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MOLDOVA

As the crisis in neighboring Ukraine worsened in 2014, the security of Moldova rapidly became a hot topic. Local authorities in the autonomous region of Găgăuzia carried out a referendum asking residents whether they support integration with a Russia-led customs union or with the European Union (EU). Their actions sparked protests in Chișinău and prompted the central government to call for an investigation, categorizing it as illegal and threatening Moldova's sovereignty. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported that nearly 70 percent of Găgăuzia's 155,000 residents (mostly ethnically Găgăuz, Turkic-speaking Orthodox Christians) turned out to vote. Nearly 98.4 percent of voters were in favor of closer relations with Russia. However, the referendum was not monitored.

In early spring, it became clear that Russia is waging an information war in Moldova and other ex-Soviet countries. Civil society members expressed concern about what they deemed as propaganda being rebroadcast by Russian channels. Public discontent culminated with Member of Parliament (MP) Ana Gutu's request in April for the national broadcasting regulator to take action; the regulator promised to monitor the channels.

On April 28, Moldova became the first country in the Eastern Partnership (the EU-designated group of the former Soviet republics) to obtain visa-free travel to the EU. Some analysts assessed this development as the second most important in Moldova's history, after the declaration of independence. Several months later the EU signed the Association and Free Trade Agreement with Moldova, later ratified by the Moldovan Parliament.

In September, Russia levied customs duties on a variety of Moldovan goods without regard to provisions outlined in bilateral agreements and the statutes of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The duties compounded the effects of Russia's earlier bans on Moldovan imports, resulting in a \$200 million dollar loss to Moldova's economy. However, the Association and Free Trade Agreement simultaneously entered into force, allowing exporters to direct their products to other markets.

The year ended with a controversial parliamentary election campaign, in which the Kremlin-backed Socialist Party won an unexpected 25 percent of the vote. The coalition agreement was finally signed, but only by the Democrats and Liberal Democrats and with tacit support from Communists. The pro-Russian and pro-EU voters are equally unhappy with the current situation. With the exception of a few national outlets, the media's political persuasions were reflected in biased coverage of the election.

MOLDOVA at a glance

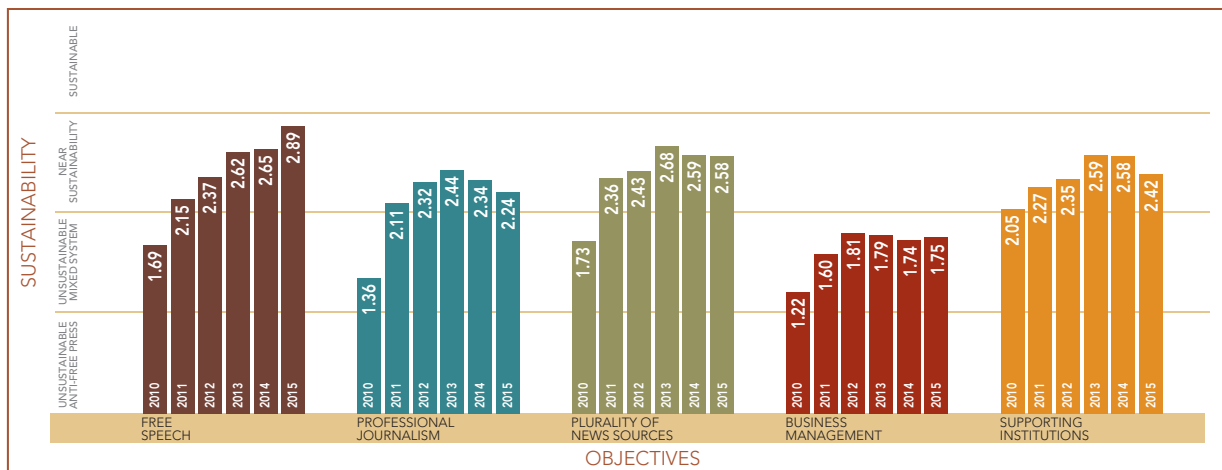
GENERAL

- > Population: 3,583,288 (July 2014 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Capital city: Chişinău
- > Ethnic groups (% of population): Moldovan 75.8%, Ukrainian 8.4%, Russian 5.9%, Gagauz 4.4%, Romanian 2.2%, Bulgarian 1.9%, other 1%, unspecified 0.4% (2004 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Religions (% of population): Orthodox 93.3%, Baptist 1%, other Christian 1.2%, other 0.9%, atheist 0.4%, none 1%, unspecified 2.2% (2004 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Languages: Moldovan 58.8%, Romanian 16.4%, Russian 16%, Ukrainian 3.8%, Gagauz 3.1%, Bulgarian 1.1%, other 0.3%, unspecified 0.4% (2004 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
- > GNI (2013-Atlas): \$8.780 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2014)
- > GNI per capita (2013-PPP): \$5,180 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2014)
- > Literacy rate: 99%; male 99.5%, female 98.5% (2011 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
- > President or top authority: President Nicolae Timofti (since March 23, 2012)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations, Internet news portals: Print: 166 newspapers, 232 magazines (National Bureau of Statistics, 2013); Radio Stations: 56 (Broadcasting Council, 2014); Television Stations: 69 (Broadcasting Council, 2014); Internet News Portals: top three: protv.md, noi.md, unimedia.md (Gemius, 2015).
- > Newspaper circulation statistics: *Komsomolskaia Pravda* (34,195), *Argumenti I Facti* (14,449), *Makler* (13,047), *Antenna* (10,900), *Unghiul* (10,755), *Timpul de dimineata* (7,136), *Ekonomiceskoe Obzrenie* (4,063), *Panorama* (4,062) (BATI, 2014)
- > Broadcast ratings: Competing surveys produce dissimilar results. According to IPP (2014): Top three television: Prime TV (private), Moldova 1 (public), Jurnal TV (private); ProTV has highest rated newscast. Top three radio: Radio Noroc (private), Radio Moldova (public), Russkoe Radio (private). According to AGB Moldova (2013): Top three television: Prime TV, Moldova 1 and TV7; Top three radio: Hit FM, Russkoe Radio, and Radio Noroc
- > News agencies: Info-Prim Neo, Moldpres (state-owned), Infotag, Info-Market, Monitor Media, Basa-press, Deca-press, Novosti-Moldova
- > Annual advertising revenue in media sector: Television: €9 million; Radio: €0.6 million; Internet: €1.7 million; Print: €2 million (AAPM, 2014 est.)
- > Internet usage: 1,748 million (Gemius, 2014)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MOLDOVA



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2015: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



CHANGE SINCE 2014

▲ (increase greater than .10) □ (little or no change) ▼ (decrease greater than .10)

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.

Scores for all years may be found online at http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscorers.xls

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Moldova Objective Score: 2.89

Legal norms—and to a lesser extent, social norms—protecting and promoting freedom of expression in Moldova and have improved continually, with increasing public trust in the legal framework. This progress resulted in an unprecedented score for Moldova of 2.89 for this MSI objective, compared with 2.65 last year. Although the actual framework has changed little since 2013, cases of libel and crimes committed against journalists have decreased, according to the panelists.

According to Olivia Pîrțac, a freelance media expert in Chișinău, the law on freedom of expression, the broadcasting code, the election code, the criminal code, the law on access to information, and the legal amendments guaranteeing editorial freedom for public media adequately ensure the right to exercise free speech. All of these regulations are in line with international standards. However, citizens, institutions, political party members, and religious groups continue to attempt to exert influence over the media, through either financial or direct editorial control. Vitalie Dogaru, host and talk show producer with Publika TV, said, “Although parliament has adopted a law guaranteeing editorial freedom to mass media outlets,” party leaders and public persons still interfere with and

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing or registration of media protects a public interest and is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > The law protects the editorial independence of state of public media.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily available; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media, journalists, and citizens.
- > Media outlets’ access to and use of local and international news and news sources is not restricted by law.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

maintain control of media institutions. Ion Bunduchi, executive director of the Association of Electronic Media, added, “Legal norms protect and promote freedom of speech, but social norms do not—possibly because we lack the necessary traditions.”

In the breakaway region of Transnistria, restrictions on press freedom increased during the past year. In April, its unrecognized authorities tried unsuccessfully to pass a new press law requiring online media to register. According to local civil society representatives, the law would have put greater restrictions on the right to receive and distribute information. Draft laws on information security and on countering extremism have been proposed but not yet adopted. Even with the multitude of media laws, media members are still having a hard time working in the region. “Journalists, bloggers, and photographers do not feel secure in Transnistria,” explained Luiza Dorosenco, director of Media Center in Tiraspol. “[It is] not clear who or where one can take a picture [and under] which regulatory act this is stipulated,” she said.

As in past years, panelists noted that improvements in licensing have not been motivated by regulators, but by parties that acquire licenses. “The process of licensing is not fair and competitive in my experience,” said Andrei Bargan, manager of Cimișlia-based Radio Media and Media TV. “Two years ago, we submitted a request to extend the coverage of Radio Media in the southern region. Out of several frequencies available for Cahul, Comrat, and Leova, we received only the medium-wave frequency for Leova, which had been unsolicited until then. The frequencies for Cahul and Comrat in the FM band were given to the music radio station Maestro FM, which was not at all in line with the concerns of the people living in the region but aired good music.” Other panel members noted that the decision had been as good as made in favor of Maestro FM, and that it was too late to change that. Maestro FM is a music-only station, with just a few 5-minute general newscasts that mostly reprise Publika TV and international news. It offers no regional news.

The Broadcast Coordinating Council (BCC) licensing activities have yet to win the trust of media professionals and of society at large. But its regulatory mission was put to the test on several occasions throughout 2014. In the first months of the year, civil society pressured the regulator to protect public opinion against propaganda originating in Russia, and finally prompted it to announce that it would monitor the content of the channels in question. In July, after a lengthy public debate and one week of monitoring, BCC penalized several television stations for not abiding by the broadcasting code. According to mediafreedomwatch.org, BCC suspended Russia24 for 6 months and penalized

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two more stations that rebroadcasted content of Russian channels (RTR and Ren TV). These stations were given maximum fines of MDL 5400 (\$344), while the stations Prime (rebroadcasting Pervyi Kanal) and TV7 (rebroadcasting NTV) were issued public warnings.¹

Later, during the November parliamentary elections, BCC demonstrated its lack of authority as it stopped short of suspending the right to air advertisements for those broadcasters that overstepped the broadcasting code—specifically the provisions regarding fair and balanced coverage of candidates. It also applied very minor sanctions to channels belonging to or affiliated with top politicians. In light of the importance of protecting the country’s information space, and the decisiveness of this year’s parliamentary elections, civil society regarded BCC’s reactions as belated, overly cautious, and failing to enforce its role of guarantor of the public interest. In the panelists’ view, these events were additional signs that BCC is still politically influenced.

Entry into the media market is not restricted, and Moldova has no legal requirements that would create unequal conditions for media start-ups. However, Bunduchi expressed the belief that some practices of “oligarchical media” have a negative influence on new participants in the media sphere. Rodica Mahu, chief editor of *Jurnal de Chişinău*, agreed: “Print media are treated similarly to any other limited liability company. We are subject to the same tax policy, which brings us to our knees very quickly.” For these media outlets, access to the advertising market is also tedious, Mahu added. She said that her “newspaper has very little advertising, and it doesn’t provide sustainable income.” Veaceslav Perunov, journalist and manager of *SP* newspaper

¹ See the BCC’s decision at <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=353796> It should be noted that Prime is part of the media group controlled by media tycoon and Vice Chairman of the Democratic Party Vlad Plahotniuc while TV7 belongs to Chiril Lucinschi, prominent member of the Liberal Democratic Party.

in the northern town of Bălţi, is a longtime advocate of tax incentives for print media. In that panelist’s opinion, an income tax exemption is necessary to support the survival of local, small, independent newspapers.

Assaults against media professionals were rare in the past year, with only a few cases reported. Threats against journalists, especially from politicians, were more common. Some panelists said that the drop in assaults was due to journalists “behaving too well” and thus avoiding persecution. In most of the assault cases, investigative journalists and active citizen reporters were targeted. In June, Vadim Ungureanu, an intern at the information portal Deschide.md, was detained for 72 hours in what the portal described as “a well-thought-out and well-executed act of revenge” by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) for publishing information concerning the ministry. In response, MIA issued a press release announcing that it had apprehended “...a 24-year-old man from Chişinău who blackmailed officials to obtain compromising information about Moldovan celebrities,” and that his detention was “...the completion of an operation that included documentation of the blackmailing and the delivery of false, compromising material that was subsequently published by the suspect in a media outlet.”

Also in June, citizen journalist Oleg Brega of the online television channel Curaj.tv, reported that he was attacked by several individuals that sprayed him in the eyes and kicked him. He also was insulted and physically assaulted by the driver of an MP. The incidents happened within the span of two days, and the second incident involved the driver of Maria Postoico, the head of the Communist Parliamentary faction, who was unhappy with the journalist’s report on the use of her official car for personal needs.

In August, the investigative team of RISE Moldova reported threats from individuals after a feature describing “the Russian laundromat” money-laundering schemes in Eastern Europe. In September, the investigative weekly *Ziarul de Garda* reported threats and pressure following the publication of an article discussing the properties and foreign trips of the Moldovan Metropolitan (highest-ranking cleric in the Moldovan Christian Orthodox Church). However, law-enforcement bodies did not investigate these claims.

Moldovan law formally guarantees the editorial independence of public media, but independence in practice is not ensured. For example, the appointment of supervisory board (SB) members for public broadcaster Teleradio-Moldova (TRM) has been underpinned by

political interests, as discussed in last year's MSI. Since December 2013, TRM has been operating without its highest administrative authority because the SB had only three active members out of nine positions. The Parliamentary Committee on Culture, Education, Research, Youth, Sport, and Media organized several meetings in an effort to appoint the six remaining members, reviewing a list of 12 candidates selected by BCC. The committee failed each time. In April, the head of the committee declared that the MPs needed more time to consider the candidates' resumes, but did not return to this matter until the end of the legislature's mandate. Later, committee member Valeriu Saharneanu admitted that coalition parties could not reach an agreement concerning the formula for assigning the candidates. Bunduchi commented, "Not only is the supervisory board appointed using political criteria—which is contrary to the law—but the financing mechanism also allows for external interference."

In the Găgăuz autonomous region, local legislators attempted to institute greater control over the SB of the local public broadcaster Teleradio-Găgăuzia (TRG). In October, the People's Assembly of Găgăuzia debated a draft law containing proposals inconsistent with national legislation—specifically the broadcasting code. These proposals were aimed at modifying the legal procedure of issuing broadcasting licenses, usage licenses, and rebroadcasting permits. Responsibility would be transferred over to the Executive Committee of Găgăuzia and the BCC's supervisory role over local broadcasters would be amended, according to a statement released by NGOs on media-azi.md.² Politicians, instead of the regulator, would be left to decide who airs what, panelists explained.

Since its decriminalization in 2004, libel has not been a challenge for journalists or media outlets. The civil law procedures for filing a lawsuit have also been tightened. The preliminary procedure, which is now compulsory, is followed by a very short period during which the plaintiff can pursue the case. In addition, a tax must be paid amounting to 3 percent of the damages requested. These requirements are enough for many, but not all plaintiffs withdraw their lawsuits. In spite of the clear legal provisions on libel and public dignity, some citizens still resort to courts to defend their honor, even if not always armed with cogent arguments. "Many (plaintiffs) count on the corruptibility of the judiciary, while others simply wish to settle accounts with certain journalists and media. Whatever the result, plaintiffs count on intimidating journalists, and getting the outlet involved in lawsuits that go on for years and come

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One of the latest cases is that of *Ziarul de Garda*, a newspaper sued by newly elected Socialist MP Andrei Neguta for publishing information on his alleged Romanian citizenship. The article was later reprised by *EvenimentulZilei* in a satirical piece. According to Alina Radu, manager of *Ziarul de Garda*, apparently *EvenimentulZilei* was not taken to court by the Socialist MP; her newspaper was the only one sued. Panelists noted that the legal burden of proof is shared equally by the plaintiff and the defendant.

Regarding access to information, increasingly bureaucratic processes are hampering the openness pledged by central authorities since the 2009 change in government, as information is not released completely or in a timely fashion. Mahu offered some examples, stating, "As far as *Jurnal de Chişinău* is concerned, the Prosecutor General's office answers our requests in two months; the Migration Bureau takes more than one month. The most reticent are the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, the Ministry of Defense, and the Information and Security Service, while the Ministry of Health informed us that heads of departments can speak to the press only with the consent of the minister or vice-minister."

As in past years, community journalists struggled to obtain information of public interest from local authorities. "We still have to sue [local authorities] in order to obtain information; nothing has changed. Most of the time, they say the Law on Access to Information does not apply to us," Perunov noted. Alina Țurcanu, former chief editor of Chişinău-based *Adevarul* and current television editor at the Moldova desk of Radio Free Europe, agreed. "Many press services believe that their duty is not to facilitate access to information for public interest but rather to protect the institutions they represent and release only positive information," she said. Civil servants continue to cite "state

² See the statement issued subsequently by media NGOs <http://media-azi.md/en/stiri/media-ngos-asking-people%E2%80%99s-assembly-Găgăuzia-comply-legislation-republic-moldova>

secrets,” “trade secrets,” and “investigative secrets,” often without justification, she added. “When the press requests sensitive information, public authorities ask for written requests and hold off, only to release a vague, incomplete answer that you cannot use for your article.”

Most of the time, authorities in the Transnistrian region deny requests for information submitted by NGOs and the few media outlets that are not owned by *de facto* authorities. Transnistrian authorities do not bother explaining their decisions, and usually no one dares to ask questions. As in any authoritarian regime, dissent and independent voices are stifled, and access to information restricted.

As in previous years, the last two indicators scored best. Access to news, including foreign news, is unimpeded and unrestricted by law. Access to the profession also continues to be free and unrestricted. All panelists agreed that there are no barriers to becoming a journalist in Moldova, but noted the “lack of professionalism among young reporters.”

In the Transnistrian region, journalists outside of the region have to obtain accreditation—a tiresome process from both the legal and financial standpoints. Foreign media must register as legal entities with the local authorities.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Moldova Objective Score: 2.24

As the Yanukovich regime crumbled in Ukraine this past year, Russian propaganda spread not only in Ukraine, but in other countries within the Eastern Partnership, according to the panelists. Most of these media outlets are available also in Moldova, as all federal Russian channels are rebroadcast in the country, often with less than 30 percent local content.

Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine continued to be topics of increased public interest. Coverage was frequently unbalanced and poorly sourced, if not unscrupulous, according to the panelists. (See Objective 3, Media Pluralism, for more details.) Professionalism was especially strained in the Moldovan press coverage of political party domestic events and activities. Monitoring reports by media NGOs found that during the elections, only one television station, the privately owned Romanian-language ProTV Chişinău, maintained balanced reporting. The other four private channels with national coverage (Prime, Canal 2, Canal 3, and Publika) reported favorably toward the Democratic Party and its vice chair, media tycoon Vladimir Plahotniuc. Other, more private channels with local coverage were moderately biased, with TV7 and N4 favoring the Liberal Democratic Party; Accent

TV favoring the Socialist Party; and Jurnal TV slanted against the Democratic Party.³

The panelists expressed unanimously their dissatisfaction with journalism quality. However, their scores varied for the first indicator on objective reporting and for the second indicator on ethical standards, with greater optimism by the media professionals who produce their own content. Civil society representatives on the panel, though, harshly criticized the quality of content. Blogger Vlada Ciobanu asserted that “Moldovan journalism is in a continuous decline” and “sourcing is sacrificed for speed or for a hidden agenda.” Other panelists agreed, and Țurcanu added, “Superficiality is another problem. The press, especially online, is full of garbage (and) information that is poorly researched, with lots of mistakes.”

Petru Macovei, executive director of the Association of Independent Press (API), said that journalism quality deteriorated in 2014, in new media as well as in the traditional press. From February to July 2014 API undertook media monitoring and used the results in a public campaign against information manipulation, which it demonstrated in its findings.⁴ “To some extent, this can be explained by the dynamics of the electoral campaign, when media that is covertly controlled by politicians preferred to make ethical compromises to promote their candidates or to discredit their opponents,” he said. “Thus, biased reporting became ever stronger, while some broadcasters with national

³ The monitoring reports can be found at <http://api.md/page/en-2014-261>

⁴ The monitoring reports are available online at http://api.md/upload/files/Report_nr_1_monitoring_tendencies_of_manipulation_.pdf and http://api.md/upload/files/Raport_de_monitorizare_nr_2_.pdf

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 and retain qualified personnel within the media profession.
- > 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 exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

coverage resorted to techniques approaching manipulation, such as covering only those events that favored certain politicians and disadvantaged their opponents.”

On the other hand, Dogaru stressed that even reports that seem well sourced could be unethical. “The balance of sources is only an illusion,” he said, “because parties are not equal in terms of relevance, message, and representation.” He specified that it is partly the journalist’s fault for succumbing to pressure from the owner, while the rest of the blame falls on sources that treat media prejudicially, either ignoring journalists or giving superficial answers which lead to unfair, unbalanced media content.

Ethical standards are disregarded most often in relation to protection of under-aged persons or sensitivity toward people with special needs. Often, journalists covering topics related to crimes also ignore the presumption of innocence, according to Bunduchi. Bargan and Mahu agreed, adding that plagiarism is practiced on a large scale and without penalty.

The Moldovan Press Council is the national self-regulatory institution whose mission is to rehabilitate ethical journalism. During 2014, the council reported an increase in plagiarism, especially in online media. “Even though some Web resources admit that this behavior is shameful and correct their mistakes immediately after being notified by the regulator, they still can’t give up this unethical practice,” stated council secretary Macovei.

One of the causes of unethical media reporting is the close connection with self-censorship, which is sector-wide but most visible in those outlets controlled by politicians and business entities or people affiliated with either. The panelists saw this practice as affecting the quality of journalism on a large scale and awarded this indicator the lowest score in this objective. The panelists agreed that the large-scale self-censorship is a direct result of a media market that has bred conditions for owners to cultivate interests other than ensuring the success of their company. The failure to self-censor does not imply any risks to the lives and security of journalists. However, the relatively small market is heavily impacted by a few influential participants, so most professionals fear losing their jobs. “Self-censorship comes from this vital necessity, but is also an effect of the more-or-less direct pressure from editors and managers of media projects—who in turn self-censor when giving feedback to journalists,” Dogaru stated.

Panelists said that media outlets cover important events, and there are no banned topics. However, media expert Bunduchi of the Association of Electronic Media countered

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and said that the media frequently pursue political agendas instead of the public’s interest and do not follow up on the events they cover.

During the past year, the regional political situation revealed a number of weaknesses in the Moldovan media sphere, one of which is the security of the information space. “Since the Information and Security Service is closed for media, what freedom do we have to cover issues of national security, given this very complicated geopolitical context?” Mahu queried. In the opinion of Dumitru Ciorici, former editorial manager at Unimedia news portal, media outlets cover social topics widely, while political topics can be covered selectively, depending on whether or not the owner influences editorial policy.

Pay levels have improved to some extent in the past year, yet not consistently. At the local level, wages are not enough to retain journalists and media managers. Bargan complained that in “the past five years, the small wages offered by local broadcasters have caused five journalists from Cimișlia to leave for other TV and radio stations in the capital.” The situation is even more acute in the Găgăuz and Transnistrian regions. According to Veaceslav Parfionov and Dorosenco, journalists often have to take several jobs and/or work overtime to supplement their salaries. However, Ciorici added that Internet journalists are usually able to rely on their wages for a living, with salaries “just slightly higher than the monthly average (at) MDL 4300 (\$260) for a full-time job.” He added, “This is more than people in other fields earn, but it is small compared with the monthly income needed for a decent life.” Media professionals that decide to leave journalism altogether usually migrate to communication jobs or assist with international projects, where, some panelists said, “the wages and the emotional comfort are greater.”

While locally produced entertainment does not eclipse news and information programming, they are no match for foreign entertainment programs. The Moldovan television market is dominated by the content aired on foreign stations, which local channels re-broadcast. Thus, ProTV Chișinău has less than 30 percent local content, with

the rest of airtime dedicated to news, shows, and movies rebroadcast from Bucharest-based ProTV. The same pattern applies to Prime (rebroadcasting Pervyi Kanal from Russia), TV7 (rebroadcasting Russian NTV), and so forth. The public finds the rebroadcast content more appealing than the local content, which usually is little more than news. The arrival of two information-only channels in 2010 and the subsequent increase in the number of newscasts by other broadcasters have tested the public's interest for news. Although the industry is still capable of supporting the existing interest, the panelists said that they expect the balance to shift in favor of entertainment programming once media businesses grow.

The panelists agreed that facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are in line with regional standards in Eastern Europe. Although the regional public broadcaster TRM managed to re-equip its news and debate studio with the help of foreign donors, one panelist noted that the broadcaster still trails behind other outlets and its equipment is insufficient. Many media professionals find it difficult to adapt to emerging technologies, panelists said. The regional public broadcaster TRG still lags behind other networks, as its equipment is insufficient and "could use an update," according to the panelists.

Online media outlets are on the rise and provide a diversity of niche content, but the content remains questionable at times, panelists said. In February, the founders of the popular news portal Unimedia launched the economic news website Agora.md, which benefited from significant promotion on Unimedia. In March, the Realitatea.md group was launched, consisting of six websites with various content from general news and the economy to gossip. The group is managed by Dumitru Tira, former manager of Publika TV. Later in 2014, the economic news portal Moldstreet.md was launched with support from the European Endowment for Democracy. The portal has its own code of ethics and is managed by media law expert and former BCC member Eugeniu Ribca. As public healthcare undergoes a number of reforms, the dedicated portal E-sanatate.md was created with donor support to provide the public with information and to support these reforms.

Investigative journalism is still "practiced with prudence," as one panelist put it. In print media, the field is covered admirably by the Journalistic Investigations Center and *Ziarul de Garda*. The publication produced a series of video investigations in partnership with TV Moldova 1, which provided airtime. Perhaps the most notable launch of the year, welcomed by both the media community and civil society, was RISE Moldova, a local branch of the international investigative network RISE. However, the launch of investigative sites is rare and requires donor

support in order to remain afloat. Ciorici, who now manages Agora.md, outlined the costs related to creating a specialized media outlet. "Quality reporting incurs high expenses due to the additional time needed for producing content, [which can] translate into a deficit" for a media institution, he said. For these reasons, niche reporting is not a viable option for local media in Moldova.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Moldova Objective Score: 2.58

Over the past year new media outlets supplemented existing offerings and partially responded to the public's request for information. In addition to the online outlets mentioned above, new players in the television market enriched the industry. Moldova Sport, Moldova Business Channel, and Realitatea TV launched in early summer, and the local division of the public Romanian broadcaster TVR opened officially in November. Establishing the TVR local affiliate became possible through an intergovernmental agreement between Moldova and Romania. It stipulates that national public television stations are given free and unrestricted broadcasting in each other's air space.

Despite a multitude of information sources—public and private, broadcast, and online—their quality is lacking and they do not always ensure media pluralism. For example, some outlets providing a credible source of information disappeared in 2014, changed ownership, and/or lost their

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE, OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet, mobile) exist and offer multiple viewpoints.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted by law, economics, or other means.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for media outlets.
- > Private media produce their own news.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the 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
- > The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues.

status. Russian language Kommersant.md, known for its objective and well-sourced reporting, was closed down in the summer for financial reasons officially, but unofficially because the Russian editorial group Kommersant withdrew permission to use the name. As a result, the team led by Vladimir Soloviov started a new Russian-language portal, Newsmaker.md. The newspaper *Adevarul Moldova*, famous for its investigative reporting, also filed for bankruptcy in the spring and ceased its print edition in July. On September 1, Chief Editor Țurcanu of *Adevarul Moldova* resigned, followed by the entire editorial team. (See Objective 4, Business Management, for more details.) In the aftermath, most journalists joined the Moldovan desk of Radio Free Europe. In the fall, channels Euro TV and Alt TV were bought by Klassika Media. According to media reports, Klassika Media is controlled by business owner Ilan Shor, a newcomer to the media market with reported ties to Liberal Democratic leader Vlad Filat. Towards the end of the year, the radio station Vocea Basarabiei announced the launch of a television station with the same name, amidst accusations of a forceful takeover with a view to sell it to Vlad Filat. This development raised questions over the station's editorial independence.

Overall, media experts agree that media plurality is threatened by growing divisions along language and foreign policy preferences—pro-Romanian media/pro-European and pro-Russian media/anti-European. Pro-Russian outlets outnumber pro-Romanian outlets both in the capital city and outside. The dominant position of Russian-language media was particularly visible, as Russian media became actively involved in the coverage of the Ukrainian conflict. “We are engulfed by pro-Kremlin rhetoric,” Mahu said, as Moldovan cable offers no “European TV stations...apart from TV5.” She also noted that British, French, German, and Romanian newspapers are not sold at newsstands. Mahu's opinion echoed those of Moldovan media experts and civil society representatives, who have lamented the increase in propaganda being broadcast by Russian media outlets and have repeatedly requested the BCC to protect the country's information space, panelists reported.

National and international media can be accessed without restriction. However, panelists identified a number of factors that indirectly might hinder people's access to information, including standard of living, way of thinking, and illiteracy. “There is a net difference between urban and rural communities in the way one can access media,” Mahu explained. “In rural areas, certain TV and radio stations are the most accessible sources.” She added that Romanian-language print media are even less accessible in light of the fact that nearly 30 percent of the population cannot read the Latin alphabet. Parfionov also listed

“We are engulfed by pro-Kremlin rhetoric,” Mahu said, as Moldovan cable offers no “European TV stations...apart from TV5.”

illiteracy as one of the main impediments to access to information in the Găgăuz region. “Ultimately,” Ciobanu added, “what people lack is the culture of finding relevant and professional media sources.”

Contrary to popular belief, panelists said, Internet connection fees are not the greatest impediment to access to information in online media. According to a 2013 survey carried out by CBS-AXA on behalf of the electronic governance portal Egov.md, 64 percent of households had computers, with a 62 percent Internet penetration rate—an 8 percent increase since 2012. Only 13 percent of respondents that did not have an Internet connection made reference to the price of subscription fees, although 60 percent said they could not afford a computer. In the Transnistrian region, access to mass media is limited to regional outlets. Neither print nor broadcast media from the west bank of the Nistru River are distributed there, for political reasons.

A report by Deutsche Welle Akademie found that the content of public broadcaster TRM has become much more balanced and independent, with “new programs and talk shows creating a public sphere open to debate.”⁵ However, TRM still neglects its function as a leader in the public broadcasting field by not setting the topical agenda. The panelists noted that TRM lacks objectivity and avoids criticism about the basic quality of its programs, despite the breadth of public interest issues it covers, including healthcare, culture, education, and minority and consumer rights. Ciobanu assessed the public image of TRM as “having no clear partisanship, but favoring from time to time one party over others, especially during the parliamentary elections.” According to a former Moldova 1 reporter, who wished to remain anonymous, journalists prefer to showcase and dedicate more airtime to certain politicians, rather than criticize their opponents, or they simply cover them in a positive light. However, the source also indicated that producers tend to structure newscasts to favor the Democratic Party, as well as people and organizations affiliated with the party, through airtime and relevance.

⁵ Edition DW Akademie, No. 2/2014, “In the Service of the Public. Functions and Transformation of Media in Developing Countries”, available at <http://www.dw.de/popups/pdf/40272159/edition-dw-akademie-in-the-service-of-the-public-functions-and-transformation-of-media-in-developing-countries-pdf>

Media NGOs that monitored the coverage of the 2014 campaign reported that public station Radio Moldova aired the highest number of unbiased news items, while TV Moldova 1 newscasts were “largely balanced, with a slight bias in favor of Prime Minister Iurie Leanca,” as stated by media-azi.md.

Moldova has a number of privately owned press agencies and one state-owned agency that gather and distribute news to media outlets, various institutions and organizations, and the public at large. Press agencies offer their services mostly in text format, although IPN also offers live streaming and video records of press conferences and Infotag provides analytical pieces. Due to high subscription fees, local press agencies as a rule do not rely on international agency news feeds. The exception is Romanian agencies, which Moldovan agencies can access for free to a large extent. Panelists viewed the state-owned agency Moldpress as the most uncompetitive and unprofessional news agency, as it trails private agencies in terms of speed, objectivity, and sources.

Private broadcasters produce their own news stories, with a few notable exceptions. Bunduchi explained, “Radio stations usually avoid producing their own news because of a lack of human and financial resources.” Instead, these broadcasters use the services of news agencies and/or digest news from web portals. Blogger Ciobanu stated that a number of information portals are in fact “borrowing” news from fellow websites. Increasingly, the best-quality investigative reports are simply reposted on news websites. “For now, bloggers are only a source of opinions, not news,” except when bloggers are “deliberately publishing leaks,” she added.

Media ownership transparency was the lowest-scoring indicator in the entire MSI, as the owners of the most important media institutions remain unknown to the public. Since the pro-European political coalition came to power in 2009, media ownership transparency and concentration have become major problems and have gradually worsened. Ludmila Andronic disparaged the concentration of media ownership in a few conglomerates and the lack of objectivity in certain outlets, which is “so obvious that it allows consumers to guess the ownership of the outlet.”

Government authorities pledged to adopt the draft law on ownership transparency proposed by the Independent Journalism Center in 2013; however, there has been little progress to date. On July 21, 2014, the draft law was adopted on the first reading, and the lawmakers promised to pass it on the second reading before the start of summer. They failed to do so because the parliament held no further meetings until the elections.

During a monitoring visit to Moldova in September, co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Lise Christoffersen and Piotr Wach expressed their concerns at the number of mass media outlets in the hands of a few owners, including some politicians. The officials expressed their hope that the situation would improve once the transition to digital broadcasting is carried out. The panelists were less confident, though. Bunduchi noted that the digital switchover presents a possibility for improvement but also for decline, depending on how change is implemented.

The broad range of media outlets ensures an adequate representation of Moldovan minority interests. The Russian minority in particular has access to a multitude of outlets. Recently, several institutions that had historically targeted the majority Romanian-speaking population have established Russian-language versions of their websites. The outlets include the newspapers *Timpul* and *Evenimentul Zilei*, the Moldovan desk of Radio Free Europe, and *Ziarul de Garda* in January 2015. Coverage of sensitive topics (for example, European integration and the Ukrainian conflict) differs in minority language media, as they often take a more pro-Russian view. “The ‘parallel lives’ of Romanian and Russian language press continue,” Mahu observed. “Their ideas and information are, for the most part, antagonistic.”

In the Găgăuz region, the public has access to newspapers, radio, and television programming in the Găgăuzi language, while national public broadcaster TRM provides a variety of news and programs in minority languages (Russian, Ukrainian, Găgăuzi, Bulgarian, and Roma).

Dorosenco commented on the diversity of social interests in Transnistria. She assessed the situation as far from generally accepted standards, explaining that “a number of topics, such as European integration, are cast in a negative light,” and that “the activities of NGOs are almost always ignored, just like the contribution of international organizations to the development of our civil society or economy.” The deficiency is true of both the state-owned television and the private channel TSV (TCB).

Minority-language print media are nearly nonexistent. The Ukrainian language paper *Gomin (Ujvîy)* and Moldovan language paper *Adevarul Nistrean (Fltdphek Ybcnhzy)* have very few subscribers and insignificant circulations limited to Transnistria.

Local, national, and international news are clearly covered disproportionately in Moldova. The events from other regions of the country are underrepresented. Only two regional networks (Aici TV, composed of 4 local stations covering 10 localities; and Canal Regional, with 12 to 14 local television stations) offer regional coverage. Private

broadcasters with national coverage rarely provide news about local and regional events. Moreover, TRM laid off most of its regional staff in its restructuring process. Local journalists Perunov and Bargan added that even when covering local events, the national press take a sensationalist approach to reporting, without conducting adequate research or presenting balanced sources.

The panelists debated the value and use of social media for accessing information. For example, in 2014, media outlets used information obtained from social media in their coverage of prominent cases of judicial corruption, according to some panel members. The most notable case involved Judge Elena Neaga, who was fired after Jurnal TV investigated her fortune by viewing pictures posted on her Odnoklassniki profile. Yet other panelists noted that in certain cases, mass media risk turning into mere vehicles for distributing rumors or, as one said, “leaks intended to intoxicate the information environment.”

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Moldova Objective Score: 1.75

As in past years, this objective received the lowest score from the panelists, as the media market has not evolved. The panelists agreed that the media sector in Moldova faces a number of challenges that hinder progress, including market size, unfavorable economic conditions, concentration of advertising, political influence, and deficient management.

MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > 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.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.

“There is a long-standing state of apathy, which presumes that every media institution must implicitly have a sponsor, either from business or from politicians,” Ciobanu pointed out.

The panelists noted the case of *Adevarul Moldova*, a newspaper published by the Adevarul Media company, which became insolvent in 2014 after incurring a large debt. Due to a contractual issue, the Bucharest-based holding Adevarul could not take action to resolve the issue with its subsidiary, but promised to secure a new investor. Chief editor Țurcanu recalled that the “the team in Chișinău was not given a clear official answer, and the solutions proposed [to address the insolvency of Adevarul] were not transparent.” Meanwhile, the editorial team had not received its wages for several months; and in August, to halt the further accumulation of debt, the administrator decided to temporarily suspend the outlet’s print edition.

At the same time, a pro-communist website in Chișinău published an article alleging that *Adevarul Moldova* was purchased by media tycoon and politician Vladimir Plahotniuc. “The members of the editorial team did not have proof to confirm this information, but they did not want their names associated with the name of this politician,” added Țurcanu.

In November, with a new chief editor, the outlet was re-registered and its print edition re-launched, without paying outstanding wages due to its former employees. The identity of the new owner and the purpose of the newspaper’s re-launch are still unclear.

Another major transaction took place in the last days of 2014. On December 30, the news portal Unimedia announced that it was purchased by the publisher Miraza, which first published the local- turned-regional newspaper *Expresul* for seven years. Bacalu, director of *Expresul*, said that the acquisition of Unimedia represented a step forward. While the details of the transaction are not yet clear and the amount of the deal was not disclosed, founders said that both outlets were intended to function as efficient enterprises from the beginning. “Our media group was conceived and operates as a business; it has always been self-sustaining,” Ciorici explained. “The rationale for the Unimedia deal was to invest money to develop Agora.md.”

As for other online sources of information, Ciorici said, most are not conceived as businesses and are not managed accordingly. Dogaru added that in the broadcasting industry,

production costs are very high and often cannot be covered by the revenue generated.

For income, media institutions rely either on advertising or direct funding from owners, and some depend on both. “There is a long-standing state of apathy, which presumes that every media institution must implicitly have a sponsor, either from business or from politicians,” Ciobanu pointed out.

This environment has led to a push for development of a media market in which some outlets, especially newcomers, explore alternative funding models, panelists said. They gave the example of the economic portal *Mold-street.md*, which has instituted a paid-content model. The website allows registered users free access to five articles per week, while subscribers have unlimited access for a monthly fee of MDL 11 (\$0.66) or an annual fee of MDL 40 (\$2.40). Local residents can pay in cash or electronically by SMS. So far, *Mold-street.md* has not disclosed information regarding the sustainability of this business model. The portal also relies on traditional advertising along with revenue from its communication and public relations services, which are offered on its second website, *Press-release.md*.

At the local level, print media continue to publish more classifieds than traditional advertisements. Panelists noted that the revenue from subscription fees is symbolic, and advertising and direct funding by owners continue to be the primary source for sustainability and means by which the press are controlled.

Broadcasters continue to rely heavily on advertising revenue. Their managers admit having a hard time garnering support given the state of the advertising market, which remains monopolized by Casa Media. It controls nearly 40 percent of the market and is owned by politician and businessperson Vladimir Plahotniuc, according to press reports.

Alkasar Media Services, co-owned by PLDM member Chiril Lucinschi and Gazprom Media Holding, has a 27-percent share of the advertising market; followed by Nova TV Group, with 20 percent. Together, these three agencies are in a position to distort the market and impact journalism quality, even when the owners and managers do not interfere. “Masked advertising has reached very high rates, and advertising agencies have made numerous attempts to corrupt the press in this respect—especially during the electoral campaign,” Macovei stated.

Occasionally, advertising agencies and the government collude, as was the case recently with Casa Media and the National Anti-corruption Center (CNA). A December article by *Ziarul de Garda* revealed that CNA signed a contract with Casa Media worth MDL 280,000 (\$17,000). According

to the newspaper, the other two important agencies were not aware of the public procurement tender, but CNA spokespersons claimed to have notified all market players. The contract stipulated that the advertisement be broadcasted on Prime and Publika TV.

The government provides no direct subsidies for media, but no legal provisions exist to regulate the distribution of state advertising in a transparent or fair manner. The amount of state advertising available is insignificant, but public acquisitions offer local authorities opportunities to exert influence, especially with smaller outlets.

According to the journalists among the panel, local-level authorities frequently abuse public funds and distribute advertising unfairly. Perunov gave an example. “This summer our newspaper participated in a public tender, and though our offer was better from all viewpoints—we had the highest print run in Bălți and our price was more competitive—the Communist newspaper won the tender,” he said.

Due to the poor enforcement of the Law on Denationalization of Periodicals, about 10 publications founded by regional and local authorities continue to receive support from public budgets and continue to compete for government advertising. According to the panelists, local independent media feel outdone by this unfair competition. However, Bargan said that public periodicals are able to sell advertising just as private media can, and even though these public outlets can “obtain funds from independent, non-government sources, they seldom do.”

The public broadcasters TRM and TRG continue to be funded from public budgets. From 2010 to 2012, TRM did take various financial steps, including implementing a new system of wages for employees, applying for grants, and launching projects to attract funds for institutional development. But ultimately, the external funding ceased after the 2013 shift in management.

The highly concentrated advertising market discourages even profitable media businesses from conducting market research. Not only are marketing surveys expensive for most media outlets, but they are also deemed irrelevant by many managers. Perunov complained that even if opinion polls were carried out to research the readership, in the end “advertisers don’t care” about circulation figures. As a result of these conditions, the circulation data that the Audit Bureau of Circulations (BATI) offers has gradually lost its appeal for print media, despite initial enthusiasm.

BATI also provides Internet statistics, which are considered more relevant. Broadcast ratings are evaluated on demand,

rather than in general, since most broadcasters have given up on the services of AGB Moldova—still the only agency to use people meters. “AGB’s data have little credibility,” according to Bargan. He cited a 2010 AGB report that stated that the channel AICI TV, a local network, had 5-7 percent viewership during time slots when the network was not broadcasting. According to media reports, AGB Moldova is allegedly connected to media conglomerate Casa Media and Prime Trust.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Moldova Objective Score: 2.42

This year, the fifth objective decreased from 2.58 to 2.42, underscoring Moldova’s lack of media associations and the worsening distribution channels. According to the panelists, the media sector has virtually no owner associations. There are two associations of regional broadcasters—Reteaua Aici TV and Meridian—that were created with the assistance of international donors, but they are insufficiently active, according to Bunduchi. The network of Aici TV is composed of Rezina-based Elita TV, Cimișlia-based Media TV, Soroca-based Sor TV, and Ungheni-based VTV. They cover several of the central districts, including the capital city, one district in the north, and one district in the south. Meridian seems somewhat more active, composed of 14 local broadcasters from all over the country—including two from the Transnistrian region. In the summer, the national agency Moldtelecom (MTC) started rebroadcasting the network’s channel Canal Regional. During the electoral campaign, 12

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of media owners and managers and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists’ rights and promote quality journalism.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs exist providing substantial practical experience.
- > Short-term training and in-service training institutions and programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, cable, Internet, mobile) are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

of its members held debates and a joint telemarathon on election day. The Association of Independent Press, which is a cross between an association and an NGO, supports the needs of local publishers.

The country has only one professional journalism association: the Journalists’ Union of Moldova. According to the panelists, it is an inactive association that preserves traits of a traditional Soviet trade union. Mahu argued that the need for solidarity is filled by NGOs, but a professional media organization should still be created. She characterized journalists as “socially vulnerable,” even those that are “honest and incorruptible professionals,” and because they are not protected by any support group, they “could end up on the streets.”

Media NGOs continue to protect the freedom of expression and are quite active in defending journalists and the freedom of speech. For example, the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) and API offer a broad range of services, from legal support to training, advocacy, monitoring, and research. Together with the Press Freedom Committee, the Journalists’ Union, the Resource Center of Moldovan Non-government Organizations for Human Rights (CREDO), and the Viitorul Institute for Development and Social Initiatives, they have created the Moldovan Press Council, a self-regulatory body for the industry. Other NGOs, such as the Association of Electronic Media, have an active role in reforming the public broadcasting industry, while the Journalistic Investigations Center pursues investigative reporting.

Civil society representatives argued, however, that media NGOs should reinvent themselves and learn to conduct advocacy campaigns. The Transnistrian region currently has eight NGOs supporting human rights (including media and freedom of expression). Only two public associations, the Union of Journalists and the Media Center, specifically support journalists. The former undertakes no activities and lacks resources, while the latter works with journalists and NGOs, and co-operates with international donors and partner organizations on the west bank of Nistru River. But according to the panelists, NGO impacts might diminish, as local self-proclaimed authorities consider adopting a draft law similar to the Russian law on “foreign agents.”⁶

Journalism remains a popular course for candidates entering higher education, behind economics and law. Nevertheless, education institutions frequently lack the technical equipment and qualified instructors to ensure that young graduates have the practical skills vital to the profession.

⁶ A detailed analysis of Transnistrian media NGOs can be found in the IJC’s study at <http://media-azi.md/en/media-ngo-sector-transnistrian-region-current-situation-and-perspectives-development>

“Most media institutions are interested only in making the best use of the journalists’ capacities without investing in their professional growth,” Dogaru explained.

Most courses are taught by professors who studied under the Soviet regime or by young lecturers with little teaching or practical experience. Dogaru, who taught journalism at the Moldovan State University and is currently on staff at the Chişinău School of Advanced Journalism (CSAJ), explained that “field work” and practical training are more time-consuming than lecturing on theory. He added that “professors lack personal experience in sourcing, writing, and editing journalistic pieces,” and therefore students are not presented with the opportunity to learn practical skills. Due to these issues, the employment rate among journalism graduates is very low, and some editors prefer to work with journalists that possess other professional backgrounds.

In the light of these shortcomings, eight years ago CSAJ launched an alternative project that addresses the skills gap among young graduates in the journalism field. The 10-month course offers candidates the possibility to improve their skills or to re-qualify as journalists. Recently, CSAJ admitted that the number of applicants has dropped, which can be explained partly by the nature of the school and partly by the expectations of the industry. “Most media institutions are interested only in making the best use of the journalists’ capacities without investing in their professional growth,” Dogaru explained. Hence, journalists attend courses during their free time while they work and are less willing to pay for them. This makes most types of medium-term and short-term studies financially difficult, compounded by the problem that a significant share of their cost has to be covered by donor assistance.

With regard to short-term studies, the panelists said they are popular among practicing journalists and are abundant in the market. Many media NGOs have training programs covering various topics and genres, providing journalists with technical courses such as video editing, ethical reporting, and data journalism to improve their skills.

Media equipment sources, printing houses, and related facilities are apolitical, not restricted, and not monopolized. The existing printing houses offer a wide range of services, including digital printing, and many newspapers have color pages. However, the number of providers of such services is limited, due to the small size of the market. Perunov said that he expects the market to shrink further—

particularly the print sector, because of the high expenses that publishers incur. “(It is) easier to sustain an online publication than a print one,” he commented.

Distribution channels remain mixed—print press distribution is stifled by monopolization, while other types of distribution are largely free and unrestricted. The state-owned enterprise Posta Moldovei is still the only distributor of periodicals with national coverage, and its relationship with publishers deteriorated visibly in 2014. Many newspaper managers claimed that its fees, terms, and conditions obstruct their activities. In September, Posta Moldovei announced that it would not accept unpackaged newspapers for distribution and asked publishers to package the publications separately for every regional post office in the country. At the same time, Posta Moldovei offered to package the newspapers for an additional fee. Commenting on the issue, Macovei said, “The Association of Independent Press requested an immediate response from the government and the parliamentary committee for media, while publishers refused to sign new distribution contracts for 2015. Only then was this repackaging condition excluded, and several meetings were held to negotiate another contract for the distribution of periodicals.”

The objections of publishers are all the more significant given the poor quality of Moldovan postal services, which drew criticism from Mahu for another reason: “This year, Posta Moldovei campaigned for the Democratic Party and sabotaged Subscriber’s Day. It was delayed by almost a month—thus jeopardizing the newspaper subscription campaign,” she stated.

In Chişinău and a few other large towns, print publications are also distributed by the state-turned-private company, Moldpresa, but its services do not provide an alternative. This makes print media distribution services the most monopolized and expensive in the entire range of distribution channels.

At the same time, other types of media distribution channels are beginning to lack diversity. Thus, it is symptomatic that MTC has slightly increased its share in the cable market.⁷ MTC holds a majority of the Internet market (64 percent in terms of revenue) in addition to fixed telephony (over 93 percent in terms of revenue). Its main competitor, Sun Communications, and local cable providers have seen their market shares slide.

⁷ According to the latest ANRCETI data, MTC’s share of the cable market increased from 15 percent in 2012 to almost 19 percent by the end of 2014 in terms of subscribers, and from 25.4 percent to 26.7 percent in terms of turnover during the same period. See http://en.anrceti.md/sectorul_audiovizual

MTC is trying to strengthen its already dominant position, while its policies are increasingly arbitrary. In April, MTC announced an increase in the Internet connection fee because of a general rise in prices in the domestic and foreign markets—a trend not confirmed by the national regulator ANRCETI. In August, MTC rearranged the position of channels in its packages, putting Prime TV first instead of the public broadcaster Moldova 1. In December, MTC announced that as of 2015, the fee for the basic cable subscription package would increase by 14.5 percent (from MDL 55 to MDL 63), explaining its decision by an increase in maintenance and support costs. This results in a tightly controlled market, which is even more potentially impactful given that Plahotniuc allegedly controls MTC.

Bargan expressed the concerns of local broadcasters with the approaching deadline for the digital switchover, as most outlets do not have digital transmitters. According to the national strategy, finally adopted by parliament in May but not published, all television stations must switch to digital broadcasting on July 1, 2015.

Information and communications technologies are well developed but often are not used effectively for distributing media products. In 2014, online media outlets reported no issues around infrastructure. The relatively high connection speed and affordability has ensured a growth in Internet penetration rates in Moldova, including rural areas. According to official data, most Internet connections use broadband technologies: 42 percent of subscribers use ADSL connections and 23 percent use fiber optic connections.

List of Panel Participants

Ludmila Andronic, chair, Press Council, Chişinău

Andrei Bargan, manager and television editor, Media TV and Radio Media, Cimişlia

Vlada Ciobanu, blogger, vladaciobanu.com, Chişinău

Dumitru Ciorici, editorial manager and co-founder, Interakt, Chişinău

Vitalie Dogaru, program host and producer, Publika TV, Chişinău

Luiza Dorosenco, director, Media Center, Tiraspol

Petru Macovei, executive director, Association of Independent Press, Chişinău

Rodica Mahu, editor-in-chief, *Jurnal de Chisinau*, Chişinău

Veaceslav Perunov, journalist and manager, SP, Bălţi

Olivia Pîrţac, freelance media law expert, Chişinău

Alina Țurcanu, television editor, Radio Free Europe Moldova desk, Chişinău

The following panelists submitted a questionnaire but did not attend the panel discussion:

Ion Bunduchi, executive director, Association of Electronic Media, Chişinău

Veaceslav Parfionov, member, Supervisory Board of Teleradio-Gagauzia, Comrat

Moderator and author

Cristina Leva, head of Publications and Research Department, Independent Journalism Center, Chişinău

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