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# ROMANIA

After three years of prolonged electoral campaigns for an impeachment referendum, European elections, parliamentary and presidential elections, one may have expected 2010 to be a calmer year. This was the case only to a limited extent. President Băsescu won a new term at the end of 2009 and he did so against the opposition of the major media outlet which openly supported his competitor. Băsescu succeeded in ending the myth that no one can win elections against the media, but this victory haunted him in 2010.

Seizing the momentum of the presidential elections victory, Băsescu succeeded in creating a new majority in the Parliament attracting splinter groups from the opposition parties, both National Liberals and Social Democrats, and thus manufacturing a government coalition together with his own Democrat-Liberal Party and the representative of the Hungarian party. This coalition proved to be surprisingly stable in 2010, when it resisted no less than five attempts through censure motions of the opposition in Parliament to force the resignation of the government.

Political stability did not mean social and economic stability. 2010 was the year in which the effect of the economic crisis fully hit Romania. Macroeconomic stability was maintained only with money borrowed from IMF and with the austerity measures of severe budget cuts. President Băsescu personally assumed responsibility in May 2010 for cuts of up to 25 percent for state employees and 14 percent of all pensions. This later measure was declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, so the government was forced to increase the VAT by 5 percent.

Băsescu and his government needed a minimal consensus to make these cuts acceptable to the public, but after years of jostling the media and opposition he had no chance to obtain such support. Both the mainstream media and the opposition attacked the budgetary cuts and blamed Băsescu personally for the economic crises and its effects. Media coverage of public policies reached new populist lows. Băsescu's personal ratings fell below 15 percent.

Although media outlets savagely attacked public spending cuts, media owners themselves savagely cut costs in 2010. Our panelists approximated a total loss in journalists' salaries of over 50 percent in 2010 compared with pre-crisis 2008. Many outlets were closed, especially in print media, or transferred operations onto the Internet.

For the 2010 study, all MSI objective scores decreased because of the elections, given the polarization of the media outlets and the open conflict between the President Băsescu and most of the media owners. 2010 shows a normalization, with some objectives increasing and others decreasing, but in most cases the fluctuation is slight to small. Objective 4, business management, is the only exception, with a moderate drop of 0.20 over the course of last year due to the severe effects of the economic crisis on Romanian media. This trend continued and the score of Objective 4 went below 2.00, from 2.12 in 2010 to 1.92 this year.

# ROMANIA AT A GLANCE

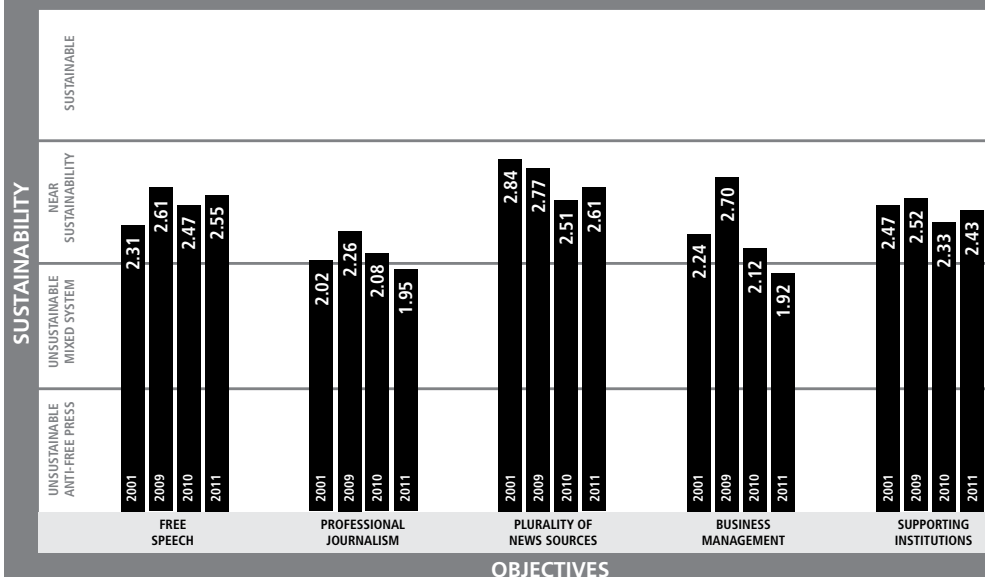
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 21,959,278 (July 2010 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Bucharest
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Romanian 89.5%, Hungarian 6.6%, Roma 2.5%, Ukrainian 0.3%, German 0.3%, Russian 0.2%, Turkish 0.2%, other 0.4% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Eastern Orthodox (including all sub-denominations) 86.8%, Protestant (various denominations including Reformat and Pentecostal) 7.5%, Roman Catholic 4.7%, other (mostly Muslim) and unspecified 0.9%, none 0.1% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Romanian 91% (official), Hungarian 6.7%, Romany 1.1%, other 1.2% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2009-Atlas):** \$178.9 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **GNI per capita (2009-PPP):** \$14,460 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2010)
- > **Literacy rate:** 97.3% (male 98.4%, female 96.3%) (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Traian Băsescu (since December 20, 2004)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Newspaper of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: Over 1,000, exact number unavailable; Radio Stations: Exact number unavailable (704 radio licenses granted by the National Audiovisual Council); Television Stations: 8 general stations, 3 sports-oriented, and 4 news stations (387 television licenses granted by the National Audiovisual Council)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top ten papers have a combined circulation of approximately 1,127,000 (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2010)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three television stations: Pro TV (7.9%), Antena 1 (4.9%), Kanal D (2.9%) ([paginamedia.ro](http://paginamedia.ro), 2011)
- > **News agencies:** Mediafax (private), Agerpress (state-owned), NewsIN (private)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** €273 million, of which €209 million is spent on television, €27 million on print, €23 million on radio, and €14 million on internet and cinema. ([paginamedia.ro](http://paginamedia.ro), 2011)
- > **Internet usage:** 7.787 million (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ROMANIA



Scores for all years may be found online at [http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE\\_msiscors.xls](http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscors.xls)

### 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.

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

### Romania Objective Score: 2.55

There are no serious legal threats in Romania to the freedom of speech and the legislation is generally considered to be in line with democratic principles, although some of the participants feel the lack of regulation to be a problem for media. Dan Tapalagă, a journalist, said, "Insult and slander became something common on television and in newspapers and there are no consequences. In the last 10 years we have not seen greater freedom of speech than what we have at the moment. You can do whatever you want, practically nothing happens."

The current legal framework is favorable to freedom of speech, but this legal protection is unstable. From time to time, members of Parliament propose laws to regulate the field. Most of these initiatives lack political support and are withdrawn following criticism from the media community. For example, in 2009 two MPs proposed a law that would require television stations to ensure a 50-50 balance between "positive" and "negative" news, citing a need to protect public health as negative news caused depression. The draft law was vetoed by President Băsescu. Two other MPs proposed in 2010 a law to regulate readers' comments on online newspapers and to subordinate TVR International,

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

##### FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

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

*Dan Tapalagă is among the journalists very critical towards big media owners but he strongly criticized the president's initiative, asserting that "it's potentially dangerous. It doesn't make me feel well knowing that I'm in the 'threats to national security' chapter."*

the public television channel for Romanians living abroad, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. After the media community fiercely criticized these drafts and actively lobbied against them, both proposals were rejected in the Parliament. Elena Coman, of Soros Foundation, said even if such ideas do not produce direct effects, they exemplify a "regulatory field which is dynamic, chaotic and potentially dangerous."

Panelists were alarmed by a new draft of the National Security Strategy that presents the press as a threat to national security. Proposed by the president, the document considers the so-called "media smear campaigns" among the threats to national security, claiming these campaigns spread false information about the government. Panelists explained these campaigns as series of articles on the same topics, repeatedly targeted at intimidating decision makers.

Although observers recognize the negative potential of media owners to use their outlets as political weapons, they are still worried about bringing the issue within the limits of national security concepts, afraid it will lead to increased power for the secret services. Dan Tapalagă is among the journalists very critical towards big media owners but he strongly criticized the president's initiative, asserting that "it's potentially dangerous. It doesn't make me feel well knowing that I'm in the 'threats to national security' chapter." Three leaders of political groups in the European Parliament, Martin Schultz (Socialists and Democrats), Guy Verhofstadt (Liberals) and Daniel Cohn-Bendit (Greens) sent an open letter to the speakers of the Romanian Parliament asking them to reject the proposal, considering it an "undemocratic gesture" and an infringement of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The draft is still waiting to be adopted by the Parliament.

The intervention of the secret service was central to a media issue in 2010 when Sorin Ovidiu Vintu, a controversial businessman and owner of a media conglomerate, was indicted for providing financial support to a fugitive who was a former director of an Investment Fund controlled by Vintu. The Romanian Secret Service assisted Prosecutors in phone tapping Vintu, as was the legal procedure. When

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the transcripts were made public, including those of many conversations with journalists working in his media group, they showed a depressing image of an owner openly dictating editorial policies. Furthermore, Maria Popa, working for the Media Monitoring Agency, felt that "publishing the transcripts raises the issue of the confidentiality of sources. If people know that their identity can be uncovered at a later stage, they will not reveal information. The courts were the ones responsible to protect the identities and they didn't." Dan Tapalagă stressed this later point, "It is the judge's decision to select which transcript goes public. They have a law, why don't they apply it?" The public did not react strongly to the leaking of these sources; rather, people were interested in the content of the case.

The National Council of Broadcasting (CNA) controls broadcast licensing. It is nominally an autonomous body subordinated to the parliament, and the president, the cabinet, and the parliament appoint CNA's 11 members. Over the years MSI panelists have constantly criticized CNA's poor management of the licensing process. This year's panel continued to raise doubts about both the process of granting licenses and CNA's failure to follow-up with monitoring. Panelists agreed that granting licenses is not done in a correct, competitive, and apolitical manner. The criteria for granting licenses are vague and several groups of insiders may obtain licenses with little attention paid to the content of the projects submitted. According to Iulian Comănescu, a media analyst, "The same persons come with a joke content format and get licenses. This means that the market is closing." Journalist Dan Tapalagă complained that "there are always the same people who get licenses whatever they write in those projects," and Silviu Ispas, the director of an advertisement agency reiterated that "with whomever you talk to who got a license or tried to, you hear the same horror, Sci Fi stories." Additionally, there are major problems with CNA's follow-up. According to the law, CNA is supposed to monitor the implementation of the editorial plans and to sanction the broadcasters that fail to fulfill their proposals, but only superficial follow-up is conducted. The main all news television station, Realitatea TV, was caught in a scandal in 2010 regarding ownership interference in the coverage of

politics. When Realitatea's nine-year license expired in the following period the station applied for a renewal submitting an editorial plan emphasizing journalists' independence. This was largely considered to be disingenuous but the renewal was nevertheless granted. Dan Tapalagă raised these issues during the MSI meeting. "I saw the editorial plan of Realitatea TV," he said. "You can write practically anything there, it does not matter." All of the panelists believed CNA should have a stronger policy to enforce the content promises made by broadcasters when they apply for licenses.

In addition to the common criticism of the CNA, this year the panelists disparaged current must-carry rules. Must-carry rules require television cable companies to transmit a minimal package of stations (25 percent of all stations they transmit): all channels of public television, the largest national private stations (in terms of measured audiences), largest regional and local stations (also by audiences). This rule led to including in the must-carry package of commercial stations some very low quality news stations such as OTV (a scandal oriented outlet), because they are popular with viewers. Some observers and even CNA members feel the must-carry rule implies in practice that the state is favoring television stations that lead the race to the bottom in term of journalistic quality.

Since the total number of television stations increased in the last years, the must-carry rule affected the business interests of cable companies, which fiercely lobbied to change it. The broadcasters' association lobbied to maintain it and the two lobbies clashed at the CNA level. The institution initiated a bill in 2010 to redefine the must-carry package. However, Răsvan Popescu, the president of CNA, is reluctant towards a significant change quoting the possibility that some officials will put pressure on the cable companies to stop transmitting some channels if the obligation would be abolished.<sup>1</sup> For instance, Popescu said, there are towns with de facto monopolies of one cable company that submits requests to the town halls for transmission. Without the must-carry obligation, the mayor can informally impose the distributors to transmit or not a certain channel, according to their preferences.

Romania has no legal rule to limit media cross ownership and the tendency of cable companies to start their own television channels raised concerns, given the fact that 78 percent of Romanians watch television via cable companies.<sup>2</sup> 10 television launched in December 2010 and one panelist believed that CNA was pressured to give this license and that

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by M. Preoteasa, I. Comănescu, "Romania," in M. Dragomir, M. Thomson (eds.), *Mapping Digital Media: journalism, democracy and values*, OSI/Network Media Programme, London (draft version as of September 15, 2010) (from now on "Preoteasa & Comănescu, 2010")

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

the entire debate around the must-carry rule was meant to make room for the new station. Some even suspect the government and President Băsescu, which are in open conflict with most television stations, to favor the emergence of new players on the market. Dan Tapalagă commented, "If you change the must-carry rule, then you move the power of the media moguls from one side to the other."

The EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive set in 2009 the general framework for the digitization of broadcasting. Romania initially set 2012 as the deadline for switching from analog to digital transmission but postponed it until 2015, the last possible deadline accepted at the European level. The official explanation for the delay concerned the socio-economic difficulties of the country, but some argue that the government was unable to manage this process and instead answered to the pressure of the cable operators which were interested in a controlled opening of the market. One panelist, Manuel Preoteasa, a journalist and co-author of a special report about digitalization, believes "the political signal of postponing digitalization is only one: they want to keep the market closed. There is tremendous pressure coming from the current players in the market." The other co-author of the digitalization report, Iulian Comănescu added that given the effects of the economic crises on the media sector "nobody is in the mood to invest. And digitalization assumes new investments."

For the most part there are no undue fiscal barriers to enter the media market in Romania. As noted last year, after the economic crisis there was some discussion of introducing facilities for media outlets such as tax deductions or VAT refund for distribution. Some panelists voiced concern over the possibility. "Any kind of advantage created by the government creates problems," said Dan Tapalagă, "The press should work as a business, period. Considering the reality in Romania any such policies would create unacceptable distortions." However 2010 did not bring such policies from the government and the issue was not even seriously discussed.

2010 saw negative effects of the abolishment of the intellectual rights contracts and a resultant higher social tax: A widespread practice in media was to pay journalists using the so-called "intellectual rights contracts" allowing authors to pay only income tax and avoid paying social taxes. Although it was initially meant to cover only non-permanent work and artistic products (thus not the work done by the journalist in their quality of regular employees) these types of contracts became a norm in the media outlets. As part of the general strategy to close fiscal loopholes and increase the social taxation, the government abolished the intellectual rights' contracts in 2010. Beyond the de facto increase of

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taxation for media employees, it was the form of paying the social taxes that created widespread distress. According to the initial form of the law, each 'author' paid in this form had to go each month to three different institutions (pension, health and unemployment offices) to pay the social taxes. As lines were created to these institutions, the scandal occurred in summer of 2010 when the new legislation was supposed to be enforced. An online petition asking for a simpler modality to pay was initiated and signed by 6000 journalists, actors, painters and other artists affected by the law. The government changed the law simplifying the payment system, but the taxation itself remained.

The Fiscal Agency, the Romanian equivalent of the IRS, undertook in 2010 a prolonged investigation into the accounts of Realitatea TV, the leading all news television station. The station's management protested the action, accusing the government of interfering in response to the station's anti-government line in the 2009 electoral campaign. One panelist, Elena Coman, believes this was a case in which "fiscal control was used as an instrument for abuse," but other panelists were convinced that such controls may benefit media industry because they could punish those not playing by the rules. "I think there should be more controls because those of us who pay taxes compete in the same market as the ones who pay salaries avoiding taxes," asserted Manuela Preoteasa, a journalist and online media entrepreneur.

Unlike some of its neighbors, Romania is not the scene of murders or retaliatory violent attacks against journalists. No journalist has been killed or injured in recent years, but some cases of harassment still occur. Occasionally harassment takes aggressive forms, mostly from the subjects of the reporting. Maria Popa, program manager within Media Monitoring Agency, pointed out that the authorities' indifference in prosecuting these cases is distressing. "We even had a case with a cameraman who was hit by the owner of a building which he was filming right in front of some policemen who did not intervene." Some panelists blamed the media for provoking aggressiveness. Preoteasa claimed "the media uses an aggressive style both in language and subjects it covers and this backfires against the journalists," but other panelists did not think the style justifies harassment against

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the press. All agreed, however, that there was a general hostility towards journalism as profession: "If you read the comments on forums directed at journalists, you'll be terrified at what people would do to them," said Elena Coman. "I have attended political rallies from 1990 and I have seen how the atmosphere has evolved." Dan Tapalagă elaborated, "People look now at journalists with hatred and say 'this one belongs to Vântu, this one belongs to Băsescu.'"

Repeated attempts to achieve real editorial independence for public media have fallen short. Public media in Romania include the national television society (TVR), the national radio (SRR), and the public news agency (AgerPres). The president, the parliament, and the cabinet appoint the boards of these national radio and television stations, according to a 1995 law. After years of talking about changing the law in order to create a more accountable mechanism to appoint board members, many participants are beginning to accept that the situation cannot be improved. "The politicians are interested to depoliticize TVR and SRR only artificially and only during the elections," lamented Maria Popa.

Some expected the president to keep a promise he made back in 2005—to support a change in the rule of the game—after he and his party won both parliamentary and presidential elections in 2009, and after Băsescu refused to appoint a representative in the previous boards, saying the law should be changed. The new parliament delayed the appointment of new boards for the public media until it rejected the Turcan bill in June 2010, which would have changed the law.

The old rules were applied to appoint new boards and management, and Alexandru Lazescu was appointed president of TVR. Lazescu is respected in the profession, as much as one can be in such a highly divided media and political scene, as he has rich experience working in media. The move to appoint Lazescu at TVR was at least seen as a return to the tradition to appoint professionals. However, the opposite happened at SRR. Maria Toghina, a professional appointed by the Liberal Party as the head of Public Radio, succeeded in the last years to build a reputation for balance and good management but her position was negotiated within the current government coalition and obtained by the Hungarian Party, which appointed András István Demeter as the head of SRR while Toghina stayed on as an adviser to the new president.

Cezar Ion, a panelist working in the public television said "the law does not protect at all the television and public radio." When asked if some regulations, for instance, the existence of an ethics committee directly elected by TVR's employees, offer the journalists working there more protection than enjoyed by their colleagues at private stations, Ion answered, "The existence of an ethics committee is a plus, but it is

inefficient. It is form without substance. The committee gives some rulings but it is ignored, its decisions fail to have an impact. Within the board is a permanent political struggle, a reproduction of the situation in the Romanian parliament." However, other panelists perceive TVR as offering better opportunities for professionals than the private outlets. "Although the system is bad, it also allows some happy occurrences and the situation of journalists is generally better at TVR. Besides, now there is a migration trend from private networks to TVR, given the economic crisis."

In November 2010 the opposition Social Democrat Party (PSD) announced a new bill to abolish the compulsory subscription for TVR and SRR—each household and company theoretically pays such a tax, although the actual collecting rate is rather low. PSD criticized TVR for being a mouthpiece of the president and the government (perhaps an unfair position from a party which previously appointed its spin-doctor as the head of the television). The draft law has minimal chances to be voted but it speaks volumes on how the political class is changing its discourse towards this institution.

The legal confusion provoked by incoherent decisions of the Parliament and the Constitutional Court concerning libel ended in 2010. As reported last year, the Parliament eliminated by law the prison terms for libel back in 2006, but the Constitutional Court reversed this decision on the grounds that the honor of a person cannot be defended only with monetary awards. The Parliament was to vote on another version of the law following the Constitutional Court decision but the legislative did nothing, resulting in a lot of confusion in the judiciary about the issue. Most of the judges decided libel cases based on the assumption that libel was not a matter of the criminal code, but this was rather a good practice than a clear legal rule. "Every judge applied the law as he/she understood it, there was no unitary practice," explained Maria Popa. Fortunately this situation was clarified when the Supreme Court (the highest Court in Romania in charge of the interpretation of the legislation, and separate from the Constitutional Court, which is in charge with the interpretation of the Constitution) decided that libel should not be judged under the Criminal Code, thus de facto making libel a subject of the civil law.

Romania adopted a Freedom of Information Act in 2001. In 2006, the government made a significant improvement to the law by including all national companies and state-owned firms. However, this very liberal law is undermined in practice by a culture of secrecy deeply entrenched in the state institutions. Trying to use the law leads often to endless negotiations with the public servants whose first reaction is to stamp each document they work with as 'secret.' Although the law allows them, verbal requests are almost always

refused and redirected to written ones. This is especially problematic for journalists since they need rapid access to information. Some exceptions exist, however, as journalist Dan Tapalagă remarked, “With the Freedom of Information Act, we get the information only if we threaten them with a lawsuit. If you limit yourself to filing a request according to the law, they don’t give you the information. If you threaten them with a lawsuit, they give it to you.” Nonetheless, the information given is often badly edited and presented, and of little use. The public institutions in Romania still make a distinction between traditional, mainstream media and the new media. The Chamber of Deputies refused in 2009 to allow a blogger the same access as the journalists but since then such cases did not occur. A freelance journalist was denied access in Parliament because she was not a representative of a media outlet, but a solution was found after the case was brought to the public’s attention.

As in the previous years, the panelists did not consider access to international media a problem in Romania. International magazines are widely available, the only problem being the high prices compared when compared with average wages. The Romanian media outlets are free to republish foreign content but such partnerships are still rare due to economic constraints.

There are no restrictions for practicing journalism in Romania; however, the perceived low quality of Romanian media made some of the panelists regret not having such restrictions. Some institutions are however still reluctant to cooperate with freelancers and bloggers.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Romania Objective Score: 1.95

The panelists continued to complain about the low quality of reporting in Romanian media, and debated whether today the Romanian media are more or less professional than in the euphoric period of the early ‘90s. “There is no comparison to the 1990s,” Manuela Preoteasa believed. “We have real content now, not just opinions,” but Iulian Comănescu disagreed, almost nostalgically. “At least we had some norms and content based on information back then. Now we have only propaganda and pacts with the politicians. I no longer have anything to read, to watch.” Some of the panelists accused news television stations of transmitting a general catastrophic view about reality. “If you turn off the two news televisions, reality becomes bearable, try it,” urged Tapalagă, but this is not a solution for the general public who often do not have access to online news as an alternative to

*“‘Investigation’ means someone is leaking information to you, you receive a dossier and you just publish it, without further documentation,” according to Iulian Comănescu.*

the local newspapers controlled by politicians and the news television stations.

Content added value in print is poor in recent years as the two most active all-news television stations set the agenda and the newspapers follow, and talk shows dominate the television news programs. “News bulletins have some background information, some substance but the problem is with the talk shows,” said Tapalagă, which panelists complain are too focused on scandals and manipulative in handling political issues. Talk shows are prolific because they are cheap to produce. Investigative journalism, on the other hand, is expensive and almost extinct from Romanian television. “‘Investigation’ means someone is leaking information to you, you receive a dossier and you just publish it, without further documentation,” according to Iulian Comănescu. Romania media in general lack the basic preoccupation for accuracy and fact-based reporting. In There is a lack of fact-checking, effort to get multiple viewpoints, or background research. Since the media is highly concentrated and the holdings try to sell their content on various channels, there is no real difference in this regard between television, radio, and print.

## JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

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



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More and more content is being produced by independent projects funded by NGOs or in freelancing. For example, the Rosalynn Carte scholarships for reporting mental disorders led to several editorial projects that launched debates on how to deal with depression, also trying to analyze the social prejudices against looking for mental help. The Media Monitoring Agency implemented a project to investigate fraud surrounding EU funds in Romania. The Centre for Independent Journalism implemented projects to encourage unbiased reports about the Roma minority and the Soros Foundation Romania started a project which is funding documentaries and offering them free of charge to television stations.

While there are several ethical codes for media in Romania, none of them has implementation mechanisms and self regulation is basically non-existent. The main owners' organization, the Romanian Press Club, has its own code, as does the main trade union but they either lack the capacity or willingness to implement them. Behaving ethically in Romanian media is purely a personal choice; there is no organizational pressure to behave ethically. “There are journalists, who respect the norms, but they are not in the top positions, they do not make the decisions. The trend does not favor them. The reporters from the news television ask good questions in press conferences, but the editors totally change the meaning of the news,” Manuela Preoteasa said. “These rules are not implemented because there is no code at the management and ownership level. There are many obligations for journalists, but there is no obligation for managers and owners.”

Moreover, there is little public demand for ethical behavior, as exemplified by the case of Dan Diaconescu. For years a marginal television figure, Diaconescu started a small television station called OTV in early 2000. The station survived by promoting extreme trivialization, with endless live broadcast of bizarre stories and characters. It only covered politics in a plotting and populist manner. Diaconescu had

some marginal success in terms of audiences but it was never clear how the station survived, although rumors about blackmails abounded and there was a practice of charging people to be invited onto programs.

Nevertheless Diaconescu became one of the richest men in Romanian media, accumulating a personal wealth of over €30 million. He was arrested in 2010 for blackmailing a mayor. The anticorruption prosecutors presented taped conversations between him and the victim that showed a complex system of extortion, including the threat of live announcements on television about the mayor's businesses. Diaconescu spent 30 days in jail but was released with a lawsuit pending. Once back on live television, Diaconescu started a war against the prosecutor handling his case with below the belt personal attacks. The Anticorruption Office filed a complaint to the Broadcasting Council (CNA) which fined Diaconescu €5,000, but this did not discourage Diaconescu,<sup>3</sup> who continued to defy the CNA. He launched a new party called The People's Party and appointed his brother as the formal president of it in order to circumvent the law against television stations overtly favoring any party.

Diaconescu's case demonstrated the inability of CNA to prevent unethical behavior in television. This was at least formally recognized by some of the Council members, who sent an official letter to the Culture and Media Committees of the Parliament in order to find solution for the “shortcomings of our institution.” The letter, signed by 6 of the 10 members, acknowledged that “by its lack of reaction CNA encouraged media outlets to breach the basic norms of professionalism.”<sup>4</sup>

In such an environment, panelists considered self censorship to be a constant presence in Romanian media, with pressure coming mostly from businesses and political interests. Elena Coman believed that companies that paid for publicity during the financial crisis ended up dictating content. For example the Rosia Montana Gold Corporation (RMGC) started a controversial project to mine gold in the Rosia Montana area against the protests of many NGOs and environmental groups. At the beginning of the project the media was overwhelmingly against the project but this attitude started to change noticeably in the last period after RMGC became a major advertisement payer. Newspapers announced during editorial meetings that no more was to be written on the Rosia Montana case.

Various media outlets keep informal lists of politicians to be criticized or supported. “It is common knowledge that you don't write about such and such minister. The

<sup>3</sup>Carmen Maria Andronache, “DNA sesizează CNA. Dan Diaconescu, amendat cu 20.000 de lei,” paginademedi.ro, 23 November 2010

<sup>4</sup>Carmen Maria Andronache, “CNA este depășit de situație. O spun oficial membrii Consiliului!” paginademedi.ro, October 29, 2010

name differs from one editorial office to another,” said Tapalagă. Elena Coman said the economic crises aggravated political pressure since it “spoiled the good guys also. We are too poor to be honest. Being ethical is a luxury,” when layoffs disproportionately affect people known to disregard editors’ directives.

At the same time editors try to anticipate owners’ wishes. This was clear from transcripts of media tycoon Sorin Ovidiu Vintu’s conversations when he was coordinating an anti-Băsescu strategy in the 2009 electoral campaign, openly telling<sup>5</sup> his editorial management that he had an “army” to be used against Băsescu. There was no reaction from the preeminent journalists called by Vintu. Tapalagă explained, “In the transcripts one can see how the mechanism works. The people find out what Vintu wants and they are ready to fulfil his wishes. Therefore, there is no need that Vintu or the party tell them what to do. They adapt themselves.”

In October 2010 Vintu made a surprising move signing a management contract with Sebastian Ghiță for a period of five years. Ghița has a personal fortune of up to €300 million according to Romanian Forbes and he took over the management of Realitatea TV, promising to invest €75 million in exchange for 80 percent of future profit. Realitatea TV, however, was never profitable and few media insiders believe it could become so. The media community overwhelmingly believes that Ghița’s involvement is simply a win-win strategy for the two tycoons, allowing Vintu to take a step back in order to solve his judicial problems and allowing Ghița to gain political influence by controlling the television station for five years. Ghița’s IT companies are heavily dependent on state paid contracts, and in an interview<sup>6</sup> published several days after the transaction announcement, Ghița said, “Businessmen have no sympathies, they have interests. Realitatea TV supported various political leaders in various periods.” The reputable journalist Cătălin Tolontan published on his blog details<sup>7</sup> about the closed relation between Ghița and some social democrat leaders and summarized the general view within the media community that Realitatea TV will continue to support this party.

There are no permanent taboo subjects for the Romanian media but rather particular issues that are covered according to the owners’ interests, as shown above. The foreign news and topics are poorly presented in the media. “The globe

starts in Bucharest and ends at the border for the Romanian press,” said Dan Tapalagă. There is also general reticence to cover anti-business topics. Despite the major social interest, the media was slow to react in covering a draft bill that would change the conditions for banking contracts, making them more favourable to the banks’ clients.

During the financial crisis in 2010, panelist Iulian Comănescu intimated that the “media suffered a bigger implosion than other industries. The personnel budgets fell more than the average in the economy.” Panelists approximated that journalists’ revenues were halved between 2010 and 2008. Media companies dealt differently with the crises. With Dinu Patriciu’s new investments, the newspaper Adevarul did not lay people off and only reduced salaries accordingly with the taxation changes mentioned earlier. Intact Corporation announced in 2009 a 20 percent overall salary cuts and stayed with this. Realitatea Media (Ovidiu Vintu’s companies built around Realitatea TV) closed most of its print outlets and laid off more than 50 percent of people working for its television stations, those remaining also suffered sharp wage cuts. Outlets not announcing layoffs were exceptions in 2010. The journalist and blogger Cătălin Tolontan, who worked in top level editorial positions for the last 20 years, claimed “the Romanian media currently has the fewest employees in the last 10 years. The fewest people, with the fewest resources.”

<sup>8</sup> Consequently, as Dan Tapalagă pointed out, “It is not the salary level which puts pressure on journalists, but the possibility to be sacked. First of all you have to think what you have to do not to be laid off.”

Panelists denounced the general tendency in Romania to mix yellow journalism with quality journalism. Panelists feel there are no really professional newspapers, but rather various degrees of mixing the two categories. There is a general tendency to cover politics in a very populist manner, overshadowing difficult choices of public policy with hysteria and scandals. In television, the success of OTV has led many mainstream stations to copy its yellow journalism style, known as “OTVisation.” “The televisions’ problem is that they cannot copy OTV as much as they want,” said Silviu Ispas. Thus the difference between mainstream and yellow television journalism is fading away. Cezar Ion said, “We have these stations that started as news, but now there is only circus.”

Panelist did not consider the technical capacity of media outlets to be a problem for content production. Dan Tapalagă, a former newspaper editor who made the transition into working for a web portal, commented that many of his former colleagues refused to update their skills

<sup>5</sup> “Stenograme integrale in dosarul Vintu. Pasaje intregi n-au aparut in presa. Citeste in intregime discutiile lui SOV cu Sergiu Toader, Corina Dragotescu si Stelian Tanase. Cum si-a lasat Vintu supape majore in trust,” Victor Cozmei, HotNews.ro, October 19, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Sebastian Ghiță: “La Realitatea, peste eticheta Vintu lipim alta,” Florin Ciornei, Evenimentul Zilei, November 29, 2010

<sup>7</sup> “Realitatea TV, PSD și generația lui Sebastian Ghiță în cinci fapte reale,” www.tolo.ro, December 2, 2010

<sup>8</sup> “Cătălin Tolontan: Conținutul nu se discută în nici un fel cu patronul,” interview for ImpactNews, November 5, 2010

*“The moguls cannot be condemned because they invested. The problem starts when they begin making deals with politicians,” noted Iulian Comănescu.*

for use in a modern multimedia environment, “One can see them carrying around a pen at the press conferences. Journalists refuse to get training, to learn to work with new technologies.”

Romania has a developed market for niche publications and this was affected to a lesser extent by the economic crises than the mainstream media. There were three business-focused dailies in Bucharest before the economic crises; one of them was closed in 2010. Still this market is still too fragmented with two dailies and three weeklies reporting on a still underdeveloped economy. On the other hand, Romania lacks publications oriented on social issues, such as education or health. While most foreign investors left the mainstream market where the competition was driven by political interests, they remain powerful in the glossy magazines market (for IT, vehicles, women, fashion).

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Romania Objective Score: 2.61

Little more than 1 percent of Romanians regularly buy quality newspapers.<sup>9</sup> This does not mean the offerings are limited; on the contrary the market is sharply fragmented with more than 13 Bucharest-based daily newspapers (although several of those counted in last year’s report abandoned print and limited themselves to online operations). Public television has six channels, and there are two active all-news television stations (Antena 3 and Realitatea TV) and two other television stations that have partially failed but are still transmitting. As in the previous years, media outlets remained concentrated in several conglomerates, with limited shifts in power and market in 2010.

The media conglomerates were built around powerful individuals, and panelists consider them as unique entities though they sometimes function as separate companies linked among themselves by the personality of the owner.

<sup>9</sup>Calculated in “Preoteasa & Comanescu, 2010.”

Adrian Sarbu is the only person in this elite group of conglomerates that employs media as his main activity. Sarbu launched Mediafax, the first private news agency in Romania, which dominates the market, and the first professional private television station (Pro TV), which revolutionized the media market in the mid ‘90s. He built a media empire around Pro TV which now includes five television stations (niche orientated for movies, sports, women’s issues), two radio channels, a daily and several magazines. Although Pro TV remains the leader of generalist television stations in terms of audiences, the outlets controlled by Sarbu are largely irrelevant for the public agenda since they limit themselves to entertainment.

Dan Voiculescu, a former informant of Securitate, the secret service of Communist Romania, made a fortune in the early ‘90s with shadow deals involving state ownership. Voiculescu invested early in media, starting a newspaper and a television station, Antena 1, to compete with Pro TV (Antena 1 is currently the second one in terms of audiences). Voiculescu controls six television stations, three newspapers (one generalist, one sports oriented, one business oriented) and several magazines. His all news television station Antena 3 is an outlet created to be a mouthpiece for attacking President Băsescu, which it does obsessively, although with limited success given the fact that Băsescu won two terms and an impeachment referendum.

Sorin Ovidiu Vintu controlled, at its peak, a media empire of over 20 media outlets in all segments—television, print,

### MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE, OBJECTIVE NEWS.

#### PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, internet, mobile) exists and offer multiple viewpoints.
- > Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted by law, economics, or other means.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are non-partisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for media outlets.
- > Private media produce their own news.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.
- > The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues.

Internet, radio, but they were never profitable and Vintu was the main participant in the media investment frenzy of 2005–2008 period. As 2009–2010 brought both new legal problems for Vintu and general difficulties for media, his companies were the most affected. He closed most of the print outlets, neglected radio operations and maintained for a while Realitatea TV as the flagship operation.

Dinu Patriciu, who made his fortune in the oil business, started investing in media in 2005 and more seriously in 2006, when he bought Adevarul, once the most reputed quality newspapers. Adevarul is considered number one in Romanian quality newspapers but Patricia also controls the tabloid Click, the most popular in yellow journalism.

These media conglomerates are continually expanding to the detriment of independent outlets. Although one cannot speak of monopoly, the concentration itself may be a problem when these owners impose the same line to their outlets, as it was the case in 2009 electoral campaigns, when the Vintu and Voiculescu's outlets set the anti-Băsescu agenda of mainstream media. "The moguls cannot be condemned because they invested. The problem starts when they begin making deals with politicians," noted Iulian Comănescu. On plurality of news in Romania, Silviu Ispas said, "We have several sources, but they are not objective."

There are no legal restrictions in Romania for preventing the access to media, both traditional and new media. There is a problem for print media to reach the rural areas, where around 40 percent of Romanians still live, but this is rather an economic decision made by the newspapers. Our panelist Silviu Ispas worked for a leading local newspaper—Ziarul de Iasi—and mentioned that for most of the local outlets distributing in the villages was not making economic sense, thus they were not even trying. Television is the media most available to rural audience.

The main problem of public television is not the usual political infightings around it but its constant decline in audiences. The TVR 1 primetime news declined from 7.9 percent in 2005 to 2.2 percent in 2010.<sup>10</sup> This was accompanied by the worsening financial situation, with the public television Company registering losses of around €19 million in 2010. Surprisingly most of the losses do not come from TVR providing some public interest content that do not attract audiences. On the contrary, the popular sports broadcasting is responsible for €12 million losses.<sup>11</sup> TVR competed in auctions for broadcastings rights with private stations and the former management had an irresponsible policy to acquire them at any costs.

<sup>10</sup> "Preoteasa & Comanescu, 2010"

<sup>11</sup> Figure provided by TVR to the author.

*After an explosion in the number of blogs in 2008 and 2009, this trend lost speed and there are less than five bloggers in Romania able to make a living out of their work. Generally speaking, the blogs' content consists on opinions and personal reactions to the general news, with limited originality.*

An insider of the public television, Cezar Ion thought that "there is pluralism of opinions within TVR. Journalists that lean leftwards select their guests accordingly and vice versa." Compared with their critical attitude towards the former head of TVR, the panelists tended to trust the new president Andi Lazescu. "I think TVR will evolve better under Lazescu," said Iulian Comănescu. "In comparison to the other presidents, he acts the fastest. Lazescu was a member of the board and Executive Director at TVR and he knew what had to be done."

The news agency market is dominated by Mediafax, a private agency created in early '90s that shadowed the stated owned Agerpres. Mediafax's dominance was challenged in the last years by NewsIn, an agency created by Sorin Ovidiu Vintu. NewsIn forced Mediafax to be more flexible in negotiating the contracts and reducing the prices, but it finally failed in establishing a market for itself and became a victim of the general restructuring of Vintu media companies in 2010.

The state owned Agerpres is formally controlled by the Parliament, but it is largely irrelevant. Its €4.6 million budget is comparable with the one of Mediafax but Agerpres is look upon by the journalists as an old unreliable outlet. It is visible only when some scandals occur there, such was the case in 2010 when the pop VIP Madalina Manole killed herself and Agerpres published a so called interview with the singer. It was later exposed to be a compilation of old statements and Manole's blog fragments. The editor of Agerpres was the 'author' of the interview and she was only suspended for two months after this scandal.

All television stations and most radio stations produce their own news programs, but the panelists were critical with the general tendency to create content only from politicians statements and scandals. Panelists said, "News programs mean more and more artificial content, politicians' statements commented upon by other politicians...Newspapers have ended up being news compilations and information from other sources."

*Panelist Silviu Ispas, a top manager in the advertisement industry, described how the crises changed the rules of the game: "...The most stable press institutions are now the local newspapers, which have more revenue sources—national advertisement, local advertisement and small local announcements."*

There is no real difference between public and private mainstream television stations. The first channels of TVR are competing with private stations to provide entertainment and sports, although the new management announced its intention to promote educational programs as well. On the other hand, TVR currently produces documentaries and cultural programs but they are broadcasted on a special channel—TVR Cultural—with minimal exposure.

After an explosion in the number of blogs in 2008 and 2009, this trend lost speed and there are less than five bloggers in Romania able to make a living out of their work. Generally speaking, the blogs' content consists on opinions and personal reactions to the general news, with limited originality.

While it was considered a problem several years ago, ownership transparency is largely known in Romania. Ironically this was encouraged by the media concentration, with big companies cross-promoting their outlets, thus having to recognize their ownership.

Although declining in the last years, a general bias is still present in Romanian media against minorities, especially the Roma. "Most online publications accept the readers' racist comments and rarely moderate statements which incite violence and racial hatred," said Maria Popa. There is a Pavlovian reaction from the mainstream media after each statement of a Hungarian minority leader asking for autonomy in Transylvania, an issue which is still largely considered a non-debatable one by most of the Romanian journalists. "Any declaration about autonomy from the Hungarians immediately becomes a media volcano," noted Coman. There is no governmental or political pressure against covering some gender, sexual or ethnic issues. However, the prejudices against Roma, homosexuals, or Jews are widespread among the journalists, which is immediately visible in the way the cover such subjects.

Each of the 41 counties of Romania has one or more local newspaper, but their quality is generally low. Local television stations were pressured in the last years by the national stations, which need local licenses to cover the entire territory and as a consequence the local content provided has decreased. The national television TVR launched in 2008 a dedicated channel for regional content, but its audience numbers are low.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Romania Objective Score: 1.92

Despite the wage cuts and layoffs virtually all media companies registered losses in 2009. Total advertising revenues decreased 37 percent in 2009 compared with 2008.<sup>12</sup> The economic crises affected print media disproportionately, where the decrease reached 55 percent. The advertisement market reached its peak in Romania in 2008, with €540 million (€337 million for television and €82 million for print media). The amounts forecasted for 2010 show a further decline, with a total projection of €308 million (€209 for television and €27 million for print).<sup>13</sup>

Before the crisis hit, Romanian media managers were generally trying to increase the share of the revenues from advertisement. This strategy back fired in 2009 and 2010 since the advertisement declined sharper than the subscriptions and direct sales. Panelist Silviu Ispas, a top manager in the

#### MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

##### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.

<sup>12</sup> Initiative Media quoted by "Preoteasa & Comanescu, 2010"

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

advertisement industry, described how the crises changed the rules of the game: “Before the crisis, the industry tended to draw a higher percentage of revenue from publicity and that is exactly where the crisis hit the hardest. Mainstream newspapers were affected the most. The most stable press institutions are now the local newspapers, which have more revenue sources—national advertisement, local advertisement and small local announcements.” If one looks back to earlier MSI studies, local newspapers were considered disadvantaged because of being disconnected to the national advertisement market, compared with the Bucharest based newspapers.

Romania has many active advertising agencies, most of them local branches of big international players such as McCann Ericsson; Grey, Saatchi & Saatchi; Leo Burnett; BBDO; Young and Rubicam. As was the case in the previous report, the panelists complained about the corrupt practices of the agencies, including blackmailing media outlets into providing higher rebates to the agencies.

Ad agencies also transferred practically all of the losses provoked by the crises on the shoulders of the media outlets. Silviu Ispas, an insider of the advertisement industry described these practices, “No media channel is indispensable. You can prove scientifically, with statistics, that you can reach the same target as the one wanted by your client. So, the agencies are calling the shots and the media has to obey. The rebates, the money that the media outlets return to the ad agencies in return for delivering clients, were increased to ensure that agencies would receive the same revenue as last year. Realitatea TV and Pro TV ruined the market. In June 2009, Pro TV raised the rebate it was paying back to agencies to 15 percent and this without conditioning a minimum amount of advertising income. All the advertisement agencies took their clients to Pro TV, followed by Realitatea TV. This also explains the severe effects for the print media. The agency takes its rebate faster from television, from a single contract, than on multiple contracts with many newspapers.

There are no direct subsidies for media outlets in Romania. However, an indirect and disruptive form of subsidy consists of the advertisement money paid by the state institutions and state owned companies. Adrian Nastase’s government abused these contracts in 2000–2004, when the state became a major player on this market. The new government installed in 2005 passed a special law with the assistance of the Center for Independent Journalism, creating a transparent system to announce state advertisement contracts and some criteria to distribute the money to media outlets. The problem seemed to be controlled in 2005 - 2008 but returned in 2009 with the economic crisis.

The Romanian media industry has developed professional forms of measuring audience and circulation for nearly all segments, including print, television, radio, and Internet. The Romanian Audit Bureau of Circulation (BRAT) was founded in 1998 as an independent, not-for-profit organization to bring together the media outlets, ad agencies, and clients playing for advertisements. The advertising agencies have set the existence of a BRAT certificate as a precondition for allocating any advertising contract. BRAT later developed the National Readership Survey (SNA), which approximates the total number of readers for publications and establishes the demographic data. Some panelists continued to raise doubts about the number of readers reported by SNA. Since many voices in the industry raised the same concerns, BRAT contracted in 2010 an external auditor for its system and the audit confirmed BRAT’s practices were in line with international standards, though some criticism of the measurement system remains, including amongst some panelists.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Romania Objective Score: 2.43

Although they were severely hit by the economic crisis, Romanian journalists remain skeptical of joining trade unions. 2010 continued the trend of pay cuts and layoffs in the industry, but there were few signs of collective actions from the journalists. There are special associations of local publishers and broadcasters that are organized formally as non-governmental organizations in order to promote business interests and lobby the government when legislation affecting their sectors is debated. However, these associations are minimally active most of the time, with a minimal permanent staff around one to two employees.

The only reaction to pay cuts and downsizing in the media sector was the judicial assistance provided by the union MediaSind for several journalists that started law suits against their employers after being laid off. This union claims to have 9,000 members but panelists were generally skeptical about this claim. MediaSind signed in 2004 a collective labor agreement for the media industry, establishing some rights for the journalists, including a so called “clause of conscience” forbidding ownership’s interference in editorial policies. However, this contract is largely ignored in the industry and was ineffectual in preempting the arbitrary actions against the journalists.

2010 brought the first cases won in courts by some journalists, with the union’s help. A journalist won a case against Evenimentul Zilei newspaper for being paid below the

*MediaSind signed in 2004 a collective labor agreement for the media industry, establishing some rights for the journalists, including a so called “clause of conscience” forbidding ownership’s interference in editorial policies. However, this contract is largely ignored in the industry and was ineffectual in preempting the arbitrary actions against the journalists.*

minimum wage established by the collective agreement for those with graduate studies. One of the panelists, Elena Coman, underlined that MediaSind was a necessary voice defending the journalists this period, “Regarding MediaSind, we don’t have to concentrate and to be too critical on the membership issue. They are vocal on protecting rights; they sued the owners and defended the journalists.”

As noted in last year’s report, at the national level, the Press Club of Romania (CRP) used to be the most powerful media organization, counting the country’s most important media outlets and journalists as members. CRP experienced a self-imposed revolution in 2007 and at the beginning of 2008, and was radically transformed. The president of CRP, Cristian Tudor Popescu, started a process to separate the journalistic

#### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

##### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

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

side of CRP from the media owners. This led to the creation of the Association of Romanian Journalists (AJR), which has taken over for CRP in representing journalists.

All of the panelists agreed that this had been a good plan but recognized the failure to implement it. Panelist and president of AJR, Cezar Ion said, “As AJR president, I can state that the association has failed. It is visible, it has certain notoriety, but it is insufficient from the point of view of its initial goals. There are two reasons for lack of progress: a) the lack of cohesion around certain ideas. There are few within the profession for whom ethics constitute a fundamental concern; and b) the media outlets management’s lack of desire to support these kinds of principles.”

There was a lack of interest from the owners’ side to have a powerful common organization, especially after the economic crisis). Coupled with the bureaucratic difficulties to register an owner’s association<sup>14</sup> and the lack of leadership from inside the CRP (Popescu resigned or was marginalized and the new president is a less reputed journalists with no real influence over the owners), the CRP did not succeed in reinventing itself as an umbrella association.

After the journalists left to create AJR, the Club itself remained with the unclear role to represent the owners. Cezar Ion explained that there are some plans to create a Media Committee—an organization dedicated to the profession’s self regulation composed of CRP and AJR but added that “it works only theoretically.” As Elena Coman explained, the former glory of the Club was dependent on Cristian Tudor Popescu’s personality and thus started declining after his departure, “Popescu toiled in trying to bring them together. He had the capacity to be a catalyst.”

The most important NGOs dealing with media freedom are the Center for Independent Journalism (CIJ) and the Media Monitoring Agency. They act as media freedom watch dogs and advocacy groups and are particularly active in promoting ethics rules and self regulation, although they operate mostly in Bucharest and 2-3 big cities, none of them in small cities or rural areas.

Romania has around 20 journalism university programs, both public and private. Previous panels criticized the media university programs for being disconnected from the reality of the profession and too theoretical. This year some panelists noticed some efforts to connect with the media outlets by inviting practicing journalists as visiting professors and paying more attention to developing practical skills. Two

<sup>14</sup>In order to register the organization, each company has to provide: registration papers, decisions of the board to participate, decisions to appoint a representative, decisions on their mandates—including on who the vote for the management of the future organizations, banks accounts of each company and the papers to prove liquidity.

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media faculties, in Bucharest and Cluj, are implementing a €5 million EU funded project to develop media outlets staffed with students

The Center for Independent Journalism is the main provider of short-term training programs for journalists, training more than 5000 journalists since November 2004. CIJ offers short term journalism courses, both topical (health, political reporting, investigative journalism, etc) and general (news writing, narrative reporting, photojournalism). The most popular courses are those in narrative reporting and “good governance” (a complex of articulated courses in human rights, covering public authorities, budget reading, public procurement and journalism ethics). In 2010, CIJ offered, for the first time, a program aimed exclusively to online journalists, to teach them how to create and use multimedia products to enhance their story-telling.

Newsrooms rarely pay to train their journalists. CIJ charges fees up to €80 for short term courses, with discounts for students. The fees cover the costs of the courses, but not the general functioning of the Center. No more than six organizations pay systematically for their journalists to attend. While CIJ maintained a full swing activity, based on grants from various donors, some of its fee-based courses went unsubscribed, although there was a clear interest for them.

Since Romania is part of the common European market, there are no restrictions for trading media equipment or printing facilities. The market is competitive. There is only one plant in Romania producing paper for publications and this was a concern several years ago, when a powerful local politician bought the plant, but since 2004 Romania has no import taxes and most media outlets are currently buying paper from other countries. There are no subsidies for printing houses and the critical media has many options on the market and there are no monopolies on public or private distribution.

## List of Panel Participants

**Adrian Voinea**, manager, *Gazeta de Sud*, Craiova

**Iulian Comănescu**, blogger, *comanescu.ro*, Bucharest

**Manuela Preoteasa**, journalist and director, *EurActiv.ro*, Bucharest

**Silviu Ispas**, manager, Midas Media Group, Bucharest

**Maria Popa**, program assistant, Media Monitoring Agency, Bucharest

**Elena Coman**, public relations coordinator, Soros Foundation-Romania, Bucharest

**Dan Tapalagă**, editor, *hotnews.ro*, Bucharest

**Cezar Ion**, president, Association of Romanian Journalists, Bucharest

**Cătălin Moraru**, editor-in-chief, *Monitorul de Botosani*, Botosani

**Teodor Tita**, editor-in-chief, *Realitea FM*, Bucharest

## Moderator and Author

**Cristian Ghinea**, media expert, Bucharest

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