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MOLDOVA

The beginning of the year saw the swearing-in of a new government, led by Prime Minister Pavel Filip, a former economy minister and a member of the Democratic Party. After the deep social and political crisis of 2015, 2016 brought relative stability, despite tension surrounding the presidential election on October 30, the People's Assembly election in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia on November 20, and a presidential election in the breakaway region of Transnistria on December 11.

In March, the Constitutional Court agreed with protesters who in 2015 had demanded that the country return to presidential elections through direct vote instead of a parliamentary ballot. The election went to a second round in November, with Socialist Party leader Igor Dodon beating Maia Sandu, the Western-leaning, reform-minded leader of the Action and Solidarity Party, with 52 percent of the vote. Dodon was sworn in in December.

In the People's Assembly of Gagauzia, half of those elected declared themselves independent candidates, but analysts believe most were stalking horses for the Democratic Party and the Socialists, which after the election claimed to have won a combined 28 of the assembly's 35 seats. In Transnistria's de facto presidential election, Vadim Krasnoselski, chairperson of the region's de facto parliament, won a crushing victory over incumbent Yevgeny Shevchuk in the first round.

The new government's agenda for the media industry through 2018 focuses on the same pressing issues that remained unresolved under previous governments, including formulation of a national media development concept; passage of a new broadcasting code; safeguarding the public broadcaster from political intervention; ensuring the independence of the broadcast media regulator, the Broadcasting Coordinating Council; elimination of unfair competition in advertising; and alignment of the public information law with e-governance practices and needs. By year's end, a new draft broadcasting code and amendments to the public information law had passed a first reading in parliament.

In the spring, the government released a list of reform measures it planned to launch in the months before the Association Agreement with the EU came into force on June 1, and parliament established the European Integration Council to oversee the implementation of the agreement. In late September, the government announced that it had achieved 94 percent of its priority reforms, although a civil society report said 45 percent of the reforms had been carried out poorly or not at all.

In both presidential campaigns, analysts criticized blatant media bias, inappropriate interference by the Orthodox Church, and negative campaign tactics. Ahead of the presidential election in Moldova proper, a Parliamentary Assembly – Council of Europe delegation expressed deep concern about the opaque party funding system, media monopolies, and the quality of media coverage of elections. In 2016, the flow of anti-EU propaganda continued from Russian and domestic sources. Analysts credit this propaganda and the government's lack of seriousness about reforms with helping to propel the Socialist leader to the presidency.

MOLDOVA at a glance

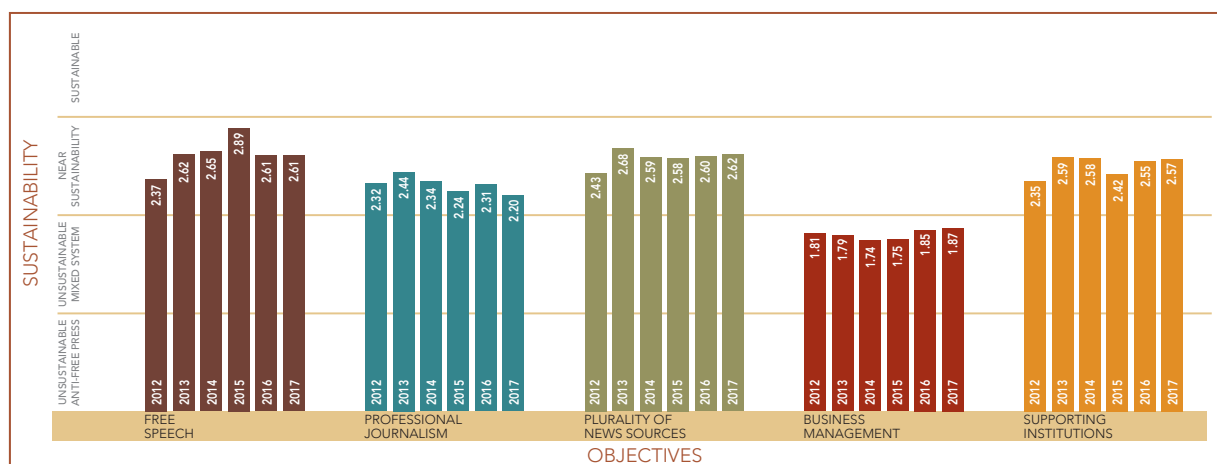
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 3,510,485 (July 2016 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 (2015-Atlas):** \$7.956 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- > **GNI per capita (2015-PPP):** \$5,400 World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.4% (male: 99.7%; female: 99.1%) (CIA World Factbook, 2015 est.)
- > **President or top authority:** President Igor Dodon (since December 23, 2016)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active media outlets:** Print: 171 newspapers, 258 magazines (National Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova, 2015); Radio Stations: 59 (Broadcasting Coordinating Council, 2016); Television Stations: 78 (Broadcasting Coordinating Council, 2016); Internet News Portals: point.md, protv.md, unimedia.md (Gemius, 2016)
- > **Print circulation statistics:** Newspapers: *Komsomolskaia Pravda* (1,989,808); *Makler* (770,463); *Antenna* (654,980); *Unghiul* (501,960); *Timpul de dimineata* (351,910). Magazines: *Rabotai & Otdahai* (48,000); *Aquarelle* (38,500); *Business Klass* (27,500) (BATI, 2016)
- > **Broadcasting media ratings:** Top three television: Prime TV (private), Moldova 1 (public), Jurnal TV (private)
- > **News agencies:** IPN, Moldpres (state-owned), Infotag, InfoMarket, Sputnik
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** Television: €12.4 million; Radio: €0.56 million; Internet: €2.8 million; Print: €1.2 million (AAPM, 2016 est.)
- > **Internet usage:** 2.4 million (ANRCETI, 2016)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MOLDOVA



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2017: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



CHANGE SINCE 2016

▲ (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 <https://www.irex.org/msi>

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Moldova Objective Score: 2.61

In Moldova, freedom of speech is guaranteed by the constitution and the law on freedom of expression. In 2016, no cases of serious media intimidation via lawsuits were reported. Dumitru Lazur, coordinating editor of RISE Moldova, said the law on freedom of expression “sets a procedure for examining defamation cases that is favorable for journalists and media acting in good faith. It discourages abuse by people who believe their honor, dignity, or professional reputation was damaged through dissemination of some information.”

Nadine Gogu, director of the Independent Journalism Center (IJC), said recent court rulings have favored the press and that civil society has been an effective watchdog against judicial threats to free speech. But the media can be gagged in other ways. Lawyer Eugen Ribca said, for instance, that certain television channels had been dropped by a government-owned cable operator that dominates the rural market.¹ “At the same time, although national law has very clear provisions on protection of journalists’ sources, these provisions are not applied consistently,” he said.

Moldova’s media law meets European standards on free speech, but “many media are politically affiliated, which is obvious from their tone and content,” said Galina Zablovskaya, executive director of the Association of Advertising Agencies.

¹ <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/ong-urile-de-media-cer-cca-s-%C4%83-investigheze-cauzele-reale-ale-sist%C4%83rii-emisiei-unor-posturi-tv>

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 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 offended parties 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.

Vladimir Topal, director of BasTV in the southern Basarabeasca region, agreed, saying, “On certain channels, journalists can’t provide truthful information to viewers because a dog won’t bark at its owner.”

The Transnistrian constitution and law on media also guarantee freedom of speech, but Luiza Dorosenco, director of the Tiraspol Media Center, said former President Shevchuk himself violated these laws. “The law stipulates that republican media are to be founded in an equitable manner by the president and the Supreme Soviet,” she explained. “However, the Supreme Soviet has been excluded as a founder. Its representatives have often complained of not having access to state press and TV.”

In Moldova, only broadcast media need be licensed, which is done by the Broadcasting Coordinating Council. Decision-makers have yet to align the relevant laws with European standards, which contributes to continued polarization in media.

“There are serious problems with licensing terrestrial broadcasting activity, namely lack of precise and measurable licensing criteria, lack of objective criteria for protecting the public interest in the licensing process, appointment of BCC members based on political affiliation, insufficient justification of BCC decisions, etc.,” Ribca said.

Ludmila Barba, coordinating editor at the national public broadcasting institution Compania Teleradio-Moldova, said membership on the coordinating council seems to be based on political affiliation. “Thus, licensing turns into a politically biased process. Especially since members of parliament hold or own certain media.”

Several other panelists echoed those sentiments.

“We’re talking about important licenses, usually for capital-based frequencies,” Topal said. “In rural areas, a frequency may not be in demand for a long time.”

Veaceslav Perunov, director of the Bălți weekly newspaper SP, said, “Some top-rated TV channels openly broadcast propaganda, and many channels systematically break the law, while the BCC does nothing and is therefore inefficient.”

As for online media, Topal said they should remain unlicensed but that owners should be legally required to publish on their sites a mailing address and contact information for the person in charge of editorial policy. “Otherwise, it’s difficult—if not impossible—to hold online media to account, as was shown by the recent presidential election.”

Websites that disseminated false reports about candidates appeared in the run-up to the vote. The reports were picked up by traditional media, especially those that belong to politically connected owners.

The panelists agreed that national law places no restrictions on media entering the market, nor does it particularly disadvantage media, compared with other industries. However, Ribca said a law on postal communications passed in 2016 did nothing to end “certain abusive and differential/discriminatory taxes and fees for periodical publication distribution services.” Gogu noted, too, that different types of media are treated differently, with broadcasters needing licenses and being monitored by a regulator, unlike print and online outlets.

Alexandr Burdeinii, editor-in-chief of the business news agency InfoMarket, said print media get tax breaks if advertising occupies less than 30 percent of their space. Perunov, of SP, acknowledged that the print media don’t have to pay the value-added tax on their sales but said exempting their advertising income from the levy would truly make a difference.

“It’s easy to come into the market, but it’s hard to stay there,” Topal said. “For instance, a TV channel that only wants to have local content won’t be able to compete with another channel that produces, let’s say, 30 percent local content, while the rest is retransmission of an already well-known brand. And advertising suppliers prefer well-known brands. How do local channels get in and stay in?” In Transnistria, the government funds some media, while independent outlets receive no support from the authorities, Dorosenco said.

Offenses against journalists are rare in Moldova, but when they do occur, Ribca said, the authorities’ response is usually inadequate “possibly because, among other things, journalists turn to public opinion rather than law enforcement authorities to protect their rights much more often.” Gogu noted that reporters have initiated legal proceedings after being attacked by protesters or members of politicians’ entourages, “but it should be mentioned that in many of these cases journalists behaved offensively.”

Barba said the chief editor of *Ziarul de Garda* had posted on social media about attempts to intimidate staff after the newspaper had published certain investigations. Vadim Sterbate, a reporter for the Observatorul de Nord newspaper in Soroca, was threatened by an official of the Defense Ministry after he criticized the business activity of the official’s relatives. After the case received widespread publicity, the official resigned. In another instance, a reporter with the IJC who requested information from the Interior Ministry instead received a subpoena to be questioned “in connection with examination of materials concerning the supply of information on alleged illegal actions of police workers.”²

Burdeinii said law enforcement and the broadcast regulator are more loyal to government-affiliated media than to other media. Zablovskaya said, “Journalists, bloggers, and photographers, like

² <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/condamn%C4%83m-abuzurile-mai-fa%C8%9B%C4%83-de-o-reporter%C4%83-centrului-de-investig%C8%9Bii-jurnaliste>

any ordinary person in Moldova, cannot feel protected by the state.” Likewise in Transnistria, Dorosenco said, “It’s unclear who can be photographed and where and which law regulates it. Therefore, the way for abuse is open.”

Lawmakers did nothing in 2016 to strengthen legislation that might protect media from political interference. Ribca said the public broadcaster is subject to political pressure in the budget process and in the appointment of its top managers and members of its regulatory oversight council. Several panelists agreed, but Barba said the government has never fully financed the public broadcaster’s production needs. On the other hand, she said, politicians do not want it to become self-sustaining because that might threaten their influence over it, although she added that there is much less political pressure on the broadcaster than there was from 2001 to 2009, when Moldova had a Communist government.

Gogu said members of Teleradio-Moldova’s oversight council are appointed on political grounds. The council, in turn, elects the broadcaster’s managers in the same way, through an opaque process with no measurable criteria. She said Teleradio-Moldova’s election coverage “is relatively balanced” but lacks context, “so that the audience can’t form an adequate opinion of what is going on in society.”

Also relevant for 2016 was the dismissal of outspoken director Ion Terguta, of the MIR-Moldova channel, because he often criticized the current country’s leadership.³ In addition, a law hastily passed by the People’s Assembly of Gagauzia restricts the activity of that region’s public broadcaster, IPRA, possibly undermining its editorial independence and encouraging censorship.⁴ Gagauzia authorities have ignored warnings from civil society groups and the Broadcasting Coordinating Council about attempts to pressure IPRA.

Defamation has been decriminalized in Moldova. The few serious cases brought against journalists in the past few years have been resolved in the journalists’ favor. Generally, judges tend to excuse journalists and not penalize editors, possibly the result of hard lessons learned from cases lost at the European Court of Human Rights. That is not to say that the media do not engage in defamation. “In elections, especially, publication or dissemination of denigrating or slanderous material is often ordered, and victims choose not to go to court either because they don’t trust the justice system or because they don’t want to provoke certain media to ratchet up the orchestrated denigration campaign,” Barba said.

Topal said this behavior is also an issue in online comments sections. He said administrators who do not moderate comments should have their sites blocked on grounds of public

³ <http://www.media-azi.md/en/stiri/declaration-media-ngos-we-condemn-government-decision-appoint-person-convenient-current>

⁴ <http://cca.md/news/cca-alarat-de-posibilitatea-instituirii-cenzurii-asupra-mass-mediilor-audiovizuale-n-autonomia-g>

order and security. Administrators can be held responsible for comments on their sites that defame or include hate speech. A couple of panelists noted that no one was found guilty of libel or slander in 2016. SP's Perunov attributed that to the quality of the relevant laws, specifically on freedom of expression.

Still, Viorica Zaharia, chairperson of the Press Council, recalled that *Ziarul de Garda* was targeted by anti-corruption prosecutor Adriana Betisor after publishing an investigation revealing that Betisor owned more property than she could likely afford on her salary. The case is still open.

In Transnistria, controls over certain speech have tightened since August 2014, when Shevchuk issued a decree on "extremist activity" that penalizes "public calumny of a person holding public office in central or local public authorities, during or in connection with the fulfillment of their official duties.

During 2016, journalists had trouble getting access to information due to agencies' misuse of a law protecting personal data. As a result, Ribca said, "important institutions," such as the Central Election Commission, the People's Assembly of Gagauzia, and the Superior Council of Magistracy, the judiciary's self-regulatory body, were put on the list of institutions not in compliance with freedom of information laws.

Mariana Tacu, head of the Journalism and Communications Science Department of the State University of Moldova, said it's difficult for journalists or ordinary citizens to get access to information on public purchasing. As an example, the Press Council's Zaharia said in April 2016 that he could not find information on the Chişinău mayor's website about the city council's decision to allocate some of the municipal budget to the mayor's press office. "The decision was published on the web page only after contacting the person who was responsible for publication of decisions," he said. "Thus, officials allow themselves to hide documents from the public that might result in unfavorable coverage of them or their institutions, while journalists can't keep track of which documents are made public and which aren't."

Lazur, of RISE Moldova, said that when his organization asked the Central Election Commission in August 2016 for biographical information on candidates for parliament in 2014, the commission instead asked the National Center for Personal Data Protection to determine whether the requested information "was considered personal data or not." Lazur said officials also use claims of commercial or state secrets, which are vaguely defined in law, to refuse requests for information. He said one study found that about 50 percent of denials are made based on the pretext of protecting commercial secrets.

In another instance of obstruction, the Superior Council of Magistracy tried to require those who wanted to attend court sessions, including journalists, to obtain permission from a

court official. The council backed down in the face of media protests. "Journalists, especially those doing investigations, claim problems with access to information because replies to their inquiries are often pro forma," Gogu said, while "some journalists are privileged, being the first to receive information from certain state structures."

Tudor Darie, of Interact Media, said information of public interest is usually given first to media that are politically aligned with the government. Perunov said no officials have yet been penalized for not providing requested information in a proper manner and called for stronger sanctions. In the Transnistrian region, Dorosenco said the de facto parliament had adopted a rule that only the official press service can produce audiovisual material during its sessions and that journalists must request such materials from the press service.

In Moldova, there are no restrictions on access to domestic or international sources of news or information. Rather, Gogu said, many media violate copyrights, plagiarizing content or running it without the authors' permission. "The problem persists because many Moldovan media lack self-regulation mechanisms," she said, although panelists Zablovskaya and Burdeinii said journalists credit original news sources more than they used to. Picking up foreign news can be fraught in Transnistria because, as Dorosenco explained, as of June 2016 making disrespectful statements about Russian troops stationed there could result in a prison sentence of up to seven years.⁵

Most panelists agreed that entrance to the journalism profession is free and open in Moldova. "Journalists are not subject to restrictions, but they don't have many rights either, since, for example, there are events that not everyone can be accredited for," Zablovskaya said. Gogu said some foreign journalists had trouble getting accreditation to cover the presidential election, while Dorosenco said foreign journalists, except those from Russia, are treated with suspicion or even hostility in Transnistria and are often denied accreditation.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Moldova Objective Score: 2.20

In 2016, panelists said the quality of Moldovan journalism declined, largely thanks to the presidential elections and elections to the People's Assembly in Gagauzia. "Media that produced fair reports during 2016 are more an exception rather than a rule," Ribca said. Tacu, of the Moldova State University, said, "Particularly in TV newscasts, one can see a systematic absence of professional documentation, use of irrelevant sources, and a lot of subjectivity." Barba said even balanced

⁵ <http://www.zdg.md/stiri/stiri-politice/dictatura-transnistreana-7-ani-de-inchisoare-pentru-cei-care-vor-nega-meritele-federatiei-ruse>

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).

news reports lacked documentation and background, with journalists often publishing unverified reports or simply relaying official statements.

Zaharia and Gogu discussed the problem of one-source reporting, which Gogu said leads to media manipulation and subjectivity. "There are media that belong to owners with interests in politics and the economy publishing information that is obviously tendentious, comes from a single source, and is deliberately unverified," Zaharia said. "News bulletins and talk shows on some TV channels are made to reflect a single point of view, promote certain people or political parties, and create a negative impression about others." He added that only people who will express a certain view are invited to appear on talk shows.

The Broadcasting Coordinating Council did impose sanctions on five television stations, some of which it said had "blatantly defied the norms and standards of journalism" with their biased election coverage.⁶ During the 2016 electoral campaign, there were registered cases of dissemination of false information, particularly among online media, which are not regulated.

Most panelists agreed that the media's extreme politicization has diminished Moldovan journalism. Lazur, from RISE Moldova, said it had also damaged the media's reputation. "Excessive politicization of media during presidential elections led to a considerable decrease in the Moldovan people's trust in media," he said, from 42 percent in April 2016 to 31 percent in October. Lazur said, though, that there are still independent media in Moldova who strive to maintain professional principles and standards. As for Transnistria, Dorosenco said media there report on the difficult relationship between Chişinău and the region's

⁶ <http://cca.md/news/cca-accent-tv-ntv-moldova-publika-tv-i-jurnal-tv-nu-vor-avea-dreptul-s-difuzeze-publicitate-com>

de facto government in Tiraspol "only from Tiraspol's point of view."

The panelists said Moldova's ethics code for journalists is frequently violated, even by those media that signed it. For this, Barba blamed "economic and social conditions," along with the links that many media have with political or business groups. "The 2016 elections revealed this fact to the fullest extent," she said. Gogu said the most frequent ethics violations include editorial content that is indistinguishable from advertising, political promotion thinly disguised as news, and plagiarism.

To that list, Zaharia added the use of obscenities in print (as noted in some monitoring reports on the presidential election), the spread of false information taken from other media sources without verification, epithets such as "oligarch" or "killer" routinely used against certain people, and a lack of balance. In this polarized media environment where ethics are not prized, compromised journalists have little trouble finding work. "There are no real and effective mechanisms for making journalists accountable while their reputation is of little consequence," Zablovskaya said.

Burdeinii said the unwillingness of certain members of the trade to adopt generally accepted professional standards "affects the quality of journalism, as there are, for instance, bloggers who call themselves journalists, while being unable to make a distinction between a news report and an opinion piece." Similarly, Tacu called for regulation of online journalists and bloggers and controls on the use of drones in investigations.

The panelists agreed that self-censorship is widespread in Moldova, with Barba noting that Freedom House had been identified it as a problem. Many journalists cannot cover subjects in an "accurate and even-handed manner" but instead must comply with their editors' demands, Gogu said. "Hence, there is a high degree of self-censorship when selecting a subject, sources, and so on."

Self-censorship has its roots in the concentration of Moldova media ownership by major business figures and politicians, Ribca said. Zaharia said it happens most often at large media outlets and affects which topics are covered and which sources are consulted. "In some newsrooms, reporters know from the very beginning that an event organized by an institution/person/political party not supported by the media owner will not be covered by this media," he said.

Self-censorship is in service to advertisers and not just owners, Perunov and Burdeinii pointed out. For local media, it is a consequence of financial vulnerability, Topal said. District authorities can easily terminate contracts with local media, such as publishing or advertising, if they notice that information "is not filtered to their taste." Dorosenco said self-censorship also prevails in Transnistria, where "media products not complying

with [the government's] editorial policy will not be allowed to be published or broadcast."

The panelists differed on whether media in Moldova ignore important events. "Diversity of media owners allows a certain diversity of information, too," Ribca said. Although media are dominated by the ruling Democratic Party, other political factions own major outlets as well. Barba disagreed, saying, "Unfortunately, most journalists are guided by the politicians' agenda instead of setting the agenda for politicians. Thus, the empty talk of politicians often replaces events that are of real importance for citizens."

Similarly, Gogu said, "Journalists cover events important for their masters but not those important for the wider public. Topics are filtered, often omitted, or, to the contrary, sensationalized. Some irrelevant subjects or news items are repeated for several days." Burdeinii said political news often crowds out coverage of social, economic, or other news, and Topal said nationwide media usually ignore important events taking place at the local level. Transnistrian media hardly report on events organized by civil society groups, except for "patriotic" ones, Dorosenco said, and even then the groups are not named.

Although there is no reliable, comprehensive information on journalists' compensation in Moldova, all panelists agreed that low salaries make journalists vulnerable to corruption. For instance, Barba said many journalists welcome the chance to make commercial productions to supplement their income. "The more media or journalists try to be independent, the lower salaries they have," she said. Gogu said journalists' salaries are not especially low, compared with other professions, but added that those who work for a politician or business person can make thousands of euros per month, while others make less than the mean monthly salary of MDL 5,000 (\$250). "This is one reason why some journalists abandon their profession," she said.

"Freelance journalists must write for several media simultaneously while "editors' offices are in a permanent search for grants in order to increase their incomes," Zaharia said. "When salaries are small, many journalists readily accept gifts or orders to write hidden advertising materials," Burdeinii said. Topal and Perunov said local media regularly lose their best journalists to better-paying outlets in the capital or to emigration. Dorosenco said that in Transnistria, amendments to a law on compensation for some public employees meant that only reporters, and not editors, designers, or production workers, are considered journalists—and only journalists are permitted to receive honoraria to supplement their salaries.

Newscasts get more air time than entertainment programs, especially domestically produced ones, so most people turn to foreign media, Tacu said. Zablovskaya explained that entertainment programs are much more expensive than the plethora of talking heads on Moldovan television. "I have the

impression sometimes that there are too many news bulletins, but that doesn't mean the wider public is well-informed, since many newscasts rather misinform than inform," Gogu said. Barba said entertainment shows get higher ratings than news shows, but Topal said that at the local level there is "a visible interest specifically in community news."

The panelists said print and online journalists generally have access to the materials and technology for gathering, producing, and disseminating information. Gogu said she had noticed that "many more media items are published quickly," and Darie noted that managers pay for Internet subscriptions for their employees so they can get online outside the office.

Broadcast media are in a different situation. "There are difficulties in radio and TV, especially in regional ones that can't invest in technologies as rich channels in the capital do," Burdeinii said. Perunov, of SP, said, "Equipment is out-of-date at some [national] channels, too." Barba agreed, saying, "Teleradio-Moldova has come almost to the end of functioning, from a technical point of view, due to insufficient funding." She said there is no money for new video cameras, equipment, or software.

Journalists practice only certain specialties in Moldova. "If specialization were compulsory, it would contribute to an increase in the quality of information products, due to deeper and more systematic documentation, as well as to more specialized and appropriate language," Tacu said. Topal said some local journalists are specialists, but "since staff turnover is high, there is a need for additional training of new employees who replace the trained ones who leave."

On the subject of investigations, most panelists said they are conducted most often by print and online media but almost never by television or radio stations. "Managers aren't interested in it because they have employers behind them who can't allow investigating cases of corruption," Gogu said. "Both specialized and investigative journalism exists, thanks to projects supported by foreign donors, because newsrooms can't afford the luxury of specialized departments."

Print media often reprint investigations conducted by specialized nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), Barba said, but broadcast media do not, whether from a lack of interest or from the expense involved in transforming such investigations into video clips. "Specialized and investigative journalism is expensive; that's why it's not widespread," Perunov said. Burdeinii said, "Investigations are done either under grants or on the account of a client who orders one. The media themselves aren't interested in expensive investigations for their own sake or for the sake of quality journalism, since that's not profitable from an economic standpoint."

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Moldova Objective Score: 2.62

Moldova has many sources of information, and in 2016, new television stations, newspapers, and websites were launched. Some media broadcast news via mobile telephones. More than 1.5 million of Moldova's 3.6 million people had Internet access on their mobile phones as of the third quarter of 2016.⁷

But other challenges persist. "There are many media, but there's not a great diversity of opinions within the same media, and a media consumer has to consult several sources in order to get informed and to understand what is going on in society," Darie said. The problem is, again, political control of media, Gogu said. She added that social media can be a good alternative source of information, but even it is plagued by trolls and bloggers doing the bidding of politicians. Lazur said those who rely on media owned by members of political parties risk being manipulated.

A poll conducted in September 2016 by the IJC found that 38 percent of news consumers in Moldova are rather unprepared for understanding whether an item is manipulative and propaganda or not.⁸ Zaharia said the notion of pluralism in the country's media "is rather specious." For instance, he said, four major channels that broadcast news belong to the same owner and provide the same information and the same opinions. Some Russian-language media, as well, present only information that is anti-Western and pro-Russia.

In Transnistria, media of all types operate, and citizens are active on social media. Dorosenco said older people prefer print media while younger ones use online media. Outlets in the region reflect various political opinions, but opposition media or those critical of the government are under pressure. For example, at least 16 websites and Internet forums have been blocked since 2012, she said. There are few bloggers in Transnistria, but social media, particularly the VKontakte and Odnoklassniki social networks and YouTube, are popular. Facebook groups are also very active.

Moldovans face no legal restrictions in accessing domestic and foreign media, but some panelists noted that rural residents do not enjoy the same availability of information that their urban counterparts do. As the country switches to digital transmission, new regulations were approved, allowing for "socially vulnerable" populations to be issued set-top boxes to pick up the digital signal, but those measures have not been implemented. Gogu said that even though prices for Internet service are relatively low, they are still beyond the means of

⁷ http://www.anrceti.md/files/filefield/Raport_ev.pieteiCE%20trim3_2016.pdf

⁸ http://mediacritica.md/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Sondaj_Percept%20Bia-popula%20Biei-privind-informa%20Biiile-false-%20Biiile-distorsionate-din-mass-media_Septembrie-2016-2.pdf

some of the rural poor, who also cannot afford newspaper or magazine subscriptions. "Access to international media is limited, essentially, because of massive presence in Moldova of Russian TV channels, some of which freely broadcast political propaganda," Topal said. In Transnistria, the Internet is well-developed in both cities and the countryside. Citizens have unrestricted access to media, but Dorosenco said, "Some websites posting material unpleasant to the Transnistrian leadership cannot be accessed."

Most panelists agreed that NPBI Teleradio-Moldova, the national public broadcasting company, is largely impartial. Ribca said monitoring in 2016 turned up no political bias at the NPBI, but the public Gagauzia Radio Televizionu "showed a dangerous drifting from legal, managerial, and editorial standards in this sphere."⁹ Public media produce more educational and cultural programs than commercial outlets and promote European values, but Zablovskaya said such content attracts very low ratings. Topal was a dissenter on this score, saying, "You can hardly call public media completely independent and impartial if they are state-financed."

State media are very politicized in the Transnistrian region. "If considering those two TV channels—1 Transnistrian and TSV—one promotes the ideas of the head of the administration, and the other promotes the ideas of the Obnovlenie Party, which holds more than half of the seats in the Supreme Soviet," Dorosenco said. Moldova's government-owned Moldpres news agency and its private counterparts, IPN and Infotag, are well-respected and tend to be impartial, as their survival depends on their ability to distribute their product as widely as possible, panelists said. Gogu said the agencies often complain,

⁹ <http://gagauzmedia.md/index.php?newsid=5870>, <http://gagauzmedia.md/index.php?newsid=6373>, <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/compania-publica%20gagauziya-radio-televizionu-ar-putea-fi-lichidat%20>

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.

however, about news organizations plagiarizing their reports or using their information without attribution. As for international press agencies, Darie said few Moldovan media, especially online and print outlets, can afford their services.

Private broadcast media in Moldova produce and broadcast their own news, but they also rely heavily on news and other programming from Russia and Romania, Barba said. "Producing their own materials requires considerable money that they don't always have," Zablovskaya said. Regional broadcasters produce news "that emphasizes community needs, and they often pick up items from bloggers, as well," Topal said. Gogu said there is little variety in broadcast news because private companies own multiple channels, and "the same news report is broadcast by all channels belonging to that holding." News broadcast on private channels differs from that on public television due to private stations' "massive promotion of the interests of political or economic actors," she said.

For two years, Moldovan law has required disclosure of the owners of broadcast media. Barba said the law has "led to greater clarity" but said ownership of other media, particularly online, remains obscure. But Zablovskaya said real owners are still able to hide, except to the extent that their stations' editorial practices clearly support certain interests, and Ribca said the disclosure requirement has not "de-monopolized" the industry. In any event, Perunov, of *SP*, said, "Few consumers care who owns this or that TV channel. And probably even fewer realize the whole danger of TV control by owners."

All the panelists expressed concern about the concentration of media ownership in a few hands and its effects on editorial policy. "The owners of major media are politicians; therefore, the relevant media promote the agenda of their owners and fail to reflect the whole range of societal issues," Gogu said.

Ribca said some topics are taboo in Moldovan media. For example, he said, "Issues about sexual minorities are covered only from the perspective of violation of the rights of the representatives of this category of people, no more."

"Coverage of political events ... still prevails at the expense of reflection on social and cultural challenges," Tacu said. But Zablovskaya said certain topics make their way to Moldovan media, thanks to the efforts of outside groups. For example, civil society organizations might fund programming on reproductive health, the environment, culture, etc.

Although the Transnistrian region has three official languages, Russian prevails in practice. Dorosenco said the Ukrainian-language *Гомін* (*Gomin*) and Romanian-language, Cyrillic *Адевърул Нистрян* (*Adevarul Nistrean*) have seen a drop in circulation and cut their publication frequency. She said, "Certain topics, such as European integration or the contributions of international foundations to regional

development, are either ignored, or reflected in a negative context."

Moldovans have to follow several sources in order to get information about important local, national, and international events. Some panelists said local media seldom cover national or foreign news and national media neglect local news. This information patchwork is exacerbated by national media's selective use of international news "depending on the channel's orientation," Zablovskaya said. Barba said there is not enough foreign news in Moldovan media. "The media still don't perceive Moldova as a part of the regional or international architecture," she said. "Even the conflict in a neighboring country, Ukraine, is not regularly covered anymore, but consumers hear about it from Russian channels, so public opinion is manipulated."

Bloggers are less concerned about problems of the community and focus more on politics, although they can have an impact when they touch on subjects that interest a wider audience. For example, Gogu noted, after blogger Gheorghe Erizanu wrote about a controversial recipient of the State Literary Awards, the awarding procedure was suspended.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Moldova Objective Score: 1.87

Perunov attributed the dearth of well-run, sustainable media outlets to a "deficit of well-trained managers and the poor general state of the economy." Public media outlets consistently complain about tight budgets, but some experts respond that they are not open about how they use even those limited funds. Similarly, Zaharia said, "There are newsrooms that have both professional journalists and staff trained in marketing, advertising, and accounting. However, most are funded by owners or interest groups."

Two types of media that are particularly unsustainable are those with "political financing sources" and those funded by grants, Ribca said, and Lazur, of RISE Moldova, warned that "in the absence of support provided by foreign donors, some independent media are likely to cease their activity."

This precarious economic situation has given rise to problems, such as advertising disguised as news, custom-ordered news items, or wages paid under the table, Gogu said. In the Transnistrian region, the mainstream media have no incentive to be efficient or sustainable as they "serve the interests of their employers, whether it's the administration or Sherif holding," Dorosenco said, referring to the region's major conglomerate.

Moldovan media get revenue from several sources, but because advertising and circulation income are unstable, the independence of many outlets is under threat, Zablovskaya

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.

said. Likewise, Perunov noted that each year the amount of advertising falls, leaving media searching for other funding sources, although experts note that ad spending rises in an election year. In print media, advertising revenues plunged from €3.6 million in 2010 to an estimated €1.2 million in 2016.¹⁰ Barba said that for many influential media, the “largest source of revenue is funding from employers that are interested in political dividends.”

“For local media, commercial advertising as a source of funding is still a dream,” Ribca said.

Instead, BasTV’s Topal said, “We write projects hoping to get grants, we provide paid information to the local public administration, we develop the cable television, etc.” Those media that conduct investigations rely entirely on grants. “The portals Rise.md and Anticoruptie.md, for instance, are managed by media NGOs that have no sources of income other than grants,” Lazur said. “Unfortunately, the advertising market, besides the fact that it’s very small, is also politicized, and this affects the development of the press as a business,” Barba said.

As usual, Transnistria is a different story. Dorosenco said state media rely on subsidies instead of advertising, and small, independent outlets hold no interest for advertisers.

Moldova’s veteran advertising agencies tend to focus on large, international clients, Ribca said, while Zablovskaya said such “serious” customers want to see reliable audience research, which many Moldovan media cannot provide. Therefore, domestic media tend to make their pitches to less-demanding domestic advertisers.

¹⁰ <http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/evaluarea-cadrului-juridic-de-reglementare-domeniului-publicitatii-si-recomandari-pentru>

National legislation allows public broadcasters to air advertising, with certain restrictions on teleshopping programs. Not all mass media have advertising departments, and Perunov said advertisers are especially not interested in newspapers. “Therefore, there are newsrooms where all employees deal with advertising, from journalists to the directors,” he said. Burdeinii said most advertising agencies use television, working through the Casa Media clearinghouse. A 2016 study by the IJC found that 55 percent of ads appeared on television and that Casa Media, which sells space on eight major channels (Prime TV, Canal 2, TV 4, Canal 3, RENTV, Publika TV, STS, and Super TV) controls an estimated 59 percent of the market.¹¹ Among the major advertisers are Nestle, Procter & Gamble, the Berlin Chemie Menarini Group Moldova, and Moldtelecom. As for ethics in advertising, Darie said online advertisers operate more transparently, and Gogu said the market suffers from unfair competition, with companies getting favorable rates because they share an owner with a media outlet. In Transnistria, most advertising agencies focus on outdoor ads.

Few media managers try to adhere to generally accepted ratios of advertising revenues to other income. Barba said the national public broadcaster gets about 10 percent of its revenue from advertising, maybe less outside an election year, with the rest coming from state subsidies and proceeds from co-productions. Darie said online media’s sole income stream comes from advertising.

Zablovskaya said the amount of advertising legally permitted per hour of broadcasting corresponds to industry standards but that ads still don’t bring in a sufficient share of revenue. For two years in a row, she said, “There has been a drastic reduction in budgets for advertising, because it makes no sense to advertise a service that people can’t pay for. Therefore, most ads are for drugs.” Print media that receive no more than 30 percent of their revenues from advertising are exempt from value-added tax on their circulation sales, but Perunov said the cap should be raised to 40 percent or 50 percent.

Only public broadcasters and Transnistrian media funded by the Tiraspol administration receive government subsidies, making them vulnerable to political pressure, especially as the government’s advertising spending is unregulated and opaque. “There’s no transparency, no monitoring,” Barba said, noting that public auditors had not reported on the way state advertising is distributed.

Zablovskaya said the Association of Advertising Agencies receives no paid advertising from the government, as many mass media are required to broadcast public-service ads for free. Particularly at the local level, Gogu said, there is an understanding that media friendly to the local government stand a better chance of winning public relations tenders,

¹¹ <http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/evaluarea-cadrului-juridic-de-reglementare-domeniului-publicitatii-si-recomandari-pentru>

regardless of their audience size. "There's no political will to pass regulations or best practices about the equitable distribution of state advertising," Ribca said.

Market research is conducted in Moldova, but most media outlets cannot afford it, the panelists said. As a result, the audience is rarely taken into account when content is developed. Most media conduct online polls for feedback, but those are ill-suited for developing strategic plans. In any event, Gogu said, media that "follow the agenda of political owners" are not concerned about the public's interest or audience research. "Media are not motivated to pay for market research because the advertising market is monopolized, and most advertisers don't work directly with media but distribute their ads through local sellers. Consequently, advertising isn't distributed according to audience figures but according to some other criteria," Barba said.

For four years, the Audit Bureau of Circulation and Internet (BATI), in partnership with the Gemius market research firm, has measured print circulation and website traffic, producing information that Zablovskaya said is highly credible. However, only 34 media outlets subscribe to its service. Gogu said some members have withdrawn from the organization, saying they had not benefited from it.

Barba said the Moldova-1 public television station, but not its sister station, Moldova 2, uses AGB Nielsen Media Research studies, although she said "many" of her colleagues question the results that AGB delivers. Ribca said the company is "suspected of political affiliation and therefore is not trusted." Moldova lacks an independent institution measuring audience and reach that provides timely information and is affordable to large and small media, Tacu said. In Transnistria, Dorosenco said that no market research is conducted and that no market research companies exist.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Moldova Objective Score: 2.57

National law places no restrictions on the establishment and operation of trade associations. However, the few that exist are ineffective and not very visible, Ribca said. "The exception perhaps would be the association of cable operators, which is self-funded from membership fees and occasionally pushes the idea of blocking foreign broadcasts and supporting domestic productions," Barba said. As for other organizations, such as the Meridian Association of regional radio and television owners or the Broadcasting Employers' Association, "it's not even clear whether they function or not," she said. Darie said online media have no association to represent their interests. Dorosenco said Transnistria has no associations of publishers or media owners.

Professional associations also face no legal restrictions, and Moldova has several that are particularly concerned with improving the quality of journalism and debating issues in the field. Among them are the Sports Press Association of Moldova, affiliated with the International Sports Press Association (AIPS) and AIPS-Europe; the Guild of Agriculture Journalists; the Press Club of the Independent Journalism Center and Press Freedom Committee; the Investigative Journalists Club; the Association of Environmental and Eco Tourism Journalists; the Association of Russian-Speaking Journalists; and the Young Journalists Center. But Zaharia said most of these groups are not active, and when journalists run into trouble with the authorities or others, it's the media-focused civil society groups that step in with legal assistance.

Barba said the oldest professional association, the Journalists Union of Moldova, "has dishonored their activities and has given them up, and over recent years has not undertaken any attempt to revive them." Associations receive no government funds and often rely on international donors who are keen to help improve Moldovan journalism, Gogu said. A trade union, theoretically concerned with journalists' labor rights, and a journalists' union focused on free-speech rights operate in Transnistria. Journalists apply for membership in the trade union and can join the journalists' union after working for three years. "In practice, neither the journalists' union nor the trade union is concerned about defending the rights of journalists or about their training and collaboration with similar international associations," Dorosenco said. Both associations, which are funded by membership fees, support the authorities and work closely with them.

Several media NGOs promote democratic journalism, press freedom, access to information, and the like. Gogu's IJC, for example, provides services ranging "from training and legal assistance for journalists to drafting legislation. We have good cooperation with international institutions and with development partners." Barba said that despite the lack of a strong union, when problems arise related to freedom of expression, groups such as the IJC, API (Asociatia Presei Independente), APEL (Asociatia Presei Libere Din Moldova), together with other pro-democracy organizations, issue joint statements.

The panelists wondered, though, if the authorities listen.

"The community of media NGOs actively promotes the quality journalism and proposes amendments to legislation...but the authorities' response is vague or nonexistent," Lazur said.

In Transnistria, Dorosenco's Media Center NGO has been working for almost 15 years to promote independent media. It responds to violations of press freedom, provides legal advice to journalists, and cooperates with specialized international bodies. Media NGOs are visible and often effective in their

work with journalists, Burdeinii said Moldova could use more such organizations “to provide services and involve journalists in projects they implement.”

Journalism is studied in universities in Moldova and in a 10-month postgraduate program at the Chişinău School of Advanced Journalism, managed by the IJC. In addition, there are master’s and doctoral programs for those interested in research.

“We have educational and quality programs, but they, largely, are poorly implemented,” Ribca said. Burdeinii said universities focus too much on theory or experience that might be relevant abroad but not in Moldova, and “that is why many graduates don’t work in their specialty.”

Barba said there is a big gap between the classroom and real working conditions. “The professional qualifications of young journalists are poor, probably because education is on a commercial basis and insufficiently prepared candidates can get into universities,” she said. Zablovskaya said the entire education system, including journalism studies, has declined. “We prepare too many specialists, but after graduation, few stay not only in the profession, but even in the country,” she said. “Yes, young people can study freely and abroad, but it’s rare when a young person with a journalism degree earned abroad returns to work at home.” Gogu said media employers complain about the quality of graduates, “but some media are not interested in quality, especially those wanting to hire docile people.”

The Transnistrian region lacks academic programs that would give future graduates sufficient practical skills. “The exceptions are those students who come to the department of journalism and from early on begin to work closely with any media,” Dorosenco said. Student media do not exist, and future journalists are expected to collaborate with the university newspaper, where the editor strictly controls output.

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 in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

Opportunities abound for journalists in Moldova to attend short-term training courses, which are usually free and offered by media NGOs. Indeed, Barba said journalists sometimes tire of so many trainings and that many of the skills taught are never put to use. Gogu said supervisors, especially in understaffed newsrooms, do not always agree to let their journalists attend. Ribca said the short-term trainings are “sufficient,” but media organizations and training organizers should confer more closely to ensure that the courses are teaching more uniform materials. Tacu said the short-term trainings are essential and should be expanded to media outlets’ management and marketing staff “to help them implement strategies for make a profit.” Dorosenco said that in Transnistria, “journalists’ participation in trainings organized by NGOs is frowned upon, including by the journalism department of the university.”

The supply of media equipment, newsprint, and printing services is one of the few industries in Moldova run on strictly a business, and not political, basis, Darie said. As in previous years, the panelists cited problems with printing services. In the capital, for example, only two printing houses operate, which is sufficient, considering the steady decline in newspaper circulation figures, but the business has become unprofitable and is no longer developing, Burdeinii said. Zablovskaya speculated that there could be a “cartel agreement” between the two printing houses. Ribca said printing houses are not well-distributed around the country, and Perunov said regional newspapers cannot take advantage of the quality of service offered by printing houses in the capital and are therefore printed in black and white. Among Transnistria’s several printing houses, the government-owned press offers lower prices, but “if the newspaper isn’t loyal to the regime, the printing house might refuse the order, saying it lacks the capacity,” Dorosenco said.

Such means of media dissemination as kiosks, cablecasting, the Internet, and mobile telephony are apolitical and unregulated in Moldova. There were no publicly known cases of media being blocked from mobile networks or the Internet during 2016. Online media and bloggers can freely choose the software, platforms, domains, and IP addresses they want. Some inconveniences are noticed in print media distribution, “where there is state monopoly and exaggerated prices,” Burdeinii said.

Some suspicious cases of technical failures were reported when cable service providers blocked access to some television stations. For instance, Gogu said that in April the signal for the Russia-centric TV7 was dropped from the satellite network for a few days. Station management restored the signal by switching frequencies and described the incident as a political order and pressure on the channel.¹² In another case, Jurnal TV said the national operator Moldtelecom deliberately stopped a live

¹² <http://tv7.md/ro/social/tv7-sistarea-retransmitterii-semnalului-tv7-print-satelit-este-o-comanda-politica/>

broadcast of protests in the center of Chişinău. Moldtelecom, in turn, blamed the problem on a cyber attack, Darie recalled.

Topal said he fears for the future of regional broadcasters, which now have frequencies and transmitters but might not be able to afford the tariffs for access to the multiplexes during Moldova's transition to digital broadcasting.

In the Transnistrian region, Dorosenco said, "The Internet, transmitters, television towers, and mobile networks are in the hands of the authorities and of the commercial monopoly Sherif. Under such circumstances, outlets uncomfortable for the government can be easily blocked, which actually happened several times."

Experts said the country's information and communications infrastructure is satisfactory and meets the needs of the media and citizens. Moldova ranks among the top five countries in mobile Internet use.¹³ In the first half of 2016, the number of mobile Internet users based on 4G technology grew by 67 percent over the end of 2015, topping 221,500. In the same period, the number of mobile Internet users based on 3G technology stood at 1.4 million, making the overall penetration rate of mobile broadband access 44.5 percent.¹⁴

Darie acknowledged that the country enjoyed speedy Internet service but said the infrastructure belongs to the government and that private companies must pay enormous sums to gain access to them, effectively limiting access.

Similarly, digital transmission will not be able to reach all of the country's rural areas, Topal said, as local operators have been slow to develop the expensive networks needed and because the tariffs to get access to the state's network are too high.

In Transnistria, the ICT infrastructure also enables digital television, broadcast media content online, podcasts, and mobile phone messaging, but "mobile phones with Internet access are not that common because of the price," Dorosenco said.

¹³ http://www.noi.md/md/news_id/94706

¹⁴ <http://www.anrceti.md/news08092016>

List of Panel Participants

Eugen Ribca, media law expert, Chişinău

Mariana Tacu, journalism department head, State University of Moldova, Chişinău

Ludmila Barba, journalist, Moldova 1, Chişinău

Nadine Gogu, executive director, Independent Journalism Center, Chişinău

Tudor Darie, manager and co-founder, Interact Media, Chişinău

Viorica Zaharia, journalist and president, Press Council, Chişinău

Galina Zablovskaya, executive director, Association of Advertising Agencies, Chişinău

Vladimir Topal, owner and manager, BasTV, Basarabeasca

Veaceslav Perunov, manager, SP, Bălţi

Luiza Dorosenco, director, Media Center, Tiraspol

Alexandr Burdeinii, editor-in-chief, InfoMarket, Chişinău

The following participant submitted a questionnaire but did not attend the panel discussion.

Dumitru Lazur, coordinating editor, Rise Moldova, Chişinău

Moderator & Author

Ion Bunduchi, media expert, Chişinău

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