

# **MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX**

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## **2006/2007**

**The Development  
of Sustainable  
Independent Media  
in Europe and Eurasia**



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The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Europe and Eurasia  
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*On the whole, the MSI panelists agreed, principles of freedom of expression and media independence are mimicked rather than observed. Although two governmental newspapers have been privatized, they continue receiving governmental subsidies and benefits.*



Photo courtesy of Steven Knowlton

MOLDOVA

# M

Moldova had a difficult 2006, pressured economically by Russia in response to the country's stated reorientation toward European integration, solidarity with the "color revolutions" in Ukraine and Georgia, and the government's assertions that Russia should withdraw its troops from the separatist region of Transnistria. Moldova was hit hardest by the ban on its main export, wine, about 70 percent of which targets the Russian market. At the same time, Moldova had to live up to its commitments to democratization and economic reforms included in the Moldova-EU Action Plan, a higher degree of media independence among them.

The embargo on Moldovan exports was lifted after meetings between the Moldovan and Russian presidents that exacted some toll from Moldova. On the democratization front, parliament amended a number of laws, but this measure did not produce major practical changes. The European Commission's Moldova country report identified seven key flaws in the governing Communist Party's approach, including poor implementation of reform strategies, widespread corruption, limited judicial independence, and insufficient media freedom.

A new broadcasting code was adopted in 2006, heralded as a better piece of legislation than previous laws but nevertheless, in the view of the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel, formulated so as to allow the authorities to preserve their control over the Broadcasting Coordination Council (BCC) and the public broadcaster Teleradio-Moldova. Through the BCC, the government also controls distribution of licenses and frequencies and is able to harass the stations that are critical of conditions in Moldova, according to the MSI panel. The code also features a new version of provisions regulating the public broadcaster, allowing the closure of the Chisinau City stations Antena C and Euro TV Chisinau, which provided airtime to the opposition and other views critical of the governing party and its political partner, the Christian-Democratic Popular Party (PPCD).

On the whole, the MSI panelists agreed, principles of freedom of expression and media independence are mimicked rather than observed. Although two governmental newspapers have been privatized, they continue receiving governmental subsidies and benefits. Subsidies also are paid to district newspapers published by local administrations, which creates unfair competition for independent local newspapers.

In spite of some development of the advertising market, media businesses are still unattractive to investors, whether domestic or foreign. Media are more often than not motivated politically and funded by sources that do not see their investment as one in media as a business. Under these circumstances, journalist partisanship and self-censorship are widespread. There have been timid attempts to create a journalists' trade union, but they failed. Journalists continue being divided along ideological lines.

# MOLDOVA AT A GLANCE

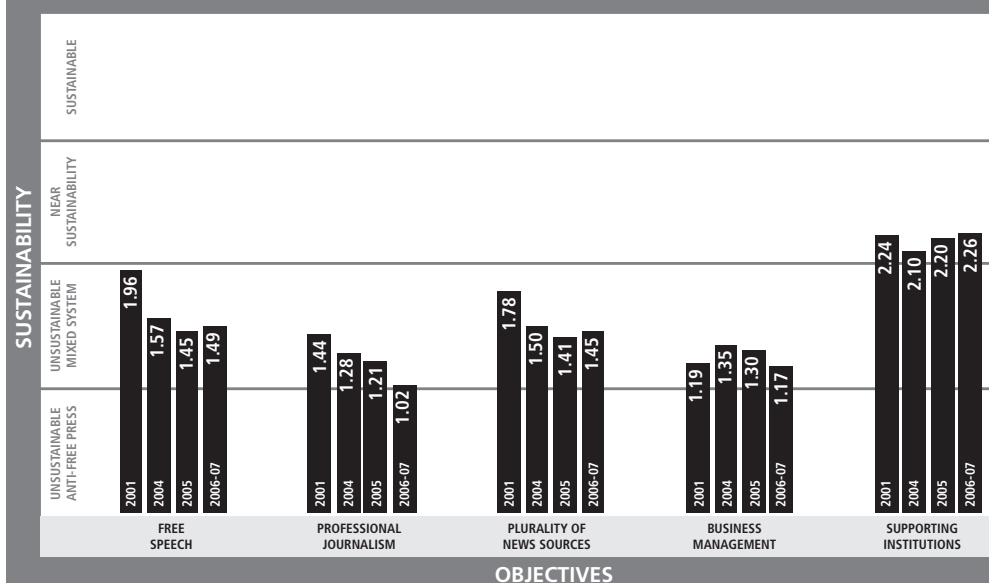
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 3,968,071 (October 2004 census) [www.statistica.md/recensamint/Date\\_prel\\_Recens\\_din2004.doc](http://www.statistica.md/recensamint/Date_prel_Recens_din2004.doc)
- > **Capital city:** Chisinau
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Moldovan/Romanian 78.2%, Ukrainian 8.4%, Russian 5.8%, Gagauz 4.4%, Bulgarian 1.9, other 1.3% (without the Transnistria region and city of Bender) (October 2004 census, [www.statistica.md](http://www.statistica.md))
- > **Religions (% of population):** Eastern Orthodox 93.3% (October 2004 census, [www.statistica.md](http://www.statistica.md)), Baptist, Adventist, Catholic, Jewish, and other communities.
- > **Languages (% of population):** Romanian (official), Russian, Ukrainian, Gagauz (a Turkish dialect), Bulgarian, others
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** 3.744 billion (Excluding Transnistria; World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$2,880 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** adult male 95%, adult female 81.3% (2000 est., World Bank)
- > **President or top authority:** Vladimir Voronin, president

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print media: According to the Moldpresa catalog ([www.moldpresa.md](http://www.moldpresa.md)), there are three "dailies" (two of which published five times per week on weekdays, and one four times), two semi-weeklies, and 22 national weeklies, all in Romanian; in Russian there are four dailies (one of which published from Moscow), two semi-weeklies, and 18 weeklies. In Transnistria there are nine newspapers, one of which published five times a week, another one three times, and the others weeklies; one weekly is published in Romania (in Cyrillic) for distribution in Moldova. Additionally there are about 40 district and regional publications. **Radio/TV:** According to the Broadcasting Coordination Council, in December 2006 in Moldova there were 38 over-the-air television stations and 45 radio stations (one radio station broadcast by wire). There are 156 cable operators and 10 MMDS (wireless cable) operators, covering practically all of Moldova ([www.cca.md](http://www.cca.md)).
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** total circulation: N/A, largest newspaper: *Flux*
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three television stations: TV Moldova 1, Pervii kanal v Moldove, TVR
- > **News agencies:** Infotag, BASA-press, Reporter.md, Moldpres, Info-prim Neo, InfoMarket, Deca-press
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 9.6% (2005, World Bank)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MOLDOVA



### Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

### Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

### Near Sustainability (2-3):

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

### Sustainable (3-4):

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

Moldavians do have access to various radio and television stations, including foreign broadcasters and the Internet. The only limitation is their ability to pay for access and their geographical location, especially in rural areas, where the choice of media is small and newspapers arrive with delays.

Overall, the MSI assessment found that despite some progress in the field of media legislation, the general situation has slightly deteriorated.

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

### Moldova Objective Score: 1.49/4.00

The majority of MSI panel members saw 2006 bringing positive changes in media law but said that overall the situation deteriorated instead of improving. This refers especially to the new Broadcasting Code. In spite of active involvement by political forces and civil society and pressure from international organizations such as the Council of Europe, the new code was formulated so as to allow the governing coalition to preserve its control over the Broadcasting Coordination Council and the public broadcaster Teleradio-Moldova. Moreover, the new code helped the Communist Party and the Christian-Democratic Popular Party take over the Chisinau City stations Antena C and Euro TV Chisinau, whose editorial policies were independent from the government's interests. The MSI panelists ranked Moldova at 1.49 for this objective, compared with 1.45 the year prior.

#### 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.

"Formally the Broadcasting Code is a step forward, as it contains improvements on the previous law," said panelist Anatol Golea, TV7 director. "Laws in Moldova are generally good enough for positive reports to the Council of Europe. The problem is with their enforcement, and the same is true of the new code." He said the situation at Antena C and Euro TV is a case in point regarding enforcement and that the BCC members and the code itself reflect the current political current, with changes likely when parliament's political makeup changes.

A number of media nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including the Independent Journalism Center, Association of Independent Press, Association of Electronic Press APEL, Acces-Info Center, Media Impact Agency, Journalists' Union of Moldova, and the Press Freedom Committee, expressed their "dismay at the manner in which the city stations Antena C and Euro TV Chisinau [were] reorganized. The actions of the city authorities and the Broadcasting Coordination Council compromise[d] the enforcement of the new Broadcasting Code." Managers of the two stations were dismissed on December 14, 2006, and Antena C suddenly stopped broadcasting the afternoon of December 15. The media NGOs called the forced evacuation of journalists from the premises and sealing off of the station "coercive and antidemocratic measures, which contradict the spirit and letter of Moldova's Constitution guaranteeing the freedom of expression and the media."

The reasons referred to by the authorities—technical problems with the transmitter, a bomb threat at the radio station's offices—and the period they chose for the actions are reminiscent of other attempts to silence the media, including during protests by journalists in front of Teleradio-Moldova in the summer of 2004. Igor Botan, director of the Association for Participatory Democracy ADEPT, said the "scandal was triggered by an attempt to use new legal provisions in order to settle older political accounts." According to "e-democracy" records, the majority communist fraction in the Chisinau City Council threatened the Antena C and Euro TV Chisinau managers with dismissal if they continued to air programs "full of propaganda and accusations against the Russian nation and the Soviet Army."

Dmitri Kalak, member of the editorial board of *Ekonomicheskoe Obozrenie*, said, "No law is perfect, and so their enforcement cannot be perfect, either. The municipal media are 'pocket' media, and therefore the focus should be on the way in which they are to be privatized and turned into independent media." Petru Macovei, Association of Independent Press director, countered, supported by other MSI participants, saying that the Moldova Communists' Party (PCRM) and Christian-Democratic Popular Party (PPCD) "are

*The institution of spokesperson is almost nonexistent. "You call a civil servant, and he sends you to the press service, and the latter tells you he needs to ask the civil servant and you should call later. And when you do call later, he is no longer available," says Corneliu Rusnac, a BBC reporter and chairperson of the Press Freedom Committee.*

dividing up the pie." "The same happened to BCC, when the candidates who did not have the support of these two parties were rejected," said Vlad Bercu, editor-in-chief of the BASA-press agency.

Elsewhere in the media law, amendments were made to Article 16 of the Civil Code, providing liability for defamation. The article now lists a series of criteria meant to help judges decide on the "reasonable" amount of compensation to be awarded to defamed plaintiffs. The amendment does not set a ceiling on moral damages, although the idea of limiting the amount awarded to plaintiffs enjoys strong support among most media outlets in Moldova, MSI panelists noted.

Moldovan law provides that international treaties on human rights to which the country is party, including that of the European Court for Human Rights, must have precedence when domestic legislation contradicts international norms. But things work somewhat differently in reality. Defamation lawsuits still plague journalists, especially given that Article 16 of the Civil Code has not been brought in line with European standards and judges often fail to apply international treaty provisions simply because they are not aware of them. Although the European Court's jurisprudence states that judges must take into consideration the journalists' good faith and the scope of research they did, in practice judges ignore this and punish journalists regardless when the latter fail to prove fully the truthfulness of their statements.

MSI panelist Olivia Partac, a lawyer with the Independent Journalism Center, said, "The cases that Moldova lost at the European Court have a positive impact. However, the solutions offered by judicial practice take a long time to evolve, and therefore it is the legal framework which needs to be improved." Partac referred to the case of *Julieta Savitchi vs. Moldova*. Julieta Savitchi, a reporter at BASA-press news agency, won a case against the Moldovan state at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in October 12, 2005. Savitchi accused the country's authorities of violating her

right to freedom of expression after she was ordered to pay a fine for having published an exposé about the activities of the traffic police in the Moldovan capital, Chisinau. Moldovan courts had found her guilty of libel. The ECHR ruled in favor of Savitchi and ordered the Moldovan authorities to pay her 3,000 euros in compensation for moral damages, as well as 1,500 euros to cover legal costs. This is the second case won by a Moldovan journalist against the country's authorities at the ECHR. In 2004, the ECHR ruled in favor of journalist Valeriu Busuioc, who also had been found guilty of libel.

Panelists also noted that Article 304 of the Criminal Code is not in line with European requirements, as it provides "a fine from 200 to 500 conventional units or 180 to 240 hours of unpaid community work, or imprisonment of up to two years" for "libel against a judge or a criminal investigator or a person contributing to justice, accompanied by allegations of a severe, extremely severe, or exceptionally severe crime, in relation to the trial of cases in court." In addition, the Administrative Code provides for arrest for up to 30 days for libel and verbal abuse.

Concerning licensing, MSI participants saw positive aspects of the new Broadcasting Code: clearer criteria and fewer documents required when applying for a broadcast license; extension of the validity term of licenses from three to seven years for radio stations and from five to seven years for television stations; the possibility to extend the broadcast license upon the holder's request if the holder observes the legislation in force and the requirements of the license; and the possibility of transmitting the license to a third party if the latter takes on all the obligations under the license. However, the improvements in the new code will become reality only if BCC acts as a politically independent institution, MSI panelists said. "Unfortunately, in the cases of Antena C and Euro TV Chisinau, BCC supported the interests of PCR and PPCD and acted as their lever," said Nicolae Negru, editor-in-chief of *Mass Media in the Republic of Moldova*.

The MSI panelists said they believe that censorship is still present at the public company Teleradio-Moldova. Most often it takes the shape of "suggestions" not to include in programs unwanted individuals or events unfavorable to the current government, the said "Every young journalist going to work for the public TV starts to censor him/herself on day one. If you are unable to censor yourself, you have to go," journalist Corina Boaghe said in *Timpul* on November 2006. "For example, I made a program about the Romanian language for non-Romanian speakers. They refused to run it because, they said, it could trigger a war in Transnistria. In another program I spoke about the cultural communities existing in Moldova. This program was not aired, either." The European Court for Human Rights has taken under review the



case *Larisa Manole et al. vs. Moldova*, in which the plaintiffs want Moldova to recognize that it violated the freedom of expression by introducing censorship at Teleradio-Moldova.

Starting up a media business and the associated costs are identical to other business areas. The tax code allows value-added tax (VAT) exemptions for books and periodicals. However, in the summer of 2006, given the flaws in the tax law that leave room for legal interpretation, the tax authorities found *Jurnal de Chisinau* guilty of failing to pay 350,675 lei (\$28,144) in VAT in 2004 and 2005. It was ruled that the newspaper had to pay the tax plus penalties and fines for a total of 630,156 MD lei (about \$50,600). *Jurnal de Chisinau* appealed the decision by saying that this was a political order aimed at terminating the paper.

Financial subsidies are provided to state-owned media, and advertising placed by state institutions and public companies is channeled to the state-owned media, too. Also widely spread is the practice of using public money to buy subscriptions to papers that are loyal to the government. Some business leaders do not buy advertising in independent newspapers lest they upset the government. But they may be susceptible to pressure to advertise as directed by authorities, including with the public broadcaster, one panelist said.

Kalak, editorial board member with the weekly *Ekonomicheskoe Obozrenie*, described this as “not the authorities’ problem but the media’s problem, because all the media are divided and are seen as being tied to certain political figures. This is why some businesspeople are afraid that their business may become tied to politics. Even if the powers-that-be should change, the media situation will not.” Golea believes that there is also a problem with the “freedom of business, since when a business buys advertising it is considered to be rich, and so the authorities send in the financial controls. Even if you do everything legally, they will always find a reason for another check. This is why unless a businessperson needs an urgent advertising campaign, they prefer not to advertise, even if they have money and advertising might be good for their business.”

Following a number of programs criticizing the Interior Minister broadcast in September 2006, the authorities started harassing and discrediting ProTV, a Chisinau private station. A ProTV employee was arrested after allegations of bribery, and the station’s offices were searched. Media-support groups, opposition parties, and some international organizations reacted to what they said were abuses by the authorities. Another form of media intimidation is sudden checks by various government inspectors, panelists said. In September 2006, the economic police started verifying all the business documents of the Balti newspaper *SP*, under the pretext that an *SP* employee failed to

account for 54 lei (about \$4) after selling classified advertising space to three individuals.

The authorities tend to ignore any link between an assault and a person working as a journalist and fail to persevere in the investigation, panelists said, citing the 2006 attack on sports journalist Ion Robu.

The Access to Information Law passed six years ago formally allows any individual residing legally in Moldova to request any information or document from public authorities or institutions, without having to give a reason. In practice, however, it is difficult to request information. The MSI participants agreed that despite good laws, bureaucratic barriers continue to hamper access to information, and they are getting worse. State institutions are as closed as they were six years ago, panelists said, and some, such as the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Finance, do not have press offices. The institution of spokesperson is almost nonexistent. “You call a civil servant, and he sends you to the press service, and the latter tells you he needs to ask the civil servant and you should call later. And when you do call later, he is no longer available,” says Corneliu Rusnac, a BBC reporter and chairperson of the Press Freedom Committee. Kalak added, “Press services have become barriers preventing journalists from accessing information, a sort of shield to protect the civil servants.” In the provinces, the situation is even worse. Vasile Spinei, Acces-Info Center director, said that in spite of the Access to Information Law, which is in line with European norms, information is provided selectively and mostly to journalists who are loyal to the authorities. Some journalists are invited to press conferences held by high officials, while others are not, the panelists said.

The MSI panel noted that there were also positive developments regarding this objective during 2006. After a lawsuit spanning more than two years, the Supreme Court of Justice ruled that the General Prosecutor’s Office (GPO) needed to disclose the names of the prosecutors who had pocketed allowances awarded to them illegally. The justices, whose decision is final, ruled in favor of the Center for Investigative Journalism, which had sued the GPO when the latter refused to issue to the Center a number of documents on the allowances. The government also endorsed a law on transparency in decision making, developed by Acces-Info and other NGOs, and the bill thus became a legislative initiative.

The state imposes no barriers to media’s access to international news and sources of information, with the cost of buying them the only limitation. Anyone can become a journalist, and there are no licensing or other requirements. Journalists are not entitled to any special privileges or social rights.

Journalist accreditation in Moldova is required by the 1994 Press Law. The law specifies that “publications and news agencies can accredit journalists, according to the prescribed procedure, to public authorities as well as to cultural and sports events.” The ambiguous provision “according to the prescribed procedure” led to institutions developing their own requirements, some of which were never made public and resulted in denial of accreditation. In 2006, Cornelia Cozonac of the Center for Investigative Journalism successfully sued the GPO when it denied her accreditation, but few journalists in similar situations go to court.

Foreign journalists in Moldova are accredited by the Foreign Ministry in accordance with regulations approved by the government in 1995. There are several ambiguous provisions in the regulations, but no cases of abuse are known so far.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Moldova Objective Score: 1.02/4.00

Most MSI panelists said they believe that the quality of journalism in Moldova is not improving, largely because the economic circumstances of journalists are not improving, either. Accurate, objective, multiple-source reporting remains the exception rather than the rule, they said, and journalists are not motivated to produce quality reporting. “Mercenary journalists have more work and are better paid, as they are ready to serve political causes and other various interests,” says Petru Macovei, director of the Association of Independent Press. “The situation in journalism is not different from the situation in other professions: there are a small number of well-trained journalists, and many more with average or poor training,” said Partac of the Independent Journalism Center. For this reason, the panelists gave this objective a rating of 1.02.

Divisions along political and ideological lines prevent enforcement of the Journalism Ethics Code of Moldova, adopted in May 2000. The code provides that “journalists have the obligation to separate clearly information from opinion and use only information they know is accurate and comes from trustworthy sources; such information ought to be presented in an impartial manner; the journalist must never receive direct or indirect compensations from third parties for publishing certain information or opinions; journalists must respect the individuals’ privacy.” Violations of the ethics code can be noticed both in public and private media, however, and the same is true of self-censorship, panelists said.

Most agree that there is censorship at the Public Company Teleradio-Moldova, which they said has not changed its editorial policy and remains a propaganda tool of the governing party. There is little coverage of topics such as poverty, emigration, trafficking in women, etc. and few debates on controversial issues. In a review of Moldova’s progress in implementing the EU-Moldova Action Plan, the European Commission stated that the transformation of Teleradio-Moldova into a public company was done superficially, according to December reports.

Private radio and television stations tend to be excessively “prudent” in their coverage lest they upset the authorities, panelists said. Kalak, editorial board member of the *Ekonomicheskoe Obozrenie* weekly, said he considers censorship in Moldova to be self-censorship. “There is no external censorship; what happens in reality is that media are given to understand that they should show more loyalty, as the case with ProTV illustrates,” says Golea, TV7 director. Bercu, editor-in-chief with BASA-press news agency, says that “there is censorship imposed by media owners.”

According to surveys carried out for the Institute for Public Policies, media credibility in Moldova is quite high, lagging only the Orthodox Church. However, credibility has been declining in recent years, with surveys showing drops from 65 percent in December 2005 to 63 percent in April 2006 and 58 percent in November 2006, according to Institute for Public Policy data.

MSI participants put the average salary among print journalists at between US \$100–\$150 per month and \$80–\$100 outside Chisinau. Private broadcasters pay on average \$300,

## 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.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

while the public broadcasters pay \$150. Bercu, editor-in-chief with BASA-press, said he believes that “journalists working for the state-owned news agency are better off than journalists in private agencies.” Various media-support groups have noted that amid Moldova’s increasing inflation, most journalists have to work several jobs in parallel and are under constant stress to find part-time work in order to survive economically.

The majority of MSI panel members saw no positive developments in investigative journalism. “There is no investigation journalism in Moldova,” says Kalak, editorial board member with the *Ekonomicheskoe obozrenie* weekly. Not only is sustained, probing reporting costly in a sector that is poor, but also journalists who take on the risk of investigating certain issues do not feel protected. “Investigative journalism is not spread because of high risks: such investigations are not tolerated by their targets, journalists are threatened by various means, and investigations unfortunately have a negligible impact in Moldova,” said Partac, a media-law expert at the Independent Journalism Center. *Ziarul de Garda*, an investigative weekly published in Chisinau, distributed an October 2006 statement informing the public, other media outlets, governmental agencies, and diplomatic missions of the pressures to which the newspaper’s reporters were subject. Individuals representing various state agencies as well as unknown persons pressure *Ziarul de Garda* reporters, the declaration said, and there were also attempts to influence the paper’s editorial policy and corrupt its journalists. “The pressure on journalists intensified when stories about corruption in Moldova’s legal system were published,” according to the declaration, posted at [www.impact.md](http://www.impact.md).

On October 13, 2006, the website of the Center for Journalistic Investigations ([www.investigatii.md](http://www.investigatii.md)) was hacked and destroyed, including the archive of stories. The site carried more than a hundred investigations in Romanian and English carried out by the Center in the previous three years, as well as documents and photographs made by journalists during their work.

Most private radio and television stations have their own broadcasting equipment, including transmitters. The Public Company Teleradio-Moldova and a number of private radio stations use the services of the state-owned company Radiocomunicatii. Panelist Ludmila Barba said she believes technical conditions improve only very slowly at Teleradio-Moldova, and “new equipment sometimes sits in warehouses because there are no funds to renovate the premises.” Print media also do not have the option to choose a printer with modern presses.

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### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

**Moldova Objective Score: 1.45/4.00**

MSI panelists also saw little change during 2006 in the plurality of news sources available to the public, with only some areas of Moldova being well served. Rural areas are dominated by the public broadcaster Teleradio-Moldova, which covers the news from the viewpoint of the governing party. “The population living in Chisinau has access to a more or less diverse choice of information sources, said panelist Partac. “In the countryside, however, the access to diverse and pluralist information is limited. This gap could be bridged if people read newspapers. But unfortunately, people in Moldova read very little.” Angela Sirbu, Independent Journalism Center director, said “the information sources available on the media market tend to become homogenous, and thus fewer and fewer stations can be heard covering events from angles different from those of the media loyal to the authorities.”

In 2006, according to the Moldpresa catalog ([www.moldpresa.md](http://www.moldpresa.md)), there were three Romanian-language dailies in Moldova (two published five times a week and one four times) and two semi-weeklies as well as 22 national Romanian-language weeklies. In the Russian-language press, there were four dailies (one of which published in Moscow), two semiweeklies, and 18 weeklies. Also in Moldova, there are about 40 district and regional publications, including the Gagauz Autonomy, of which almost half are funded by local public authorities.

In Transnistria there were nine newspapers—of which one was published five times a week, another one three times—and the others were weeklies. There was only one weekly newspaper published in Romanian (in Cyrillic).

In broadcasting, according to data available from the Broadcasting Coordination Council ([www.cca.md](http://www.cca.md)), there are 38 over-the-air television stations and 44 radio stations. There

are also 156 cable operators and 10 wireless cable operators covering practically all the district towns of Moldova. In villages, cable television is very rare.

Among television stations producing their own output, only the public television channel Moldova 1 covers the entire country. Two private channels, Pervai Kanal v Moldove and NIT, cover 70 percent of the country but are viewed as loyal to the Communist authorities. The rebroadcasting license for the Russian public channel ORT Pervii kanal, held by Analitic Media Group for seven years, was withdrawn in November 2005 by the Broadcasting Coordination Council and given to a company called Media Satelit, which is widely believed to be owned by an individual close to the authorities.

Radio Moldova has national coverage, and a few other stations cover about two-thirds of the country. One of them is the Chisinau station Antena C, whose broadcasts were suspended in mid-December due to "technical reasons" when a police squad raided the station, purportedly looking for a bomb. Antena C and Euro TV Chisinau, both owned by Chisinau City, were subject during 2006 to attempts to privatize them to the advantage of the Communist Party and the Christian-Democratic Popular Party, which hold the majority in the Chisinau City Council.

Internet access is unrestricted. According to the director of the Mathematics and Computer Science Institute of the Academy of Sciences, Constantin Gaindric, Internet use in urban areas is about 8–10 percent and falls to 0.5–0.6 percent in villages (Infotag, May 31, 2006).

#### 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.

The access to domestic and international mass media is limited only by financial circumstances. The BBC, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio France Internationale, and other channels are broadcast in Moldova on FM frequencies owned by local stations, and on UHF. Over-the-air and cable television operators rebroadcast BBC World, CNN, TV5, RAI, and others, and Moldovan viewers have access to television channels from Romania, Russia, and Ukraine. Western and Romanian press imports are limited due to the high costs. Some Russian newspapers, especially tabloids having local offices in Chisinau, sell many more copies than local Russian-language papers. In 2006, domination of Russian radio stations declined when two Romanian-language stations, resembling the format of Russkoe Radio, emerged on the market.

The year 2006 saw the demise of another private news agency, Flux. Besides the state-owned news agency Moldpres, which covers events from the viewpoint of the governing party, there are also private agencies—BASA-Press, Infotag, Info-Prim Neo, Reporter.md, and Deca-Press. However, not all of them are editorially independent.

The large number of private radio and television stations generally broadcast entertainment, most often produced outside the country, and local news bulletins of three to five minutes each hour based on news-agency feeds. "Entertainment programs are usually as bad as the news programs, and therefore viewers prefer to watch foreign stations," says Spinei, director of Acces-Info Center.

Only four radio stations produce their own newscasts—Radio Moldova, Antena C, Radio Free Europe and BBC, with the latter offering a daily 15-minute current-affairs program focusing on Moldova—and two television stations, Moldova 1 and NIT.

Local news reports in Chisinau are produced by PRO TV, NIT, TV 7, and TV 21. In Balti, Comrat, Cahul, Cimislia, Edinet, and other cities, there are local television and radio stations that produce their own newscasts in Romanian and Russian.

The new Broadcasting Code fails to ensure transparency of ownership and media funding in Moldova, and this information generally is not known. "Unfortunately, when it comes to owners, the public is informed only of general matters, such as 'the founder of the newspaper is X Ltd.,'" said panelist Partac. Panelists said that this lack of transparency allows the governing party to take advantage of its control of the BCC and purchase private media through intermediaries, including Pervii kanal v Moldove. "Nobody knows who really owns the privatized newspapers *Moldova Suveran* and *Nezavisimaia Moldova*. The name shown in documents is obviously only a front. One possible reason why independent media are not transparent is that the owners

are afraid of possible harassment,” said Spinei, director of Acces-Info Center.

The media of the national minorities face financial difficulties. Although they receive funds from the public budget, most newspapers in the Gagauz Autonomy are published not in the Gagauz minority language but in Russian, since in Soviet times they went through a Russification process. There is still a problem with newspaper distribution and access to national newspapers in the separatist region of Transnistria.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Moldova Objective Score: 1.17/4.00

Development of media businesses is slow in Moldova, according to MSI panelists, who ranked the country at 1.17 for this objective. Golea, manager of TV7, said that although the advertising market in Moldova has been developing “more rapidly in recent years, the ‘wine crisis’ (the Russian ban imposed on Moldovan wine imports) reduced the advertising growth rate under the expected level” in 2006. Panelist Kalak disagreed, saying that the advertising market in Moldova is one of the most dynamic in the region. “In the early 1990s, the advertising market was hardly worth US \$1 million. Today, the TV advertising market alone exceeds \$10 million, growing at a pace of more than 1.5 times every year,” said Serghy Starush, general manager of Star Communication Group in BASA-Economic (November 11, 2006). Advertising is distributed unevenly, with more than 50 percent taken in by a handful of television stations, panelists said.

“Advertising is not always spread according to audience or its profile. It is the authorities who influence the way in which advertising is distributed,” says Bercu, editor-in-chief with BASA-press. Spinei, Acces-Info Center director, believes that “one severe issue hampering the development of private media is the fact that the authorities channel from the wings the distribution of advertising towards the outlets which are loyal to the authorities. The ‘disobedient’ businesspeople might get into trouble” through inspections and other threats.

“The independent media covering political issues hardly make ends meet,” said Partac. “They receive little advertising, because advertisers tend to be harrassed if they support such media. However, advertising flows freely to publications (stations) which deal with only entertainment and business issues, not bothersome to the authorities.” Kalak said, however, that some newspapers do not attract ads, in spite of their high circulation figures, because they are “politically biased.”

Macovei says that “the local press shows a barely noticeable trend towards recovery. However, the unfair competition from the publications put out by the local authorities, using public funds, has worsened.”

Lack of investments, given the slow economic growth, poverty, local businesspeople’s unwillingness to invest in advertising, and poor management practices hamper the development of media as businesses in Moldova, panelists said. Dependence on outside funding and subsidies remained a major problem in 2006, with one of the consequences of this situation the widespread practice of hidden advertising.

The government provides subsidies to the formally privatized media (*Moldova Suveran*, *Nezavisimaia Moldova*), and they have continued their policy as authorities’ image polishers. Independent newspapers receive no subsidies from the public budget. They have to rely most of the time on subscriptions. Some independent newspapers are funded by either political parties or unknown funders.

The small circulation that newspapers can muster retards investment in upgrading of printing facilities. In turn, the poor quality of print keeps away advertisers, who want color options and flawless printing. In Chisinau, newspapers can be printed at only two presses, one of which is owned by the state and the other by a political figure.

Media market research and advertising research have only made their first steps. Examples are the market research commissioned by six newspapers that are members of the Association of Independent Press and the market research conducted by the newspaper *Timpul de diminețã*.

#### 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.

Audience measurements have been conducted since 2003 by the local offices of such international research agencies as TNS TV Monitoring and AGB Nielsen Media Research. There is no circulation auditing in Moldova. Therefore, the circulations newspapers show, as prescribed by law, are often inaccurate.

The new Broadcasting Code requires that advertising running on foreign channels that are rebroadcast by Moldovan radio and television stations be eliminated or replaced by local advertising. Foreign television stations, such as those from Russia, Romania, and Ukraine, that broadcast over the air to Moldova have instant access to the Moldovan advertising market, too. Some multinationals take advantage of this, being able to sell their products in Moldova without having to pay money for advertising here.

The state holds the monopoly over press distribution in rural areas. Private newspapers reacted strongly to the fact that Posta Moldovei unilaterally increased newspaper distribution tariffs by 15 percent just before the subscription year starting in 2007, forcing newspapers to raise their rates. It is not possible to create private distribution networks because of the financial difficulties newspapers face, panelists agreed. The state owns Moldpresa, the distribution company, as well as one of the two printers in Chisinau, the majority of printers situated in district towns, the Radiocomunicatii company, and the Press House, where the offices of half of Moldova's papers and magazines are located.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Moldova Objective Score: 2.26/4.00

The supporting institutions for the media sector in Moldova include the Journalists' Union of Moldova, the Association of Independent Press (founded in 1997 and representing 17 local and national print outlets published in Romanian and Russian on the left and right banks of the Nistru river, as well as two news agencies and the Independent Journalism Center), and the Association of Electronic Press (founded in 1999 and representing 22 radio and television stations, production companies, and individual professionals). However, the MSI panelists agreed that these groups did not manage to develop a strong sense of solidarity among journalists in 2006. The journalists in fact have drifted even farther apart, panelists said, clinging either to their political loyalties (whether to the authorities or to the opposition) or East/West preferences.

The League of Professional Journalists, founded in 2004 by journalists who left the Journalists' Union of Moldova, exists only on paper. The discussion participants pointed to the failure of the attempt to create a journalists' trade union, which has been talked about for some years. "More than 70 percent of opinion-poll respondents in the last five years believe that a media-workers' trade union is needed," said Bercu, BASA-press editor-in-chief and chairman of the Association of Business Journalists. "This issue had to be settled yesterday or even the day before yesterday. The issue has been raised at the last three conferences held by the Union of Journalists. Even a commission was created. There have been several drafts of the by-laws, the last one dating from autumn 2005, developed by the Association of Business Journalists and Press Freedom Committee as part of a large project funded by the Eurasia Foundation. The idea has plenty of support in principle. But things tend to bog down when it comes to practice."

At the same time, the authorities are trying to mimic cooperation with the civil society, including media NGOs. In a declaration on the latest amendments made to the media legislation dated July 2006, the Association of Independent Press, Journalists' Union of Moldova, Press Freedom Committee, and the Independent Journalism Center expressed their concern with "the formal manner and haste with which the relevant parliamentary committee organized debates of the draft Broadcasting Code only one day before its discussion in parliament in plenary session, thus leaving almost no time to media NGOs to review the draft." The signatories said they believed that the attitude "showed one more time that the Moldovan parliament only pretends to cooperate with the civil society."

## 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.

A number of media NGOs—APEL, IJC, JUM, API, the Press Freedom Committee, Acces-Info, Media-Impact, Association of Business Journalists, and others—monitor media laws, formulate draft legislation, try to enhance freedom of the press and access to information, and defend journalists' freedoms and professional rights. They provide legal assistance in court, and training. But Sorina Stefarta, coordinating editor-in-chief with the daily *Timpul de diminețã*, said, "Media NGOs fight for the freedom of the press only through words. Unfortunately, there is nothing else they can do."

The State University, Free International University of Moldova, European Studies University, and State University of Comrat offer journalism programs. But MSI panelists said that journalism education is hampered because the Moldova schools will accept anyone who pays tuition, and many graduates are unqualified. "It is risky to hire today a graduating fourth-year student—you have to start 'raising' him from year two," said Golea, TV7 director.

Vitalie Dogaru, coordinator with the School of Advanced Journalism Studies in Chisinau, wrote in December 2006 (*Mass Media in the Republic of Moldova Magazine*, p. 3) that several reasons leave the quality of journalism education below international standards: "Small salaries and large workloads are not attractive for media professionals. Schools have today the old teachers who are not aware of new professional principles and provide students with useless knowledge of outdated history and theory instead of knowledge on modern media work. The young teachers hired by universities do not have enough media experience, and the examples they use in classes—oftentimes learned by rote from books—have not been tried in Moldovan media and are therefore not credible. ... Universities are underequipped with technical tools used in newsrooms and therefore cannot simulate real-life newsroom situations. Therefore, when young journalists graduate university they have to start everything from scratch, on their own and at their own peril."

The MSI participants said the opening in September of the School for Advanced Journalism Studies within the Independent Journalism Center provided a welcome source of training in practical journalism skills. Journalists, editors, and managers also can upgrade their professional skills through courses organized by other media-support organizations.

Newsprint delivery is not restricted and is supplied to the degree newspapers can buy it. Access to printing presses is not restricted, either, whether state-owned or private. There is a problem with the quality of printing services, and lack of investment also prevents private distributors from emerging. Most newspapers distributed outside Chisinau have to use Posta Moldovei services. The distribution monopoly in Chisinau is held by the joint stock company Moldpresa, which

*Sorina Stefarta, coordinating editor-in-chief with the daily Timpul de diminețã, said, "Media NGOs fight for the freedom of the press only through words. Unfortunately, there is nothing else they can do."*

is a successor to the state-owned company Moldsoiuzpechat. There is only one private distributor—Omniapresa—which has news kiosks across Chisinau. Some newspapers are sold from newsstands.

Access to the Internet is not limited by law, for the public or for journalists. Internet services are supplied by Moldtelecom and many private providers.

## Panel Participants

**Ludmila Barba**, Department Director, TV Moldova 1

**Vlad Bercu**, Editor-in-Chief, BASA-press, Chairman of Association of Business Journalists

**Anatol Golea**, Director, TV 7

**Dmitri Kalak**, Member of Editorial Board, *Ekonomicheskoe obozrenie*

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

**Olivia Partac**, Lawyer, Independent Journalism Center

**Corneliu Rusnac**, BBC Reporter, Chairman of the Press Freedom Committee

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

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

**Sorina Stefarta**, Coordinating Editor-in-Chief, *Timpul de diminețã* daily

## Moderator

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