

# ROMANIA



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2018

Tracking Development  
of Sustainable  
Independent Media  
Around the World



# ROMANIA

## AT A GLANCE

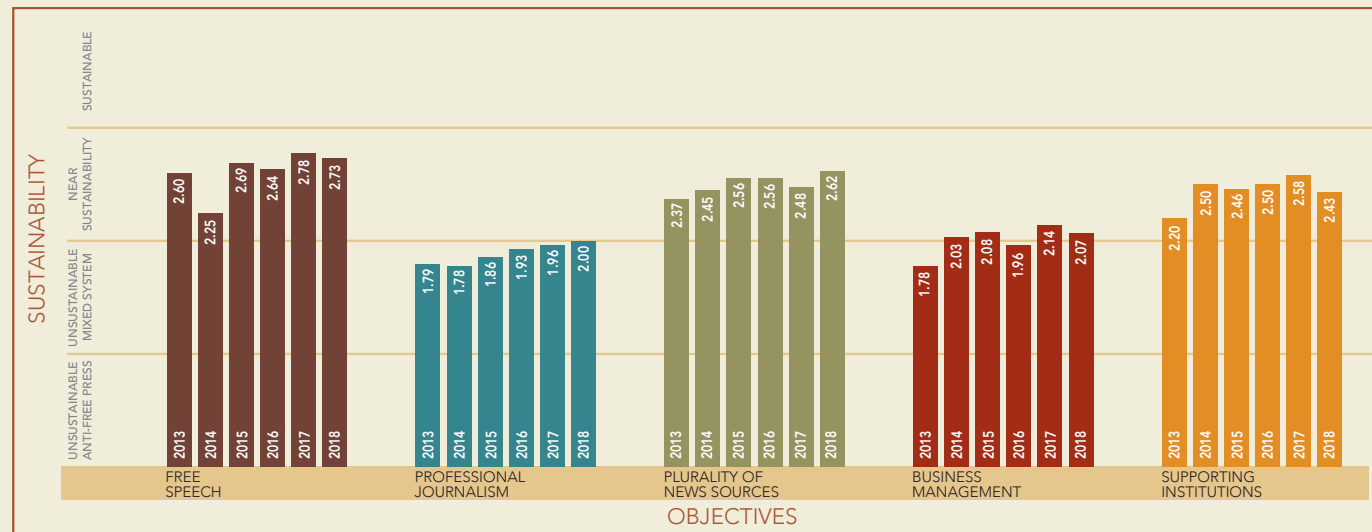
### GENERAL

- **Population:** 19,310,216 (Jan 2017 est., Romanian National Statistics Institute)
- **Capital city:** Bucharest
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Romanian 88.9%, Hungarian 6.5%, Roma 3.3%, Ukrainian 0.25%, German 0.18%, other 0.87% (2011 Census, National Statistics Institute)
- **Religions (% of population):** Eastern Orthodox (including all sub-denominations) 86.5%, Protestant (various denominations including Reformed and Pentecostal) 5.1%, Roman Catholic 4.6%, other (includes Muslim) 3.6%, none or atheist 0.2%, (2011 Census, National Statistics Institute)
- **Languages (% of population):** Romanian (official) 90.9%, Hungarian 6.7%, Romany 1.3%, other 1.1%, (2011 Census, National Statistics Institute)
- **GNI (2015-Atlas):** \$188.4 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- **GNI per capita (2015-PPP):** \$21,610 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- **Literacy rate:** 98.78% (2011 Census, National Statistics Institute)
- **President or top authority:** President Klaus Iohannis (since December 21, 2014)

### MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- Number of active media outlets: Print: number unknown, 85 publications audited by BRAT; Radio Stations: 528 licenses for terrestrial broadcasting, 23 satellite broadcasting; TV stations: 283 licenses for cable broadcasting and 96 for satellite, (CNA Report 2017); Internet news portals: number unknown (183 websites audited by SATI, 58 of which are news or current affairs sites)
- Newspaper circulation statistics: Top three by circulation (July - September 2017, according to BRAT): *Click* (circulation 71,996, daily private tabloid); *Sibiu* 100% (circulation 70,000, regional weekly private newspaper, free); *Libertatea* (circulation 39,971, daily private tabloid).
- Broadcast ratings: Top three television stations, in prime-time: PRO TV (8,4%, national); Kanal D (5,4%, national); Antena 1 (5,3%, national) (paginamedia.ro, January 2018)
- Main news website traffic: www.adevarul.ro (8,650,000 unique visitors/month); www.stirileprotv.ro (8,300,000 unique visitors/month); www.libertatea.ro (6,300,000 unique visitors/month); (paginamedia.ro, February 2018).
- News agencies: Agerpres (state-owned), Mediafax (private), News.ro (private).
- Annual advertising revenue in media sector estimated for 2017: €405,5 million (€13,5 million print market, €268 million TV market, €23 million radio market, €72 million Digital, €29 million OOH) (according to Initiative agency cited by Capital.ro)
- Internet Usage: 62.8% of the population (2017, Internet World Stats)

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### 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.



MSI scores for Romania saw declines in all objectives, except for professional journalism (Objective 2) and plurality of news (Objective 3). The 2018 MSI scores reflect the positive impact of professional journalists who keep fighting against an otherwise bleak and disheartening situation. Despite the largest drop in scores in the business management and supporting institution objectives, Romania overall compared favorably to some neighboring countries. As one panelist said, “Freedom of the press is a freedom that we still have.”

The year of 2017 began in Romania with massive street protests in late January, during which 500,000 people protested the government’s plan to change anti-corruption legislation. At stake was the freedom of Liviu Dragnea, head of the ruling Social Democrat Party (PSD) and chair of the Chamber of Deputies.

Dragnea has already been convicted of rigging votes and sentenced to a four-year suspended prison term. Currently, he faces new accusations of organizing a criminal group, abusing public office, and defrauding European Union funds. If convicted, he would be bound for prison.

Romania saw strong political party instability in 2017. Prime Minister Sorin Grindeanu and his cabinet were ousted in June by the same parliament that voted him in just six months earlier in January. Five months later, parliament approved Grindeanu as head of the telecom regulator National Authority for Regulation and Control in Communications (ANCOM). The administration of Mihai Tudose, Grindeanu’s successor, was equally short-lived. Inaugurated in June 2017, his cabinet resigned in January 2018 under pressure from his own party. No formal accusations were brought against Tudose, but it is widely believed that he confronted Dragnea. A new government led by Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă, a loyal collaborator of Dragnea, was appointed in January 2018. She is the first female prime minister of Romania.

Accusations reached new heights against parts of the judiciary, including the head of the Anti-Corruption National Directorate (DNA) Laura Codruta Kovesi. Dragnea accused DNA and intelligence services of launching a witch hunt against PSD politicians and creating a “parallel state.” Subsequently, the government issued more than 100 emergency ordinances in 2017. These acts become legally enforceable on the day of publication and without a

preliminary parliamentary debate. Some 261 articles of the fiscal code were amended last year — many overnight.

All this turmoil was reflected within the public. Romania citizens are deeply divided and each side fairly radicalized. The country has witnessed an increase in nationalistic and intolerant discourse. These groups have demonized NGOs, and activists have been publicly accused of having sold themselves to foreign interests.

For the media, 2017 was equally difficult. During the January street protests, the Ministry of Interior published a “blacklist” of people who, in her opinion, have initiated social unrest. This list included several vocal journalists that have expressed their views and criticized the government on their personal Facebook pages. Officials attacking journalists continued throughout the year. Journalists have been blamed for distorting the government’s agenda and misrepresenting its otherwise good performance. As such, the debates on the role of journalism in democratic societies and the distinction between journalism and activism became more relevant than ever.

Little progress has been made in cultivating professional solidarity. Several journalists left corporate media to join smaller operations or to freelance. Among the most frequent causes for these departures is newsrooms failing to follow ethical norms consistently. For example, the whole editorial staff of the newspaper *România Liberă* left when its long-standing policy of protecting editorial independence was abandoned in order to protect the interests of its owning family.

In keeping with the past two years, the best investigative reporting was done outside big, traditional newsrooms. Independent journalists sourced some of the best stories, such as the business operations of religious cults in Romania and the blatant instances of malpractice by highly revered doctors.

**OBJECTIVE 1:  
FREEDOM OF  
SPEECH**

2.73

**The Romanian constitution guarantees freedom of expression, which is also protected by the civil code and other laws that apply to mass media. The few restrictions to freedom of speech are meant to protect institutions such as national security, the right to privacy, and anti-defamation laws. The constitution also explicitly prohibits incitement to war of aggression; hatred based on nationality, race, social class, or religion; incitement to discrimination; incitement to territorial secession; public violence; and obscene conduct.**

Although it is addressed in the constitution, defamation of the country is not punished under any enforced law. In April 2016, a draft law criminalizing disrespect to the state insignia was adopted tacitly by the senate but not by the decisional chamber of deputies. Legislation that applies to pornography; illegal gambling; fascist or xenophobic propaganda; copyright infringement; or the protection of one's dignity, honor, or privacy may trigger court injunctions. Often these cases require the content writer or the Internet service provider (ISP) to remove illegal or harmful content.

Alexandru Giboi, director of the public news agency Agerpres, agreed that the current legal framework protects freedom of speech, but noted that it could change quickly. "What's stable now can be unstable tomorrow," he commented, "We have no legislative predictability, and this can happen regardless of which party is in power."

Panelists agreed that freedom of speech in Romania is eroding because citizens, while fully enjoying such freedom, no longer consider it an

important issue. Liana Ganea, from the NGO FreeEx ActiveWatch, said the situation is worsened by the public mood. The social, cultural, and political polarizations became even more acute in the last year, she noted. As ActiveWatch's Răzvan Martin described, "These tensions are visible in the streets during the protests, but also in all public communication channels: the mainstream media, websites that exist to publish inflammatory materials, [and] social media."

Journalist Luiza Vasiliu said that the collective interests of media companies and their investors often dilute freedom of expression. However, she added, "if the journalist is quite visible and already has a supportive audience, this violation of freedom can cause a public outcry, as in 2017 with Mihai Barbu." Barbu, a journalist from the daily newspaper *Adevărul*, conducted an exclusive interview with Roger Stone, a former campaign advisor for now-US President Donald Trump. The newspaper's editor asked him to cut out several answers during editing, apparently at Stone's request, but Barbu refused, publicized the story, and became the target of harassment. He subsequently had to resign. "There was a small scandal in social media, among journalists and Barbu's loyal readers, but that was it," said Vasiliu. After this scandal, journalists were asked to sign an annex to their work contracts, specifying that they agree to not discredit the employer, the persons in charge of the company, or the company's affiliates and partners.

Anca Spănu, editor in chief at *Viața Liberă* local daily newspaper in Galați (SE Romania), said that the worsening work environment for her newsroom is seen primarily in the pressure they are under from religious groups. "We had to drop the weekly page dedicated to religion and faith because we weren't able to do it objectively anymore," she commented, "The male journalist who was

writing this page left, and the county's head of the Orthodox Church does not speak with women — and we are all women in charge of the newspaper." In 20 years of documenting the Romanian media, this is the first time that the panelists have raised the topic of sexism.

Panelists also pointed to the problematic influence of the ruling party on media. "When PSD is in power, you know it," one participant said. "They act like landlords. We have laws, but they don't care about them. They buy journalists, use advertising from public money as a tool to pressure the media, and send the state institutions to control us."

Ioana Avădani from the Center for Independent Journalism (CIJ) described the specific laws under threat. "We can see how the public support for freedom of expression is eroding," she said, "And by this, I'm not just referring to the media or journalism, but also to the freedom of association and the freedom of public assembly. The intention to turn this into legislation is clear and consistent."

Other panelists confirmed that constitutional protections are being challenged. Răzvan Martin said that in 2017, lawmakers proposed several draft laws and administrative acts intended to limit or sanction the freedom of assembly. The measures include proposed changes to the penal code that increase the sanctions for public-order offenses. Cristian Godinac, president of the trade union Mediasind, said that he is convinced that the next step will be to enact a press law. "All the signals we have received so far are worrying," he commented.

Natalia Vasilendiuc, an associate professor in the journalism department at the University of Bucharest (FJSC), optimistically put Romanian media into regional perspective. "If we compare ourselves with our Hungarian neighbors, for example, they have two laws that prohibit the access of certain journalists to certain institutions or information or

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access to information about the government or the presidency," she said. Vasile Hotea Fernezan, a journalist working for a local public television station, echoed these sentiments. "I really feel we have freedom of speech. If there are threats or violations, people do react."

The regulator for Romania's audio-visual sector, the National Audiovisual Council of Romania (CNA), is an autonomous body that controls broadcast licensing and enforces legal obligations. Members are selected by parliament. According to CNA officials, its role is to "ensure that Romania's TV and radio stations operate in an environment of free

### 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.

speech, responsibility, and competitiveness." The 11 members are appointed in staggered terms so as not to coincide with the general elections.

Despite the legal guarantees of CNA autonomy, panelists agreed that the council was politicized heavily in 2017, diminishing its credibility with the media sector and the public. Some members vote according to the interests of the parties or entities that nominated them, rather than according to a consistent philosophy respectful of the public interest. "In 2016, we thought the council reached its lowest point in terms of not doing its job," said CIJ's Cristina Lupu. "They did not often react to legal violations, and when they did, it was too little or too late. This trend continued and was even amplified in 2017." She also said that she believes consumers ask for even more television regulations to compensate for CNA's lack of work.

Licensing is another crucial CNA task. The Romanian government has switched off analog terrestrial TV transmissions, and licenses are available for only satellite, cable, or digital broadcasts. There is virtually no demand for the latter, because media companies do not have the technology to broadcast digitally.

Costin Ionescu, a journalist with Hotnews.ro, expressed the belief that CNA is politically controlled, and some license requests have been approved or rejected for explicit political reasons. For example, in November 2017, CNA extended the license of România TV, a broadcaster that frequently uses persuasion and misinformation to deliver messages in line with the interest groups to which its owners belong. At hearings, some CNA members criticized the station for its approach to news and received promises from the program director that it would no longer fall into "the sin of manipulation." As of November 2017, România TV continued to be fined for violating the country's audiovisual law.

According to Avădani, one of CNA's most controversial decisions was its refusal to grant a license to a TV station due to its alleged connection to *Russia Today*. CNA officials argued that they saw a risk that the station would broadcast propaganda materials. "This decision was supported by a lot of members of the public, but I believe this is a dangerous precedent," Avădani said, "Allowing the CNA to not grant a license based on the idea that somebody might do something questionable is very troubling."

Panelists agreed that media companies can enter the market freely, with no special conditions. The value-added tax (VAT) for the media sector stayed at 19 percent — the level generally applied in Romania, though the VAT for print distribution is reduced to nine percent. While commercial companies can file claims for VAT refunds, public media institutions cannot, resulting in significantly higher operating costs.

Some media companies receive life support from the state, by being allowed to operate with huge fiscal debts for many years or during a prolonged insolvency process. Other media outlets do not have such assistance and are required to stay current in their financial accounts. "We would have our accounts blocked after one day for just a 10 lei (\$2.20) debt to the state budget," said Cătălin Moraru, the editor-in-chief of *Monitorul de Botoșani*.

This selective treatment is not reserved for local media. In Bucharest, media institutions that report critically on the government are under scrutiny. "The state, through its institutions, has instruments that can be activated if it feels threatened by the journalists' disclosures," said Vasiliu, "This year, after constantly writing about the affairs of the ruling Social Democratic Party's leader, Liviu Dragnea, RISE Project [journalism non-profit organization], and Hotnews were visited by the inspectors of the National Agency for Fiscal Administration (ANAF).

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The journalists were then summoned to meetings with the inspectors, and they had to explain each receipt, each trip, each source of funding.”

In early 2018, a confidential ANAF report was leaked to some government-friendly websites. The websites then published materials about RISE Project’s donors, including the Embassy of The Netherlands. The posts accused them of interfering in “national business” by financing journalists to write critically about the Romanian state. Soon after, these websites launched a slanderous campaign against the Dutch ambassador.

Many journalists are officially employed with salaries in line with Romania’s minimum national wage that is mandated by law; taxes are paid on this amount. The rest of their negotiated salary is paid under separate so-called “copyright contracts” that offer lower social protection and can be ceased without prior notice, weakening job and payment security. Participants frequently mentioned this way of payment as a financial vulnerability for media.

Of the 501 articles in the fiscal code, 261 were changed in 2017, without any public consultations and most with immediate application. Some have been overturned since implementation. “Under these circumstances, long-term planning and budget projections becomes a sad joke,” said Avădani, who also noted a consistent anti-capitalistic streak in government discourse.

Direct state subsidies to media are rather small and infrequent, generally going to cultural media published by ethnic minorities.

Crimes against journalists are still rare, but when they do happen, they do not generate public outcry or reactions from state institutions. “We had repeated aggressions against journalists during the protests at the start of the year,” said Ganea. She added that police have no interest in investigating crimes against journalists when they occur. Panelists

also argued that violence is tolerated particularly if it is against journalists who work for unpopular media. Vasiliu explained that journalists, especially investigative reporters, are often threatened with lawsuits as a method of intimidation, although often these suits are not pursued. Still, politicians have increased the level of aggression in public discourse toward journalists. Spănu also noted the wave of online attacks and harassment that journalists endure every day in comments from the public.

**“A number of journalists and media in the country are facing civil lawsuits on defamation or damage of reputation, being pressured with high and non-proportional fines,” said Aleksandra Bogdani of Reporter.al, who is a defendant in the Gjoni case, “Such lawsuits in Albania tend to establish a climate of pressure over media and journalists, due mainly to the fact that the arbiter, the judiciary system, suffers from corruption and politicization.”**

Romanian law protects the editorial independence of public media. Control over these institutions is maintained via politically appointed board members, although effects on program content are not necessarily very visible. Parliament can dismiss the boards by rejecting their annual reports — an effective instrument of political control. In the case of the public television service TVR, over the past 27 years just one board has completed its four-year term.

In February 2017, the radio and TV fee was eliminated, so public media institutions now receive direct funding from the state budget. At that time,

TVR had huge debts to the state and private and institutional partners. Panelists are closely following the change to see its impact on media independence. “I am really worried,” said Vasile Hotea Frenzan, a journalist with TVR, “After they took away the public fee, the politicians feel they are giving us their money and that they are our owners, so we are not allowed to criticize them.”

Parliament did adopt a law that separates board presidents from the public media general managers, thus eliminating an inherent conflict of interest. NGOs have been requesting this change for more than 15 years. The law is pending presidential promulgation. Another draft law is more concerning; this one requires the director of the state news agency Agerpres be fired if parliament rejects its annual report. According to the panelists, firing directors is generally viewed as the main political tool over public media.

Libel is no longer a criminal offense in Romania. The civil code protects privacy, human dignity, and the right to one’s own image. Privacy is also protected under criminal law. In cases of defamation, the plaintiff is exempt from paying the taxes required for other types of reparations. In Moraru’s view, this can cause plaintiffs to ask for exorbitant amounts in claims, which can have a chilling effect on media. However, Ganea said the judicial situation towards the media is not of great concern at this point in Romania, with “a lot of cases won by journalists in court.”

Access to public information is governed by Law 544/2001, which grants access to information produced or held by public institutions. Journalists enjoy special treatment, as their questions must be answered on the spot or within 24 hours. The Ciolos government, which ruled from November 2015 to January 2017, made transparency and access to information one of its priorities. Panelists said that

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these conditions changed immediately after PSD returned to power.

Although access to information seems to be getting worse at the local level, access is more open at the central level, according to Matei Martin of *Dilema Veche*. He shared his experience with requesting information. “We made a dossier at *Dilema Veche* about the parking tickets and submitted 50 FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] requests. We received most of the answers in time,” he said. But he added that public institutions’ cooperation is directly related to the type of information being requested. More sensitive material is not offered immediately, if at all.

Journalists unable to access information often have to use the courts to exercise their rights under Romania’s freedom of information laws, adopted in 2001. From his experience, Fernezan says these freedom of information cases are now handled better, with judges asking institutions to release requested information. One example from December 2017 is the case of Atlatzo Erdely Egyesulet, who won a lawsuit against the Hungarian minority party UDMR. Party officials refused to tell journalists how they spent the 28 million euros received from Romania’s state budget over the last six years.

Panelists expressed some concern about possible erosion of freedom of information. In June 2017, the media revealed that the government consulted public institutions on how to improve the application of the freedom of information law and some employees suggested scrapping it altogether, saying it was useless.<sup>1</sup>

Access to information from foreign sources is not restricted; the few limitations are mostly economic, as foreign news agency services are quite

expensive. Romanian law provides no protection for information or news, so copyright infringement is still the norm. Plagiarism continues and has not been a topic of civil or professional debate. Using his experience at Agerpres as an example, Giboi said, “If we close the public website, half of local media dies. They simply steal all our materials.” In copyright cases, judges do not distinguish between news events and journalistic productions.

Romania has no legislative or political restrictions related to access to the media market or to the journalism profession. Public institutions often ask journalists for credentials, and sometimes this can lead to abuse. Panelists gave the example of a Cluj blogger that was not allowed into a press conference. Additionally, independent journalists have a harder time obtaining information, as sometimes authorities and institutions do not recognize the status of freelance journalists.

### OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

2.00

**The general conditions around professional journalism continue to worsen. Public-interest journalism and mainstream media struggle to stay steady amidst economic problems and political involvement.**

Romanian media have professional and ethical codes, created by professional organizations and NGOs or drafted and adopted independently by newsrooms. However, they are barely observed or enforced. Panelists described an example: In December 2017, all the TV stations broadcasted a video of a crime from the Bucharest metro, in which a woman was pushed under a train. The video aired

for days, despite the audiovisual law forbidding the broadcast of killings. Digi TV, considered a quality TV station, explained its editorial decision by claiming it was in the public interest.

The panelists underscored that good journalism does exist in the Romanian sector, with many journalists honestly trying to do their work. According to Ionescu, however, ethics are not prioritized by-and-large. “There are many journalistic pieces done correctly, with respect to the professional standards, but compared to the total number, there are far too few,” he said, “At many media institutions, professional standards are completely ignored — not just due to a total lack of professionalism, but also because that’s what the bosses and the non-journalistic interests of the media business ask for.”

Moraru described similar experiences: “I have young journalists coming into the newsroom — students, young graduates — and their first question is, ‘How it should look, boss?’ They come into the newsroom without even considering the standards. They are prepared to do whatever the boss asks.”

The Romanian media sector has a few examples of quality journalism that continue to grow and improve the industry. Moraru said that their influence is not felt strongly beyond Bucharest. “What you have here are drops in an ocean,” he observed. According to his brief analysis of local media, 25 of Romania’s 42 counties have no real journalism. “There are a lot of publications, but they produce what I call ‘an illusion of journalism.’ They publish press releases, accidents, and book launches. They don’t have any content directly obtained through journalism activities. This is very dangerous, because it gives the public the illusion that they are informed.”

Many articles are biased and one-sided, and some journalists continue to publish unverified or

<sup>1</sup> <https://pressone.ro/guvernul-se-pregateste-sa-modifice-legea-accesului-la-informatiile-publice/>

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even invented news. More websites are promoting fake news and propaganda, and disinformation appears on a regular basis.

Vasiliu said that whether reporters verify their information depends on the newsroom. But the practice of not verifying is increasingly frequent. He gave an example: "In December 2017, media reported a high-profile murder/suicide, claiming the husband murdered the wife before taking his own life and saying she had marks on her body. The next day, the Chief Prosecutor put out a statement: the two committed suicide several hours apart, and there were no marks on the woman's body. But to the public, the husband remained the criminal."

Journalists that cannot bear the political pressures or poor ethical standards in their newsrooms often leave to create their own alternative media. This trend continued in 2017, with several new independent newsrooms created and older outlets increasing their visibility and producing public-interest content.

Most print and online media do not separate editorial content from advertising. Clearly and unequivocally signaling ads and paid-for content is an obligation under the Romanian Advertising law, and strict advertising rules are set by the audiovisual law. However, news and advertorials are run on the same page and look the same, and advertising is not labeled as such. "We have to fight with companies and politicians and tell them it is illegal not to mark advertising accordingly. But they tell us that we are crazy, because everybody else is doing it," said Moraru. "For them, it is very cheap to buy unmarked advertising online."

Ispas, president of the Romanian Transmedia Auditing Bureau (BRAT), expressed the belief that ethical norms have been replaced with commercial norms. He added that the bureau itself is under pressure to bend rules. Recently, two

tabloid newspapers, known for yellow journalism, have asked to be registered as quality "general newspapers." One of the claims has been approved, while the other is still pending. "I am not that convinced these publications practice ethical journalism," said Ispas. Matei Martin also noted that many publications mix hard news with blog posts. "They sell opinions as news," he said.

Panelists expressed strong concern about plagiarism. Some media outlets simply rerun stories published by others without mentioning the source. Online publications plagiarize particularly frequently, as many believe that "if it is on the Internet, it is free to use," panelists said. In their view also, journalists are aware of the rules against plagiarism and simply do not respect them, because they will face no sanctions.

**"Being under financial pressure, with very few and often unqualified reporters, online media have almost undone any professional level of reporting that traditional media have achieved," Bogdani said. "They often publish news without any sources and copy news from one another, often publishing unverifiable, fake news in addition to violating copyright."**

Moraru recollected the story of a local newspaper in Suceava that went to court to fight against a website that was appropriating the paper's entire content. The judge ruled that this was not a copyright infringement because Romanian law does not protect news copyrights, and the judge extended this definition to all materials published by journalists. According to Ganea, "The judge

misinterpreted the copyright legislation."

Journalists largely practice self-censorship, and panelists agreed that the problem worsens every year. Vasiliu said, "Rather than losing their job or risking a scandal in the newsroom, those who work at media struggling with financial problems, or where the editorial freedom is limited, resort to self-censorship to survive." Only journalists from independent initiatives that work for little money or even as volunteers score high on editorial independence or professionalism, according to Vasiliu. "It is these people who save the honor of the profession," concluded Avădani.

The media cover all important stories, though outlets differ in how they report. Lupu gave an example: "There were moments when we were watching coverage of the same event on different TV stations, and it seemed they were talking about different events. There were 50,000 people marching peacefully in the streets, one TV station announced, and the other said 10,000. A third said there were violent street fights between police and the protesters. For the general public, it is hard to make sense of all this."

The media tend to avoid certain topics, such as those connected to national security. Giboi said that some subjects are not covered in traditional media, but noted that when issues begin to be published online, traditional media also start reporting on the topic. This practice is particularly true with investigative reporting. While everyday events cannot be hidden, newsworthy problems can. As Vasiliu said, "In Brăila, for example, a journalist investigated the county hospital but she could not publish the story because the owner of the newspaper is friends with the hospital director."

Salaries for journalists are not competitive and remain a problem. Except for some VIPs (mostly TV stars), most media personnel have seen salaries



**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).

diminish from the economic crises. Sometimes they go unpaid for months. According to Vasiliu, “A lot of them left the profession, went to PR and advertising, or opened small businesses. The situation is even more disastrous outside Bucharest.”

Within Bucharest, pay rates differ between print/online outlets and TV. An experienced TV reporter can earn \$600 to \$1,500 per month, but the editors for television earn far less, approximately \$450 to \$500 per month. At local media, even the national minimum salary (roughly \$250 per month) is considered decent. In some cases salaries can go up to \$600 for print media and even more for national TV station correspondents. Some journalists complement their media revenues with side jobs, which can cause conflicts of interest.

Many experienced journalists have left the profession altogether, sometimes becoming

spokespersons for local authorities, which offers better and more regular salaries. With these departures comes another problem: “You don’t have anyone to replace them,” Moraru said. “Good people don’t enter the profession, especially in local media.”

Avădani added that, while salaries are small, they do not correlate with corruption. “There are people who are very well paid within the profession and their behavior is more than unethical,” she said.

News still represents a major part of the broadcasting market. Romania has several all-news TV stations, and each general TV station produces at least one main news program. However, many of the news programs are almost tabloid in nature, with serious ethical and professional violations. Panelists agreed that many broadcast news shows are entertainment programs, and according to Matei Martin, “infotainment has a very important place in print.”

Despite a plethora of channel options, the poor quality of programming risks an uninformed populace, some panelists argued. “The political and current affairs talk shows are entertainment. The moderators use manipulative tactics and choose guests according to their own agendas,” asserted Vasiliu. For Romanians, TV remains the top source of information, followed closely by online sources — primarily social networks.

In Romania, access to technology is easy but not cheap. There are major discrepancies in technology levels among media institutions. The differences are also magnified between national and local media. Many newsrooms cannot afford to invest in equipment, software, or skilled technical people. “We have not changed our computers for the last 15 years,” one panelist lamented. “We have licensed software, but we can’t install the latest versions because it is not compatible with the computer.” While some journalists do not have

money for gas and use their personal car or phone to do their jobs, other outlets provide journalists with laptops, cameras, and unlimited mobile phone and Internet access.

Romania has little specialized reporting, and investigative reporting is rare. Vasiliu noted that most of the specialized reporters (health writers, for example) are entangled in group interests and industry fights. Ionescu observed that the number of investigative productions is small, but their audience is high at times.

Moraru said that for a local newspaper like his, specialization is costly and not efficient. “All reporters should be able to conduct at least a minimal, mediocre investigation. The problem is that sometimes there is no public reaction to such articles, and the managers consider it money wasted. And here we come full round circle, back to infotainment,” he said. Spănu commented that *Viața Liberă* also has to limit its specialized content. “For us, a reporter can work on an investigative story no more than two weeks. And this is while doing also other work, because I can’t have a person blocked for only one piece.”

Hotea Fernezan emphasized that Romania has good investigative reporting, conducted bravely by independent projects. He mentioned the work of the RISE Project, “lone ranger” writers such as Ovidiu Vanghele and Emilia Șercan, and unlikely sources such as the Bucharest-based sports newspaper *Gazeta Sporturilor*, headed by Cătălin Tolontan. “Their articles may not make [it into] traditional media,” Ferzenan said. “But the public reaction to them on social media — likes and shares and comments— demonstrates that there is an interest in such topics; that they are needed in our society.”

Matei Martin said that two specialized fields are noticeably neglected: international news and culture reporting. “Journalists are free to cover such topics,

but they don't have the needed means because they are underfunded," he commented. The EU agenda, for example, remains painfully under-reported, despite the fact that Romania is poised to take over the Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2019.

Matei Martin also pointed out a silver lining in the economic crises that keep affecting the Romanian media. "The crises forced us to reflect on alternative funding," he explained. "The appearance of alternative publications, supported by communities of individual donors or by long-term sponsors, revitalized ailing sectors such as investigative or culture reporting." Panelists said they are cautiously optimistic, as such funding models are limited and insufficient to guarantee steady quality and sustained progression.

Vasilendiu added that funding shortages impede not only the development of specialized reporting, but also the investment in young reporters. "Students come to us poorly prepared," she explained. "We do teach them specialized reporting at university. But sometimes international news remains unreported because the young journalists do not know what the news is about."

**OBJECTIVE 3:  
PLURALITY  
OF NEWS**

2.62

**The Romanian media market is composed of numerous outlets, but the total does not guarantee a plurality of news. Most outlets present the dominant point of view, while alternative positions are either ignored, criticized, or simply mocked. "It's a matter of editorial policy, decided by the higher-ups and over the head of journalists," said Ganea. In some cases, even the point of view of an accused person is**

**not presented. For Moraru, finding the truth by consuming media is possible, though difficult. "I have to follow multiple channels; keep an eye on the follow-ups," he said.**

As such, many Romanians turn to social media for news — to their detriment, Vasiliu observed. "Social media is a space where information is circulated," she said, "They do not generate information. Many times, people are unaware of this distinction and completely trust opinions and unverified information."

Facebook is the most popular social network in Romania, with 10 million accounts.<sup>2</sup> By comparison, Twitter has only 377,800 Romanian subscribers, 53,500 of which are active users.<sup>3</sup> Facebook users are quite active, however, some 77 percent accessing it daily.<sup>4</sup> It has become customary for politicians and even public institutions to apply a "Facebook first" communication policy, using it as the primary way to reach citizens. Traditional media routinely cover news about what a public figure has posted on social media. For the younger generation, Instagram and Snapchat are the more appealing social networks, according to CIJ findings regarding teenagers' media use.<sup>5</sup>

Romania law places no limitations on access to any media, but some citizens are constrained financially. Access to media correlates with the means of living, Ganea explained. Hotea Fernezan agreed and noted that users have less access in rural areas as opposed to urban. The medium type

also determines access. For example, print media are restricted due to distribution problems.

Vasiliu said that access to national and international information should not be seen only in terms of technical access. "We have a worrying number of functional illiterates," she said. "Many citizens know how to read, but are not able to understand the meaning of a text or don't have the critical tools to evaluate the content." In 2015, OECD found that 42 percent of high school students in Romania are functionally illiterate.<sup>6</sup>

Public media outlets seem to be less polarized than commercial outlets, according to the panelists. Ionescu said that generally, public media cover all points of the political spectrum, but sometimes they apply editorial subterfuge to give more exposure to certain opinions. Hotea Fernezan had a similar view. He said that public media journalists try to maintain balanced coverage, but lean toward the political powers and underreport some topics that might be troublesome to the ruling coalition. As Vasiliu put it, "Public media work mostly in the service of the state, not in that of the citizen." Panelists said that legislative instability is a contributor to the imbalance, and cited the recent law that changes funding for public media. Critical shows are sometimes received poorly, and current affairs shows often feature guests that are advising the country but who have served prison sentences for corruption.

Some panelists did note positive aspects. Hotea Fernezan said that public television is filling a void and providing social interest shows and content for minorities. "The public media offer longer formats, [and] educational and cultural programs that the commercial media ignore or treat marginally."

Romania has two major private news agencies,

2 Facebook figures offered for advertising purposes

3 <https://www.zelist.ro/blog/social-media-ro-in-cifre-retrospectiva-anului-2017/>

4 <https://economie.hotnews.ro/stiri-it-22014046-romanii-facebook-cati-intra-zilnic-retea-cum-comparam-alte-tari-din-regiune.htm>

5 The study will be publicly released in May 2018

6 <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-results-in-focus.pdf>

**Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news.**

**PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS**

- ▶ A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- ▶ Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- ▶ State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- ▶ Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- ▶ Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- ▶ Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- ▶ A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.
- ▶ Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliable.

Mediafax and News.ro, that compete with the state-owned Agerpres. According to Ionescu, only Agerpres has the needed resources to cover the media market's need for news. Giboi said that his agency has correspondents in all 42 counties and dedicated regional news services. "The local media buy these services from us," he said. "The national media do as well because they can no longer afford to keep regional correspondents."

Panelists said that both private news agencies are struggling. "Mediafax, once number one in news production, is in an insolvency situation and functions with just a handful of staff," explained Petrișor Obae, a media analyst with Paginademedi.ro. "News.ro had a rough economic year in 2017

and is currently looking for an investor to develop the project." Spânu expressed the belief that her journalists at *Viața Liberă* can produce higher quality news than what Romanian agencies provide. "The price-quality ratio does not justify the expenses," she said. Moraru said that the media business model has changed and fewer publications are seeking news agency services. According to the panelists, possible successors to news agencies might be photo services, such as Inquam Photos, or firms providing data visuals and graphics.

Transparency of media ownership is not a significant problem in Romania, but only because it has no effect on audiences. Broadcast company ownership is known publicly, as CNA regularly publishes an updated list with stakeholders, down to individuals. Although some stations dedicate significant time to promoting their owners' interests, this editorial policy does not affect ratings. Obae gave an example: "Romania TV aired a series about the so-called unveilings of Sebastian Ghița (the former MP who fled Romania in December 2016 while under police investigation) without mentioning once that he controls the station. The audience stayed." He also mentioned Realitatea TV, a station that features owner Cosmin Gușă as a consultant, political analyst, or the president of the Romanian Judo Federation, depending on the context, but never in his actual capacity.

Romanian law has no requirements for print or online media to disclose ownership. Avădani said that politicians own most local and national media, either directly or through third parties. Ispas emphasized that publicizing the names of shareholders does not necessarily reveal the ultimate profiteers of an outlet. "Owning media via intermediaries is a way of life — a national sport," he commented.

Many print publications and local TV

broadcasts have disappeared and migrated to cable, following the digital switch, and what is left of the influential traditional media is in the hands of a couple of owners. Ionescu has observed that the little foreign investment in media is concentrated in television and glossy magazines. Also worrying is the increase in the dissemination of fake news, which has ballooned in the past two years, according to Vasiliu. "Readers do not know that what they're reading is from a site engaged in pro-Russian propaganda," she commented. She added that she thinks that journalists themselves do not sufficiently discuss ownership issues or how they influence editorial content. In Ionescu's view, the lack of interest in media ownership is a reflection of the low media literacy in the country.

**"Today it is political parties, political leaders, and state institutions that produce news rather than the media, which often becomes a mere conveyor belt for this readily produced news," said Dervishi.**

With local broadcasters almost irrelevant in terms of influence and audience, national outlets have a particular focus on the news from Bucharest. It mirrors the centralization of political power and allows for local party leaders to act with virtually no civil oversight. Moraru said that in other parts of the country, where "real media" survives, citizens are well informed about their areas. But he added that "the national media almost never talk about the real problems in the provinces. They only report on fires, crimes, and traffic accidents," he said.

In December 2017, the Craiova-based *Gazeta de Sud* director and editor in chief, who led the paper for 23 years, was fired by the owner. In order to justify a release through no professional fault, the

owner eliminated the position altogether. *Gazeta de Sud* is one of the oldest local newspapers, with a large circulation in several counties in southwest Romania. It was also critical toward the local authorities throughout the year.

Costin Juncu, the managing director for the Romanian Association for Audience Measurement, criticized Romanian reporters' international coverage. "To understand international news, you have to check with international sources," he explained. "What is provided here is faulty and unprofessional."

The dominance of the majority shows also in the marginalization of minorities in Romanian media. The situation is "catastrophic," Vasiliu said. "Set aside the public media — they are obligated under the law to reserve space for the national minorities. The rest of the media tell the stories of the majority population." She noted that channels such as Digi24 and Pro TV have aired campaigns against the beneficiaries of social assistance programs — many of whom are members of minority populations.

Panelists pointed out that independent media projects, sometimes funded by grants, help foster content about sexual minorities and those suffering from mental illness or drug addiction. Spânu shared her experience at *Viața Liberă*: "For me, as an editor, it was very difficult to introduce such topics in the newspaper. The pressure comes from the public. It seems like the simple fact that there are religious denominations other than Christian Orthodoxy is unacceptable to them."

The public radio and TV have to reserve air time for programs in the minority languages, and Agerpres has a news service in Hungarian. "A colleague of ours learned Hungarian in order to be able to manage the service," Giboi said.

#### OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

2.07

**The majority of Romanian media companies are not self-sustainable, and making a profit is the exception in the media business. The string of insolvencies continued in 2017. Regarding the management of media companies, all the panelists had the same conclusion as in previous years: media organizations are managed poorly. This, combined with the disruptive context in which the industry functions, has led to layoffs, shrinking newsrooms, a lack of investments, and drops in circulations.**

"Are the media well managed?" Obae asked. "Let's take a look at the sheer reality: *Jurnalul Național*, bankrupt; *Adevărul*, insolvency; *România liberă*, insolvency; *Ziarul financiar*, insolvency; *Evenimentul zilei*, insolvency; Prima TV, insolvency; Realitatea TV, insolvency for more than six years<sup>7</sup>. What kind of management are we talking about?"

"Too few media companies are well managed and profitable," Ionescu agreed. "For the handful that are sustainable, there is no guarantee that this sustainability secures their editorial independence."

Ispas added to this picture of financial problems: "Privately-owned media have dramatically cut costs — so dramatically that they can barely support the product." He said that nobody in Romania can profit with their media businesses. Generally, owners make money from other businesses and inject it in the "media toys" that they run to maintain their clout. Vasiliu noted that journalists' low salaries are often paid late, and

newsrooms are dramatically understaffed.

The conditions are the same at public media, according to the panelists. They said that only way to pay the accumulated debts of public television was to scrape off the licensing fee and finance public media directly from the state budget. "This is not a good economic strategy — to cut costs until you endanger journalistic production, and then claim that you made a profit," Giboi said.

Hotea Fernezan criticized the lack of transparency that he has witnessed within the public media. As an example, he described how he and his journalist colleagues at TVR Cluj were left out of the appointment process for managerial positions. "Each manager is selected through a contest, based on a management project. We have asked to see the winning projects, so that we can knowingly contribute to their implementation. We were not lucky enough to get them. This kind of lack of accountability leads to arbitrary and illogical decisions that enable the siphoning of the public money."

The origins of media funding is another debatable issue. For most media companies, the sources are limited: either capital injections from their owners or, for public media, funding from the state budget. "In the early 2000s, the dream of any print company was to have 80 percent of revenues from advertising and 20 percent from copy sales," Ispas said. "Little by little, some reached that point. For local media, it was more difficult. It took us 10 years of joint efforts to have them attract significant amounts from national advertisers and not rely on the small, local ones. After the 2008-2009 global financial crisis and all this political turmoil, the situation tipped over."

This funding instability impacts editorial content, according to Vasiliu. "The money from the owner keeps media prisoner regarding editorial policy," she said. "The line between advertising,

<sup>7</sup> All outlets cited by this panelist are national media, based in Bucharest.

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advertorial, and sponsored content becomes so thin that sometimes the public has no way to really know what they see, read, or hear.”

The Romanian media advertising market is served by small and large agencies based internationally and locally. Most agencies are staffed with professionals, but that does not preclude excessive kickbacks, predicated contracts on editorial content, or ignoring certain unfriendly media. Obae explained that another difficulty with ad agencies is cash flow disruption: “If in communications or other services, you have to pay your bill immediately, or you risk having your service cut off. Advertising agencies pay their media clients after months of delay. This results in a cash flow crisis for the publisher, who is too worried about ruining a contract to claim what is his.”

**While business and editorial operations are formally divided, Kurti said, “even the media that are considered serious are guided by their interest of the moment. In other words, editorial policy follows the interest of the owner.”**

Ispas commented on the same problem. “If you look at the figures, the advertising budgets seem to go up,” he observed, “But this money does not make it to the media bank accounts. The rebate — the money that a medium has to return to the agency as a ‘success bonus’— may be as high as 50 percent.”

For online advertising, money goes primarily to the big platforms, such as Google and Facebook. “Google redistributes some of it to the local publications. For Facebook, this is out of the question,” according to Obae.

Avădani discussed new trends in advertising that might further harm the media. In 2017, the

first influencer agency in Romania was launched. These enterprises promote bloggers of all ages identified as trend-setters in their respective circles.<sup>8</sup> The agency essentially monetizes on the fact that Internet users are more inclined to believe what their peers say, as opposed to institutions or companies. “These new marketing tools — social media, influencers, bloggers — further deplete the traditional media of already shrinking revenues,” Avădani said. “The real problem, though, is that if some rules of transparency are not observed, people take these posts from influencers [as] genuine, without knowing they are actually paid for those posts. We noticed this while working with high school students. They have no idea that the VIPs they follow are actually exposing them to advertising.”

Panelists said that print advertising money is precious enough that newspapers will do whatever it takes to keep that revenue coming. They work to find more and more advertising, but get less and less return as the market changes. Commenting on the plight of *Monitorul de Botoșani*, Moraru said, “We have to face the truth: with cheap and highly targeted advertising online that is much more efficient, why would the advertisers give their money to us?”

Panelists also observed that online advertising is cheap and insufficient to sustain media operations. “On top of that, it is ugly,” said Matei Martin. “We have no control over the banners that are displayed on our website, and the pop-ups make the newspaper almost illegible.”

With no one in Romania producing reports on the media market, the state share in the advertising market remains unknown. In the last few years, the state budget has made up less of the market and local administrations more, in particular by their use of advertising money from EU-funded projects.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.makeoverburo.com/>

During 2017, the number of such projects diminished significantly, but the arbitrary allocation of public advertising money continued. State institutions still pull advertising when they are criticized in the media that they fund. The state also has the power of intimidation, which can make commercial advertising cease. “The practice of the authorities seeing who is advertising in your newspaper, and then sending all kind of controls over to them, is back,” said one editor.

Budgetary instability and the unreliable economy make market studies and financial planning futile, according to the panelists. “It is useless to build business plans,” Moraru said. He gave the example of *Monitorul de Botoșani*’s subscription prices for 2018. He was unable to set them as of December, as fiscal legislation is changing and he does not know what taxes the

### 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.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

company will owe. He also decried the media sector's lack of upper-level personnel — “people who know how to manage a media business.”

Some panelists expressed the view that marketing studies are conducted to better hook the public, not necessarily to cater to the media's informational needs. Giboi said that by law Agerpres is not allowed to conduct paid marketing studies, so it gets information from whatever sources are available — mostly from the Internet Audience and Traffic Study (SATI).

The SATI is conducted by the Romanian Transmedia Audit Bureau (BRAT),<sup>9</sup> a long-established industry organization. The bureau performs circulation audits once a year, which results in publicly available data; the National Readership Survey (SNA), an in-depth study containing socio-demographic figures of readers per publication; and the Monitoring of Investments in Advertising Study (MIP), the results of which are available for purchase by members and third parties. In 2017 BRAT had 173 members and included publishing house staff, advertisers, and ad agency staff. It audited 85 titles and 183 websites of various content. Those numbers were down from 2016, when the bureau had 182 members and audited 95 titles and 219 websites.

Television viewership is measured by the Romanian Association of Audience Measurement (ARMA). Juncu said that audience figures for national outlets are measured independently, and the methodology is in line with international standards. The company performing the measurement is selected via public bid every four years by a commission composed of five representatives from TV stations, five representatives from advertising agencies, and five members of the National

Audiovisual Council. Foreign independent companies conduct an audit of the association's findings. “In 2017, the measurement service was verified by an external independent auditor, Ernst and Young, based in Tampa, USA,” Juncu said. “The conclusions of the analysis show that the service complies with the technical specifications decided by the Romanian market and also the international standards.” Ispas disagreed, arguing that the TV measurements are not objective and too politically flawed.

Most online media prefer using the less expensive traffic.ro measurement, rather than the professionally done but expensive SATI. Some also use internal measurements conducted with Google Analytics.

Audience measurement is another way in which local media are disadvantaged. BRAT audits only 18 local publications and one regional publication, while audience measurement for local TV and radio stations is generally cost-prohibitive. Local online outlets have some data available, but primarily use this information to secure advertising from GoogleAds.

**OBJECTIVE 5:  
SUPPORTING  
INSTITUTIONS**

2.43

**If 2015 to 2016 was a period in which some professional associations of journalists were revived, in 2017 those gains were lost. Many of these groups were part of the Convention of Media Organizations, created by CIJ as a loose alliance. The convention includes approximately 30 professional media associations, owner associations, and trade unions. As soon as the project ended and the associations had to function without the resources CIJ offered, the convention ceased to be active.**

Vanghele described the conditions as dire: “There no longer are associations of media professionals. We don't have entities in charge of lifelong learning. Print media is handicapped by the lack of distribution networks. The only thing we still have are some NGOs that, despite efforts to defend journalists against employers' abuses, don't manage to be visible or vocal enough for the general audience to learn about the problems from a particular newsroom.”

Vasiliu added that the disappearance of credible and effective professional associations has led to a “deprofessionalization” in the field. One of the few remaining organizations, the Union of Professional Journalists in Romania, suffered an internal crisis after two factions accused one another of an overthrow attempt.

Hotea Fernezan noted that the Association of Media Professionals from Cluj, in northwestern Romania, has a visible presence. The association has taken public positions on professional skirmishes or when journalists are threatened by local politicians. Additionally, some organizations of Hungarian media in Romania remain functional, if isolated due to language constraints.

Romania has some trade unions of media professionals, the largest and most active being MediaSind. The union is well connected to European and international platforms. In addition to voicing professional concerns, MediaSind assists journalists in legal situations and offers consultancies on work-related subjects.

Media owners essentially are in the same state of disconnection. Organizations exist mostly on paper, with limited or no activity. This sluggishness is partly because media owners are in the media business to gain political or economic influence, not to make a profit or to benefit from association.

The Romanian Press Club, one of the oldest

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.brat.ro/>

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and best established business associations, reduced its activity to zero in recent years. The club does not issue public reactions or positions, and even its website is no longer online. Smaller, local media owners were active in 2016 but grew silent in 2017, focusing more on individual survival. For them, dealing with systemic problems comes secondarily and only if they are mobilized with assistance from outside groups.

One of the large organizations that panelists identified as active in 2017 was the Romanian Association for Audiovisual Communication. Still, this group tends to represent the interests of the major broadcasting corporations, rather than those of local stations, panelists said.

NGOs that attempt to protect freedom of expression and the media also experienced a complicated year in 2017. CIJ and ActiveWatch – Media Monitoring Agency are the most relevant and among the only NGOs remaining. Ganea, a program coordinator with ActiveWatch, described the budgetary conditions: “We have funding problems. There aren’t any donors interested in supporting projects for journalists or human rights in general. Our main project, FreeEx, through which we react to all problems media related, hasn’t received any financing since 2015.”

With a lack of other support, the work by these NGOs is critical. “The professional associations are non-existent. And this gap, including advice when legal aid is needed, is filled by NGOs, such as CIJ and ActiveWatch,” said Vasiliu. While Ispas agreed that these organizations do important work, he said that their impact is limited because they do not have local branches.

State and private universities in Romania offer 20 journalism and communications programs, graduating around 2,000 students annually. “The number of students who want to attend a journalism

program is dropping every year,” said Vasilendiu. “We have more candidates for the public relations and advertising program than for journalism.” In Matei Martin’s view, this is the trend because a degree in journalism is no longer considered valuable in the job market.

The content of journalism programs is outdated and quality did not improve in 2017, according to the panelists. As Lupu commented, “If we want to change the belief that journalism school is one of the worst options for a future student, universities need to change. The students are prepared to write for newspapers, but they don’t learn about open data and data journalism, for example.”

Vasilendiu also noted that students enter university poorly prepared. “They don’t have any general knowledge,” she said, “They don’t know who the members government are or even basic things about neighboring countries, the region, or the EU. And we don’t have the time to teach them the basics. This is a specialization.”

Panelists also pointed out that different schools have different curricula, so each institution’s graduates have very different concepts of what journalism is. In addition, media institutions do not have a serious interest in hiring competent young journalists. “For a lot of mainstream media managers, students are only cheap or free labor. They don’t see the value in investing in them for the long run,” said Avădani. Ultimately, most students end up unready for journalism and with little understanding of what the job entails.

Avădani said that some Romanian groups are sponsoring initiatives aimed at improving the quality of journalism education. UNICEF Romania and CIJ remain invested in a program on developing university curricula. They offer journalism instructors more training and extra materials, to allow them to better integrate topics into their courses. Hotea

### 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.

Fernezan mentioned that the journalism department at the university in Cluj invites experienced journalists to be guest speakers. It also has close partnerships with local media, where students can work as interns.

Short-term courses or training programs for journalists are rare. “TVR Cluj is part of CIRCUM, a network that often organizes short-term courses for journalists,” said Hotea Fernezan, “But, despite being members, we don’t have many opportunities to attend trainings. Most of the time, the journalists who go are the ones selected by the management of the TV station, and they are sent even if the language in which the trainings are held is not very familiar to them. Often, when I went by myself to the

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trainings, I was forced to take some time off to be able to attend.”

A few years ago, NGOs such as CIJ were delivering these services on a larger scale. They have seen a significant decline, however, as private donors lack funding and media owners have little interest in paying for such programs. Panelists said that many owners and managers have no desire to train their staff, as they care more about trading in influence than good journalism.

According to Avădani, journalists themselves have a very limited appetite for professional advancement. The public does not necessarily appreciate the acquisition of additional skills, and it does not lead to increased salaries. Moraru said that he would love to have his employees learn specialized skills, but this would mean his newsroom would be understaffed during the training. Lupu agreed, adding, “Regional trainings are not an option for us anymore. It is so hard to find interested journalists, and the numbers are so low that the resources needed for those trainings are not justified.” She said that she does try to organize classes to address new developments in media, including hackathons and programs on data journalism.

Access to media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities is apolitical, unrestricted, and not monopolized. However, distribution is a major problem for Romanian print media. In 2016, only 3,500 newspaper kiosks operated in the entire country — considerably fewer than 10 years prior, when the total was around 8,000.<sup>10</sup> In 2017, the number shrank by another 1,000, with just about

2,500 left in September 2017, according to Tolontan.<sup>11</sup> Many groups have eliminated kiosks, either because it was too expensive to move them elsewhere or because it was more cost effective to sign a separate distribution contract. Panelists described an incident from September 2017, when kiosk owners confronted Daniel Băluță, the mayor of a Bucharest sector. They accused him of removing their stands during a construction project and throwing them in the dump, when the owners had paid to have them relocated. The conflict ended in violence and police arrested some of the kiosk owners.

**“Associations of publishers and journalists are not highly influential when it comes to fundamental problems media face in Albania,” Bogdani said.**

On September 25, all major newspapers published the text a “Dark day for the print media in Romania” on their front pages. The headline was in response to the Ministry of Education announcement that all schoolbooks will be printed by a state-owned company. With print houses already on the decline and dependent on producing materials such as textbooks to sustain their businesses, the decision was a huge blow, and will likely impact distribution.

Cable and satellite operators play equally important roles in securing access to media products. The market is dominated by three major players: RCS-RDS, with a 49 percent market share; Telecom, with a 20 percent share; and UPC, which has the lowest market share at 17.5 percent. The last report by ANCOM, published in November 2017, stated that the market in Romania is comprised

of 7.3 million subscriptions — 4.9 million cable, 2.4 million DTH satellite, and 106,000 IPTV.<sup>12</sup>

Cable companies can decide which local TV stations they carry and where in their grid to place their programs. Some local TV stations have complained that RCS-RDS refuses to carry their programs. RCS-RDS has its own local stations on Digi TV, and according to the panelists, it likely does not want to encourage competition. In turn, UPC prefers not to broadcast Digi stations — and if it does, it obscures them by placing them on high channels.

Internet infrastructure continues to develop rapidly, in part thanks to the wide penetration of mobile devices in Romania. The country has 4.5 million land Internet connections, accounting for 55 percent of households. More popular is mobile broadband Internet, with 16.6 million connections — a penetration rate of 85 percent of the population. Mobile Internet traffic doubled in the first half of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016, according to data provided by ANCOM.<sup>13</sup> The growth is largely due to the competitive nature of the mobile communications market, leading operators to regularly present offers and incentives to attract new clients.

### List of Panel Participants

**Alexandru Giboi**, director, Agerpres, Bucharest

**Anca Spănu**, deputy editor-in-chief, *Viața Liberă*, Galați

**Cristi Godinac**, president, Mediasind, Federation of Journalists’ Trade Unions, Bucharest

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.paginademedi.ro/2016/10/distributia-presei-jumatate-din-chioscuri-au-disparut-in-ultimii-ani-jumatate-din-firme-in-faliment>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.tolo.ro/2017/09/20/difuzorii-de-presa-din-bucuresti-vor-sa-faca-luni-greva/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.paginademedi.ro/2017/11/cifre-ancom-73-milioane-de-abonati-la-cablu-in-romania>

<sup>13</sup> ANCOM cited by Capital, at <http://www.capital.ro/ancom-traficul-de-internet-mobil-s-a-dublat-in-prima-jumatate-a.html>



## ROMANIA

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

**Costin Ionescu**, journalist, Hotnews.ro

**Costin Juncu**, managing director, Romanian Association for Audience Measurement, Bucharest

**Cristian Pantazi**, editor-in-chief, Hotnews.ro, Bucharest

**Ioana Avădani**, executive director, Center for Independent Journalism, Bucharest

**Luiza Vasiliu**, journalist, *Scena9 & Casa Jurnalistului*, Bucharest

**Liana Ganea**, program coordinator, FREEEX Active Watch, Bucharest

**Ovidiu Vanghele**, journalist, Center for Media Investigations, Bucharest

**Maria Țoghină**, vice-president, Clubul Român de Presă, Bucharest

**Matei Martin**, journalist, *Dilema Veche*

**Natalia Vasilendiuc**, lecturer, University of Bucharest, Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies, Bucharest

**Petrișor Obae**, media analyst, Paginademedia.ro, Bucharest

**Răzvan Martin**, program coordinator, FREEEX Active Watch, Bucharest

**Silviu Ispas**, President, Romanian Transmedia Auditing Bureau, Bucharest

**Teodor Tiță**, journalist, Europa FM, Bucharest

**Vasile Hotea Fernezan**, journalist, TVR Cluj, Cluj-Napoca

### Moderator

**Ioana Avădani**, executive director, Center for Independent Journalism, Bucharest

### Authors

**Ioana Avădani**, executive director, Center for Independent Journalism, Bucharest

**Cristina Lupu**, communications and project manager, Center for Independent Journalism, Bucharest

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