



## **Monitoring Report**

### ***Elements of Propaganda, Disinformation, and Violation of Journalism Ethics in the Local Media Space***

***July 1 – September 29, 2019***

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## GENERAL INFORMATION

From July 1 to September 29, 2019, the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) monitored 12 media outlets – news portals and TV channels – to identify whether the disseminated journalistic materials contained any breaches of deontological rules and elements of information manipulation. The monitoring team analyzed how the outlets covered events of public interest in politics, economy, foreign policy, and in other fields, whether they complied with professional and ethical standards such as verification of information through several sources, pluralism of opinions, balance in the news reports on conflicts, and so on. By using the Journalist's Code of Conduct and specialized academic works, they identified disinformation procedures and techniques.

The analysis was based on the assumption that news is the main media product where people search information about daily reality. Therefore, regardless of the media owner's views on political or economic issues, news must contain exclusively facts and not journalists' opinions. Also, they should be presented in neutral and accessible language, and should reflect reality as accurately as possible, observing the balance of sources.

### **Purpose of monitoring:**

The monitoring was aimed at determining whether the media observed professional ethics or used manipulation techniques in their coverage of topics of public interest. In particular, the monitoring sought to identify the mistakes made by journalists (intentionally or unintentionally) while reporting facts, so that case studies and monitoring reports could play an educational role. Another objective was to contribute to increasing media consumer awareness of the risks of getting information from unsafe sources, to help consumers understand how the media can manipulate/misinform, so that they be able to distinguish between a manipulative journalistic product and a product that presents reality impartially.

### **Criteria for selecting media outlets for monitoring:**

- Coverage – national;
- Language – Romanian and Russian;
- Impact – circulation and audience.

**Television:** TV Moldova 1, Prime TV, Canal 3, Accent TV, NTV Moldova, Televiziunea Centrală (Orhei), Jurnal TV, TV8, PRO TV Chișinău.

**Online media:** Sputnik.md, Kp.md, Unimedia.info.

**Methodology:** The report focused on political, economic, and social events of major public interest that took place during the monitoring period, and analyzed how these events were covered by the media. The language and images used by journalists, their choice of events to be covered, the correctness of source quoting, and the tone of presentation were analyzed by referring to the Journalist's Code of Conduct<sup>1</sup>, guidelines and recommendations in the sphere of responsible and high-quality media<sup>2</sup>, and the notions of **manipulation** and **propaganda**, as defined in the Dictionary of Sociology<sup>3</sup>.

**Manipulation:** *“Action taken to make a social actor (a person, a group, or a community) think and act in a way that is compatible with the interests of the initiator and not with their own interests, by using persuasion techniques that intentionally distort the truth, leaving an impression of freedom of thought and decision. Unlike influence by means of rational persuasion, **manipulation** aims not at a*

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<sup>1</sup> Moldovan Journalist's Code of Conduct, [http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod\\_d\\_rom.pdf](http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod_d_rom.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Guide of Style with Ethical Standards for Journalists, API, [http://www.unicef.org/moldova/Ghid\\_Etica\\_Journalist\\_RO.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/moldova/Ghid_Etica_Journalist_RO.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Cătălin Zamfir, Lazăr Vlăsceanu, Dictionary of Sociology, Bucharest, 1998, p. 332., p. 457.

<http://vignette4.wikia.nocookie.net/nccmn/images/1/1c/Dictionar-de-Sociologie-Catalin-Zamfir-Lazar-Vlasceanu.pdf/revision/latest?cb=20150813042511&path-prefix=ro>

*more accurate and deep understanding of the situation, but at suggesting a convenient idea by means of misleading through false arguments and by appealing to non-rational emotional levels.”*

**Propaganda:** *“Systematic activity of transmitting, promoting, or spreading doctrines, messages, or ideas from the position of a particular social group and ideology, in order to influence, change, or shape certain concepts, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, or behaviors. Propaganda is practiced in such a way as to achieve the goals and interests of the group it serves, so there is no neutral or objective propaganda.”*

**The main topics monitored** between July 1 and September 29, 2019:

- Tax Increase for the HoReCa Sector (August 12, 2019);
- Justice Sector Reform (August 28, 2019);
- President Igor Dodon’s Visits to Moscow and Brussels (September 2-5, 2019);
- Divestiture of Parliamentary Immunity and Detention of Tauber and Apostolova, MPs (September 16, 2019);
- Sandu Government at 100 days (September 23-24, 2019).

## **I. GENERAL TRENDS**

The monitoring showed that journalists from some monitored media outlets continue deviating from deontological standards when they write news. We identified elements characteristic to propaganda and information manipulation as well as breaches of the Journalist’s Code of Conduct, such as:

**Selective presentation of facts, opinions, and statements** - Prime TV (Justice Sector Reform);

**Lack of the right to reply** - NTV Moldova (President Igor Dodon’s Visits to Moscow and Brussels); Prime TV, NTV Moldova, Televiziunea Centrală, Unimedia.info, Kp.md (Divestiture of Parliamentary Immunity and Detention of Tauber and Apostolova, MPs); Prime TV, Sputnik.md, Unimedia.info (Sandu Government at 100 days);

**Mixture of facts with opinions** - Prime TV, Televiziunea Centrală (Tax Increase for the HoReCa Sector); Prime TV, TV8, Televiziunea Centrală (Justice Sector Reform); Prime TV, Canal 3, Televiziunea Centrală, NTV Moldova, Accent TV (President Igor Dodon’s Visits to Moscow and Brussels); Canal 3, Kp.md (Divestiture of Parliamentary Immunity and Detention of Tauber and Apostolova, MPs); Prime TV, Canal 3, PRO TV Chişinău, Televiziunea Centrală, Accent TV (Sandu Government at 100 days);

**References to sources that cannot be checked** - Canal 3, Televiziunea Centrală (President Igor Dodon’s visits to Moscow and Brussels); Kp.md (Divestiture of Parliamentary Immunity and Detention of Tauber and Apostolova, MPs); Accent TV (Sandu Government at 100 days);

**Spreading of false information or statements** - Prime TV, Canal 3 (Tax Increase for the HoReCa Sector); Televiziunea Centrală (Divestiture of Parliamentary Immunity and Detention of Tauber and Apostolova, MPs);

**Generalization** - Prime TV (Tax Increase for the HoReCa Sector); NTV Moldova (President Igor Dodon’s Visits to Moscow and Brussels); Televiziunea Centrală, Kp.md (Divestiture of Parliamentary Immunity and Detention of Tauber and Apostolova, MPs); Canal 3, Televiziunea Centrală, Accent TV (Sandu Government at 100 days);

**Irony** - TV8, Unimedia.info (Justice Sector Reform); TV8, Televiziunea Centrală, Accent TV (President Igor Dodon’s Visits to Moscow and Brussels); TV8 (Sandu Government at 100 days);

**Suggestion** - Moldova 1 (Tax Increase for the HoReCa Sector); Prime TV (Justice Sector Reform, Sandu Government at 100 days); Televiziunea Centrală (Divestiture of Parliamentary Immunity and Detention of Tauber and Apostolova, MPs);

**Omission** - Kp.md (Justice Sector Reform, Sandu Government at 100 days); Jurnal TV (Tax Increase for the HoReCa Sector);

**Blurring** - Prime TV, Accent TV (Sandu Government at 100 days);

**Internal and/or external enemy technique / “National savior” (“messiah”) technique** - Prime TV, Moldova 1, Sputnik.md (Tax Increase for the HoReCa Sector); NTV Moldova (Justice Sector Reform); Prime TV, Canal 3, NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Kp.md, Sputnik.md (President Igor Dodon’s Visits to Moscow and Brussels); Prime TV (Sandu Government at 100 days);

**Priority information technique** - Televiziunea Centrală (Divestiture of Parliamentary Immunity and Detention of Tauber and Apostolova, MPs); Prime TV, Canal 3 (Sandu Government at 100 days);

**Manipulation by means of video and/or audio** - Prime TV (Justice Sector Reform);

**Tendentious headlines** - Prime TV, Televiziunea Centrală (Tax Increase for the HoReCa Sector); Televiziunea Centrală (Justice Sector Reform, Sandu Government at 100 days); Prime TV, Canal 3, NTV Moldova, Accent TV (President Igor Dodon’s Visits to Moscow and Brussels); Televiziunea Centrală, Kp.md (Divestiture of Parliamentary Immunity and Detention of Tauber and Apostolova, MPs);

**Change of accents** - Canal 3, Televiziunea Centrală (Tax Increase for the HoReCa Sector); Prime TV (Sandu Government at 100 days).

## II. DATA ANALYSIS

### Topic 1. Tax Increase for the HoReCa Sector

***Context:** At the end of July 2019, the Government of Moldova announced the increase of the VAT rate for the HoReCa sector from 10% to 20%. According to the Ministry of Finance, its reduction in October 2018 by the former government had created distortions and had not changed the situation in the sector too much. The Association of Restaurants and Recreational Establishments of Moldova (MĂR) said that the Government’s decision would seriously affect the owners of HoReCa outlets and announced a 30-minute protest for August 12.*

**General conclusion.** *The most serious violations of professional ethics committed by the media were mixture of facts with opinions, unverified information that can be classified as false, generalization, and lack of the right to reply. The most prevailing manipulation techniques included suggestion, “national savior” technique, and presentation of opinions as the ultimate truth. “Leaders” in terms of violation of professional ethics were Prime TV, Canal 3, Televiziunea Centrală, and Sputnik.md.*

**Prime TV** covered [the topic](#) in a tendentious and unbalanced manner. In fact, this television politicized the topic, using it to accuse or discredit certain politicians (Dumitru Alaiba MP) and/or political parties (the ACUM Electoral Bloc). At the same time, **Prime TV** used:

- **The “internal enemy” / “national savior” manipulation technique:** ACUM and the Government led by Maia Sandu were presented in an exclusively negative context. On the contrary, the Democratic Party (PDM) and the former government led by Pavel Filip appeared in an exclusively positive context. For example, while they say that the current

cabinet of ministers increases the tax for HoReCa, hitting into this sector, then *“in October 2018, the former government reduced this tax to 10%”*;

- **Generalization:** *“In the capital city people could hardly find a place to have breakfast this morning”*;
- **Tendentious headlines:** *“Unhappy with the government”*;
- **Unverified / false information:** *“... about 100 outlets stopped working for half an hour or even for the whole day”*;
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“They say one thing and do the opposite. Dumitru Alaiba MP, representing PAS [Action and Solidarity Party], and his wife own a share of an outlet in the center of the capital, which is protesting against the decision to double the VAT rate for HoReCa. Officially, however, the people’s representative is strongly promoting the increase of this tax.”*

**Canal 3** largely followed the same scenario, interviewed the same people, and aired the same footage and text as **Prime TV**. Thus, **Canal 3** committed:

- **Unverified / false information:** *“Nearly one hundred restaurants across the country stopped working for half an hour. The outlets, most of which are from the capital, did not serve any customer from 10.00 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. ...”*;
- **Failure to mention the source of footage:** **Canal 3** used footage taken from **Publika TV** and did not mention the first source;
- **Change of accents and distortion of statements/information:** *“Prime Minister Maia Sandu did not want to comment on the decision ....”* In fact, Maia Sandu said she would make a statement on this subject on Wednesday, after the Government meeting, and not that she *“... does not want to comment on the decision.”*

**PRO TV Chişinău** and **TV8** covered this topic in a neutral and unbiased manner, without using manipulation techniques or violating professional ethics. **Moldova 1** broadcast two stories on this topic in its main newscast of the day, *Mesager*, on August 12. The first story was about HoReCa and the protest of some outlets in Chisinau; the second one was about President Igor Dodon’s announcement that *“the new tax changes approved by the Government will be discussed in extended meetings.”* While in the first story the public television covered the topic in a neutral and unbiased manner, having included the opinions of the actors involved, in the second story it favored and presented in a praising context the Party of Socialists (PSRM) and President Dodon, suggesting (**suggestion technique**) that they would monitor the situation and would try to solve it (**“national savior” / “messiah” technique**): *“... Today, President Dodon had a meeting with Speaker Zinaida Greceanii and with the leadership of the PSRM’s parliamentary group ....”*

**Televiziunea Centrală** covered the topic in a tendentious and biased manner, violated professional ethics, and used several manipulation techniques. In one of the stories, **the television changed accents**, insisting on an alleged *“conflict”* between the electoral bloc ACUM and the PSRM. **Televiziunea Centrală** used this topic to present the Sandu Government and, implicitly, ACUM in a negative context.

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *„Love with ups and downs between ACUM and PSRM. Igor Dodon is dissatisfied with the work of the Sandu Government, which has increased taxes. At a meeting with the Socialists, the head of state said that he would intervene to discuss this issue both with the cabinet of ministers and with IMF representatives”*;
- **Tendentious and manipulating headlines:** *“Igor Dodon is not happy with the work of the Sandu Government.”*

In its news stories, **Sputnik.md** committed the following violations:

- **Presenting opinions as facts / ultimate truths:** The headline of one story bore a fact that had apparently already happened – “*a number of establishments in Chisinau will stop working*”, – suggesting that they will close forever (**suggestion technique**). Later, in the story itself, it was mentioned that they “*stopped working today for 30 minutes in protest*” or “*they might close for the entire day*”;
- **“National savior” (“messiah”) technique:** In the story about the meeting organized by the head of state with the PSRM, **Sputnik.md** presented them as the ones who wish to solve the problems created by others (the Government, the ACUM Electoral Bloc);
- **Failure to ensure the right to reply:** Following the accusations made by some sources (the Association of Restaurants and Recreation Establishments), **Sputnik.md** had the mission to ask the Ministry of Finance for an opinion. Citing other sources (Dumitru Alaiba MP of PAS) to the detriment of the first source concerned (the Ministry of Finance) cannot be qualified as ensuring the right to reply.

**Jurnal TV** did not cover this topic in the newscasts of August [12](#) and/or [13](#), 2019, which can be qualified as **omission**.

## Topic 2. Justice Sector Reform

**Context:** *On August 28, 2019, the Ministry of Justice announced the organization of a press conference at which the new concept of the justice sector reform was presented. The event was attended by President Igor Dodon, Prime Minister Maia Sandu, President of Parliament Zinaida Greceanii, and Minister of Internal Affairs Andrei Nastase, who presented their own views and proposals on modifying and reforming of the justice system.*

**General conclusion.** *The event was covered by the majority of the monitored media outlets (except Kp.md and Canal 3). Some outlets were mostly interested in “Igor Dodon’s drawing on an A4 paper sheet” (Unimedia.info, TV8), others focused on the “disagreements inside” the governing coalition (Televiziunea Centrală, Prime TV). The main violations of professional ethics committed by outlets were mixture of facts with opinions (Prime TV, Televiziunea Centrală), irony (TV8, Unimedia.info), and manipulation by means of sound and video editing (Prime TV).*

**Prime TV** covered the press conference regarding the new concept of the justice sector reform in a tendentious and biased manner. **Prime TV** used this event to emphasize the “disagreements” between PSRM and ACUM. In fact, this television committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “*The top public officials organized a joint press conference today, where they announced with great fanfare a new concept of the justice sector reform*”;
- **Suggestion:** “*Andrei Nastase was invited to take a seat at a corner of the table, and the footage shows he did not like that idea... It is not the first time when Andrei Nastase gets himself uninvited into events attended by Maia Sandu.*” Thus it was suggested that Maia Sandu and Andrei Nastase have disagreements and that the situation in ACUM is tense;
- **Selective and irrelevant statements:** Speaking of Andrei Nastase, **Prime TV** journalists included an irrelevant fragment from his speech, where he congratulated citizens on “*today’s religious holiday....*” In his speech, however, Nastase focused on opinions and statements about the justice process and the reform needed in the sector;
- **Manipulation by means of video and audio:** To present Andrei Nastase in a negative light, **Prime TV** included into the news – against the background of footage with the Minister of Internal Affairs who was entering the conference room and looking for a place in the panel – suggestive audio fragments. At the same time, the video was edited at a faster pace.

TV8 covered this topic in [the main newscast on August 28, 2019](#), having used:

- **Irony:** *“Dodon does not agree with everything in the reform proposed by the Government, so he drew his own vision with a pen. It all fit on an A4 sheet”;*
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“The two proposals were not to the liking of the President.”*

[Moldova 1](#) covered the topic in a neutral and unbiased manner, having included the opinions of all sources. The public television did not commit any violations of professional ethics or use manipulation techniques in the presentation of the monitored topic. The televisions [Jurnal TV](#), [PRO TV Chişinău](#), and [Accent TV](#) produced news in the same manner, without violations of professional ethics or manipulation techniques.

**Unimedia.info** published two news stories on this topic. [In the first one](#), the portal mentioned the proposals to change the justice system that were voiced at the press conference. [In the second one](#), which spoke about the *“justice reform scheme, drawn with a pen on an A4 sheet and presented by Igor Dodon,”* **Unimedia.info** had some **ironic accents:** *“‘Presidential’ presentation by Dodon.”*

**NTV Moldova** covered this topic [in the main newscast on August 28](#). This television mostly presented the opinion and “solutions” suggested by President Igor Dodon, giving to him over 50% of the duration of the news story. Thus, **NTV Moldova** used the **“national savior” manipulation technique**, which took the form of President Igor Dodon and the PSRM being presented in an exclusively positive context and suggesting that these people and/or political entities are the ones that will reform the justice system and will put an end to corruption.

[Televiziunea Centrală](#) covered this topic in a tendentious manner, focusing on the disagreements between PSRM and ACUM: *“President Dodon disagrees”;* *“Maia Sandu insists on these processes”;* *“Andrei Nastase will not give up the idea of appointing an expert from the EU.”* This television used:

- **Tendentious and manipulating headlines:** *“The prosecutor – the apple of discord?”;* *“ACUM and PSRM can’t agree on the prosecutor general”;*
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *„The Socialists and those from ACUM have a new disagreement. What is the apple of discord this time, find out soon”;* *“The election of the prosecutor general and the justice sector reform seem to be the apple of discord between allies ....”*

**Sputnik.md** favored and presented in a positive context a certain political actor (Igor Dodon), giving him quite a lot of airtime. At the same time, in the period of the case study (August 28-29, 2019), **Canal 3** and **Kp.md** did not cover the press conference about the new concept of the justice sector reform, which can be qualified as **omission**.

### Topic 3. President Igor Dodon’s Visits to Moscow and Brussels

**Context:** *On September 2, 2019, President Igor Dodon made a one-day working visit to Moscow, where the head of state had meetings with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak and with the Gazprom Director Alexey Miller. Several days later, on September 4-5, President Dodon made a visit to Brussels, where he met with European officials.*

**General conclusion.** *Some media outlets provided excessive airtime to the coverage of the two visits, describing the president’s agenda in the smallest detail (NTV Moldova, Accent TV), opening all newscasts in the period of September 2-5, 2019 with information on the monitored topic. Other outlets aired news on this topic only at the end of newscasts, mentioning them as an aside (Jurnal*

TV, TV8). *The most serious violations of professional ethics were mixture of facts with opinions (Prime TV), generalization (NTV Moldova), irony (Televiziunea Centrală), tendentious headlines (Prime TV), failure to clearly mark opinion articles (Kp.md), and references to sources that cannot be checked (Canal 3). As for manipulation techniques, the “national savior” technique was the “favorite” (Prime TV, Kp.md, Sputnik.md).*

**Prime TV** covered both visits made by Igor Dodon – the one to Moscow and the one to Brussels – in the main newscasts on September [2](#), [3](#), and [5](#). The information was presented from a single perspective, and the main actor of the news (the head of state) appeared in a negative light, being presented in a tendentious and biased manner. **Prime TV** used:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“President Igor Dodon again went to Moscow, where he met Dmitry Kozak, who contributed to the creation of the PSRM-ACUM alliance”;*
- **Manipulating and tendentious headlines:** *“Sterile discussions”;* *“Demands for NATO”;*
- **“National savior” (“messiah”) manipulation technique:** **Prime TV** presented Igor Dodon in an exclusively negative light (“**internal enemy**” technique), as a politician and public official unable to solve a problem to the benefit of citizens (reduction of the gas price). At the same time, this television’s journalists presented the Democratic Party (PDM) and its representatives as the only political force that managed to do this in the past through concrete actions: *“In March last year, the gas price was reduced by over 20% at the request of the Government led by the Democrat Pavel Filip.”*

**Canal 3**, in newscasts on September [2](#) and [3](#), presented information only about Igor Dodon’s visit to Moscow, omitting the one to Brussels. In addition, this television covered the topic according to the same scenario, using the same footage and text as **Prime TV**. Moreover, **Canal 3** had **references to sources that cannot be checked:** *“Kozak, who is considered to be the founder of the PSRM-ACUM alliance ....”*

**PRO TV Chișinău** covered both visits of President Dodon in a neutral and unbiased manner on September [2](#) and [5](#). **TV8** did the same in its newscast on [September 2](#), regarding the visit to Moscow, committing no violations of professional ethics and using no manipulation techniques. However, in the coverage of the visit to Brussels, [in the newscast on September 6](#), **TV8** did not cover the topic as such, but made a tangential story, focused on the “flight attendant” role of the head of state during his return from Belgium. Thus, **TV8** used **irony:** *“Dodon in the role of flight attendant,” “... the passengers’ applauds were not quite loud,” “... the head of state has a special relationship with airlines.”*

**Moldova 1** covered both visits of President Igor Dodon in the *Mesager* newscasts on September [2](#) and [5](#). The public television presented information in a neutral manner, without violations of professional ethics and/or manipulation techniques. **Jurnal TV** also covered the topic in an unbiased manner on September [2](#) and [5](#).

**Televiziunea Centrală** covered the topic in a tendentious manner, presenting Igor Dodon in an exclusively negative light. At the same time, this television’s journalists used:

- **Irony / Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“The political agenda of Moldova began in Moscow, at least according to what Igor Dodon told the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak”;* *“The head of state ... is again ... in Russia. But while so far he used to promise a reduction of the price for Russian gas, this time he hopes to have it at least not grow”;*
- **Reference to sources that cannot be checked / Presentation of opinions as facts:** *“In his turn, Dmitry Kozak, who is considered to be the creator of the ACUM-PSRM alliance, welcomed the visit of the delegation.”*

**NTV Moldova** massively covered both events in newscasts of September 2-5 (2, 3, 4, 5), opening all of them with news about Igor Dodon's visits to Moscow/Brussels. **NTV Moldova** presented the president in a complimentary and exclusively positive manner, and committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** "... Igor Dodon underlined that once the crisis in bilateral relations was overcome by removal of the former anti-Russian regime from Chisinau, serious preconditions for the development of deep Moldovan-Russian cooperation appeared";
- **"National savior" manipulation technique:** "The import price of natural gas in Moldova will not increase if President Igor Dodon manages to convince the partners in Moscow to keep the current tariffs"; "Following the talks with Russian partners, a solution has been found, said President Igor Dodon";
- **Lack of the right to reply:** "Igor Dodon said that the former government artificially maintained gas prices." Thus, the president directly accused the Filip Government and the Democratic Party, and **NTV Moldova** journalists failed to ensure their right to reply;
- **Tendentious headlines / Generalization:** "Moldova does not want into NATO." **NTV Moldova** made this conclusion from an opinion poll to generalize the option shared by a part of citizens, be it even a majority, which cannot be phrased as "Moldova does not want ...."

**Accent TV**, in the newscasts in the period of September 2-5 (2, 3, 4, 5), covered the two visits according to the same scenario, using the same footage and text as **NTV Moldova**.

**Kp.md** presented Igor Dodon in a complimentary and exclusively positive manner, thus using the **"national savior" manipulation technique:** ["Coming home in applause: The president of Moldova returned to Chisinau by economy class. He came back from Brussels after an official visit"](#); ["The president of Moldova to NATO secretary: Moldova will not join NATO!"](#) At the same time, **Kp.md** failed to clearly mark opinion articles, publishing a material by Socialist MP Bogdan Tirdea, ["Dodon is a fighter: No president of Moldova has yet spoken with the NATO secretary so directly and decisively,"](#) but failing to indicate that it was an opinion article.

**Sputnik.md** presented Igor Dodon in an exclusively positive manner. Both visits were praised and described as a major success for Moldova and, especially, for the president (**"national savior" manipulation technique**).

#### **Topic 4. Divestiture of Parliamentary Immunity and Detention of Tauber and Apostolova, MPs**

*Context: On September 16, 2019, the interim Prosecutor General Dumitru Robu came to the plenary meeting of the Parliament with the request that Marina Tauber MP and Reghina Apostolova MP from the parliamentary group of the "Sor" Party be divested of their immunity. In protest, the parliamentary group of the "Sor" Party left the plenary meeting. After debates, 56 MPs voted for approval of the decision to divest them of immunity. In the evening of that day, the two MPs were detained in Orhei for 72 hours by the officers of the National Anticorruption Center.*

**General conclusion.** Some media outlets covered the event in a fair and unbiased manner (PRO TV Chişinău, Jurnal TV, Moldova 1, and TV8), while other outlets (Televiziunea Centrală and Kp.md) chose a tendentious approach. Some of the most "popular" violations were tendentious headlines, generalization, labeling, or even fakes. The most frequent violation was, however, failure to ensure the right to reply and/or opinion to the persons accused (Prime TV, Televiziunea Centrală, Kp.md, Unimedia.info, NTV Moldova).

**Prime TV** mostly covered the topic in a neutral and unbiased manner. However, in one of the news stories on the topic **Prime TV** had to ask for an opinion/reply the Prosecutor General's Office, which was directly accused by Aurel Colenco, the lawyer of Reghina Apostolova (**lack of the right to opinion/reply**).

**Canal 3** presented information in approximately the same manner, with the same statements, sources, and text as **Prime TV**. In several instances, **Canal 3** used **mixture of facts with opinions**: “A new explosion in Moldovan politics. Marina Tauber and Reghina Apostolova were detained today by prosecutors for 72 hours.”

**Televiziunea Centrală** covered the topic in a tendentious and biased manner. Moreover, it was given over 13 minutes of airtime in the newscast on September 16, which is nearly half of the entire newscast. **Televiziunea Centrală** used:

- **Tendentious and manipulating headlines**: “Marina Tauber illegally detained by NAC [National Anticorruption Center]”; “The inhabitants of Orhei are taken aback”;
- **Priority information manipulation technique: Televiziunea Centrală** aired a news story in which it tried to suggest (**suggestion technique**) that the detention of the two MPs is illegal, and only in the further stories it presented other details of procedure;
- **False information**: “... NAC officers forced Marina Tauber into the car.” The footage aired by **Televiziunea Centrală** and by other media outlets, however, clearly shows that Marina Tauber got into the NAC car without being forced by officers;
- **Lack of the right to reply**: In one of the stories, the representatives of the “Sor” Party accused the current government and Igor Dodon of bringing the justice system under their control, but **Televiziunea Centrală** failed to ensure the accused their right to reply;
- **Generalization**: “The inhabitants of Orhei are taken aback ...”; “The Orheians are outraged by the illegal actions of prosecutors and police ....”

**NTV Moldova** covered the monitored topic in the [newscast on September 16](#). Overall, **NTV Moldova** presented information in a neutral manner, with the exception of one **failure to ensure the right to opinion** (Marina Tauber and Reghina Apostolova). **Accent TV** covered the topic using the same scenario, text, and footage as **NTV Moldova**. **PRO TV Chișinău**, **TV8**, **Jurnal TV**, the public television **Moldova 1**, and **Sputnik.md** covered the topic in a neutral and unbiased manner, without violations or professional ethics or manipulation techniques. **Unimedia.info** generally did the same, with the exception of one **failure to ensure the right to reply**: “... Marina Tauber said she was expecting that, and that Igor Dodon is to blame.” This portal should have asked Igor Dodon for a reply, given he was mentioned/accused [in news](#).

**Kp.md** published five news stories/reports on the monitored topic on September 16. **One** of them was taken from **Aif.md**, and the remaining four were its own product. In its own stories, **Kp.md** committed several violations of professional ethics:

- **Lack of the right to reply**: “Denis Ulanov called Marina Tauber’s and Reghina Apostolova’s divestiture of parliamentary immunity a political order and a personal revenge of Igor Dodon against the party chairman Ilan Sor.” **Kp.md** had to ensure the right to reply to Igor Dodon, directly accused by one of the sources in the news story;
- **Tendentious headlines**: “Video with the detention of “Sor” Party MPs: The angry crowd tried to get Marina Tauber out of the police’s hands”;
- **Generalization**: “According to experts, the police was too polite with the people gone wild”;
- **Reference to sources that cannot be checked**: “According to our sources, the MPs of the “Sor” Party were not planning to flee”; “... the source told us.” Also, in one of the articles **Kp.md** used a collage, and its source was shown to be “popular art from social networks,” which cannot be considered as correct indication of the source it was taken from;

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“However, both Tauber and Apostolova were detained in Orhei. Do you see the logic in it? Still, it exists ... What will happen with the arrested women – only time will tell... I don’t know why, but I believe it is only the beginning of arrests of those involved in the theft of the billion.”*

## Topic 5. Sandu Government at 100 days

**Context:** *On September 23, 2019, the Association of Sociologists and Demographers of the Republic of Moldova released the opinion poll “Maia Sandu Government at 100 days in the opinion of the population.” The same day, September 23, the Democratic Party (PDM) organized a briefing, where they made statements about the first 100 days of the Sandu Government. On September 24, Prime Minister Maia Sandu, accompanied by some of the members of the cabinet, presented the Report on the Government’s work in the first 100 days.*

**General conclusion.** *For many of the monitored media outlets, what the media called the “story” of Maia Sandu was more important than the report itself. Other outlets used this topic to focus (only) on negative things and on the mistakes of the current Government, comparing it with the previous one (Prime TV, Canal 3). Nearly all monitored media outlets committed violations of professional ethics.*

**Prime TV** covered the topic in a tendentious and unbalanced manner. This television aired news about the report on the first 100 days of the Government both in the newscast on [September 23](#) (PDM briefing where the party spoke about its opinion of the Government’s work), and in the one on [September 24](#) (news about the presentation of the Government’s report). **Prime TV** used:

- **Priority information manipulation technique:** In the newscast on September 23, the day before the presentation of the Government’s report, **Prime TV** reported from the PDM briefing, where its representatives resorted to a comparison: they presented themselves in an exclusively positive light, as a party that held the executive power between 2016 and 2019 (“**national savior**” manipulation technique), while accusing the current country’s leadership of the poor situation in the country (“**scapegoat**” manipulation technique). *“Maia Sandu did not present a report for this period; instead, the former prime minister Pavel Filip made an alternative report”;*
- **Lack of the right to reply:** The phrase *“The current Government’s representatives have not yet reacted to the report of the Democratic opposition”* cannot be qualified as ensuring the right to reply;
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“The prime minister maintained a lyrical tone during the entire 20-minute presentation ...”;* *“Maia Sandu held to the narrative line and closed the speech with a happy end”;* *“At the presentation of the report, there were more flags than ministers in the room”;*
- **Change of accents / Suggestion:** *“Maia Sandu said that the Government managed to get loans from external partners, but the money will have to be returned by citizens”;* *“The list of failures was shorter”;*
- **Information blurring technique:** *“... Minister Andrei Nastase did not attend the event. In the past, however, he used to come uninvited to meetings attended nu the prime minister.”* In this case, **Prime TV** manipulated by not informing media consumers correctly, intentionally omitting the reason why Andrei Nastase did not attend the event – his participation in the campaign for local elections.

**Canal 3** covered the topic in a tendentious and biased manner, using the same scenario, sources, text, and footage as **Prime TV**. Among other things, this television used:

- **Priority information manipulation technique / Biased selection of opinions:** In the [newscast on September 23](#), **Canal 3** aired the story “*Unmet expectations*,” which was based on a vox pop and contained the opinions (all negative) of several people about the work of the Sandu Government. Thus, this television anticipated the release of the Government’s report at 100 days by disseminating opinions;
- **Generalization:** “... *political analysts also believe that the changes that occurred in politics in the last few months have negatively affected ...*”;
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “*In a slightly euphoric atmosphere, Maia Sandu presented today the Report on the work of the Government in the first 100 days. The document is full of metaphors and lacks concrete achievements*”; “*Overall, without much modesty, Maia Sandu firmly concluded that the current Government is the most honest of all times.*”

**PRO TV Chişinău** had one case of **mixture of facts with opinions**: “*At 100 days from the coming of the Sandu Government, people have not understood much. Moldovans say either that it is too little time for conclusions, or that nothing notable happened.*” Otherwise, the information was presented in a neutral and unbiased manner. **TV8** had a similar approach, with the exception of one case of **irony**: “*Directors can make a film out of the Government’s 100 day report.*”

The public television **Moldova 1** did not violate professional ethics or use manipulation techniques in the coverage of this topic. The same situation we found at **Jurnal TV**, which covered the presentation of the Government’s report in detail (about 10 minutes of airtime).

**Televiziunea Centrală** focused exclusively on the negative aspects of the Report, presenting information in a tendentious and biased manner, by using:

- **Tendentious headlines:** “*Report with rats and ships*”;
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “*Maia Sandu came to report with only two of the nine ministers, and she delivered a syrupy speech full of metaphors*”; “*Finishing with metaphors, the prime minister did not hesitate to throw stones into the garden of the former leadership, accusing them of all evils and making excuses for herself ...*”; “*Maia Sandu boasted of the series of dismissals and decapitation of public institutions, suggesting that clean-ups will continue*”;
- **Generalization:** “*Political analysts ... and members of the PSRM-ACUM alliance, including Octavian Ticu and Lilian Carp, criticized ...*”; “*Moldovans say that almost nothing has been done.*”

**Sputnik.md** [failed to ensure the right to reply/opinion to those accused](#) (PDM) by one of the sources (Maia Sandu). Also, **Sputnik.md** had one case of mixture of facts with opinions: “*Although so far we could see only detention of people who had direct or indirect connection with the former leadership, the prime minister promises that the current leadership is focused on increasing the well-being of citizens and on building a fair justice system that cannot be influenced by politics.*” **Unimedia.info** also informed the public in a neutral and unbiased manner, with a small exception: it **did not ensure the right to reply to the accused** in one of its articles.

**NTV Moldova** resorted to **biased selection and interpretation of data, implicitly change of accents**: “*More and more Moldovans believe that things in our country are going into a good direction. This is the conclusion of the Association of Sociologists and Demographers of Moldova... According to the survey, over 25% are pleased with the way the country is governed, and 23% are not quite pleased... At the same time, 49% are saying that Maia Sandu’s Government is capable of changing things for the better, while 42% are skeptical about it ....*” **Accent TV** used the **information blurring technique**: it made separate news stories about the big popularity of President Igor Dodon and the PSRM and about the “geopolitical preferences of Moldova,” omitting information about the work of the Government. **Accent TV** also used:

- **Generalization / Reference to sources that cannot be checked:** *“Analysts believe that these days are crucial for understanding and assessing the real intentions of the new Government.”*

**Kp.md** did not publish any news on the monitored topic, which can be qualified as **omission**.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the reporting period, July 1 – September 29, 2019, all 12 monitored media outlets committed violations of professional ethics and/or used at least one manipulation technique in the presentation of information. The main violation committed by editorial teams is still mixture of facts with opinions, followed by failure to ensure the right to reply and generalization.

Tendentious and ironic headlines remain in the list of “preferences” of several media outlets (**Prime TV, Televiziunea Centrală, Canal 3, NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Kp.md**). While labeling and negative image transfer are no longer present, the cases of false information returned (**Televiziunea Centrală, Prime TV, and Canal 3**), and are increasingly frequent references to sources that cannot be checked (**Canal 3, Televiziunea Centrală, Kp.md, Accent TV**). At the same time, ironic approaches are more intense now (**TV8, Unimedia.info, Televiziunea Centrală, and Accent TV**).

The most often used manipulation techniques for the 12 monitored media outlets were “internal enemy” technique, which usually goes together with the “national savior” technique (**Prime TV, NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Televiziunea Centrală, Sputnik.md, Canal 3**), and the priority information technique (**Televiziunea Centrală, Prime TV, Canal 3**). Cases of generalization are also more frequent (**Prime TV, NTV Moldova, Televiziunea Centrală, Kp.md, Canal 3, Accent TV**), as well as blurring of information (**Prime TV, Accent TV**).

Politicization of topics and their presentation from the perspective of political preferences continued. Thus, televisions **Prime TV** and **Canal 3** mostly aired the same news content, which favored the Democratic Party (PDM) and its representatives and presented in an exclusively negative light the ACUM Electoral Bloc and the Party of Socialists (PSRM). **NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV**, in their turn, favored President Igor Dodon and the PSRM in its news reports. **Jurnal TV** sometimes politicized topics, favoring ACUM and certain politicians (Andrei Nastase).

The monitoring of **Sputnik.md** showed violations such as the lack of the right to reply and the “national savior” manipulation technique, while **Kp.md** used generalization, omission, and tendentious headlines. The public television **Moldova 1** used suggestion and the “national savior” technique. **PRO TV Chișinău** overall covered the majority of the monitored topics in a fair, neutral, and unbiased manner. **TV8** slightly abused irony, and **Unimedia.info** several times “forgot” to ensure the right to reply to the accused.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Audiovisual Council (AC), based on article 75 (*Responsibilities of the Audiovisual Council*) and article 86 (*Cooperation with civil society*) of the [Code of Audiovisual Media Services of the Republic of Moldova](#), should take note of the findings and monitor the televisions, the content of which has been reported to deliver manipulating information. These actions are necessary in order to identify violations of legislation and apply sanctions.
- The editors of TV stations are urged to supervise the editorial content so that it complies with the mission of the media to inform the public and correctly present the reality, and not with the desire of political circles to promote their interests and attack opponents.
- Reporters are encouraged to report all relevant facts on events in an unbiased manner and after verifying information, not selectively or unilaterally.

- Media consumers are advised to seek information in several media sources, in order to avoid the risk of receiving wrong and manipulating information.