Objective Score: 1.45 / 4.00**

The MSI panel concluded that 2005 has not brought major changes in legal and social regulations, and in some areas, such as access to information, the situation has degenerated. "There is a good (stable) situation only in access to international news and the practice of journalism," said Vitalie Cazacu, director of the DECA-Press news agency. The panel also said no physical assaults on journalists that might be linked to their professional activity took place in 2005.

The Communist government launched a review of two draft laws that, if adopted, would limit further access to information. The draft law on the state and professional secrets, developed by the Information and Security Service, and the law on information, submitted by the Department of Information Technologies, would replace the Access to Information Law, which is based on European norms. The MSI panelists believe that both drafts represent setbacks, returning to Soviet principles of protecting information, and said the drafts were submitted to parliament without prior consultations with the mass media or citizen review.

The absence of a ceiling for compensation awarded for defamation generated concern among the media. "The numerous lawsuits scare away investigative journalists, while the national laws and the way in which they are enforced make such journalists especially vulnerable in the face of likely legal action," said Olivia Pirtac, the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) media lawyer. "Although according to the

jurisprudence of the European Court, judges have to take into account the good faith of the journalist and the reasonable amount of research done by him, this does not happen in practice and sanctions are

applied in all the cases when the journalist fails to prove the truth of his statements."

In summer 2005, the parliamentary faction Moldova Democrata introduced a draft amendment to Article 16 of the civil code that provided, among other things, for specific amounts for moral damages resulting from defamation. The initiative had not come to a vote by late 2005. In addition, Article 304 of the criminal code

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**Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.**

**FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:**

- > Legal/social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and the offended party must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

provided for a fine of up to the equivalent of \$500 or up to two years in prison for libeling judges, criminal investigators, or persons who “contribute to justice.” The administrative code provides for arrest of up to 30 days for libel.

All the participants in the MSI discussion agreed that there is censorship at the public company Teleradio Moldova. The producer’s code of principles, standards, and recommendations approved by the Teleradio Moldova management contains a series of ambiguous provisions that can be used against the principle of free journalistic expression. For example, Paragraph 2.1 says that “program producers must report to their superiors on problematic stories that might affect TRM’s editorial policy, at the initial stage ... The refusal to coordinate, inform, or approach the superior body can result in the omission, delay, or replacement of the given program from the plan.” Paragraph 2.1 also provides that “before any information is broadcast, the journalist has to report the identity of the source to the coordinating editor or department director, who are under the obligation to preserve confidentiality. This disclosure of the source should not be confused with the public disclosure.” Eugen Ribca, a lawyer at the Association of Electronic Press, evaluated many of the code’s provisions as “vague and allowing censorship and sanctions against TRM journalists” (*Ziarul de Garda*, 6 October 2005).

The European Court for Human Rights scheduled a December hearing in a case, *Larisa Manole vs. Moldova*, started in 2002 by the TRM Strike Committee that requests the Republic of Moldova recognize limits on the right to the freedom of expression represented by the introduction of censorship at the national television station.

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The MSI panelists agreed that was no improvement in broadcast licensing, either, during 2005. The licensing is neither fair nor competitive, nor apolitical, and it is done according to some

vague criteria—“plurality of opinions, equality in the treatment of participants, quality, and diversity of programs, free competition, local broadcasting products, and the independence and impartiality of programs”—that leave room for arbitrary decisions. The majority of the BCC members represent only the governing party and act in its interests. Under the guise of the licensing law’s requirements, Radio Singera was forced to suspend broadcasting during elections. The license of Radio Media Sfera Ltd. was withdrawn before the expiry of the one-year period granted prior to the start of broadcasting, although the station acted in good faith and informed the BCC promptly about delays in renting premises caused by circumstances beyond its control. Although the holding Euronova Media Group includes popular stations, it remains unable to obtain new frequencies to expand its coverage area. The license of Analitic Media Group, which rebroadcast the Russian first channel, was withdrawn in October in spite of the fact that the group showed to BCC the contract for exclusive broadcasting rights granted by Russia’s ORT until 2010. The license was given to an unknown company, which had been registered shortly before. In the view of Viorel Margineanu, Media IMPACT Agency director general quoted by DECA-Press news agency, the BCC meeting “was a show that was well-directed by the forces that continue to hold local broadcasting under their control.” European diplomats in Moldova also expressed concern regarding the granting of broadcast licenses and the allocation of related frequencies in Moldova. “Serious questions remain regarding the transparency of such decisions and the independence of the Audiovisual Coordinating Council,” they said in a statement released in November.

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The initiation of a media business and the related taxes are not different from other industries. There is, however, some discrimination against private media as compared to state-run ones (the governmental papers became formally “independent” in mid-2005) and district ones, although from a legal point of view they are equal. The discrimination can be seen in the distribution of such publications to state institutions and state-run businesses.

The paper *Ziarul de garda* reported in January 2005 that it had obtained a document demonstrating that the government orders institutions to use public

funds to subscribe to state-run and government-loyal newspapers. Also, some business owners voice unwillingness to advertise in independent newspapers for fear of attracting the wrath of the government (*Satpamana*, 14 October 2005, editorial by editor-in-chief Viorel Mihail).

According to the Access to Information Law, passed five years ago, any legal resident on the territory of Moldova can request any information or document from public authorities or institutions without having to explain a reason. About 20 lawsuits were started in 2005 against public institutions for their refusal to provide public information. The participants in the MSI discussion noted favorably decisions to publish the minutes of the parliament's plenary sessions and broadcast them live on Teleradio Moldova. "Although some public institutions have started to be more open to applicants for information, considerable efforts are still needed to break through the wall of excessive secrecy around public information," said Vasile Spinei, director of the Access-Info Center. "Moreover, instead of focusing on the enforcement of current provisions, some governmental bodies have come up with two draft laws (one concerning information and the other concerning state and professional secrets), whose purpose is to prevent the free access to information."

Petru Macovei, interim executive director of the Association of Independent Press, said "the government and the local administrations raise bureaucratic barriers to obtaining public information." Vasile Botnaru, Radio Free Europe bureau chief, added that although the Access to Information Law is generally perceived as an excellent one, "it is weakened by negative practices as information is turned into merchandise hidden under a layer of legal provisions that allow the introduction of fees or delays in delivering the requested information."

The state does not limit in any way the media access to international news and sources of information. The only real barrier in this regard is the financial capacity of the outlet.

Any person can become a journalist. The state does not impose any restrictions of licensing, except for the need of accreditation. Journalists enjoy no special rights or privileges. Foreign journalists are under the obligation to become accredited with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It sometimes happens, however, that local authorities can impose of their own will a requirement of accreditation for their territory. "They believe that journalist accreditation, for example in parliament, is meant to prevent them from going there and finding out the MPs' opinions on various issues. If a journalist's question is uncomfortable or if the civil servant is

simply not competent on the issue, he will say every day that he is busy," noted Natalia Girleanu, a reporter for *Novoie Vremya*.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Moldova Objective Score: 1.21 / 4.00

The MSI participants agreed that the quality of Moldovan journalism needs serious improvement. Accurate, objective information from several sources is an exception rather than the rule. Political partisanship has infiltrated even the products of some news agencies, which were once examples of impartiality. "Unfortunately, in terms of quality standards, journalism in Moldova is stagnating at best," said Petru Macovei. "Quality journalism is not profitable," added Vasile Botnaru. "On the contrary, it is becoming increasingly more unprofitable because it attracts risks, while obedient journalism is encouraged and wanted and compensated by various methods."

There is a code of journalistic ethics, adopted in May 2000, that says among its provisions that the journalist is obligated to make a clear distinction between information and opinion; use only the information believed to be accurate and based on sources the journalist knows; deliver such information impartially; reject compensation, directly or indirectly, from third

### Journalism meets professional standards of quality.

#### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

parties for the publication of a piece of information or opinion; and respect privacy. In reality, said Aneta Grosu, editor-in-chief of *Ziarul de Garda*, "poverty, self-censorship, and legislative imperfections are the things that mark the professionalism of journalists in Moldova. These circumstances also encourage corruption among journalists." Vlad Bercu, editor-in-chief at Basa-Press, added that "very low motivation in terms of salary and opportunities for promotion discourages journalism."

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As is the case with state-run media, the owners of some private media, including news agencies,

also impose on their staff taboos or conditions that run counter to the principles of free expression and the ethics code. The MSI participants agreed that self-censorship remains to be a general phenomenon in Moldovan journalism, both in public media as well as in private ones.

According to the media monitoring report on the election period January-May 2005 published by the Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections, "the majority of radio and TV stations and periodicals subject to monitoring covered the elections from an angle of clear commitment to the authorities or the opposition. The authorities had on their side not only the majority of public media, except for the Chisinau city ones, but also the majority of the private broadcasters." According to the League of Professional Journalists of Moldova, the Association of Free Journalists, the Committee for the Defense of Human and Professional Dignity, and the Anti-Censorship Committee in Broadcasting, there has been recent intensification of "corruption of journalists by political forces by their involvement into image-making or media 'hit-men' roles, especially during elections."

Teleradio Moldova continues to cover events from the position of the governing party. According to the monitoring conducted by the Association of Electronic Press APEL, TV Moldova 1 prefers "nonconflictual events" and pays little attention to topics of public interest such as unemployment, salaries, and poverty. The majority of private radio and television stations also generally avoid events and issues that might trigger the anger of the Communist government. "Naturally, journalists avoid sensitive or controversial issues that might cost them their jobs," says Angela Sirbu, IJC director.

The average salary in journalism was \$100 to \$150 per month in 2004, and in the provinces it was \$80 to \$100. In private broadcasting, journalists received an average of \$300 per month, compared with \$150 in state broadcasting. According to the League of Professional Journalists of Moldova, the Association of Free Journalists, the Committee for the Defense of Human and Professional Dignity, and the Anti-Censorship Committee in Broadcasting, the salaries of journalists in Moldova "are much under the minimum consumption basket, and at some outlets even under the subsistence minimum." These organizations found that "black labor" had spread dramatically in the media, meaning the absence of social welfare for journalists. Many journalists have to work at several jobs and hunt for temporary positions to earn enough to survive, further challenging their ability to maintain professional standards. "We cannot speak about free press for as long as journalists live in poverty, corruption, and fear," read the declaration issued by these organizations on World Press Freedom Day in May 2005.

The declaration also mentions that investigative journalism has become an extremely risky undertaking, posing a real threat to the lives of journalists. As a consequence, journalists in Moldova continue to feel fear when it comes to a free exercise of their profession. In Transnistria, a conflict region controlled by a separatist administration, journalists can be kidnapped by armed gangs of the regime. Journalists are afraid of prosecution through the judiciary in the form of enormous compensations for moral damages. "Investigative journalism is not encouraged in any way. There are no legal provisions that would offer protection to investigative journalists, who work unwillingly because the risks are very high," said Olivia Pirtac.

The majority of private radio and television stations have their own broadcasting equipment, including transmitters. The public company Teleradio Moldova and a number of private radio stations, some of them Russian, use the services of the state company Radiocomunicatii. Teleradio Moldova, however, has serious technical problems, with more than 80 percent of its equipment outdated and worn, panelists said.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

**Moldova Objective Score: 1.41 / 4.00**

As a whole, the mass media cover key events and main issues facing the Moldovan society. But in order to be fully informed, a Moldovan citizen must watch all the



**Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news.**

**PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:**

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

No major change took place in broadcasting outlets. There are private local radio over-the-air and wire stations in almost every town and district

center of Moldova. Besides Radio Moldova, which covers the entire country, a few stations (Antena C of the city of Chisinau, the private HitFM and Russkoe Radio) cover 70 percent of the territory. Besides the public TV Moldova 1, two other stations have national coverage: the Russian state First Channel and the Romanian public TVR1. Since December 2004, the private NIT TV, loyal to the authorities, has reached almost all of the country.

There is free access to domestic and foreign media, without political, legal, or technical limits, but there are considerable financial barriers. Moldovan citizens can listen to global radio stations such as the BBC, VOA, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Radio France Internationale, which broadcast on FM and UHF. Some local television over-the-air and cable stations rebroadcast BBC World, CNN, TV 5, RAI, etc. The most important channels from Romania, Russia, and Ukraine are also accessible. Western and Romanian newspapers are not being sold on the Moldovan market because of their high prices. However, papers from Russia are sold at accessible prices and nearly dominate the information market, as do Russian radio and television stations.

An average family can afford, at best, to buy just one publication. According to a February 2005 survey by the Institute of Public Policies, about 27.7 percent of the population had not read any newspaper in the past three months, 12.4 percent read newspapers "once a month or more rarely," and 18.9 percent "several times a month." Only 11 percent read papers daily, and 27.7 percent several times per week.

From a legal point of view, there are no restrictions on Internet access. However, only about 17 percent of the Moldovan population has access to the Internet.

"A major problem in villages is the lack of access to sources of information: newspapers, Internet, radio, and television stations," said Aneta Grosu. Unlike in Chisinau, where there is a large number of information sources, in many villages there are no news kiosks, there is no regular access to radio stations, and only one or two television channels are available.

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television stations and read most of the newspapers published in Moldova, the MSI panel concluded.

In 2005, there were 28 Romanian-language newspapers in Moldova, of which two were dailies and two published twice per week; there were 34 Russian-language papers, of which four were dailies, with two published in Moscow and one a twice-weekly edition. The government published two of the papers, one in Romanian and one in Russian, which were "liquidated" and turned into "independent" publications after the parliamentary elections in May.

In Transnistria, there were seven newspapers, one of which comes out four times a week and another one three times. Only one weekly was published in Romanian, using the Cyrillic alphabet. Besides, there are about 40 local and regional publications in Moldova, including in the Gagauz autonomous area, of which about half are funded from local government budgets.

A number of party weeklies stopped appearing after the elections, including *Democratia*, *Opinia*, and *Alianta*, as well as private papers and news agencies including *Delovaia Gazeta* and Interlic. After Chisinau city's agency Info-Prim was "liquidated," the staff then created an independent agency, Info-Prim Neo. Also, in October, *Timpul* started appearing on a daily basis.

The national public Radio Moldova and TV Moldova 1 continue to cover the varying political viewpoints of the country only selectively, thus serving the governing party. The final report on the monitoring conducted by APEL says that although Teleradio Moldova “has improved some qualitative and quantitative indicators,” this has not reached the level required of a public broadcaster. “The authorities continue putting pressure on the media by referring to false loyalty criteria,” said Vasile Botnaru.

“In the mass media of Moldova, the principle of including several viewpoints and different sources of information on an issue is generally not observed,” believes Petru Macovei. Aneta Grosu noted as well that “although the information sources are multiple, they provide limited information. Often, various news agencies repeat the same information.”

There are numerous news agencies, considering the size of the market. But just as the state-run news agency Moldpres provides news favorable to the government, the private agencies such as BASA-Press, Infotag, Info-prim Neo, Flux, Interlic (closed down), Reporter.md, Info-Press and DECA-Press also appear largely loyal to the authorities as reflected in the content they offer. However, Vitalie Cazacu believes that “the majority of the news agencies are still a credible source of information.”

***“The authorities continue putting pressure on the media by referring to false loyalty criteria,” said Vasile Botnaru.***

The majority of the independent radio and television stations rebroadcast foreign

channels, mostly from Russia and some from Romania. The radio stations carry local news bulletins of three to five minutes every hour, based on news-agency stories. In Chisinau only the two public stations, Radio Moldova and Antena C, Radio Free Europe, and BBC have their own news bulletins. Among television stations, besides Moldova 1, Euro TV, and the Chisinau city station, original news bulletins can be seen also on Pro TV, NIT, the Russian Pervyi Kanal v Moldove, and TV 21. There are local radio and television stations outside of Chisinau, in Balti, Comrat, Cahul, Cimislia, Edinet, and others that carry their own local news.

Most radio and television stations rebroadcast or broadcast entertainment programs. Even when they are actively involved in the political struggle, the independent periodicals cover a wider range of issues such as social, economic, and even national minority topics.

Current regulations do not provide for transparency of ownership and funding sources of most media in Moldova, and the governing party uses intermediaries to buy private media, the MSI panelists said. “There is no, and probably there won’t be any time soon, transparency regarding the true owners and funders of the media in Moldova,” said Vlad Bercu.

In the declaration issued on World Press Freedom Day, several Moldovan media organizations pointed to “the appearance of informal media holdings and the stronger concentration of media outlets in the hands of several mafia clans involving politicians, businesspeople, representatives of control bodies and the judiciary, culture figures, clergy, directors, and editors-in-chief of media outlets.”

The publications issued by national minorities (Ukrainians, Gagauz, Bulgarians, and Jewish) face financial difficulties. The media from Transnistria and the Gagauz autonomous region are published mainly in Russian. In broadcasting, an obvious disproportion in favor of Russian is noticeable, while print circulations are distributed more or less evenly between Romanian and Russian. According to the October 2004 census, about 78 percent of the population of Moldova is ethnically Romanian. The unsolved Transnistrian conflict creates problems of communication between the media on both sides of the Nistru river.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**Moldova Objective Score: 1.30 / 4.00**

The MSI experts agreed that profitable media businesses are an exception, with the advertising market developing slowly and investments in the media driven mainly by political rather than business goals. “The market is stiff and does not respond to any signals from the media,” explained Aneta Grosu.

According to Sorina Stefarta, managing editor at *Timpul*, “The biggest challenge for the media in Moldova is management. That is, the absence thereof. More often than not the director of a publication is also its editor-in-chief and business director, while the marketing team is made up of one or two people.” Vlad Bercu, who specializes in business coverage at BASA-Press, added: “Media managers do not use market surveys, have no clear long-term strategy, make no adjustments ... (In addition), Moldova is a small market where advertising is sold according to criteria different from the business ones.”

Some participants disagreed with the view that the main problem is the lack of experienced media managers. They mentioned such major barriers as the lack of investments, with foreign capital very cautious to enter the Moldovan market, and the unwillingness of local businesspeople to invest in advertising. The general poverty of the population is another factor that prevents an increase in circulation and subscription revenues. With advertising and circulation revenues covering only part of their expenses, media outlets are always looking for subsidies, which are likely to come with a price in terms of independence, the panelists said.

The most reliable, albeit insufficient, source of revenue for newspapers are subscriptions. However, according to data from the Department of Statistics and Sociology, media products are among the last in consumer preferences. For example, printed media (including books) represent only 0.43 percent of the monthly expenses of a typical household.

Some newspapers increase their circulations based on free subscriptions funded by unspecified sources, and there is also paid advertising hidden in the content, but many financial sources supporting the media remain unknown. The government provides no subsidies to independent media.

"A good deal of the local press in Moldova cannot overcome their precarious business situation because,

paradoxically, of the permanent aid they receive from various foundations supporting a major part of their expenses (especially newsprint and the printing itself). This aid does not encourage the search for viable

solutions to reach sustainability in a market," Alin Alecu, executive director of the Romanian Audit Bureau of Circulation, wrote in *Opportunities for the Creation of an Audit Bureau of Circulations in Moldova*, prepared for the IJC in 2005. On the other hand, there is "unfair competition on the advertising market from publications enjoying the support of the authorities. They receive advertising from public institutions and even from private companies subject to pressure from the authorities. Thus, a good portion of the advertising budget is distributed according to criteria other than the strictly market ones." Botnaru added: "The access to advertising is dependent not so much on the performance on the market but rather on obscure, oftentimes political criteria."

The relationship between the newspaper and the advertiser comes under threat also because of the poor black-and-white print quality. At the same time, printers cannot operate at full capacity and modernize their businesses because of small circulations.

According to the survey *The Advertising Market in Moldova* published by IJC, more than half of all advertising budgets were used for television ads and sponsorships of television programs in 2004, the last year for which data were available. The print press received about \$3.5 million, working out to an average of \$2,900 per month per publication. However, in practice, 60 to 70 percent of this amount went to three newspapers.

There are no local commercial organizations in Moldova regularly studying the advertising market and providing information to help the media adjust their products to the public's requirements and attract advertisers. There is a deficit of information that

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**Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence.**

**BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:**

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

could be used for designing strategies, marketing plans, and business methods. The advertising market of Moldova is threatened by the television stations broadcast from Russia, Romania, and Ukraine. The foreign companies advertising in these neighboring countries automatically cover the Moldovan market, too. Media managers in Moldova have advocated a law to ban the rebroadcasting of advertising not paid for in Moldova.

***Vlad Bercu, who specializes in business coverage at BASA-Press, added: "Media managers do not use market surveys, have no clear long-term strategy, make no adjustments ... (In addition), Moldova is a small market where advertising is sold according to criteria different from the business ones."***

Audience measurements have been done since late 2003 by local offices of international companies TNS TV Monitoring and AGB Nielsen Media Research. Some isolated audience and market-share surveys were carried

out in 2003 and 2004 by the Moldovan branch of the Romanian polling agency IMAS, commissioned by the IJC, and funded by donor organizations. Although publications are under the legal obligation to show their circulations, the figures often are not real. Discussions have been held on the creation of an audit bureau of circulation.

The state continues to have an important role on the media market in its capacity as owner of the Press House, a complex originally conceived of as a national center for the printed press that hosts half the newspapers and magazines published in Moldova, as well as the press distribution companies Moldpresa and Posta Moldovei, many printing houses in Chisinau and outlying districts, and the fixed radio transmission network managed by the state company Radiocomunicatii. For most newspapers, the rent fees, printing and distribution prices, communication services, and radio signal transmission prices depend on the attitude of the state toward their outlet.

"Few independent media are well-managed businesses, and this affects their editorial independence. The less professional newspaper managers are forced to make compromises with the political authorities to be able to stay on the market," said Petru Macovei.

**OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS**

**Moldova Objective Score: 2.20 / 4.00**

Political affiliation, whether to the authorities or, to a lesser extent, to the opposition remained a serious impediment for the solidarity of the media during 2005, the MSI participants agreed. The work of the Association of the Independent Press (API)—founded in 1997 and including 17 local and national publications printed in Romanian and Russian in Transnistria and Moldova, two news agencies, and the IJC—and the Association of Electronic Press (APEL)—founded in 1999 and representing 22 radio and television stations, production studios, and professionals—is marked by a division of journalists according to political criteria. The expansion of these organizations, especially of APEL, is limited because the authorities believe they support opposition political forces. Many owners avoid association for fear of raising the anger of the Communist authorities. Nonetheless, both associations provide consultancy, legal, and training services.

The participants in the discussion welcomed the start of a project to create a journalists' trade union, which had been discussed for several years. Political forces still manage to divide the journalists, and many of them do not participate, for political reasons, in Union

**Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.**

**SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:**

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

of Journalists of Moldova (UJM) activities aimed at protecting journalists' rights and the freedom of the press. The League of Professional Journalists, founded recently by a number of journalists who separated from UJM, has only sporadic activities.

Among the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) actively involved in the protection of free expression and freedom of the independent press are APEL, IJC, UJM, API, the Committee for Press Freedom, and Acces-info. Their work concentrates on monitoring and improving media legislation and access to information, journalist training, and protection of journalists' professional rights in court and elsewhere. The MSI panelists said the NGOs' work is increasing in effect.

One key shortcoming of the university journalism courses at the State University, Free International University of Moldova, and the European Studies University is the lack of attention in selecting students. Panelists said the reality is that anyone is admitted who can pay tuition, with little regard for sincere interest in the profession. Also, the reorientation of the university courses toward a stronger and more effective practical component is very slow. Most of the participants believe that universities are no longer justified in blaming the lack of funding. "What's really happening is inertia and the unwillingness to make one's life more complicated," said Angela Sirbu. "Professional, ethical journalism is seen as a Don Quixote or even as a Cinderella, while journalism training is the turf of some NGOs because the state has no interest at all in improving the situation," says Vasile Botnaru.

Journalists have the opportunity to update their knowledge and acquire new skills at short-term courses organized by the various NGOs. The topics and the nature of such courses generally reflect the needs and requests of journalists from all the areas of the mass media, including online journalism and photojournalism.

Apart from financial difficulties, there are no problems with news print delivery. There are both state-run and private printing houses with no restrictions on their use.

However, in Chisinau there is just one private printer besides the state-run Universul, and a second private printer would not survive for lack of business because the circulations are too low. Most regional newspapers are printed by privatized printing houses, which used to be part of the printing network of the Soviet-era Communist Party.

The press distribution system is based on two major enterprises: the state-run Posta Moldovei and Moldpresa JSC, which is the heir of the state company Moldsoiuzpechat. This results in a near monopoly situation. New press distribution companies are slow to appear, one of the reasons being the slow pace at which newspaper circulations develop. However, there are some private distributors, including private news kiosks such as Omniapresa in Chisinau. "The state's control over the Universul printing house and distribution companies is one of the biggest barriers in promoting the independent press," said Aneta Grosu.

Access to the Internet is provided by private operators and by the state-run Moldtelecom. However, specialists believe that Moldtelecom's monopoly over the communication network prevents competition that would lower prices of Internet services. There are no legal restrictions for journalists or the public at large in using the Internet.

***"Professional, ethical journalism is seen as a Don Quixote or even as a Cinderella, while journalism training is the turf of some NGOs because the state has no interest at all in improving the situation," said Vasile Botnaru.***

## **Panel Participants**

**Vlad Bercu**, Editor-in-Chief, BASA-Press News Agency

**Vasile Botnaru**, Bureau Chief, Radio Free Europe

**Vitalie Cazacu**, Director, DECA-Press News Agency

**Aneta Grosu**, Editor-in-Chief, *Ziarul de Garda*

**Natalia Girleanu**, Reporter, *Novoie Vremya*

**Petru Macovei**, Interim Executive Director, Association of Independent Press

**Olivia Pirtac**, Lawyer, Independent Journalism Center

**Angela Sirbu**, Director, Independent Journalism Center

**Vasile Spinei**, Director, Acces-Info center

**Sorina Stefarta**, Managing Editor, *Timpul* daily

## **Moderator**

**Nicolae Negru**, Editor-in-Chief, Mass-Media in the Republic of Moldova bulletin, Independent Journalism Center

## **Observer**

**Iuri Datii**, Country Director, IREX/Moldova

# MOLDOVA AT A GLANCE

## GENERAL

■ **Population:** 3,968,071 *October 2004 census, www.statistica.md/recensamint/Date\_prel\_Recens\_din2004.doc*

■ **Capital city:** Chisinau

■ **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Moldovan/Romanian 78.2%, Ukrainian 8.4%, Russian 5.8%, Gagauz 4.4%, Bulgarian 1.9%, other 1.3% (without Transnistria region and the city of Bender) *October 2004 census, www.statistica.md*

■ **Religions (% of population):** Eastern Orthodox (majority), Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, other

■ **Languages (% of population):** Romanian (official), Russian, Ukrainian, Gagauz (Turkish dialect), Bulgarian, other

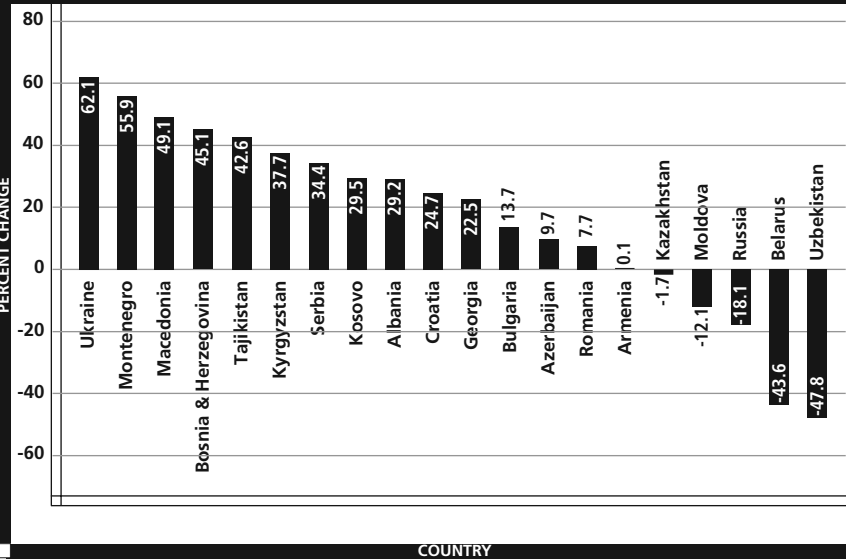
■ **GDP:** \$2.6 billion (without Transnistrian region) (2004) *World Bank*

■ **Literacy rate (% of population):** Adult male 95%, adult female 81.3% (2000 est.) *World Bank*

■ **President or top authority:** President Vladimir Voronin

■ **Next scheduled elections:** Local elections 2007

MSI AVERAGE SCORES—PERCENT CHANGE 2001–2005



## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

■ **Newspaper circulation statistics (total circulation and largest paper):** NA. *Flux* is the largest paper.

■ **Broadcast ratings (top three ranked stations):** Radio Moldova, Russkoe Radio, Hit FM, Antena C *Media Audience Survey conducted in October 2004 by IMAS at the request of the Independent Journalism Center*

■ **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** There are 30 national Romanian-language newspapers (three dailies, one biweekly); the rest are weeklies. (Nine newspapers are not published

temporarily.) There are 27 Russian-language newspapers, including four dailies (two published in Moscow) and one biweekly. There are about 40 local and regional publications. In Transnistria, there are seven newspapers. *www.moldpresa.md*

There are 40 radio stations (one radio station broadcasts by wire) and 167 television stations (51 private, 116 cable). *Broadcasting Coordinating Council, January 2005*

■ **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** \$3.5 million (print) *The Advertising Market of Moldova, IJC, Ch 2005, ISBN 9975-9599-1-1*

■ **Number of Internet users:** 150,000 *World Bank*

■ **News agencies:** Infotag, BASA-Press, Reporter.MD, Moldpres, Infoprim Neo, AP Flux, InfoMarket, DECA-Press

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MOLDOVA

