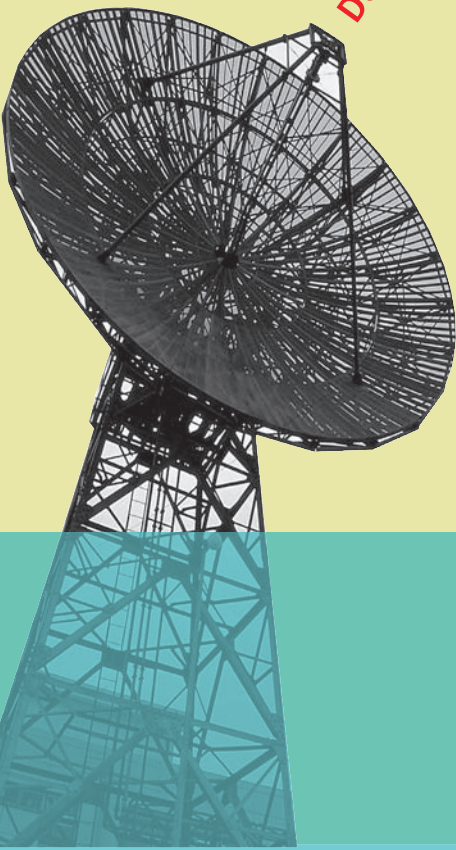


MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2003

Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Europe and Eurasia





The use of the state media as “a weapon of propaganda for the destruction of political opponents” is also a significant problem, a panelist said.



Introduction

The media environment in Moldova deteriorated in 2003, with state and legal pressure on the independent press intensifying. The governing party continued to control the state-owned media, only pretending to transform radio and television into public institutions, panelists said. There was special concern about an article in the new criminal code punishing libel with five years in prison and cancellation in the new civil code of the ceiling on monetary compensation for moral damages.

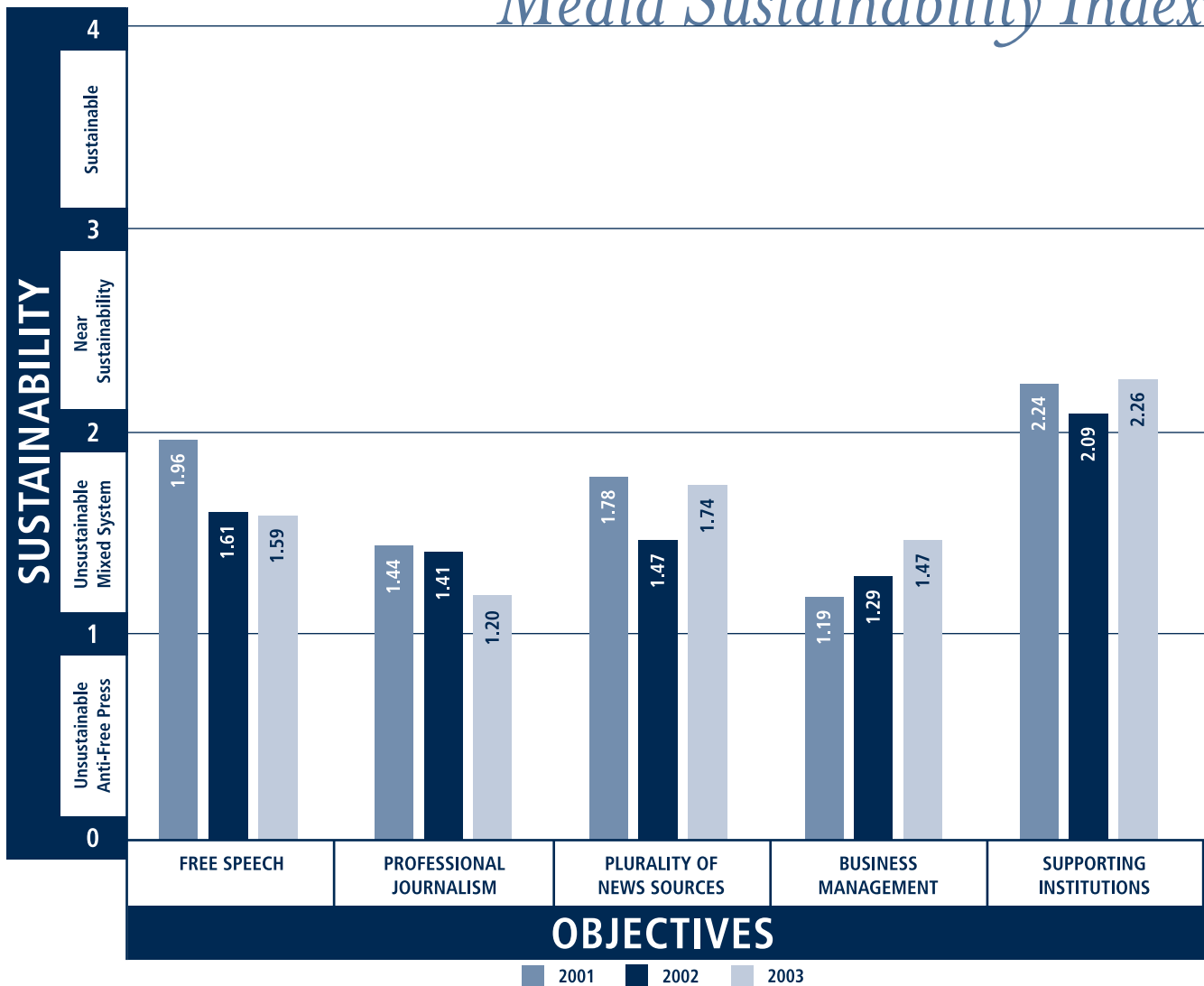
The media sector includes state, party, and commercial outlets. With few exceptions, they depend on funding sources beyond their business revenues and allow editorial interference by these sponsors from government, political parties, and businesses. Panel members criticized the lack of editorial independence, especially in the state-funded outlets, which are rife with unrestrained censorship. The use of the state media as “a weapon of propaganda for the destruction of political opponents” is also a significant problem, a panelist said.

The lack of media independence stems from many factors: insufficient revenues and difficulties in attracting capital, self-censorship, poor management, and no advertising market to deliver profits in an environment of fair competition. However, panel members noted that independent newspapers and broadcasters exist in Moldova, and some measures show increasing public trust in the media. There are professional broadcasts as well as quality print journalism, but panel members gave a low general rating to Moldovan journalism.

Access to the mass media is not obstructed legally, but it is a financial burden for producers and consumers, especially in areas outside the capital. Newspapers are delivered after a significant delay. Although private distributors have appeared, their market share is insignificant and the state-owned network continues to function as a near monopoly. State-controlled television and radio are the most accessible media for consumers nationwide. A small number of radio stations cover about two-thirds of Moldova’s territory, and there are international stations accessible everywhere. The few television stations with national coverage rebroadcast programs from Russia and

Moldova

Media Sustainability Index



Objective Scoring

The averages of all the indicators are averaged to obtain a single, overall score for each objective. Objective scores are averaged to provide an overall score for the country. IREX interprets the overall scores as follows:

- 3 and above:** Sustainable and free independent media
- 2–3:** Independent media approaching sustainability
- 1–2:** Significant progress remains to be made; society or government is not fully supportive
- 0–1:** Country meets few indicators; government and society actively oppose change

Indicator Scoring

Each indicator is scored using the following system:

- 0 =** Country does not meet indicator; government or social forces may actively oppose its implementation
- 1 =** Country minimally meets aspects of the indicator; forces may not actively oppose its implementation, but business environment may not support it and government or profession do not fully and actively support change
- 2 =** Country has begun to meet many aspects of the indicator, but progress may be too recent to judge or still dependent on current government or political forces
- 3 =** Country meets most aspects of the indicator; implementation of the indicator has occurred over several years and/or through changes in government, indicating likely sustainability
- 4 =** Country meets the aspects of the indicator; implementation has remained intact over multiple changes in government, economic fluctuations, changes in public opinion, and/or changing social conventions

Romania, but no private television station with national coverage exists, thanks to government controls. As Moldova has been redivided into regions (*raion*), local authorities have resumed publishing their own newspapers, thus limiting the opportunities for independent press in the provinces. Internet access in the countryside is free, but limited due to lack of infrastructure. Private printers are opening, but the state still owns the large printing houses.

Panel members mentioned that media coverage is distorted and biased, especially during election campaigns. During the most recent local elections, the authorities used the media (especially the state outlets) to promote their interests. Many media outlets are essentially mouthpieces of political parties. Panelists also mentioned that journalists failed to associate professionally and that cleavages within the journalistic community are encouraged by the authorities, who have reverted to the Soviet practice of creating “pocket NGOs.”

Objective 1: Free Speech

Moldova Objective Score: 1.59/4.00

The Constitution of Moldova, passed in 1994, guarantees the freedom of expression and the right to information. Censorship is prohibited. However, state authorities have passed a number of laws obstructing the liberties guaranteed by the Constitution.

On July 12, 2003, the new civil and criminal codes came into force. Article 16 of the civil code, which refers to “the protection of professional honor, dignity, and reputation,” removed the ceiling on compensation for moral damages. Media experts believe this article could considerably affect the ability of the press to report objectively, because of the threat of lawsuits brought against the media. They also are concerned about an article in the criminal code that penalizes libel with prison terms of up to five years, saying it may be used to intimidate the media and seriously threaten freedom of expression.

In February 2003, the Law on Fighting Extremist Activities was passed on the initiative of Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin. Civil society representatives in Moldova, opposition political leaders, and a number of international human rights organizations criticized this law. London-based Article 19 addressed a letter to the president requesting that he not sign the law. The article of the law that references “the liability of media outlets for disseminating information with an extremist character” and another on “the inadmissibil-

ity of using public telecommunication networks for carrying out extremist activities” expose the media to double-barreled restrictions. Article 19 argued that “the media are sent a signal by which they are shown that they are under a special regime of restrictions concerning the materials they can publish or broadcast.”

The Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel participants agreed that new laws on the media have been adopted practically overnight without debate in the press or consultations by experts. There also is concern that the true motivations for the laws are obscured. As one

“There is pressure on businesspeople not to advertise with the press that the authorities don’t like, and to advertise instead with the pro-governmental press.”

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

FREE SPEECH INDICATORS

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

As one panelist explained, “Ostensibly noble intentions very often hide anti-democratic, authoritarian interests of the governing party.”

two weeks after being proposed in parliament. According to one panelist, the stated declarations of communist deputies concerning the need “to close a gap in the national legislation” hid their “desire to subdue the Chisinau municipality’s radio and television stations.”

Experts mention that transforming the state Teleradio-Moldova into a public institution under a law adopted in July 2003 has been inexcusably delayed. Under pressure from the Council of Europe, the law was amended in March 2003 to drop the requirement that the parliament approve the members of the Council of Observers, the new public company’s main board of governors. Even so, there are many indications that the government manipulates the Council, including a move in October 2003 to circumvent it by liquidating Teleradio-Moldova and creating a new public institution. The parliament argued that this was the only way to transform the state company into a public institution, but opponents said it was simply a way for the governing party to get rid of “disobedient” journalists.

There are cases that demonstrate the government’s hand in state television programming. For example, a November 2002 edition of the talk show “Buna seara” (Good Evening) discussing the Transnistrian settlement was suspended because the leader of the communist faction in parliament refused to participate. Also, in December 2003, national radio news department director Valentina Ursu was forbidden to host her morning show of many years because she was older than 35 and “ought to concentrate on management.” Supporters said her interviews of opposition politicians were the real problem. The Moldovan president recognized, albeit indirectly, the opposition’s blocked access to the state-controlled broadcasts when he said the main television channel should include one hour of weekly programming featuring opposition party members. The station complied with President Voronin’s demand.

panelist explained, “Ostensibly noble intentions very often hide anti-democratic, authoritarian interests of the governing party.”

For example, the Law on the Local Public Broadcasting Institution was adopted on December 25, only

Other means of creative censorship are used against independent media, according to panel members, but they are a form of intimidation that cannot be proven. One participant mentioned sudden tax inspections. Another said, “There is pressure on businesspeople not to advertise with the press that the authorities don’t like, and to advertise instead with the pro-governmental press.”

The Broadcasting Coordinating Council (BCC), a panel to which the president, government, and parliament each appoint three members, is not impartial, panelists said. They cited the July 2003 council decision to monitor the Moldovan office of the Russian television station First Channel on the grounds that the council had received complaints from viewers that the station “failed to present balanced news coverage.”

The state-run media do not officially enjoy preferential legal status, but it is clear that private media are discriminated against. State media are exempt from VAT (value-added tax), state newspapers pay below-market rent, and state journalists enjoy the privileges of being public servants. When Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev visited the government newspaper *Moldova Suverana*, he promised that “he would order businesses in which the state held the majority of shares to advertise with the government newspaper” (Moldpres, August 14, 2001). He has kept his word. Moreover, the government orders public institutions and state-run businesses to subscribe to governmental newspapers. A September 2003 BCC decree said “businesses wishing to create new television stations, regardless of the location, will receive licenses only on the condition that they rebroadcast the national channel Moldova 1.”

BCC allocates radio and television broadcast licenses and frequencies, and MSI panelists contended that resolutions favor the governing Communist Party since its members have been selected based on their degree of loyalty. Some BCC members who are also radio and television station managers have been appointed in violation of the law against conflicts of interest.

So far, the BCC has not developed a clear strategy for the development of broadcasting in Moldova. Panel members criticized the BCC for its partisan distribution of licenses and especially for failing to take issue with broadcasters that do not meet license requirements. Panelists said the BCC does not have a monitoring system to verify how license holders meet broadcast requirements. Also, according to radio station Vocea Basarabiei, “by indulging stations loyal to the government and spreading unfounded claims regarding the editorial policy of stations critical of the state, the BCC has demonstrated ‘political servitude.’”

The Center for Monitoring the Information Space (SIMON) report on media monitoring showed that “in the process of applying for broadcast licenses the majority of applicants declared their commitment to producing and broadcasting local programs. But by the end of 2001, their actual fare (of the private radio and TV stations) was limited to rebroadcasting programs from other countries”—primarily Russia, followed by Romania.

Another negative trend in 2003 was a sharp increase in the number of abuses against journalists and cases in which access to information and freedom of expression were limited. At the end of 2002, the BCC decided not to renew radio station Vocea Basarabiei’s license. Besides its own programs, this station rebroadcasts Radio Free Europe and Voice of America. Vocea Basarabiei was able to resume only three months later due to the intervention of international organizations. In January 2003, the director of *Accente* weekly was assaulted. In March, the spokesperson of the General Prosecutor’s Office was dismissed for disclosing to the media a case of abuse of power by the parliament’s deputy speaker Vadim Misin. In April, the Information and Security Service and the Prosecutor’s Office interrogated the director of radio station Antena C, the producer of one of its call-in programs, and several listeners and callers on the grounds that the program “permitted indecent expressions.” Under pressure, Antena C suspended the program. In May 2003, the Chisinau Prosecutor’s Office searched the offices of the *Flux* daily to find out who wrote an article about the alleged involvement of the former honorary consul of Lebanon in Chisinau in weapon sales to Islamic terrorist groups. In July 2003, the director of the news department of the state-run news agency Moldpres, Cornelia Cozonac, was dismissed after she made public that she had been ordered to publish news from the president’s press service without any editing.

Journalists continue to be prosecuted for libel and defamation. “The general trend is that these legal provisions are used by abusive public servants in order to protect their false public dignity and take revenge on journalists,” a panelist said. Panel members noted that in the absence of an independent judicial system, judges obey the authorities and issue rulings against journalists.

Tight control over information continues. Although the Access to Information Law was adopted three years ago, public affairs officers continue to oppose journalists’ requests. According to the law, any legal resident of Moldova may request any information or document from public bodies or institutions for any reason. There are no clear procedures, however, and some state

bodies request fees or delay long enough to render the material obsolete. In 2003, press officers were sued for the first time for refusing to provide public information, and two suits were even successful. The Court of Appeals ordered the Center for Fighting Economic Crimes and

Corruption and the General Prosecutor’s Office to supply information requested by the Association of Independent Press, but neither institute immediately complied.

Journalists sometimes are barred from government events. On December 3, 2002, the editor-in-chief of *Moldavskie vedomosti* weekly, Dmitrii Ciubasenco, was not allowed to attend a press conference given by the president. The manager of the president’s office building said he had received clear orders not to admit Ciubasenco.

Access to international sources of information and news is not limited, but the finances of media outlets are a barrier.

The Moldovan authorities have not imposed labor restrictions on media professionals, except for accreditation requirements. Foreign journalists are mandated to receive accreditation from a government ministry.

“The general trend is that these legal provisions are used by abusive public servants in order to protect their false public dignity and take revenge on journalists,” a panelist said.

Objective 2: Professional Journalism

Moldova Objective Score: 1.20/4.00

Professionalism is gaining ground in Moldova, but it competes with biased, unprofessional journalism. Some produce objective or analytical articles and programs, but many others accept commissions to produce tendentious, distorted stories. Journalists from the state-run media churn out shameless propaganda in favor of the governing party.

At the same time, however, surveys have shown an increase in the population’s trust in the media. According to a survey conducted in November 2002 by the Center for Sociological Studies ILIGACIU, media are second only to the church as the most credible social institution.

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).

A serious barrier to professional journalism is the limited access to information. According to a survey conducted by the Independent Journalism Center (IJC)—a media-support nongovernmental organization (NGO)—and ILIGACIU, 83.8 percent of journalists believe that the Access to Information Law is not implemented in practice. Meanwhile, 81.8 percent say that Article 34(2) of the Constitution, which obligates public institutions to provide accurate information to citizens, is not observed.

The code of ethics adopted by the Union of Journalists in May 2000 requires that a clear distinction be made between information and opinion. The code also banned the acceptance of compensation from third parties for the publication of stories. However, the code is not fully observed. Moreover, the ILIGACIU survey has shown that 27.8 percent of interviewed journalists are not very familiar with ethics codes, and 38.5 percent recognize that they sometimes work in ways incompatible with professional standards. One significant violation occurred during the recent local election campaign when the director of the national television station, Ion Gonta, showed hidden-camera footage of two female investigative newspaper journalists in a sauna. The director later was barred from the Journalists' Union of Moldova and was accused of violating the ethics code, by "discrediting the profession of journalism and damaging the credibility of the media as a whole."

During election periods, most media outlets support political camps. According to the IJC/ILIGACIU survey, 81.8 percent of respondents believe that journalists in Moldova engage "to a considerable extent in political partisanship at the expense of the principles of free journalism." Self-censorship is a common practice in both public and private media. As with state-run media, the owners of some private outlets institute certain taboo topics.

The precarious economic situation of journalists contributes to a lack of professionalism. *The Journalist's Profile* survey has shown that 50 percent of journalists have a monthly salary under 1,000 lei (about \$76), while 37 percent earn between 1,000 and 2,000 lei per month (between \$76 and \$150). About 1,325 lei is considered the minimum "consumer budget," according to the government. The same survey shows that 52 percent of journalists have a second job to supplement their income. Some media professionals resort to political advertising and other services for political parties during campaigns. Salaries do not always depend on performance. Instead, they may relate to media owners and their connections in business or political circles. As one panelist explained, "There are bad journalists who are well paid, and there are good journalists who are paid extremely poorly."

Most radio and television stations have their own broadcasting equipment, including transmitters. Public company Teleradio-Moldova and a number of private radio stations, including several Russian stations, use the services of the state company Radiocomunicatii. Teleradio-Moldova has serious technical problems, with more than 80 percent of its equipment considered obsolete.

Investigative journalism "never appears," panelists stated. However, there have been some successful attempts in this area. The Association of Independent Press, representing private media owners, created an investigative team, and its reporting was published in member newspapers. But with the authorities so unconcerned about disclosures made by the media, journalists wonder whether investigative journalism is worth the risks, the expense, and the threat of lawsuits.

As one panelist explained, "There are bad journalists who are well paid, and there are good journalists who are paid extremely poorly."

Objective 3: Plurality of News Sources

Moldova Objective Score: 1.74/4.00

According to the Moldpresa SA catalogue, 64 newspapers and 44 magazines were distributed nationwide at the end of 2003. About 20 percent of the national newspapers are published by state bodies, and only eight newspapers (12.5 percent) were open about their political affiliations. Also, about 70 local and regional publications exist in Moldova (including the Gagauz Autonomous Region and Transnistria), of which almost half are funded from local public budgets.

According to SIMON monitoring, the Moldovan broadcasting market features 116 television outlets (four public, 36 private, and 77 cable operators). There are 32 private local radio stations (three public, 26 private, and three broadcast by wire). Several radio stations cover about 70 percent of the country (Antena C in Chisinau, and private stations HitFM and Russkoe Radio). Besides public TV Moldova 1, two other channels have nationwide coverage—Russian state television’s First Channel and Romania’s state TVR1. Political parties do not own radio or television stations. Internet access is underdeveloped, and in rural areas it is not available.

Moldovan citizens have access to domestic and international media without political, legal, or technical barriers, limited only by finances.

In 2003, however, the authorities halted the operation of TV Romania 1, *Pervyi kanal v Moldove*, *Vocea Basarabiei*, and *Ekho Moskvyy* for periods of one week to several months. Moldovans have access to international radio stations such as BBC, VOA, Radio Free Europe, and Radio France Internationale. A variety of international television channels are also available. For example, French TV5 is rebroadcast by a local station, and CNN can be received via cable operators. TVR1, Antena 1, Acasa, Prima TV, and PRO TV are accessible from Romania. Channel 1 is beamed from Ukraine. Moscow-based stations are rebroadcast fully or partially.

Western and Romanian newspapers are too expensive to find through normal channels, and it does not help that distribution networks in Moldova are not trying to bring them in. On the other hand, Russian newspapers, as with Russian radio and television, are sold at reasonable prices and dominate the media market in Moldova.

In the best-case scenario, a family can afford to subscribe to or buy only one publication. According to a recent survey commissioned by the Institute for Public Policies, about 22 percent of people do not read newspapers at all, and 10 percent read them less than once per week.

In contrast with Chisinau, rural areas do not have many information options. Many villages have no newsstands, radio programs are not received regularly, and only one or two television channels are available. Print media reach villages after lengthy delays.

National state radio and television (Radio Moldova and TV Moldova 1) do not reflect the entire political spectrum and serve as the governing party’s propaganda machine, panelists concluded. One explained, “As during Soviet rule, public television has taboo topics—names and lists of people who by no means can participate in programs. The weekly program ‘Opposition Hour,’ introduced in early December, confirms the fact that the opposition is seen as a dispensable element of political life.”

There are many news agencies, and the monopoly of the state-run agency Moldpres has been undermined in recent years by about 10 private agencies, of which

“The government often imposes political subjects in order to distract the public’s attention from more real subjects.”

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.

“As during Soviet rule, public television has taboo topics—names and lists of people who by no means can participate in programs. The weekly program ‘Opposition Hour,’ introduced in early December, confirms the fact that the opposition is seen as a dispensable element of political life.”

mainly in the form of entertainment. Newscasts are few, and their editorial policy is incoherent. Better-quality news is found at stations like ProTV Chisinau, ORT Moldova, NIT, BBC, Radio Free Europe, Radio Antena C, Radio PRO FM, as well as some radio stations outside Chisinau. These stations usually feature news bulletins and analytical programs, produced by their own news departments.

Media in Moldova are not transparent concerning ownership and funding sources. The public is not informed about who owns certain television and radio stations, especially those that influence Moldovan political culture. Media ownership is often the subject of innuendo and gossip during elections. There has been a recent trend toward media concentration, particularly regarding the broadcast media.

The Moldovan media do not reflect the full range of public interest. Most outlets primarily offer reporting on politics, with very little on social, economic, and international issues. A panel participant said, “The government often imposes political subjects in order to distract the public’s attention from more real subjects.” Stories on social assistance, the disabled, abandoned children, and similar topics are infrequent. Some independent newspapers such as *Jurnal de Chisinau*, *Timpul*, *Ekonomicheskoe obozrenie*, and *Novoie vremea* have begun to shift the focus to topics related to civic journalism.

BASA-Press, Info-tag, Infoprim, Flux, Interlic, and Deca-press have gained strong footholds on the market.

Independent radio and television stations in Moldova contribute only partially to the diversity of information. A significant number of broadcasters (96.6 percent, according to SIMON data) are concentrated in cities. Original programming is insignificant and

Of the 108 publications distributed nationwide, 56 are in Romanian since approximately 65 percent of Moldova’s population is ethnically Romanian. There are 45 publications listed as appearing in Russian (41.7 percent), while six are in mixed Romanian and Russian (5.6 percent) and one is in English. The national minority press (produced by Ukrainians, Gagauz, Bulgarians, and Jews) faces serious financial difficulties.

Objective 4: Business Management

Moldova Objective Score: 1.47/4.00

The media in Moldova are largely unprofitable. Advertising agencies and the advertising market in general are underdeveloped. Furthermore, there are few experienced media managers, and public perception of the media as a propaganda tool rather than a business remains strong. Media outlets rely partially on commercial revenues but are constantly searching for subsidies. “Media professionals feel more comfortable under the wing of somebody who provides financial support, allowing them to work without worrying about the newspaper’s funding. This mentality is changing, but not quickly enough,” one panelist said.

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. |

The government controls printing and distribution of print media in Moldova. The state owns the Press House, a national press center where half of the newspapers and magazines published in Moldova are based. The state controls distribution companies such as Moldpresa and Posta Moldovei and manages printers in Chisinau and in district towns. State company Radiocomunicatii manages the radio transmission network. Government authorities set the fees and taxes for facility rent, printing, distribution and sales, communication services, and radio signal transmission. Due to the state monopoly, fees for press distribution and transmission are considered quite high.

The state press continues to gain strength. Pro-government newspapers emerge from nowhere, funded by obscure sources and managed by civil servants. For example, *Sens* newspaper is edited unofficially by the head of the president's press service; *Tineretul*

“Media professionals feel more comfortable under the wing of somebody who provides financial support, allowing them to work without worrying about the newspaper’s funding. This mentality is changing, but not quickly enough,” one panelist said.

and *Moldovei* are edited by the editor-in-chief of the governmental newspaper *Moldova Suverana*. After Moldova reverted to the Soviet-style administrative districts, the state also began funding district newspapers, undermining independent local and regional newspapers. “One can’t say that normal business relations and market-economy rules have taken

hold in the media,” a panelist concluded.

Market research, promotion, and sales services have developed very slowly. Although advertising revenues increased in the past five years, this has not been sufficient to spur significant growth of the media sector. It is difficult to assess the real scope of the advertising market due to a lack of transparency. “Many companies are unwilling to invest in advertising, because they don’t believe in its utility,” a panel member said. Some businesses do not want to advertise with newspapers for fear of attracting the tax authorities.

Subscriptions are the most reliable revenue source for private newspapers. Some publications increase their print runs due to free subscriptions subsidized by unknown sources. Newspapers that support political parties receive subsidies from their owners. However, many sources of media funding remain unknown. It is clear that the government does not offer financial assistance to independent media.

Businesses afraid to advertise with opposition newspapers receive “recommendations” to advertise with state-run media, allowing the government to consolidate its power through its network of loyal media. One panelist explained, “In general, business depends to a large degree on whether or not you are loyal to the state. If you are not, then you are harassed until you accept the government recommendations.”

While market surveys are rare, in recent years credible surveys have been conducted through the Independent Journalism Center. Theoretically, circulation statistics can be obtained from printing houses or distribution companies, but they usually refuse to make such data available. Overall, very little information is available to the media on how to develop strategies, marketing plans, and business practices.

The managers of four television companies—Tele-radio-Moldova, Analitic Media Group (broadcasting on the ORT-Moldova channel), TeleDixi (broadcasting on the RTR TV channel), and New Televised Ideas (NIT)—have agreed to collaborate on developing local and international advertising. These stations agreed not to grant exclusive advertising rights to any agency and to reduce agency fees to the lowest possible level: 15 percent. “In order to ensure objectivity in their work with clients and advertising agencies, TV stations decided to choose, through a tender, a company to monitor TV programs and another one to conduct surveys and/or assess TV audiences,” Infotag news agency reported in November 2003. Panel participants mentioned that three of these four companies have national coverage and dominate the Moldovan media market. The only national broadcaster left outside of this agreement is TV Romania 1, they said, and since it does not sell advertising in Moldova, there is the threat of monopolization in television advertising.

“Many companies are unwilling to invest in advertising, because they don’t believe in its utility,” a panel member said.

Objective 5: Supporting Institutions

Moldova Objective Score: 2.26/4.00

The Association of Independent Press, representing the interests of private media owners, includes 17 local and national newspapers and magazines published in Romanian and Russian; it also includes two news agencies. The IJC is highly active, and the Association of Electronic Press (APEL) represents 22 radio and television stations,

“The communist authorities not only create ‘government NGOs,’ but also mimic consultations with civil society in order to gain credibility abroad.”

during the elections in early 2003, when most broadcasters allied with the governing party. This made it even more difficult to protect common media interests. The Mass Media Association, created last year to support

production studios, and professionals. However, these associations lack solidarity among the competing media owners. Many owners have political affiliations or are funded from abroad. Such political affiliations became obvious

the government, is practically nonfunctioning. Some critics considered its creation a one-off political act so that a declaration could be submitted to the Council of Europe denying the allegations of censorship at TVM and denouncing the Anti-Censorship Committee created by the employees of the state broadcaster. The Union of TV Companies was created in November 2003 to coordinate a strategy regarding the television and advertising markets.

The Union of Journalists has evolved from a Soviet-style professional organization into an effective NGO. There are various other associations of journalists specializing in areas such as agriculture or sports. However, the cleavages in the journalistic profession along political lines make it practically impossible for journalists to build solidarity. The Federation of Radio and TV Professionals, created last year at Teleradio-Moldova, committed itself to protecting the rights of journalists should the company be liquidated and turned into a public institution. The League of Professional Journalists, founded last year by the editor-in-chief of the government-run *Moldova Suverana* and former editor of the state news agency Moldpres, has so far only been active in supporting the communist authorities, thus confirming the suspicion that it is a “pocket NGO.” As one panelist noted, “The communist authorities not only create ‘government NGOs,’ but also mimic consultations with civil society in order to gain credibility abroad.”

At present there are about 30 media-support NGOs, but only about a third of those actively work with independent media. Most of the effective organizations focus on improving media legislation and the free flow of information, as well as professional training for journalists. Acces-Info works to reinforce the Access to Information Law. A group of NGOs such as APEL, the IJC, the Union of Journalists, and API monitor the transformation of state Teleradio-Moldova into a public institution.

The quality of journalism courses at the university level is improving, both at the State University and at the private Free International University of Moldova. Young people can also study journalism at universities in Comrat and Tiraspol. Moldovan universities traditionally prefer to focus on theoretical training, and practical experience continues to be a problem for many students that the schools lack equipment and money to solve.

Journalists are offered opportunities to update their skills and knowledge during short-term courses organized by the IJC, the Union of Journalists, the Association of Independent Press, and the Association of Electronic Press, among others. For example, IJC

Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS

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

has organized courses in photojournalism and agricultural journalism. Through the South-East European Network for the Professionalization of the Media, journalists may attend courses in radio management, investigative reporting, and computer-assisted research. Also, IJC has a journalism library containing Western books. API has organized courses for the development of financial management skills for newspapers and training in newspaper management.

Printing resources are controlled by both government and private owners. There are no restrictions on their use. However, besides the state-owned Universul printing company in Chisinau, there is only one private printer. A second printing service could not survive due to the low newspaper circulation numbers. Most local newspapers are printed by privatized services, which under the Soviet Union used to be part of the communist party's printing network. The panel members agreed that there are no problems with the availability of newsprint.

The state continues to monopolize the press distribution system throughout Moldova. This monopoly hinders the development of an independent press. Private newspapers do not have the resources to create their own distribution networks. However, private distribution companies have been created, such as Omnia Press. Its reach is limited to Chisinau, which used to be controlled by the state company Moldpresa.

Internet access is sold only by private providers that must use the Moldtelecom network, currently up for privatization. There are no legal restrictions limiting the use of the Internet by journalists or the general public. Moldova is among the countries with the lowest Internet use, due to high access costs of an average \$7 per month. Internet access is even less developed outside of Chisinau. According to Valeriu Sitnic, deputy director of the Information Technologies Department, more than 90 percent of Internet services are concentrated in Chisinau. Although the number of users continues to grow, progress is slow. According to a recent survey, only 1.9 percent of the population uses the Internet. Panel members criticized the fact that Moldtelecom is the only Internet operator, and its high network access fees prevent private providers from having a flexible pricing policy.

Panel Participants

Vasile Botnaru, editor-in-chief, BASA-press news agency

Val Butnaru, director, independent weekly *Jurnal de Chisinau*

Ion Enache, president, National Ethics Commission

Corina Fusu, editor, Moldova 1 TV company

Dmitri Kalak, deputy editor-in-chief, independent weekly *Ekonomicheskoe obozrenie*

Constantin Marin, professor of journalism and communications, State University of Moldova

Olivia Partac, media law unit coordinator, Independent Journalism Center

Angela Sirbu, director, Independent Journalism Center

Vasile Spinei, director, Acces-Info center

Moderator

Nicolae Negru, editor-in-chief, Mass Media in Moldova bulletin, Independent Journalism Center

Observer

Iuri Datii, country director, IREX/Moldova