

Mapping the Moldovan media system and journalism culture



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ABSTRACT: This article aims to present an overview of the Moldovan media system, beginning from the 1990s. The paper maps the country's media market and ownership structure, print press, broadcasting media, and journalistic culture. The findings are based primarily on 52 semi-structured interviews conducted in Moldova in 2006 and 2011 with journalists, media analysts, academics, and media owners, and on recent literature and some scholarship on the media system in Moldova. This article seeks to discuss the following questions: What forces have influenced media development and journalistic profession in Moldova over the past 20 years? Why has the critical situation of Moldovan media in the early years of democratization become the norm expression nowadays?

KEYWORDS: Moldova, media market, ownership, print press, broadcasting media, journalism culture



INTRODUCTION

The media system and journalistic culture in Moldova could be analyzed from different analytical approaches which depict various aspects of their emergence and development. One of these could be the perspective identified by Zielonka and Mancini (2011, pp. 1–7) in a comparative research project on ten Central and Eastern Europe media systems (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia). According to this outlook, the Moldovan media system is shifting towards the Eastern European/post-communist model, whose features include excessive politicization by the state which slows down the processes of media rebuilding and goes hand in hand with business and political parallelism, a small and weak media market, fuzzy ownership, floating media laws and procedures. All these dimensions mirror an opaque media system which imitates the external/Western models and has negative effects on the journalistic profession that could be considered disoriented due to a blurred professional identity. Moreover, this portrait of the media system and journalistic culture in Moldova could be enriched with a new concept and namely that of the

media pluralism, even if it is more “by default” (Parmelee, 2009, p. 280) or “weak” (Cărauş, 2006, p. 332). From this approach media pluralism in Moldova could be readily described as a fragmented consumer market where a certain competition between public and private media is present.

The appliance of Western analytical framing on Moldovan media has many limitations. The weak political environment maintained by a corrupt political class that has always been one of the catalysts for media development, influences one of the most important shortcomings that makes it impossible to shape the Moldovan media system into a restrictive/universal framework. This political class participated in the rise of the Party of Communists that had led Moldova down almost half of its democratic path of transition. Although from 2009 it is no longer in power, the Communist Party has remained an important media owner in Moldova. It controls not only party or private media, but also public service broadcasting. As Nadine Gogu (2011, p. 8) says “in June 2008, at least ten media outlets were guided by the Communist Party behind the scenes” and their number grows exponentially every year with the expansion of the media market. The other active political parties in Moldova have taken over the media control model imposed by the Party of Communists and led from the shadow some of the newsrooms considered independent. The anti-communist narratives of these media have been readily confused with diversity and pluralism. Another analytical challenge dwells on the Transnistrian media issue. Transnistria is an autonomous geopolitical area which is officially part of, but not controlled by, the Moldovan state. Transnistrian press integration in a Moldovan media system analysis would make it nearly impossible due to cultural differences, political system, power structure, economy, history that have come to distinguish this region from Moldova as a result of two decades of isolation and Russian influence. This issue customizes even more the Moldovan media and makes it unique to the Central and Eastern European region; for that reason, Transnistria should be presented as an individual case. In this context it should be noted that these features are not national malfunctions that show how far Moldova is from the Western ideal of the press, but should be taken on a case by case principle, which in this case is normal for the Moldovan media system and the journalistic profession and which in itself should be treated as a specific media system.

The perspective suggested in this article is more descriptive than analytical, avoiding frameworks and criticism of would-be media shortcomings. I propose to map the Moldovan media and the journalistic profession starting from the assumption that the quality of Moldova’s democracy determines the media system quality in Moldova, meaning that the transition democracy shapes an extremely changeable media system. For confirming this hypothesis, this article seeks to discuss the following questions: What forces have influenced media development and the journalistic profession in Moldova over the past 20 years? Why has the critical situation in the Moldovan media in the early years of democratization become the

normal expression nowadays? Most of the ideas of this article were drawn from 52 semi-structured interviews that were carried out in Moldova in 2006 and 2011 with journalists, media analysts, academics, and media owners. All the interviews were conducted face to face by the author. Some of the results of these research projects (2006 — “The Moldovan Journalists in Post-communist Societies: Professional Roles, Values, and Representation”; 2011 — “The Professional Practices, Values and Constraints of the Moldovan gatekeepers”) have been published in various articles and books. However, it is the first time when the integrated outcomes of these two projects appear in one paper dedicated exclusively to the Moldovan media market and ownership structure, print press, broadcasting media and journalism culture.

MEDIA MARKET AND OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE

The media in Moldova has always been underdeveloped, the main reason for which has been the immediate influence of political interests. Although at the beginning of the 1990s the new Moldovan democratic parliament adopted the Press Law and the Broadcasting Law which gave the citizens the opportunity to become owners, a political decision which did not allow press privatization blocked the media market. In consequence, the once Soviet media remained the same state media and the new founded/independent media had to overcome several legal hurdles before it could compete with the governmental press. One of the media law restrictions stipulated that a person (a Moldovan citizen only) was not entitled to own more than 50 percent of the capital in a single media institution. If the citizens wanted to set up other media outlets, their capital would not exceed 20 percent. Furthermore, according to Cărauş (2006, p. 322), post-communist media regulations in Moldova avoided terms such as “owner,” “ownership” or “concentration,” using instead the expression “founder.” The founders of the independent press were not entitled to state subsidies or external donations. Only in 1995 did the law change, admitting domestic and foreign aid in Moldova. Six years later the Communist Party that came to power revoked this right. Only after “Twitter” revolution that led to change of power the parliament has amended these law constraints.

In the first decade of democratic construction (Moldova proclaimed its independence in August 1991), the Moldovan media fared unevenly. Only state media, heavily subsidized by public resources and local and party press, had revived somewhat the media. Using the past vestiges of Soviet infrastructure, the state press had monopolized the market and the audience for many years. The media were financed from independent sources (which could not be considered independent *per se*) and had access to only a very fragmented (local, regional, urban or rural) public. Over time, depending on foreign handouts/donations, non-state media began to disappear due to lack of resources. Of the dozens independent publications in the Romanian language, that had proliferated in the early 1990s, only the weekly *Săptămâna* has survived until today. The Russian language press underwent

a different development. In that period it became a practical reality that in Moldova only Russian media could represent a business which was not always profitable, but it had stable incomes. The Russian press has managed to stay on top because of a faithful audience, represented not only by the Russian minority (which is about 6 percent of the population), but also by the Russian-speaking larger minority (formed by Ukrainians, Gagauz, Bulgarians and some Moldovan urban natives). This public, as well as a large part of the Moldovan local audience, preferred Russian media due to the higher quality of content. In consequence, as Alexandru Bohanțov, associated professor in Journalism at the Free International University of Moldova stated, the Moldovan public was “more aware of the realities of Russia than in their country and local communities” (interview with Alexandru Bohanțov, 2011).

In this context it should be noted that the Moldovan media has always been bilingual. However, among the Romanian and the Russian language press there has never been fair competition. The Russian media often surpassed the Romanian one. Even today over 50 percent of the national market belongs to Russian language media. For example, the number of Russian channels, both public and private, is from two to six in each city and they are steadily growing. Although a Russian retransmitted channel is twice as expensive as a Romanian one, the cable operators prefer to invest in Russian media having a triple market share compared with other foreign media. In 2006, for retransmitting a Russian television station like NTV and RTR Planeta, an operator had to pay monthly between 600 USD and 800 USD. On the other hand, according to Lozinschi (2006, p. 20) the most expensive Romanian channels cost 400 EUR per month, and the cheapest prices were between 70 and 175 USD per month.

The Moldovan media market has never been regulated in line with the needs of the Romanian-speaking majority. Although starting from 1995 the Broadcasting Law obliged the public and private audiovisual institutions to broadcast 65 percent of their programs in the state (Romanian) language, this provision had not been respected, even when a local NGO — CAIRO sued the Broadcasting Coordinating Council (BCC), to apply the law. In 2000 the Moldovan nongovernmental organization CAIRO, represented by graduates of foreign (Romanian, European and American) educational institutions, had tried to oblige the BCC to withdraw the broadcasting licenses for three television stations and eight radio stations, which had over 90 percent of their language content in Russian. Although the Court of Appeal of Moldova ruled in favor of CAIRO, Moldovan parliament intervention influenced the trial. The parliament issued a document which stipulated that the 65 percent refers exclusively to local production shows and program, which meant that the audiovisual legislation did not really regulate the foreign content broadcast in Moldova.

In these conditions, after the first ten years of independence, a very weak local media market developed in Moldova, characterized by an increasing dependence on Russian press. It is thus an expected and usual fact that in the 2000s the Moldovan

national media remained almost at the same level as in the 1990s. Only the local and party press were somewhat diversified. One of the novelties of that period was the first important press group establishment, named FLUX. It did represent a very rudimental traditional media concentration which owned two media outlets (newspaper and press agency) that at least initially functioned as a unique newsroom and a publishing house. The media organization was politically controlled and financed by one of the most important opposition parties at the time — the Popular Christian Democratic Party supported from the shadows by Romanian resources. Its reputation grew along the other political public and private media controlled by the Communist government. These two types of press (the ruling party and opposition media) did not compete with each other. Each of them had a specific niche and audience. FLUX was disseminating their media products for a Romanian-speaking public with a nationalist vision and claimed reunification with Romania, while the pro-communist media had a predominantly Russian-speaking audience, nostalgic for Soviet/communist times. The only unifying aim for these politically involved media was political influence and total disinterest for the press as a business. Generally speaking, in the 2000s when Moldova had a Communist government, media became, as interviewed radio journalists declared, a pro-communist agitator. Even state television, which in 2002 became a public institution, did not disguise its political partisanship with the communist government. As a public television reporter, who preferred to keep his identity anonymous, declared: “After Voronin [former Moldovan president and head of the Party of Communists] came to power, the press is very much controlled; we are practically in the years before the 1990s. We receive calls from the Government, the Presidency, and the Parliament and we are told that they have some events and we are required to come. They do not care that we do not have cameras, editorial teams, absolutely nothing; we must go. At 7 in the morning Tarlev [former prime-minister] will go to Basarabeasca [a city in South Moldova]. We must be with him, we must film him, and we must talk about his actions. Criticisms are not acceptable; we are enslaved by the communist power” (interview, 2006).

After nine years of communist constraints which have established an open censorship, electing a pro-European alliance of parties was also an un hoped for shift for media market liberalization. Foreign investment of over 10 million euros revived the Romanian language audiovisual media and redistributed part of the incomes from advertising (which was according to some estimates about 20 million EUR in 2010), that until then had mostly been concentrated in the Russian press. The presence on the media market of two controversial Romanian businessmen and media owners, Sorin Ovidiu Vintu and Dinu Patriciu, has created a short-term impression that the Romanian-language media could be profitable. A year later, after the launch of Publika TV which was Sorin Ovidiu Vintu’s project in Moldova, he withdrew by selling his shares to a powerful politician, Vlad Plahotniuc. At the same time, Dinu Patriciu continues to keep this media business in Moldova (the

newspaper *Adevărul*), although his media business in Romania is in the process of bankruptcy. Another important investment after 2009, which is not profitable either, but managed to stay in the media market due to German investment (at least 5 million EUR granted by Reinstein Media Management Germany) is the Jurnal Trust Media Group, created by the Moldovan journalist Val Butnaru.

PRINT MEDIA

The media system had a relatively free hand only in the first five years of Moldova's independence. This short period, when the media market escaped temporarily from state political monopoly had paved the way for the introduction of commercial press. Apparently, there were all prerequisites for the competitive environment and profitable press developments. However, the Moldovan print media failed to detach itself from political sponsorship. The main factors that in the mid-1990s led the Moldovan press to seek political support had been the deep impoverishment of the population and electronic media development. After liberalization of prices in the early 1990s, most families had decreased their expenditure for the purchase of periodical press. If in the Soviet period many Moldovan citizens had the resources to subscribe to several newspapers and magazines, since the 1990s very few could afford that. Furthermore, during that period most Moldovan readers turned into viewers because of the lack of a TV licence. Without permanent financial support and with high costs for production and distribution, the commercial press failed to be independent.

However, local media had adapted better than the national one to market conditions. In the mid-1990s there were many local markets which were independent and isolated from each other. In 1994 the press published in Chisinau, disappeared in some Moldovan regions. The independent local publications that in a short time adapted to new public requirements (more local news) had occupied this free niche and managed to become sustainable due to foreign donors (e.g. The Soros Foundation-Moldova). Nevertheless, the number of national publications in that period had not diminished, but rather increased. If in 1990 in Chisinau there were only 26 publications, in 1994 their number increased to 99. According to Malcoci (2000, pp. 50–56), the most prolific year was 1997, when there were about 460 newspapers and magazines, of which two-thirds had appeared in the capital. Only newspaper circulation declined dramatically. If in 1990 the 26 newspaper circulation was about 1.3 million copies per day, in 1994 all 99 publications sold only 490,000 daily copies.

Starting from 2000s, this situation became worse. In 2001 Moldova had about 150 periodicals, of which very few had a circulation of more than 20,000 copies per day. At the national level the press agencies had disseminated daily to about 39,000 copies, of which 6,000 originated from Russia. As Negru states (2001, p. 33), for about a four million population, this circulation was insignificant. The large rural population who generally read less than the urban population complicated the written

press condition even more, especially the Romanian language one, which had to cut its circulation several times in the coming years. In 2006 the national newspaper with the largest circulation was the Romanian language daily *Flux* with 45,000 copies per week, far beyond the Russian-language weekly *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Moldove* which had over 60,000 copies. In 2010 the Romanian language national best-selling newspaper *Jurnal de Chisinau* did not exceed 26,000 copies weekly. In following years, *Adevărul* Moldova took its place, the daily paper which belongs to the Romanian businessman Dinu Patriciu. According to the National Readership Survey, conducted by IMAS Chisinau in 2012, *Adevărul* Moldova was only in fifth place in the preferences of the Moldovan readers under 45 years of age (the Russian newspapers occupy the first four places, including a newspaper ad, *Makler*). With 15,000 readers per issue, its circulation was about three times higher than of the most widespread local newspaper.

However, the biggest decrease in the press market took place in early 2000s when the Party of Communists came to power. Besides founding many of the local state newspapers that represented the ruling party mouthpiece, they also introduced legal provisions in the Press Law prohibiting foreign financial aid for media. According to Carauș (2006, p. 323), at that time the most important investors in the Moldovan media were from Romania, the USA, the Netherlands, France and Greece. The last four have withdrawn their financial support after the law was amended. After the 2009 political change when the Party of Communists left power, parliament allowed the resumption of media investment. Media groups from Romania are still among the largest investors and donors. Even with permanent external donations, the Moldovan independent press is totally unprofitable. It only survives due to financial injections by political parties. All media incomes in Moldova are taboo subjects, even when one speaks about party press. Because the official income sources (subscription, sales, and advertising) cannot ensure a decent existence, the print media relies on politically-motivated financial investment. Thus, the Moldovan media has become an arena of competition for winning subsidies and sponsorships, and those who invest today prefer to stay backstage.

BROADCASTING MEDIA

In 1990, the first local private television studios sprung up in Moldova. These establishments were initiatives costing several hundred dollars of investment. They differed greatly from traditional television both in terms of infrastructure and journalistic content. The studios broadcast from rented apartments or owners' houses and their products were nothing more but a few hours of recordings. Since 1996 the status of these private televisions changed, when the Broadcasting Coordinating Council began providing the first broadcasting licenses. Most of the new broadcasters (26) were located in central district towns. Only 12 of the TV channels were

placed in the capital city of Chisinau. The best known of these have been ProTV Chişinău and Pervii Canal Moldova (recently renamed as Prime) and are active in the Moldavian market even today. It should be noted, however, that no private TV stations have used all the time to broadcast their own programs. They have constantly relied on foreign television channels, many of them from the Russian Federation. Accordingly, no private channels could be considered fully domestic, as none of them managed to reach more than 30 percent of their own content. The situation seemed to change from 2009 onwards, when foreign investors appeared on the media market. Two local television stations with regional coverage, Jurnal TV (Jurnal Trust Media Group) and Publika TV (former owner Sorin Ovidiu Vintu), have managed to put into practice new TV formats (especially news and political debates) and broadcast only their own content. These two stations have competed for a very short period so far, dividing a market share of only 3 percent. After a prolonged stagnation, Jurnal TV decided to change its news profile to a generalist-entertainment one. The latter change did not produce significant effects on competing television. Publika TV has kept its audience, even after its owner changed and rumors of its politicization spread in the public sphere. Even if these two channels had not been placed in the charts of the most watched TV stations, they have the self-assumed privilege of increasing domestic/Romanian language journalistic content quality.

Although private television stations have never been able to compete with national/public TV channel Moldova 1, they have succeeded in attracting an important part of its urban audience. Today Moldova 1 remains one of the main sources of national information, with over 36 percent of the national market share (IMAS-INC Chişinău, 2012). Moldova 1 is a sequel of Moldovan television TVM, founded in April 1958 as state\(\text{USSR}\) republican television station. In the Soviet period, it was the only television station of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. After 1990, TVM has maintained the rule of state television, practically the only television station submitted directly to parliament and BCC. After the law adoption on National Public Broadcasting Teleradio-Moldova in 2002, TVM, renamed Moldova 1, became a public service broadcaster, and subordinated indirectly to parliament. This channel could never face competition from Russian Public Television. Until 2005, the private company Pervii Canal Moldova had relayed for 6–8 hours daily Russian Public Television. After changing its founders, the station dropped its own broadcasts, sending only Russia's original public station broadcasts. Since 2008, the channel (recently renamed Prime) began to produce its own programs, which are broadcast in the same grid as Russian public television's programs. Evolving significantly in the last 20 years and currently amounting to a Western model of programs, news, shows and entertainment, Russian Public Television enjoys a grip on the audience in Moldova and is the most important public information source at a national level, covering 92–95 percent of the country.

As for radio, in the Soviet period this means of information attracted far less political interest than other media and therefore, to some extent, it had remained in the shadows. Since the 1990s, its popularity was a well-known fact: in 2003 more than 50 percent of Moldovans listened to the radio; the same percentage was attained in 2012 as well (IMAS-INC Chişinău, October 2003, March 2012). This means that radio stations had a far larger audience than the printed press, not exceeding 10 percent daily. Moreover, according to a recent survey, radio stations meet the public need better than other TV broadcasters (the way radio is providing information satisfied 62.1 percent of listeners, while TV broadcasters' activity — only 43.3 percent of viewers) (Malcoci, 2000, p. 131). After 1990, the number of radio stations in Moldova did not skyrocket in comparison with local newspapers. If in 1995 the BCC granted seven licenses, then in 2006 their number exceeded 48, most of them being taken over by private persons. The competition between them had greatly enriched Moldovan broadcasting. Of all the media in Moldova, commercial radio stations were the most competitive and probably the most profitable despite lower advertising revenues (less than 5 percent of the sold advertising in Moldova). Polidisc and Radio d'Or — two local radio stations which had significant audiences in the 1990s, gained knowledge and specialized in the possibilities of different musical formats, and were the first in determining the specific age and social characteristics of their audience. Using Russian radio channels' experience, where music constituted most of the broadcast time, these two stations had undermined the Moldovan national radio monopoly, which relied almost totally on narrative broadcast. Due to the poor saleability of Moldovan music, they broadcast only Western and Russian music. Since then the radio market has expanded greatly. Nowadays every average Moldovan city boasts an impressive number of radio stations: public, private, national, local, musical, religious, and news focused. In larger cities private radio stations have the largest audience. The most accessed radio stations in major cities are, however, not domestic ones, but rather those from Russia, such as Polidisc Ruskoje Radio, Hit FM, Retro FM (IMAS-INC Chişinău, March 2012).

JOURNALISM CULTURE

It is very difficult to estimate on average how many journalists are working nowadays in the Moldovan media. During the Soviet times, for example, a municipal committee of the Communist Party created professional files with journalists working in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, but they were never completed. However, according to the Journalists Union of Moldova, 1,200 professionals worked for the Moldovan media by 1991. One of the recent studies estimated a total of 2,000 media professionals of whom 43 percent worked in public service media, 55 percent — in private media, and 2 percent — in media belonging to political parties. Approximately 66 percent of journalists are Romanian/Moldovan, 24 percent — Russian, 7 percent — Ukrainian, 1 percent — Bulgarian and 1 percent

other nationalities, such as Armenian, Jews, Gagauz, etc. (IMAS-INC Chişinău, 2003). Today the average age of a Moldovan journalist is about 35. They are 10 years younger than the average of the 1990s. Most of the journalists who work in regional newsrooms are older than the professionals from national outlets. During the Soviet era, in journalism there were very few women, the number of young journalists was proportional to that of older journalists and the professionals with specialized higher education were several times more numerous than those with no education in the field. In recent years, more women have joined the profession, the number of young people has increased and the number of journalists with specialized higher education has declined.

In the research project “The Moldovan Journalists in Post-Communist Society,” carried out in 2006, I defined four generations of journalists active in Moldovan media. Firstly, the Soviet generation who entered the profession before 1990s represented two categories: practitioners who maintained a conservative vision of partisan journalism and professionals who had promoted democratic values, adopting the Western style of working. The Soviet journalists, loyal to the communist model, had continued to work in state/public service media, actively participating in professional associations such as the Journalists Union of Moldova, while the Soviet journalists, supporters of Western-style press, became directors or deputy editors in the first private media in Moldova. Secondly, the post-Soviet generation of journalists represented a vast heterogeneous subculture, with various social origins and different education, without any experience in the field. Their access to the profession was possible due to the lax media laws adopted in the early 1990s. Although some of these journalists had practiced the Soviet model of press and others the Western style, most of them were not associated in professional organizations, were very competitive and neglected the ethical side of the profession. The only change that took place in the last six years at the generation level was the Soviet journalists’ disappearance that did not resist the increasing mobility in the profession, the print press devaluation and new media expansion. However, journalists from this generation can still be identified in local or party press, and especially pro-communist party media. A new generation of journalists trained in Western and Romanian schools joined the post-communist generations, who have been employed primarily in newly created foreign media and who have brought an added value to the quality of journalistic content. In the beginning, the Western-trained journalists’ exodus did not create an overflow in the labor market, due to many foreign investments. However, after the withdrawal of Romanian funding many of them lost their workplaces.

During the Soviet period, in the journalistic profession there was not any shortage of jobs. Journalism was a prestigious profession with many privileges for political party members, but it was never well paid. After the 1990s the situation has not changed. Moreover, in the period when Russia became bankrupt (1998), which had a devastating effect on the Moldovan economy for many years, the majority of

journalists received their payment with delays or were not paid at all (especially in the districts), and their salary rarely exceeded 200 USD. Only journalists who represented foreign media branch offices could have a salary two or three times higher. Nowadays, the wage differences have been preserved. However, in order to increase their revenues, journalists have added incomes from other jobs. They have doubled or even tripled their basic salary by providing services in politics, economy, music, advertising or PR. As Cornelia Cozonac claimed that there is no administrative control over journalists and their work is not overloaded, which allows too many of them to supplement their very low wages: “In this field as in any creative field in Moldova there is a double salary phenomenon — one that is known by the state and another which is known only by the employee and employer. I do not know many journalists who work for a single media. Usually, a journalist can work for a media organization and has other positions, such as impresarios, businessmen, managers, etc.” (interview with Cornelia Cozonac, 2011).

In terms of self-regulation, the first media NGOs, Press Freedom Committee and Independent Journalism Center, have occurred since 1994, two years later than the first non-governmental organization in general. The Journalists Union of Moldova is the only exception. Established in 1957, it is a legacy of the Soviet Journalists Association, which, after the reorganization of 1991–1992, became a non-profit association. Starting with the late 1990s, the number of members has grown continuously. Thus in 1998 the media NGOs constituted about 3% of the total of 585 organizations registered with the Ministry of Justice (Șirbu, 2001, p. 82). Currently about 30 media associations function in Moldova, of which only one-third are active. The growing diversity of services that they offer determines their number. For example, the Independent Press Association, first established in 1997 by representatives of private newspapers and news agencies, has set the aim of promoting independent local and national media. Or the Electronic Press Association, founded in 1999, comprises the most important local radio and television companies and independent professionals. Created as an electronic media union, this organization aims to create an audit system for the radio and TV audience and set up common database programs for its members. On the other hand, the Journalists Union, which evolved from being a Soviet-style governmental organization to an independent professional association, is probably the only non-profit NGO according to Șirbu (2001, p. 83), which has “made some efforts to protect the rights of Moldovan journalists.” Besides reacting in different cases of violation of journalists’ rights and the intimidation and aggression against them, the Journalists Union has lobbied for the adoption of a law based on Access to Information and amendment of the Criminal Code articles on defamation in international law compliance. In addition, the Journalists Union proposed to the Government to exempt the periodical press from VAT as a measure of positive discrimination designed to support independent media. In this context another NGO should be mentioned, the Independent Journalism Center, which created a legal service in 1999, providing journalists and

media organizations with an advisory service in cases of persecution, while conducting their professional duties. Despite these many initiatives, the professional associations in Moldova are not functional due to the interests' divergence of media owners on the one hand, and journalists on the other, many of whom are politically affiliated or sponsored from abroad. Of the estimated 2,000 journalists working now in the Moldovan media, only about 30 percent are professionally affiliated. At the same time, many of the organizations that should represent them lead a miserable existence from the point of view of organizational representation, having only a few members being barely engaged in any specific professional activity. They are mostly dependent on external funds for which their *raison d'être* often is.

The associative dispersion of Moldovan journalists has complicated the implementation of professional ethics codes. One of the most well-known is the Ethical Code of Journalists, adopted in 1999 by the Union of Journalists of Moldova and revised in 2010–2011 by Moldovan and European experts. This code is based on documents adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on journalism ethics and the principles of conduct of the International Federation of Journalists. Although it was signed by 84 media institutions and associations, the code is not recognized by most major market players. The practical application of this code is almost impossible in Moldova because of the large number of journalists who openly declare their political sympathies.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has sought to offer a critical introduction into the Moldovan media system and journalistic profession developments. It has made an overview of the most important changes that have occurred in recent years, rather than looked outwards at how Moldovan media has integrated into the global context. The main conclusions of this article boil down to the facts that first, Moldovan media is dependent on the Russian language press, which more imitates than produces journalistic content; second, media market dependence on political recourses makes it vulnerable in terms of professionalism and ethics; third, media partisanship emphasizes deep political allegiances in a society where media represents — through its owners involved in politics — the mouthpiece of political parties and state institutions; fourth, the state monopoly over broadcasting networks and press does not allow for the consolidation of the public interest mission of the journalistic profession; fifth, drastic fiscal media policy exerted on the “hostile to power” media has inhibited any attempt to develop a competitive press market; and sixth, the media market lacks transparency which creates difficulties for making any prospective analysis for the next five or even ten years. These vicissitudes have not only strengthened during the past twenty-one years, but have become role models for budding media. Politics influences media and forms the media agenda in Moldova today. The success in this industry depends on a partnership created between journalists and politicians, and

sometimes there is no partnership at all, because politicians are media owners and journalists are future politicians.

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