

MOLDOVA



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2018

Tracking Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
Around the World



MOLDOVA

AT A GLANCE

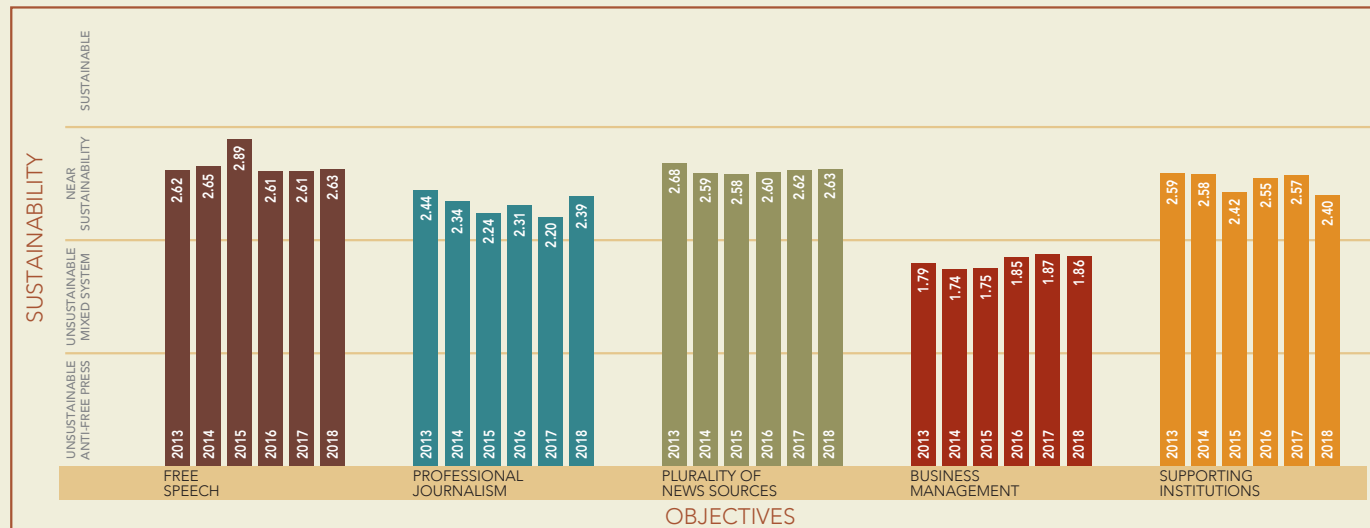
GENERAL

- **Population:** 3,474,121 (July 2017 est. CIA World Factbook)
- **Capital city:** Chisinau
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Moldovan 75.1%, Romanian 7%, Ukrainian 6.6%, Gagauz 4.6%, Russian 4.1%, Bulgarian 1.9%, other 0.8% (2014 est. CIA World Factbook)
- **Religions (% of population):** Orthodox 90.1%, other Christian 2.6%, other 0.1%, agnostic <.1%, atheist 0.2%, unspecified 6.9% (2014 est. CIA World Factbook)
- **Languages:** Moldovan/Romanian 80.2% (official) (56.7% identify their mother tongue as Moldovan, which is virtually the same as Romanian; 23.5% identify Romanian as their mother tongue), Russian 9.7%, Gagauz 4.2% (a Turkish language), Ukrainian 3.9%, Bulgarian 1.5%, Romani 0.3%, other 0.2% (2014 est. CIA World Factbook)
- **GDP at market prices:** \$ 6.75 billion (2016 est. World Bank Development Indicators)
- **GDP per capita:** \$ 5,657 (World Data Atlas, 2017)
- **GNI per capita:** \$ 2,240 (World Data Atlas, 2017)
- **Literacy rate:**
- **total population:** 99.4%; male: 99.7%; female: 99.1% (CIA World Factbook 2015 est.)
- **President or top authority:** President Igor Dodon (since December 23, 2016)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations, Internet news portals:**
- **Print:** 153 newspapers (annual edition, thou. copies – 33,827); 216 magazines (annual edition, thou. copies – 2,716) (National Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Moldova, 2016)
- **Radio Stations:** 57 (Broadcasting Council, 2017);
- **Television Stations:** 70 (Broadcasting Council, 2017);
- **Internet News Portals:** top three: point.md, protv.md, unimedia.info (Alexa.org, 2016)
- **Newspaper (annual-2015) circulation statistics:** Komsomolskaia Pravda – 1,989,808; Makler – 770,463; Antenna – 654,980; Unghiul – 501,960; Timpul de dimineata 351,910; (BATI, 2016); magazine circulation statistics: Rabotai&Otdahai – 48,000; Aquarelle – 38,500; Business Klass – 27,500 (BATI, 2016)
- **Broadcast ratings:** Competing surveys produce dissimilar results.
- **According to IPP (november, 2017):** Top three television: Prime TV (private), Moldova 1 (public), Jurnal TV (private). Top three radio: n/a
- **According to AGB Moldova (2017):** Top three television: Prime TV, RTR Moldova, Moldova 1. Top three radio: n/a
- **News agencies:** IPN, Moldpres (state-owned), Infotag, Info-Market, Sputnik (part of the Russian news agency)
- **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** Television: €12.4 million (\$14.9 million); Radio: €560,000 (\$670,804); Internet: € 2.8 million (\$3.4 million); Print: €1,2 million (\$1.4 million) (AAPM, 2016 est.)
- **Internet usage:** 2.9 million (82.9% of the population) (ANRCETI, report "Evolution of the electronic communications market, third quarter, 2017")

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MOLDOVA



SCORE KEY

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.



Moldova's overall score remained in the near sustainable category, only rising .01 points from last year's score of 2.37 to this year's score of 2.38. There was a slight increase, from 2.20 to 2.39, in the professional journalism objective because 2017 was not an election year, although political influence continues. On the other hand the supporting institutions decreased this year with the inefficiency of professional associations and the lack of opportunities for journalism students. Nonviable business planning and funding instability keep business management as the only objective that falls in the unsustainable classification.

The year 2017 was relatively stable against a background of sporadic tension between the pro-European parliament and government versus the pro-Russian President Igor Dodon. The factors behind these conditions include the country's sustainable development; attitudes toward the EU and NATO; reactions to the electoral-system change; and the referendum on the resignation of the mayor of the capital, Chișinău. This tension resulted in the Constitutional Court issuing Dodon two temporary suspensions over ministerial appointments.

Internationally, government relations with economic development partners (primarily the EU and the United States) improved slightly. The president tried to revive relations with Russia, which worsened when Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin made several offensive public statements about Moldova in August. In December, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation (RF) announced criminal proceedings against Vladimir Plahotniuc, leader of the ruling coalition Democratic Party (PDM). The committee charged that he participated in at least two attempted murders. PDM considered this harassment and persecution by Russia.

The event that had the greatest impact, however, was voting initiated by the ruling party in the mixed electoral system, which provides that half of the total number of deputies elected should be independent and the other half should represent political parties. This action was criticized both internally and internationally, and PDM was accused of changing the voting system to remain in power. According to political analysts this system will favor PDM, since in recent years this party managed to persuade many mayors and local councilors to join. Currently, the local authorities depend heavily on central authorities and consequently can be influenced easily.

The main parliamentary parties — PDM and the Party of

Socialists (PSRM) — strengthened their media presence by bringing influential television stations under their control. These acquisitions conflict with broadcast ownership law, which limits the number of licenses held by one licensee. To comply with the broadcasting code amendments that have entered into force, the PDM leader and sole owner of four stations merely ceded two stations to an adviser. No actual changes have occurred in broadcast ownership or pro-party bias in TV outlets.

External (i.e., Russian) and internal propaganda has continued. This material mostly discredits the country's European integration prospects and promotes the Russian agenda. Broadcasters' legal obligation to ensure eight hours of original media programs daily has not yielded the expected results. Monitoring by the Broadcast Coordinating Council (BCC) regulatory authority showed that half of Moldova's broadcasters have not complied with the law and that many programs released by politically affiliated stations are propagandistic.

Cloned websites, or phantom versions of popular, credible information outlets, created to manipulate users, gained traction. Some media affected include the investigative newspaper *Ziarul de Gardă*, Jurnal.md, and API.md's "STOP FALS!" [Stop Fake!] webpage. This trend does not bode well, given that about 25 percent of citizens (and more than one-third of young people aged 18 to 25) seek information online.

In June, under international and internal pressure, parliament created a representative working group to improve media regulation laws. By December 31, the group developed several important regulatory acts, including a new draft broadcasting code. Even with such efforts, problems with professional integrity remain at many media outlets, especially those with political affiliations.

**OBJECTIVE 1:
FREEDOM OF
SPEECH**

2.63

The Constitution of the Republic of Moldova guarantees freedom of speech in at least 12 articles, and more than 30 national laws have provisions regarding this fundamental right. In 2010, Moldova enacted a law on freedom of expression that sets the framework for action and the limits of this freedom. A press law is also in force, guaranteeing the confidentiality of sources, among other rights.

No journalists have been imprisoned over disclosure of information sources, and Moldova's legislation on freedom of expression is sufficient and mostly in line with European and international standards. Nonetheless, its application in 2017 was flawed. According to Eugen Ribca, lawyer and director of the economic news outlet *Mold Street*, "Legal provisions are not real guarantees for implementing media freedoms and journalists' rights. Public authorities allowed the arbitrary implementation of legal provisions, such as the application by the BCC of more serious legal sanctions for television stations that were not affiliated with the ruling party¹ or the flagrant and repeated violations by the head of state of the standards and rules for accrediting media representatives to public events. During the year there were several attempts to restrict freedom of expression: the draft of the 'Big Brother Law'

¹ "Scrisoare partenerilor de dezvoltare: Jurnal TV denunță un nou tip de REPRESIUNE din partea CCA," Jurnal.md, September 22, 2017. <http://jurnal.md/ro/social/2017/9/22/scrisoare-partenerilor-de-dezvoltare-jurnal-tv-denunta-un-nou-tip-de-represiune-din-partea-cca/>.

aimed at over-regulating online media,² the draft law imposing burdensome conditions for journalists using drones,³ and the draft law amending the Law on Personal Data Protection in order to establish the obligation for journalists to justify their requests for information of public interest in the field."

Several panelists commented on the problems with political influence. Viorica Zaharia, chair of the Press Council, shared her belief that "on paper, freedom of expression exists, but in reality, many journalists are determined [or] forced not to use this freedom, especially those who work in the media outlets affiliated with the ruling party or in public broadcasting." Ludmila Barbă, TV project coordinator for the public broadcaster Teleradio-Moldova, said that she believes the main problem is the judicial system's lack of independence.

Political influence in Moldova's media sector is troublesome. According to Victor Mosneag, deputy editor in chief of investigations at the newspaper *Ziarul de Gardă*, "De facto, we have 80–90 percent of the media politically controlled. Although justice is also politically controlled, in 2017 several judgments were issued in which public institutions were required to provide journalists with the information they requested. I would like to note here the case of the Independent Press Association and the company Post of Moldova, which holds a monopoly

2 Media AZI. "Vadim Vieru, avocat Promo-LEX, despre 'Legea Big Brother': 'Blocarea site-urilor web prin intermediul furnizorului de servicii Internet constituie o măsură de cenzură a conținutului online.'" February 21, 2017. http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/vadim-vieru-avocat-promo-lex-despre-legea-big-brother-_-blocarea-site-urilor-web-prin.

3 Media AZI. "Guvernul vrea să reglementeze activitatea dronelor. Jurnaliștii cred că noile reguli vor limita accesul la informație." March 20, 2017. <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/guvernul-vrea-s%C4%83-reglementeze-activitatea-dronelor-jurnali%C8%99tii-cred-c%C4%83-noile-reguli-vor-limita>.

on newspaper distribution. After an 18-month trial, the Supreme Court of Justice required the Post of Moldova to provide the association with the information it requested about the companies that repaired post offices in the country. Although there have been no prison sentences for nondisclosure of sources, there have been attempts to file lawsuits against journalists and publications in order to find out their sources."

Media outlets and journalists experienced pressure from various sources. As media researcher Aneta Gonța observed, "In 2017, media organizations made at least 25 public statements condemning abuses in the media sector, including the following: verbal and/or physical aggression toward journalists by representatives of political parties or civil servants; the deposition of journalist Mariana Rață at the prosecutor's office⁴ and her subsequent rebuke at a meeting of the Superior Council of Magistracy for disseminating information of public interest; the persecution and/or detention of journalists; restrictions of media representatives' access to events of public interest;⁵ the tendency of various public authorities to misinterpret the provisions of the Law on Personal Data Protection, resulting in unjustified refusals to provide information of public interest

4 Anticoruptie.md. "Vladimir Botnari, fostul comisar al Capitalei, cere tragerea la răspundere penală a unei ziariste a Centrului de Investigatii Jurnalistice." January 19, 2017. <https://anticoruptie.md/ro/stiri/vladimir-botnari-fostul-comisar-al-capitalei-cere-tragerea-la-raspundere-penala-a-unei-ziariste-a-centrului-de-investigatii-jurnalistice>.

5 Media Azi. "CJI lansează studiul național de audiență." December 18, 2017. <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/cji-lanseaza-studiul-național-de-audiență>; Media AZI. "TVR Moldova, exclusă din lista de acces la un club de discuții cu Președintele Dodon, din cauza unei 'neînțelegeri'." June 28, 2017. <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/tvr-moldova-exclusă-din-lista-de-acces-la-un-club-de-discuții-cu-președintele-dodon-din-cauza>.

to applicants, especially to journalists; the Prime Minister's statements condemning the critical position of the media toward government actions; and so on."

Valeriu Vasilică, director of the news agency IPN, said that "some professionals and media NGOs have become sufficiently aware that freedom of speech and access to information are fundamental values that need to be protected, including through actions of solidarity. At the same time, it is hard to imagine that many people would go out into the street to protect these values. The current state favors media promotion of group or personal interests that are contrary to the values of a

democratic society." This opinion was shared by Tudor Darie from the news outlet Agora.md and by Alexandru Burdeinii, editor in chief of Infomarket Media news agency. Galina Zablovski, executive director of the Association of Advertising Agencies, added, "Citizens have repeatedly found that no sort of protests bring about the desired changes."

Media experts in Gagauzia and in the Transnistrian region experienced an even worse situation with freedom of expression. In Gagauzia, for instance, reporters from independent media are not always invited to attend events of public interest conducted by authorities. In the Transnistrian region, usually, the state media have priority in accessing information distributed by authorities.

In Moldova, only broadcasters need licenses. Other types of media go through a relatively easy and accessible registration procedure. In 2017, in the context of central administration reform, the government transferred the authority to register media outlets from the Ministry of Justice to the Public Services Agency. Speaking of the relaxed legal framework to establish and operate media outlets, Vasilică noted that it "is often used for purposes contrary to those of professional and socially responsible media. We have a very large number of so-called information resources that imply association with media outlets, yet function openly and provocatively in the interests of parties or groups."

Multiple panelists noted continuing major problems in the BCC's issuance of broadcast licenses. Darie said that "licenses for television frequencies are still being granted according to certain political preferences." As Gonța pointed out, "The year 2017 was marked by arbitrary interpretations by the BCC of Article 26 of the Broadcasting Code, which concerns the transfer of broadcasting licenses. Also, the criteria for choosing winners in licensing competitions are questionable and have

been consistently criticized by experts."

Mosneag commented, "The political affiliation of the BCC led in 2017 to a case that could be interpreted as an attempt to hinder the activity of station TV8 (formerly TV7), which criticized government activities. The BCC postponed the license transfer to TV8 for six months.⁶ As a result, this TV station missed the chance to obtain grants for development." Barbă also commented on this case, saying, "The BCC justifies it by claiming it was a dispute between two economic agents—a situation that goes beyond the regulating powers in cases of license transfer." Ribca also recalled the instance of a television station in the city of Balti (the third-largest city in Moldova, after Chișinău and Tiraspol). For unjustified reasons, it was denied the renewal of its analog broadcasting license,⁷ forcing it to apply for a cable license instead.

Zaharia expressed the belief that "the BCC imposes fines on TV stations arbitrarily. It ignores gross violations committed by stations that are close to the government, including ones that retransmit foreign programs with clear elements of propaganda, and to date has not applied any sanctions to them."

Gonța added, "The BCC elected a new chairman in May, and he revealed himself [to be] against media nongovernment organizations (NGOs). By the end of the year, the BCC was fully staffed with three new members who

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.

6 Media AZI. "CCA a amânat a doua oară cererea de cesionare a companiei care administrează TV8." September 27, 2018. <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/cca-amânat-doua-oară-cererea-de-cesionare-companiei-care-administrează-tv-8>.

7 Media AZI. "TV Bălți are probleme cu obținerea licenței de emisie prin cablu." October 24, 2017. <http://media-azi.md/ro/stiri/tv-bălți-are-probleme-cu-obținerea-licenței-de-emisie-prin-cablu>.

raised certain doubts. The selection contest in the specialized parliamentary commission and the vote in parliament appeared as pure formalities, as the candidates who were the least familiar with broadcasting got the most votes. Several MPs actually left the commission meeting...but ultimately the proper candidates were nominated."

In Transnistria, the Russian-influenced region in Moldova's that borders Ukraine, media outlets have to register with the State Service for Mass Media under the local administration. License renewal depends on the political situation. Panelists described a 2017 case of "purification" in Transnistrian media, in which its parliament adopted a law⁸ affecting the publication *Profsoyuznye Vesti*. The law required the founders/editorial board members to join the Federation of Trade Unions of Transnistria, which is tied closely to the local administration and therefore subject to its control.

In Moldova there is no difference between founding a media company and any other type of company. The state gets involved only in supporting public/state-owned media outlets. "Entry into the market is free, but access is different because publishing a website and launching a television station are [two] different things and involve different costs," said Gonța.

Mosneag described the distribution cost problems that print media face. "In 2017, the Post of Moldova increased the fee for newspaper distribution and also introduced a special fee for packaging individual newspapers, which was

considered discriminatory by periodical publishers. The issue was discussed by a specialized parliamentary commission, but nothing was resolved. According to some calculations, the Post of Moldova's fees represent about 40 percent of a newspaper's cost." Barbă pointed out the reasoning behind the change. "The Post of Moldova authorities declared that, being self-sufficient, they would work at a loss if fees were not increased. The solution, therefore, would be to have appropriate state policies."

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The parliamentary commission that discussed the case left settlement to the discretion of the two parties, Vasilică said. "There is also somewhat discriminatory treatment inside the media community," he added, "For example, news agencies regulated by the same legislation as periodicals are required to pay value-added tax. Also, some media outlets and companies related to the media do not make their revenue and expenditures public, thus avoiding taxes and creating unfair economic and financial competition for media that work honestly in terms of taxes and social issues. Politically affiliated media have priority in getting funding in the advertising market and from businesses with the same affiliation."

Panelists also noted certain other discriminatory elements. According to Zablovski, "Print media pay big money for distribution, and broadcasters,

in addition, pay 1 percent of their turnover to the broadcasting support fund. It turns out that online media have the most advantage." Burdeinii commented, "When it comes to cable operators, it is not clear why some television channels are on top of the grid while others, even highly popular ones, are at the bottom. So, the place of a new channel on the grid depends on the operator's taste, just like the audience for the station."

Ribca expressed the belief that legislation enacted in 2017, in which every broadcaster—whether local, regional, or national—is obliged to air eight hours of domestic programs daily, is discriminatory. "According to the best European practices, the state should grant fiscal resources and financial aid to the media. Such resources and aid, though they have been requested for years by the media, are at this point only a dream," he said.

Multiple abuses against media representatives, some of which scandalized public opinion, were reported in 2017. Barbă recalled the case of journalist Mariana Rață from the investigative website Anticoruptie.md. She was deposed by the Chișinău Prosecutor's Office after a former Chișinău commissar filed a criminal complaint. He claimed that Rață published personal data about him and his family without his consent. In July 2017, after her investigative article "Judges of the Stolen Billion" was published, members of the Superior Council of Magistracy (SCM) admonished her publicly for incorrectly presenting one of the judges' names. SCM neglected to comment on the serious problems revealed in the journalist's investigation and instead focused on a mistake that Rață acknowledged. Rață explained that it happened because the source had not responded to her name confirmation requests.

Zaharia highlighted the case of photojournalist Constantin Grigoriță. He was "boycotted by the president, who won't let him attend any

8 Новости Приднестровья. "ЗАКОНОПРОЕКТ О ПЕРЕУЧРЕЖДЕНИИ ГАЗЕТЫ «ПРОФСОЮЗНЫЕ ВЕСТИ» ПРОШЁЛ ВТОРОЕ ЧТЕНИЕ В ВЕРХОВНОМ СОВЕТЕ." December 13, 2017. <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/17-12-13/zakonoproekt-o-pereuchrezhdenii-gazety-profsoyuznye-vesti-proshyol>.

administrative event after Grigoriță had asked him two uncomfortable questions at a press conference early in 2017.” Grigoriță filed a lawsuit against the presidential administration for restricting his access to information. The court of appeals decided that the head of state could not benefit from the immunity granted by law, as the dispute concerned access to information of public interest.

Mosneag described two more serious cases of media discrimination. “In November 2017, two *Ziarul de Gardă* reporters were threatened while filming near the building of the Global Business Center, where politician and businessman Vladimir Plahotniuc works. Previously, the police had asked another one of our newspaper reporters not to photograph in the direction of that building. In December 2017, another newspaper reporter was intimidated while trying to have a discussion with the head of Chișinău’s Central District. None of the above cases resulted in sanctions for the perpetrators, creating the impression that they are protected. Only media associations react when a journalist is threatened or intimidated.”

As another threatening factor, several cloned websites appeared in 2017 that fraudulently used the identity of some credible Moldovan media outlets to try to manipulate public opinion. Investigative authorities could not find the perpetrators.

Gonța also identified other cases of threats to media members. They included the following:

The detention of the news website Gagauzinfo.md’s film crew by law enforcement officers in the town of Ciadir-Lunga, Gagauzia, while they covered at a protest by local transportation drivers who claimed their economic rights;

The stalking of Vladimir Solovyov, the editor in chief of Newsmaker.md;

The aggression against a Publica TV film crew at a protest;

The aggression against a Jurnal TV reporter by Vladimir Hotineanu, the chair of the Parliamentary Commission on Culture, Education, Research, Youth, Sport, and Mass Media;

The aggression against a *Jurnal de Chișinău* photojournalist by a shop owner after the photojournalist took footage of outdated food; and

The prohibition of a Prime TV team from attending the congress of the Action and Solidarity Party.

Multiple panelists agreed that the legal system works against journalists. Zablovski emphasized, “In fact, media representatives don’t feel protected, just like the other citizens of this country,” and Darie commented, “There are no registered cases of courts convicting people who attack the media. They are usually public people, and their actions are covered by political influence.” According to Vasiliță, “The punishments meted out to people and media outlets are not more severe than in other areas. But the impression is that abuses against independent media covers all kinds of violations, whereas even more serious violations that are committed by the media affiliated with the regime or with political parties go unnoticed.” For example, in the Transnistrian region, independent bloggers and journalists are forbidden to film or to interview people at rallies. Panelists recalled cases in which journalists that tried to film were approached by strangers who, with no introduction, demanded that they leave the event or who followed them.

National legislation protects the editorial independence of public media outlets. It does not explicitly favor public media outlets to the detriment of private outlets, and it stipulates that the managers must be elected democratically and should be able to work independently. In reality, however, Gonța argued, “Neither the members of the Supervisory Board (SB) at Teleradio-Moldova nor the senior managers

are totally independent of politics. Here is just one example: A member of the public broadcaster’s SB is also a senior adviser to the Moldovan prime minister. The manner in which the new director for TV station Moldova 1 was elected in 2017 has been criticized; political interference is suspected.” Barbă also pointed out that “there have been cases when information access was preferentially granted to private media outlets that provide broad coverage either of the government or of the opposition.”

Several panelists explained the effects of government influence on public service media programming. Vasiliță said, “Annual funding from the state budget is based on subjective criteria and is also a method of informal political control. While surveys show that the majority of people turn to television for information, political pressure on television is also greater than, for example, public radio, which enjoys more editorial independence.” According to Darie, public media outlets are trying to be balanced, but “political influence is felt, especially in the coverage of topics related to the government and the opposition.” Mosneag recalled, “In 2017, there were protests at the public television station, in which opposition parties demanded access to screen and air time. As a result, in November, Moldova 1 launched a program intended for all political parties.”

Panelists also gave the example of the People’s Assembly of Gagauzia, which adopted a law in 2017 to increase the financial and editorial independence of the regional public broadcaster. But the autonomy’s head did not promote the law, and as a result the assembly withdrew it from its agenda.

Slander and libel were decriminalized many years ago and are provided for in the Contravention Code of the Republic of Moldova. Domestic legal rules require both sides to prove guilt or innocence in cases of defamation. The Supreme Court of

Justice of Moldova, in a decision dating back to 2006, instructed courts to take into account the specific nature of the idea of “value judgment,” which means that the person is not responsible for expressing opinions about events, circumstances, etc.—the truth of which cannot be demonstrated. Gonța noted that the law on freedom of expression distinguishes among facts, value judgments, value judgments without sufficient factual grounds, information about private and family life, public interest, persons in public office, and public persons.

However, according to Zaharia, “some media outlets are being sued for damaging dignity and honor.” Mosneag added, “As a rule, officials spoken about in the media may demand that information be refuted, but litigation is usually settled in favor of journalists. When journalists lose cases and officials demand compensation of hundreds of thousands Moldovan lei, judges reject their claims or grant them much smaller amounts.”

One such case concerned the station Pro TV, which was obliged by the court to pay MDL 40,000 (\$2,300) to a plaintiff who had invoked the television’s lack of discernment over the right to private life, respect for honor, dignity, and professional reputation. The plaintiff demanded moral damages amounting to MDL 1.5 million (\$87,000). After a trial that lasted two years, the court only obliged Jurnal TV to refute publicly the published, allegedly denigrating information about the speaker of parliament.

Another lawsuit, filed by public television director Ecaterina Stratan against journalist Vasile Năstase, was dismissed by the court, which deemed it unfounded. In the lawsuit, the plaintiff asked for a refutation and explanation as well as compensation of MDL 500,000 (\$29,000).

In 2017, *Pravda Pridnestrovya* journalist Nadejda Bondarenko was fined for slander in the Transnistrian region. She reported on a road

accident in which an underage girl was killed and that involved a Transnistrian dignitary’s relative. Experts stated that Transnistrian authorities committed serious abuses against the journalists. For instance, about half of journalists employed by state media were dismissed because they supported in the last elections the former leader Evgheni Sevciuk. They were asked to write resignation letters and indicate that they resign by their own initiative. Vasilică and Burdeinii noted that often the dignitaries and institutions that are reported on prefer not to react to criticism, and the media affiliated with them avoid covering events and public statements that might subject them to scrutiny.

Darie said that although Moldova has many cases of slander, “not all of them get to court. There are other leverages — for example, economic and financial.” Referring to websites, Zablovski recalled cases of owners who were held responsible for placing misleading advertising. Such lawsuits are usually initiated by competitors, she added.

Since 2000, Moldova has had in effect the Law on Access to Information. This legislation guarantees equal access to information of public interest for all types of media. The law is supplemented by others, such as the Law on State Security, the Law on Trade Secrets, the Law on Information and State Information Resources, the Law on Countering Extremist Activities, and the Law on the Civil Servants’ Code of Conduct. However, according to Gonța, “The provisions of these legal acts are often used to limit or delay the delivery of information to journalists. The most recent examples are the order of Chișinău’s interim mayor that obliges mayoral office employees to communicate with the media only through the public relations department; and the order of the former minister of health, whereby institutions subordinated to the ministry of health must coordinate all broadcast program and interview

invitations with the ministry’s press service.”

Zaharia and Mosneag noted a drastic regression in access to information for journalists due to the following:

Under the cover of protection of personal data, many institutions have taken the liberty of not providing the information requested or providing redacted versions.

Institutional representatives have concealed information about issues of major public interest that might prejudice the interests of the government, and only data that presents authorities in a positive light has been easily accessible.

Many institutions, especially in the judiciary, virtually have been closed to journalists, and some courts have no employees responsible for press relations.

Journalists have been unable to check information from relevant sources in a timely manner, which has discouraged them from attacking big problems in the justice system.

Some court hearings of major public interest (such as the cases of Ilan Shor and Veaceslav Platon⁹) have been held behind closed doors, contrary to the law. In another example, the public has been deprived of accurate and truthful information about the enormous bank fraud

9 Ilan Shor, the former head of the Administration Council of the Economy Bank of Moldova (BEM) and the current mayor of Orhei town, was accused of fraud and money laundering. Prosecutors accused him of stealing from BEM and laundering about 5 billion Moldovan Lei (about \$338 million). Shor was sentenced by a court in first instance to eight years in prison, but he appealed the court decision and is waiting for a verdict. Veaceslav Platon, a businessman, was sentenced to 18 years in prison for fraud and money laundering, and to 12 years for a large-scale fraud attempt and an attempt to corrupt the officers of the Special Destination Unit “Pantera” (an anticorruption unit). In both cases, the trials were not public.

committed in Moldova in 2014.

Ribca described another instance: "The worst situation is the restriction of information access on the website [Instante.justice.md](http://instante.justice.md), which is managed by the Agency for Courts Administration for the Ministry of Justice. Throughout the entire year 2017, with the support of the SCM, informational access about the exercise of justice in Moldova was blocked. Refusals of access to information of public interest were usually justified by the legislation on the protection of personal data."¹⁰

Barbă also called out SCM as responsible for the access problems. "In 2017, the SCM started implementing the Regulation on the Publication of Judgments on the Courts' Web Portal, which restricted information access by posting judgments with no reference to who was involved. The Ministry of Justice explained the need for this regulation due to citizens' complaints that their legal rights were being violated by publishing their names on the court website. This is despite the fact that even the European Court of Human Rights publishes the names and information on the parties involved in the cases it examines," she said.

"Limited access to information and truncated information offered to journalists are the reasons why we don't know who is responsible for the collapse of a building or for delivery of spoiled food to kindergartens," Zablovski observed.

Vasilică and Darie drew attention to another concern: Some dignitaries regard journalistic requests for information as comparable to citizen petitions, thereby delaying answers and

compromising the issue's timeliness.

In the Transnistrian region, the procedure for requesting official information is excessively bureaucratic, and information access in the public interest requires special permission. In 2017, more so than other years, journalists were forced to turn to the court to request access to public information. Notable among them were investigative journalists from Rise Moldova, *Ziarul de Gardă*, MoldovaCurata.md, and Anticoruptie.md.

Burdeinii placed some blame on journalists, dividing them into three categories: Those who are too lazy to obtain information, those who are favored by authorities and are given preferential treatment over others regarding information, and those who rely less on legislation and more on personal relationships and contacts with important official sources of information.

Gonța noted that online journalists sometimes are treated differently. "In Moldova, bloggers who don't have the official status of journalists have more access to information, including information of public interest, than some journalists and/or media outlets do. Then they are quoted as sources of information for traditional media."

Moldovan law does not restrict Internet access to foreign news or to sources of information. However, according to Vasilică, economic and editorial constraints are the reality. "Although access is not limited, it is significantly restricted because self-funded media outlets usually cannot afford subscriptions to local or international news agencies. And politically affiliated media usually don't subscribe to local news agencies because their aim is not to publish neutral, pluralistic coverage of events," he said.

Mosneag also commented on foreign news content: "Media outlets and journalists increasingly borrow articles from Romanian media, taking

advantage of the fact that both countries write in Romanian." Gonța added, "The articles taken from other sources often don't indicate that source, despite the fact that the law protects intellectual property." Zaharia pointed out another problem: "There are no restrictions on the use of the Internet, but the opportunities offered by the Web happen to be used abusively; for example, by distributing fake [information] or promoting hate speech."

In Moldova, newscasts and political debates from abroad are retransmitted extensively, and many of them are propagandistic. According to Barbă, this trend led parliament to adopt an amendment to the broadcasting code that limits the broadcasting in Moldova of informative, analytical, political, and military programs from countries that have not ratified the European Convention on Transfrontier Television. The declared purpose of the amendment is to fight propaganda and manipulation coming from abroad, primarily Russia. However, this amendment has created social controversy, and many experts in the field doubt that the intended effects can be achieved.

In the Transnistrian region, authorities block foreign media broadcasts, except those from Russia. There have been cases in which foreign media have applied for temporary accreditation, but they usually have been refused without explanation. In 2017, Tiraspol's KGB blocked access to [Deschide.md](http://deschide.md), claiming that information leakage from Transnistrian nonresidents was aimed at destabilizing the conditions in the region.¹¹

The choice and practice of journalism in

10 *Ziarul de Gardă*. "Încă o lovitură pentru accesul la informație? Portalul instanțelor a..." February 2, 2017. <http://www.zdg.md/stiri/stiri-justitie/inca-o-lovitura-pentru-accesul-la-informatie-portalul-instantelor-au-exclus-cautarea-unui-dosar-dupa-numele-inculpatului>.

11 Cojocari, V. "Krasnoselski recunoaște. KGB-ul de la Tiraspol a blocat accesul la pagina [Deschide.md](http://deschide.md)." *Deschide.md*, October 4, 2017. <https://deschide.md/ro/stiri/social/19098/Krasnoselski-recunoaste-C8%99te-KGB-ul-de-la-Tiraspol-a-blocat-accesul-la-pagina-Deschidemd.htm>.

Moldova is free and is not dictated by a person's sex, ethnicity, spoken language, religion, etc. However, according to Zaharia, "Authorities indirectly discourage the practice of this profession by restricting access to information, not responding to journalists' requests, and impoverishing independent media."

Several panelists commented on the downsides to free entry to the profession. "The fact that journalism can be done by anyone contributes, to a certain extent, to the deterioration of media quality — especially when it is not the journalist's main activity," Barbă commented. Burdeinii lamented that "the profession's popularity and credibility have fallen sharply, because anyone, including many bloggers, can consider themselves journalists. But they are not aware that this profession means not only collecting, analyzing, and delivering information, but also exercising responsibility, which is the very thing that they lack." Moreover, the employment of novice journalists, according to Mosneag, "is influenced by the fact that they choose to work for politically affiliated media outlets that usually have better working conditions and salaries, but whose work is foreign to socially responsible media. It is understandable, since a large part of the media is directly or indirectly owned by politicians."

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

2.39

Moldova has seen a trend of journalism quality deteriorating drastically during election years. As 2017 was not an election year, the quality of journalism improved slightly. This progress was insignificant because, in the opinion of Zaharia, "important television stations, some newspapers, and some websites served the interests of

politicians, and journalists were involved in denigrating political competitors and deliberately distorting reality in favor of the government."

Gonța shared Zaharia's viewpoint, adding that "media outlets, depending on whose interests they represent, have chosen so-called 'independent experts' who are invited every time they need to confirm 'the right thing.' It happens that many local and regional media outlets abide by professional standards to a greater extent than national outlets."

In terms of compliance with professional quality standards, Vasilică identified four categories of media: those producing fair reports as a daily practice (Pro TV, Radio Free Europe, TVR Moldova and *Ziarul de Gardă*), those affiliated with the government, those affiliated with the parliamentary opposition Party of Socialists (NTV Moldova, Accent TV, RTR Moldova), and those related to the extraparlimentary opposition (Jurnal TV, Radio Vocea Basarabiei).

The majority of panelists agreed on the gaps in the work of professionals, including (1) a focus on news to the detriment of analysis; (2) frequent claims to a single source of information, even in controversial items; (3) deliberately avoiding facts that are relevant for the public but make authorities uncomfortable; (4) exaggerated coverage of irrelevant events that are comfortable for the "political sponsor"; and (5) long reports and interviews "about nothing" that are necessary to reach the domestic production quota as required by law.

Mosneag drew attention to two other aspects that are shaping Moldovan professionalism. "Fair, objective, and well-documented journalism is practiced by the few independent media outlets supported by foreign grants. The year 2017 saw the further development of the phenomenon of bloggers engaged in political partisanship and manipulation

of public opinion. [These bloggers] are often quoted by or appear on politically controlled television stations," he said.

Moldova has a code of journalism ethics that is in line with international standards and that many media outlets have adopted. In practice, however, journalists often breach these standards. As Darie described, "The largest media outlets are politically controlled, so political orders are at the head of the table rather than the code of ethics." According to Gonța, "In 2017, the most serious violations of professional ethics were committed in the covering of delicate issues such as the online game Blue Whale or the sexual abuse of a minor girl." In the case of the abused girl, the BCC reacted by fining seven TV stations MDL 5,000 (\$290) each for their lack of ethics and professionalism in the coverage of the story.¹²

National media also have serious problems with plagiarism, "especially online, where entire texts are taken from other sources without indicating the original source," said Zaharia. Plagiarism is also widespread in Transnistria, where the media community assumes no code of ethics.

Several panelists gave examples of questionable media practices. According to Vasilică, "A general problem is that some journalists accept media orders, including for money or for other favors." Barbă pointed out that "in Moldova, there is no atmosphere for reprimanding journalists for ethics violations. Often, the journalist's prestige is measured by the size of the salary he or she was bought for. It explains why there are turncoat journalists who run

¹² Media AZI. "Amenzi de 5000 MDL pentru posturile tv care au relatat neadekvat cazul minorei abuzate din Ialoveni." December 28, 2017. <http://www.media-azi.md/ro/stiri/amenzi-de-5000-mdl-pentru-posturile-tv-care-au-relatat-neadekvat-cazul-minorei-abuzate-din>.

from opposition television stations to government stations and vice versa.” Burdeinii commented that “despite accepted ethical standards, advertising is often presented as news. Although there is the practice of labeling paid material as such, most of the articles that could be classified as advertorials are aired without such labels.”

Zablovski, however, noted one positive change. “After the law on advertising was amended by prohibiting sexist content, the situation in the media improved in this sense,” she said.

Neglect of ethical standards has also favored the spread of “electronic phantoms.” Mosneag cited multiple cases, including *Ziarul de Gardă* and Stop Fake, in which credible websites were cloned for the purposes of manipulating online media consumers.

Self-censorship in Moldovan media is widespread, even if the issue has not been made public. Gonța claimed, “Self-censorship is editorial policy, especially in politically affiliated television stations. Keeping a job is important. The owner’s interest dictates the editorial policy, and the satisfaction of this interest leads to self-censorship that is visible to the naked eye.”

Several other panelists had similar observations. “In some media outlets, the editor places certain topics under taboo, while in other outlets journalists themselves avoid certain topics, as they are aware that they will not be accepted anyway,” Burdeinii said. Mosneag noted that as a rule, “Journalists don’t oppose orders from their superiors, but rather comply with them.” Zablovski expressed the belief that “few people can afford to ignore the interests of the funders, be they political parties or commercial structures.”

Self-censorship is also widespread in the Transnistrian region. Only bloggers and some NGO productions cover certain topics, such as human rights or rising prices.

Overall, Moldovan media report the most important events, but not always even-handedly with all parties or in compliance with professional and ethical standards. Multiple panelists confirmed that bias is commonplace. Darie said, “There are problems in the coverage of events with political impact.” Zaharia stated, “Media outlets that are dependent on circles close to the government present events according to their interests — either in a positive or negative light, not neutrally as they should be.”

Gonța supported this opinion, saying, “The protests of the extraparlimentary opposition and those on uninominal/mixed voting were covered by the media affiliated with the ruling parties too, but the focus was different, so the same event was covered differently. One of the events omitted (from international news) was the massive protests in Romania in early 2017. Four of the five television stations that have national coverage did not report it, though it had had no precedents in Romania since 1989 and was reported by media all over the world.”

Barbă specified: “Unfortunately, the editorial agenda, especially of the media located in Chișinău, is set not by journalists but by politicians. We have lots of news reports and programs about politicians and very few about the lives of ordinary people.”

Vasilică, whose IPN offices have a room in which 80–85 percent of press conferences are held, admitted, “I often feel ashamed, seeing what issues the media disregard, and I also often feel ashamed at the issues they come to cover. Events with high social impact are ignored; instead, media consumers get invented topics and values thrust on them, such as scandals around sexual minorities. The conclusion is that the agenda of many media outlets is distorted.”

Zablovski further noted, “A charity patronized by a politician is often given a great deal of attention in newscasts, while a protest in the center of the

Journalism meets professional standards of quality.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS

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

capital city is barely mentioned.”

Burdeinii described a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly present in the media: “A lot of journalists ‘feed’ on what they are offered by the press services of state authorities. The enormous number of press releases allows them to work without delving deeply into topics useful for the public.”

The average monthly salary level in the media industry is higher than the overall Moldovan average (MDL 5,600, which is about \$330). “However,” Zablovski said, “this level cannot stop corruption and is not motivating professionalism. In addition, salaries are not always paid officially and transparently. Since IPN was created, employees have been paid official [monthly] salaries of MDL 5,000 to MDL 9,000 [\$290 to \$520] to maintain their professional, economic, and moral comfort. But in all 12 years of our existence, we’ve experienced an

acute shortage of personnel. After growing professionally with us, people often leave for gray areas of the media, characterized by censorship and self-censorship, media orders, and salaries that are unofficial but higher than those at IPN. Though it is unnatural, relatively high earnings in the profession are not a guarantee against corruption, just as they are not a guarantee for keeping professionals in the industry."

Several other panelists described the disparities in pay rates. Mosneag noted, "The highest salaries are usually paid by politically affiliated television stations and other media. Independent journalists are mainly supported by foreign projects and grants, and bloggers, by advertising mostly written on political orders." Gonța said, "Traditionally, private media usually pay higher salaries than public outlets; however, I know of cases where reporters at a private outlet earn less, but still prefer that outlet for its name and for what they can learn there." Barbă concluded, "We have well-paid journalists and poorly paid journalists. To keep your independence in Moldova, you have to work for foreign media or work for several independent local media at the same time."

At present, newscasts and political debates have the highest share of original content in Moldovan media outlets. Mosneag and Zablovschi explained that these programs have much lower production costs compared to entertainment broadcasts. In addition, according to Vasilică, "Decision makers in Moldovan media look at newscasts and political debates and see a more efficient tool for influencing public opinion over certain political and geopolitical options (including propagandistic messages), and they need much less investment than entertainment programs." Zaharia agreed, saying, "There is no shortage of news; there is a shortage of well-presented news. Unfortunately, the degree of manipulation in the news is very great."

Other panelists emphasized that the quantity of entertainment content is still high. Gonța said that "entertainment eclipses news among all programs to which Moldovan viewers have access. Retransmitted program services deliver mostly entertainment. The latest media audience survey shows that Moldovans extensively consume this kind of program." Barbă noted, "Along with these programs, audiences swallow huge doses of propaganda from newscasts and analytical programs that are very well integrated into the daily schedules of the programs retransmitted in Moldova."

"Journalists don't oppose orders from their superiors, but rather comply with them." Zablovschi expressed the belief that "few people can afford to ignore the interests of the funders, be they political parties or commercial structures."

In Moldova, the materials and technologies necessary for collecting, producing, and disseminating information are not a problem for print and online media. Darie said, "The Internet and new technologies allow the production of content with minimal equipment." Zaharia agreed: "Media outlets have the tools needed to offer quality products, but the editorial content is far from great."

Zablovschi and Burdeinii noted the big difference between the technical facilities of national broadcasters versus local or regional broadcasters, and Barbă and Gonța highlighted that public broadcasters are in a precarious situation regarding technical equipment. They lamented that although Moldova is on track with new technologies, it has not yet honored its commitment to switch to digital television — which should have done back in 2015.

Vasilică noted that some media outlets are properly equipped due to external support. One regional public broadcaster has been broadcasting via satellite since November 2017 through help from the government of Turkey.

Moldova has many solid print and online media that specialize in investigations, economics, politics, banking, wine making, health, and fact checking. The panelists said that these outlets have developed a great deal lately and meet quality criteria. Vasilică mentioned the newspaper *Ziarul de Gardă*, the Investigative Journalism Center, RISE Moldova, Mold-street.md, and the projects Sic.md and Stop Fake as among those making improvements.

On the positive side, Gonța noted several recent achievements: "In 2017, one of the Best Journalist of the Year prizes was won by a journalist addressing health topics; a Moldovan reporter took the best investigative journalism prize in a competition in Southeast Europe; another investigative journalist was nominated for the European Press Prize; and the Panama Papers investigation in which Moldovan journalists were involved won the Pulitzer Prize."

Other panelists observed that successes in investigative journalism are limited. "The bad part is that such media products are not covered by television stations, which are the main sources of information for the populace," Zaharia said, and Mosneag found that "there are not enough journalists in investigative journalism, just like there are not enough journalists specializing in other areas."

Panelists also pointed to a serious problem: the rapid emergence of pseudo-investigative journalism. Several websites that appeared virtually overnight have published compromising articles about politicians that are critical about the government and called these pieces journalistic investigations (e.g.,

Zeppelin Investigation¹³). Also, preordered articles were produced by some bloggers to look like journalistic investigations. Politically affiliated media usually completely absorb or quote these sources.

Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region also have media specialized in various areas, but investigative journalism is virtually absent largely due to fears about persecution.

**OBJECTIVE 3:
PLURALITY
OF NEWS**

2.63

Moldova has a wide variety of media, but very little pluralism is ensured by these individual media outlets. New media outlets have emerged, especially news websites, that offer many points of view, but some were created artificially to disseminate fake news.

Several panelists elaborated on the problems with diversity of perspectives. In Barbă's view, to be properly informed "you need to use information from many sources." Gonța stated that the population, especially in rural areas, "has access to television stations with national coverage, and since they usually offer only one point of view (that of the government), pluralism is almost nonexistent." Vasiliță observed that "decision makers in the media and in politics misinterpret the role of the media and strengthen their manipulation and propaganda tools to the detriment of their watchdog role. The relatively good part of the situation is that those decision makers are interested in promoting their own businesses and views in the media rather than in pressuring their competitors, although pressure is not totally absent."

Moldovans extensively use social networks to keep informed, with Facebook and Odnoklassniki [a Russian website similar to Facebook] the most accessed resources. Mosneag noted that politicians also have a presence in online forums, "The only platforms where the government and the opposition meet are social-networking websites, because the ruling parties' representatives usually refuse to participate in programs and interviews produced by critical media outlets."

In the Transnistrian region, the number of information resources is small. Moldovan-based print media have no access to the region, and certain television channels are included only in the commercial packages of cable operators.

Citizens' access to national and international information is free in all respects — which also means practically unlimited access to certain kinds of messages from the Russian Federation. "Poor knowledge of foreign languages other than Russian fuels unproductive nostalgia and causes distortions in many citizens' views on the values needed for development," Vasiliță observed.

Burdeinii said that free access can still be limited by technical issues, and Gonța described incidents of interference: "In 2017, the national provider of TV services was accused of jamming the broadcasts of TV8 — a fact that qualified as a restriction of rights of access to information and freedom of expression. Also [I] remember the fire in the technical building of the StarNet telecommunication company that led to the temporary cessation of television services... Some analysts assumed it was an act of revenge for the owner's involvement in politics. None of these cases were, however, confirmed officially."

Moldova has one national public broadcaster, one regional public broadcaster in Gagauz, and one public news agency; almost all of them are

politically influenced. Barbă said that by the end of the year, "there were visibly more news reports about the activity of the ruling party in newscasts, and the work of the regional public broadcaster remained very dependent on the Gagauz authorities. An example of this dependence was the Gagauz Parliament's dismissal of the Supervisory Board, which was done contrary to legislation."

Gonța said that she considers 2017 a year of regression for the national public broadcaster in terms of evenhandedness and professionalism in news. One-day monitoring of the main newscast conducted by Gonta showed that out of the 13 national news reports, 11 were authorities' statements quoted from press releases and government decisions. In most of those cases, one-sided opinions and statements made up the entire news report. Moreover, the presentation manner and the news content strikingly resembled the news shown by the other four national television stations affiliated with the ruling party.

These facts are in line with the panelists' observations. Darie said, "There is a feeling that news is covered in favor of authorities and against the extraparlimentary opposition," and Mosneag recalled, "The opposition protested throughout 2017, requesting access to the public television station and accusing it of political partisanship in favor of the government."

Vasiliță noted that the public broadcasters do contribute to the media sphere. "Public media seem aware of their purpose, covering the gaps left by private media outlets, including programs on education and culture, those intended for minorities, and so on, but its status of 'controlled Cinderella' thwarts a lot of good intentions. Public radio manages to do more to achieve its mission than public television, but its impact is smaller," he said.

According to Barbă, Moldovan news agencies

13 <http://zeppelin.md/eng>

can afford a higher degree of independence than other media because they work online and have subscribers among embassies, foreign companies, financial groups, and some media outlets, even though they also offer much information for free.

Moldova currently has one public news agency, Moldpres, and two private news agencies, IPN

and Infotag. Vasilică said that this represents a downturn. "When IPN appeared in the media market in 2005, it was the thirteenth agency. Now there are only two of them. The others disappeared from the market and were replaced by so-called information resources that have shady funding, owners, editorial staffs, professional ethics, and messages." He also specified causes for the decrease in subscriptions:

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.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- ▶ A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.
- ▶ State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- ▶ Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliable.
- ▶ Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.

"It persists for reasons that are not always objective. For example, the public television station refused to subscribe to IPN for 2018, but public radio, part of the same public company, maintained its interest in IPN news. Two years ago, the entire media holding affiliated with the government gave up its subscription to IPN, although it had previously negotiated better payment conditions. This situation disregards the existence both of agency products and of news agencies in the classical sense."

Burdeinii noted another explanation for the low usage. "Media increasingly prefer not to buy news from agencies, but to compile it and present it as their own. Agency subscriptions are affordable, but as no one was punished for 'compilations,' the media just don't buy them," he said. Gonța had similar observations: "The news of domestic agencies is very rarely quoted or used as sources. International agencies are quoted more often." A reason mentioned by Darie is that Moldovan agencies mainly offer text content without accompanying visuals. Mosneag agreed: "International agencies are used to presenting foreign news, and most national television stations subscribe to these agencies from which they take not only information, but also photos and videos."

In the Transnistrian region, media use news from the region's agencies and accessible news from Russian agencies. Subscriptions to international agencies are essentially nonexistent.

In Moldova, broadcasters with national, regional, and local coverage produce their own content as a legal obligation. However, as Vasilică said, "...many of them — especially central outlets that are politically affiliated — either cover events selectively or interpret the statements of the figures they dislike with bias, thus contributing to disinformation and manipulation of public opinion." Gonța has observed that "the four television stations

with national coverage from the holdings of the Democratic Party leader distribute almost exactly the same content." Mosneag had a similar conclusion: "Information is largely repeated, as the majority of media outlets have a common agenda. The agenda is usually inspired by the events of the day and by reporting on those events. Few media outlets choose to come up with original and exclusive content." In this sense, as Burdeinii commented, "Local and regional media are more interesting because they focus on the audiences in the localities where they work." Darie pointed out that this coverage is often limited. "Broadcasters located in the capital city often cover events from the capital, while news from Moldova's regions is rare," he said.

New media bloggers usually choose their own topics or develop stories from traditional media. But in recent months, they have been the source for suggesting topics for traditional media or are quoted in news reports. Some bloggers deeply research certain issues, but some others defiantly manipulate public opinion.

Legislation on media ownership transparency and limits on the number of television stations per owner is mostly a mere formality. Some stations have simply transferred ownership to persons directly supervised by the former owners — as was the case of the media holding affiliated with the leader of PDM. Zaharia characterized the Moldovan sphere as "two media trusts that dominate the information market, especially broadcasting. These trusts disseminate manipulative information in the interests of two political groups: The Democratic Party and the Party of Socialists. The former forms the government and controls the parliamentary majority, and the latter is the party of the country's president."

Gonța described recent developments related to ownership. "In Moldova, media are bought not by economic trusts but rather by wealthy politicians,

directly or through intermediaries. There is no considerable investment in our media, although there have been talks this year, even in the government and parliament, about its importance for the media landscape. The only attempt to manage a television station — TV8 — with foreign investment was hampered by the BCC for six months. Other investment is at the website level; the most recent example is the launch of Nokta.md in the Gagauz autonomous region.” Vasilică added, “The fairest media outlets are those that get foreign investment, but unfortunately, they are a small part of Moldovan media, and significant foreign investments in the field are still waiting their turn.”

While the situation with ownership transparency in broadcasting has improved somewhat, for Internet outlets the situation is critical. “Online media are not regulated, which has led to the emergence of dozens of websites of unknown origin. The majority of them produce manipulative content or disseminate fake news,” Mosneag said, expressing the panelists’ general observations.

In Moldova, the national public broadcaster delivers programs in minority languages accessible to all citizens, and the regional broadcaster delivers programs in the Gagauz language. In the district of Taraclia, predominantly populated by Bulgarians, the local private broadcaster also delivers programs in the Bulgarian language. In 2017, the Roma community launched a radio station in the Romani language. Burdeinii and Zablovski expressed the view that “it is possible for every minority to have media outlets, but the problem is probably related to funding.”

Panelists said that Moldovan media report inadequately on social subjects. Mosneag noted, “The media provide the public with information that brings traffic or views, but the outlets that address the issues of ethnicity, religion, or gender are not in

this category.” According to Gonța, “Delicate topics, such as gender equality, social conventions, religion, and sexual orientation are covered rudimentarily and remain somewhat taboo. In Moldova, those who address such issues are considered brave and nonconformist.”

Mosneag noted that politicians also have a presence in online forums, “The only platforms where the government and the opposition meet are social-networking websites, because the ruling parties’ representatives usually refuse to participate in programs and interviews produced by critical media outlets.”

Vasilică explained the status quo as follows: “Social issues haven’t yet reached a notable place in the media’s concerns, including reasons such as: (a) certain topics are addressed in the interests of politics; (b) the division of society based on language, gender, ethnicity, etc., is encouraged for political interests; and (c) Russian language is extensively kept on the market for geopolitical interests to the detriment of other languages and ethnic groups living in Moldova, including Gagauz which, despite having the mechanisms of an administrative territorial autonomy, prefers official and media communication in Russian.”

The panelists underscored that media professionals are divided into two large groups based on language — Russian and Romanian —and this fact reflects the two parallel worlds of Moldovan society. For example, the media published in Romanian cover the national and international events in a different way than those published in Russian. Sometimes, the approach and the perspective of the

coverage are adversarial. In the panelists’ view, these groups are a worrying phenomenon, because they reflect and perpetuate the division of society as a whole.

In order to have a comprehensive overview of news, Moldovan consumers need to consult several sources. “Because of a lack of technical and financial resources, and because of the increased interest in politics of Chișinău’s television and radio stations, which make up about 60 percent of the total, the daily concerns of the rural population mostly remain outside the editorial agenda,” Barbă said.

Darie noted that Moldova has an abundance of national news and a deficit of local and international news, while Gonța commented, “In addition to the fact that local media deliver few national news items and national media deliver few local news items, about one-third of the districts have no local media outlets.” Vasilică had a slightly different viewpoint, observing, “News on local issues is present in the media with national coverage, but such reports often resemble detective stories or scandals, and the big local problems remain in the focus of local media and are most often not the focus of journalists from central outlets. One reason for this is lack of funders’ interest in social and local problems, as they bring fewer political dividends,” he said.

Zablovski noted that international news reports “are also presented depending on the orientation of the media outlet, with corresponding comments.”

According to the panelists, local bloggers and citizen journalists have not yet gained proper recognition, and traditional media do not seem to understand the need to present a fully informative picture of reality to consumers.

**OBJECTIVE 4:
BUSINESS
MANAGEMENT**

1.86

In Moldova, the efficient management of media companies remains a challenge for many reasons. Mosneag and Zaharia expressed the belief that independent media outlets survive due to foreign grants for funding, while politically affiliated media outlets are supported financially by their owners — usually politicians. Most have no long-term business plans and cannot afford to hire staff for marketing, human resources, or business management. The managers of newspapers and websites are journalists that combine editorial and administrative work.

Several panelists commented that resources are not devoted to business development. “In over 25 years of Moldova’s independence, no training of media managers has been initiated. Sporadic training courses have only partially contributed to solving this problem,” Barbă said. Zablovski judged the managerial shortfalls as “based on the fact that quite a lot of media outlets closed in 2017.” He gave the example of Realitatea TV, which disappeared from the media landscape after three years on the air. According to Darie, “Most often, media outlets focus on content production and partially or totally ignore the issues of efficient management. In the absence of sales and customer service departments, and given the extremely small advertising market, media outlets cannot be self-sufficient.”

Other panelists mentioned financial legitimacy problems with website owners. Gonța pointed out, “Lots of online media outlets and bloggers in Moldova support their work with resources that are either not very or not at all transparent.” According to Burdeinii, “To make money, the majority of media

and bloggers agree to publish ‘preordered’ material. In such cases, sustainability loses its essence.”

Although media outlet income is made up of multiple sources, this is not a favorable situation. Zaharia has found that “the most important economic and political groups fund two media trusts that dominate the information market, and it seriously damages the journalistic content they deliver. So, a lot of journalists work for politicians and not for the population of this country.”

Mosneag provided a breakdown of media income: “In Moldova, only some media outlets persevere with earnings from advertising. Some independent media, including newspapers, survive from grants and from circulation sales. Important television stations have wealthy owners and earnings from advertising. While in the case of grants, the editorial policies of outlets cannot be influenced, if an outlet has a political owner, it is inevitable.” Gonța said that she is sure that “interventions in editorial policy cannot be excluded — even in the case of public broadcasters, as only about 60 percent of their needs are financed.” Zablovski added that “media outlets have the biggest earnings during election campaigns.”

Burdeinii has found a paradox: seemingly diverse revenue sources — advertising, grants, sponsorships, contract articles, subscriptions, the national budget (state-owned outlets) — do not guarantee stable funding or the necessary degree of editorial independence. Vasiliță agreed, offering this example: “IPN obtains 65–70 percent of revenue from subscriptions, 15–20 percent from projects funded by foreign donors, and the rest from renting the press conference room and from commercial services including publishing and distributing press releases. For many years this revenue has covered current expenditures and the payment of exaggerated taxes. So we can’t invest

in development, for example. A significant reduction in one of the three components of revenue might bankrupt the company, causing approximately 20 employees to lose their jobs.”

Moldova has networks of advertising agencies that contract with the largest providers, including those from abroad. “Politically independent advertising agencies usually collaborate with media outlets. Generally, agencies are the ones who set prices for advertising; only in some cases can contracts be negotiated individually,” said Mosneag.

According to Zablovski, the big problem is that “serious clients are interested in the price for reaching the target audience, and the majority of media outlets lack this information.” At television stations that have audience data, advertising from international agencies prevails. The other media either seek advertising themselves or appeal to local advertising agencies.

Vasiliță and Darie said that they believe that big advertising agencies give preference to the politically affiliated television stations, and whatever is left for the remaining media outlets does not amount to much. This trend points to the lack of a real advertising market, and in addition, Burdeinii predicted a drastic reduction in advertising budgets for print media and television. At the same time, the online market has a balance between budgets allocated and ratings of media websites.

Speaking about the quality of advertising products, Gonța noted, “Some online and television advertising is produced professionally with companies appealing to known actors and production houses.”

In the Transnistrian region, the advertising market is essentially missing. Advertising is mostly placed in state-owned media; the region has no companies that can measure audience size or audit the circulations of periodical and online publications.

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.

According to Barbă, advertising does not have a standard line item in a media outlet's budget for at least two reasons: the Moldovan advertising market is underdeveloped and it is monopolized.

Several other panelists said that outlets are needing to compromise standards and focus on bringing in advertisers. Mosneag explained, "Independent media often have to accept advertising that contradicts their editorial policy in order to raise extra money. Print media get less and less advertising. Advertising from state institutions usually goes only to the media outlets that are close to the government." Gonța noted, "The revenue of the media depends mostly on the funder. In some media outlets (e.g., retransmitted stations like Pro TV Chișinău) the content of programs is lost in favor of advertising, as managers are forced to deliver more and more advertising." Zablovski said, "The amount

of advertising allowed in one hour of broadcasting corresponds to standards, but the share of revenue is insufficient, even though in 2017 the advertising market grew somewhat." Burdeinii commented, "Today, even media that have been surviving for 25 years on circulation and advertising are forced to look for sponsorships."

In Moldova, public broadcasters are subsidized, and in the Transnistrian region they are owned by the local administration in Tiraspol. Zablovski and Gonța stated the belief that the government is not an active or important actor in the advertising market, but that it sometimes might "recommend" certain advertising that needs to be run for free by a number of media outlets.

Several panelists pointed out the connection between government funding and alliances. Vasilică said that there is no transparency in the advertising money that state companies allocate, so the assumption could be that funds are given based on the loyalty shown by affiliated media. Ribca agreed, saying, "This situation continues also because advertising from state institutions is in no way regulated by legislation." Mosneag added that "this aspect is developed locally, too — district councils refuse to advertise in local media if they criticize their work."

Market studies in Moldova are scarce, partly because of the unpreparedness of media managers, partly because of the lack of resources, and partly because some of the studies conducted have not had enough credibility. As Vasilică commented, "Market studies do not always lead to the improved quality of media products in the classical sense of correctness, pluralism, and social responsibility," and Barbă added, "When, for example, political interests are sought, market studies don't matter much." Gonța had a similar opinion: "Although market studies are conducted rarely, media don't take into

consideration the public's preferences, even in those rare cases."

Zablovski noted, "Market studies have been around for a long time, but only a few media outlets can pay for them. As a result, we have an unfair distribution of budgets for advertising. Moreover, consumer preferences are studied just twice a year, which cannot reflect the real situation. Ongoing, complex market studies are very expensive and cannot be done."

Vasilică concluded, "Market studies have an impact as long as their results produce real effects on media activity and on advertising placement. A big audience does not always guarantee a lot of advertising. It should also be noted that measurement results are not sufficiently known to the media community and to the general public."

Mosneag described his outlet's efforts to gather data. "Ziarul de Gardă studies readers' preferences by asking for and responding to feedback. For example, we took into consideration the requests of rural subscribers who repeatedly asked us to publish the TV guide and the horoscope in our newspaper, although the editorial staff initially considered this information irrelevant," he said.

The Transnistrian region does not have agencies specializing in market studies, so its media outlets have no data.

In Moldova, the AGB Nielsen Media Research Agency provides data on audio and TV audiences, and the Audit Bureau of Circulation and Internet (BATI) provides data on print media circulation and website traffic. In Barbă's opinion, however, "AGB services are very expensive. And, for example,

television station Canal Regional cannot afford this luxury, so it becomes less competitive in obtaining advertising and grants. In addition, there is a great deal of doubt about the independence and objectivity of AGB studies. There have been cases when AGB showed a high rating for a television station that was on a technical maintenance break at the time."

Other panelists also described the agencies' limitations. Gonța said, "AGB Moldova measures the audience of only 16 TV stations out of the several dozen in operation." According to Mosneag, "Not even all newspapers have access to BATI because they have to pay a monthly fee of several hundred euros, and not all media outlets have this money. Advertising agencies, however, take BATI measurements into account when proposing advertising contracts, and if you are not a BATI member, you are virtually isolated. It is much harder for you to get advertising." Vasilică concluded, "Market studies have an impact as long as their results produce real effects on media activity and on advertising placement. A big audience does not always guarantee a lot of advertising. It should also be noted that measurement results are not sufficiently known to the media community and to the general public."

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

2.40

Moldova has no legal restrictions to prevent establishing professional associations within the media community. Nevertheless, said Vasilică, "Such associations are mostly missing. This situation is created by the multitude of extramedia interests that drives many media owners and managers. Politically affiliated media

cannot stimulate the emergence of professional associations." Burdeinii expressed a similar opinion: "Even if such associations exist, they are neither visible nor efficient and we, the media outlets, don't feel their presence and support." Darie added that "Online media don't yet have a professional association, although one would be appropriate." Barbă was able to identify some associations but also pointed out their shortcomings. "Formally, there are the Cable Providers Association of Moldova and the National Broadcasting Employers' Association. If the former is heard about at least at annual forums, then the latter hasn't been heard about since 2014 when it addressed the BCC with a request," she said.

Because Moldovan laws do not impose restrictions on the creation and functioning of professional associations, several have appeared in journalism and focus on sports, economics, the environment, agriculture, and other topics. "But these associations are not very visible, as they mostly organize internal events and competitions among their members and have few, if any, concerns about quality standards in the field," Mosneag said, voicing the opinion of most panelists. Burdeinii also observed, "If not all, then definitely the majority of professional associations work from grants, and if there were membership fees, associations would be much closer to journalists."

Some associations have affiliations, such as the sports journalists' affiliation with the International Sports Press Association (AIPS) and AIPS-Europe, but this does not have the expected impact on media quality. In the Transnistrian region, media members have a trade union and a journalists' union funded from membership fees. However, they do not protect the rights of journalists or help with their professional development.

Moldova has several NGOs that protect freedom of speech and independent media. Some of them are quite active and collaborate closely with the media; react to violations of press freedom; support regional media; get involved in the review of media legislation; provide free legal counseling to journalists and media outlets; and partner with similar international organizations.

Gonța noted some of their accomplishments: "NGOs participated this year in the working group for improving the media legislation created by parliament. The important draft Audiovisual Media Services Code was developed and proposed for public debate and has been placed on parliament's website. Other relevant documents (Law on Advertising, Concept of the National Media Development, the Information Security Concept) are in the advanced stages of drafting, discussion, and modification, so there are real chances for some of them to become legal in 2018 and genuinely contributing to the development of a healthy media landscape in line with democratic standards."

Other panelists described the high quality of Moldovan organizations. "There are experienced, sustainable NGOs that have made significant achievements: the Independent Journalism Center, the Independent Press Association, the Electronic Press Association, the Investigative Journalism Center, and others," Vasilică said, "They constantly conduct projects with professionalism and have attained a high degree of alliance among themselves and with NGOs in related fields, such as human rights or fighting corruption." Zaharia agreed, saying, "The country's media NGOs are in line with the mission to monitor the government's work and to promote professional, quality standards in journalism. They benefit from the support of international field organizations and from the support of programs to develop the skills of journalists who

want their work to be fair and professional.”

Experts on the panel also noted that in 2017 media NGOs focused on several issues, such as media literacy; fake news, which is increasing in domestic media (especially online); media commitments assumed in the EU-Moldova Association Agreement; gender balance in media; media action against manipulation and disinformation; and delays in the switchover to digital television.

Moldova has a wide range of institutions specializing in training media professionals. They include five specialized university departments, one of which is in Transnistria; and the Chişinău School of Advanced Journalism, which is affiliated with the Independent Journalism Center. Several other universities have courses or master’s degree programs related to the field.

Nevertheless, half of the panelists agreed that when young journalists come to media outlets, they cannot prove they have the needed practical abilities. Gonţa adds, “The problem of public educational institutions is mainly their lack of modern technical equipment for practical classes and their unfamiliarity with the job market demands. In the private sector, basic training is weaker. The best solution would be to combine the two types of approaches for a specialized education.”

In Zablovski’s view, the country’s educational institutions have deteriorated, and students are being lost to foreign countries. “One should count on young people who study journalism abroad; the problem is that most of them don’t come back.” Burdeinii identified one more problem with new employees: “No matter how well-prepared graduates are, when they come to editorial offices, they are told to forget whatever they have learned and do what we tell them. Everything depends on the editorial policy.”

In the Transnistrian region, graduating

journalists have nowhere to get a job, so they are forced to work in other areas. According to the panelists, this phenomenon is common because universities prepare more specialists than the job market actually needs.

A significant number of the projects carried out by media NGOs are educational and have a real impact on the media community’s professionalism. Mosneag claimed that the newspaper he represents “encourages short courses, both at work and outside it, and journalists don’t have to take leave for this purpose.”

However, other panelists pointed to several issues with educational offerings. Vasilić noted, “Not many journalists from politically affiliated media attend them, nor do journalists from small editorial teams that cannot afford leaves of absence for periods longer than a half a day or so.” Zablovski said that “most of the time, the courses are free for journalists, and possibly for this reason, they are not as effective as expected.” Gonţa added, “Training courses are not systematic. A 2017 survey of media needs showed that journalists need regular courses. The shocking thing is that, when asked about which courses are the most necessary, journalists put news in first place, followed by interviews, which means that there are big problems in journalism education.” In the Transnistrian region, journalists are offered remote training with video presentations, but the trainers have the reputation of being propagandists.

In the panelists’ view, Moldova has enough printing houses to meet print media’s needs, but they also described several shortcomings. According to Mosneag, “The printing quality of periodicals is often below acceptable level.” Burdeinii also pointed out that “private printing houses are better equipped than state-owned printing houses, but wealthy glossy magazines still prefer printing in other countries — for example, in Ukraine.” Zablovski

commented, “There are two big printing houses in Chişinău, but they are enough given that periodical circulation is constantly decreasing. However, the likelihood of a cartel agreement between printing houses is very high.”

Several panelists recalled a serious case reported at the end of the year regarding the magazine *Acasă*. Managed by a member of the opposition political party, *Acasă* accused the state publishing house *Universul* of refusing to print its publication. *Universul* invoked the alleged debts the periodical owed, but the magazine in turn responded that the refusal to print the magazine was due to included material that criticized the government.

The distribution channels for media in Moldova

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.
- Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- Sources of newsprint NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- Printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

M O L D O V A

are apolitical and unrestricted. Darie said that “mobile phone operators also work independently and properly,” while Gonța and Zablovski commented that the Internet is the only medium with no monopoly on content distribution. Vasiliță pointed out that “some broadcasters complain of the high costs for telecommunication and broadcasting services on the one hand, and of the discriminatory practices by cable operators for including stations in their packages on the other hand.”

Zaharia agreed, saying, “The country’s media NGOs are in line with the mission to monitor the government’s work and to promote professional, quality standards in journalism. They benefit from the support of international field organizations and from the support of programs to develop the skills of journalists who want their work to be fair and professional.”

The problems of newspaper distribution in Chișinău’s kiosks also became more acute in 2017. Citing repairs of main streets, the mayor’s office removed the kiosks, including the ones that sold newspapers, so for a while it was nearly impossible to find newspapers and magazines in the center of the capital city.

According to the common opinion of the experts, in Moldova the information technology infrastructure is developed sufficiently. It makes the delayed implementation of digital television by authorities all the more unjustified; they did not manage the process efficiently, responsibly, or in due time, so the new deadline was moved to 2020, according to Vasiliță and Gonța.

Moldova is a country with one of the highest Internet speeds, but as Burdeinii pointed out, “there still are differences between Internet access to people in cities versus those in rural areas.” Mosneag noted that overall, though, Internet use is broadening gradually. “All media outlets offer free access to website content, and users frequently access them via mobile phones. For example, in 2017, half of the users of the *Ziarul de Gardă* website accessed it via mobile phones. However, the number of those who know how to use modern technologies is not very large, and not all media outlets have adapted their websites to new technologies,” he said.

List of Panel Participants

Eugen Ribca, media law expert, director, economic news website Mold Street, Chișinău

Aneta Gonța, media researcher, lecturer, State University of Moldova, Chișinău

Ludmila Barbă, journalist, Moldova 1, public TV station of Teleradio-Moldova, Chișinău

Tudor Darie, manager and cofounder, Interact Media and the news website Agora, Chișinău

Viorica Zaharia, journalist, chair, Press Council, Chișinău

Galina Zablovski, executive director, Association of Advertising Agencies, Chișinău

Anonymous, journalist, regional public broadcaster, Comrat, Gagauz Yeri Autonomous Region

Victor Mosneag, deputy editor-in-chief, newspaper *Ziarul de Gardă*, Chișinău

Natalia Scurtul, director, NGO MeDiaLog, Tiraspol, breakaway region of Transnistria

Alexandr Burdeinii, editor-in-chief, Infomarket, business news agency, Chișinău, Russian ethnic minority

Valeriu Vasiliță, director, IPN news agency, Chișinău

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

Viorica Zaharia, journalist, president, Press Council, Chișinău

Anonymous, director, NGO, Tiraspol, breakaway region of Transnistria

Valeriu Vasiliță, director, IPN news agency, Chișinău

Moderator and author

Ion Bunduchi, media expert, Chișinău

The panel discussion was convened by the Independent Journalism Center on December 27, 2017.