



Monitoring Report

Elements of Propaganda, Information Manipulation, and Violation of Journalism Ethics in the Local Media Space

April 1 - June 30, 2019

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GENERAL INFORMATION

From April 1 to June 30, 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 analysed 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 information manipulation 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 for professionals in the field. Another objective was to contribute to increasing consumer awareness of the risks of getting information from unsafe sources. Monitoring helps consumers understand how the media can manipulate and enables them 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, Jurnal TV, TV8, PRO TV Chişinău.

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 analysed 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 analysed by referring to the Journalist's Code of Conduct¹, guidelines and recommendations in the sphere of responsible and high-quality media², and the notions of **manipulation** and **propaganda**, as defined in the Dictionary of Sociology³.

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 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”.*

¹ Moldovan Journalist's Code of Conduct, http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod_d_rom.pdf

² Guide of Style with Ethical Standards for Journalists, API, http://www.unicef.org/moldova/Ghid_Etica_Journalist_RO.pdf

³ 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>

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 behaviours. 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 April 1 and June 30, 2019:

- Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM for the creation of a parliamentary coalition (April 11, 2019);
- The Family March and the “I’m OK” Solidarity March (May 18-19, 2019);
- The protest organized by ACUM against the fuel price increase and the counter protest organized by a group of young people (May 21, 2019);
- Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu (June 8, 2019);
- Collapse of a residential building in the town of Otaci (June 19-20, 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:

Labelling - Prime TV (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM; Protest organized by ACUM; Collapse of a residential building in Otaci); Unimedia.info (Protest organized by ACUM); Canal 3 (Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu);

Selective presentation/truncation of facts, opinions, and statements - Prime TV (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM; Protest organized by ACUM; Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu; Collapse of a residential building in Otaci); Televiziunea Centrală (Protest organized by ACUM);

Lack of the right to reply - Accent TV (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM; Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu); Prime TV, Canal 3 (Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu; Collapse of a residential building in Otaci); Unimedia.info (Protest organized by ACUM);

Mixture of facts with opinions - Prime TV, Canal 3 (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM; Protest organized by ACUM; Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu; Collapse of a residential building in Otaci); NTV Moldova (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM; The Family March and the “I’m OK” Solidarity March); Accent TV (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM); Televiziunea Centrală (Protest organized by ACUM; Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu); TV8 (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM); Sputnik.md (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM); Jurnal TV (Protest organized by ACUM);

References to sources that cannot be checked - Televiziunea Centrală (Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu);

Spreading of false information or statements - Televiziunea Centrală (Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu);

Generalization - Televiziunea Centrală (Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu); Prime TV (Protest organized by ACUM); TV8 (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM);

Irony - TV8 (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM); Jurnal TV (Protest organized by ACUM);

Suggestion - Prime TV, Canal 3 (The Family March and the “I’m OK” Solidarity March; Protest organized by ACUM; Collapse of a residential building in Otaci); Kp.md (Protest organized by ACUM);

Omission - Canal 3 (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM); Televiziunea Centrală, Jurnal TV (The Family March and the “I’m OK” Solidarity March); NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Sputnik.md (Protest organized by ACUM);

Blurring - Moldova 1 (Protest organized by ACUM); Accent TV (Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu);

Internal and/or external enemy technique - Prime TV, Canal 3 (Protest organized by ACUM);

Priority information technique - Sputnik.md (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM); Prime TV, Canal 3, Televiziunea Centrală (Protest organized by ACUM);

“National savior” (“messiah”) technique - Prime TV, Canal 3, NTV Moldova, Accent TV (Collapse of a residential building in Otaci); Accent TV (Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu);

Manipulation by means of video and/or audio - Prime TV, Canal 3, Jurnal TV (Protest organized by ACUM); Canal 3 (Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu); Prime TV (Collapse of a residential building in Otaci);

Negative image transfer - Accent TV (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM); Prime TV, Canal 3, NTV Moldova (The Family March and the “I’m OK” Solidarity March);

Tendentious headlines - Prime TV (Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu; Collapse of a residential building in Otaci); Accent TV, Televiziunea Centrală (Post-election negotiations between PSRM and ACUM); NTV Moldova (The Family March and the “I’m OK” Solidarity March);

Change of accents - Prime TV, Canal 3, Televiziunea Centrală (Protest organized by ACUM);

Publication of unverified information and/or figures - Televiziunea Centrală, Kp.md, Unimedia.info, Jurnal TV (Protest organized by ACUM).

I. DATA ANALYSIS

Topic 1. Negotiations between PSRM and ACUM for creation of a parliamentary coalition

Background: *On April 10, 2019, the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM) officially invited the parliamentary groups of PPDA (Dignity and Truth Platform Party) and PAS (Action and Solidarity Party) (together forming the ACUM Electoral Bloc) to negotiations for creation of a governing coalition. The meeting took place the following day, April 11, 2019. Each of the two political entities came up with a number of conditions. After the meeting, PSRM representatives said they would discuss the conditions at the meeting of their party’s republican council the following day, April 12, 2019.*

General conclusion: The coverage of the topic differed depending on the political preferences of the 12 monitored media outlets. Many of them approached the topic in a tendentious and unbalanced manner, presenting the two political entities and their representatives either in negative or positive context, according to their owners’ attitude towards the two. Some outlets made abuse of labelling (Prime TV), others disproportionately selected and included the opinions of main actors (NTV Moldova, Sputnik.md), and a third group used irony (TV8), tendentious headlines and generalizations (Accent TV), as well as negative image transfer, without ensuring the right to reply to the persons concerned (Televiziunea Centrală).

Prime TV aired two news reports about the negotiations between PSRM and ACUM: one of them referred to the meeting of the two political entities, and the second one contained expert opinions about the negotiations. The information was presented in an unbalanced and tendentious manner. PSRM and its representatives were shown in a neutral context, while the members of ACUM - in an exclusively negative context. **Prime TV** in its two reports used the following techniques:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “*Veiled interests*”;

- **Repeated labelling:** “Discussions between PSRM and the PAS-PPDA binomial regarding the creation of parliamentary majority have failed”; “those of the PAS-PPDA binomial said they are not interested in getting certain positions... ”;
- **Unilateral and tendentious selection of opinions: Prime TV** included only the opinions of experts who claimed only that the discussions and negotiations between PSRM and ACUM had failed.

Canal 3 did not cover the topic of the negotiations between PSRM and ACUM in any of its newscasts, which can be qualified as *omission*.

NTV Moldova covered this topic in a disproportionate and tendentious manner, presenting ACUM and its representatives in a negative context, while PSRM appeared exclusively in a positive context. For example, while ACUM representatives came “*absolutely unprepared*”, “*delivered populist statements*”, and “*made verbal attacks*”, PSRM representatives wanted a constructive dialogue. **NTV Moldova** also committed:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “...in the discussion about the main public offices, ACUM insisted for Andrei Nastase to be speaker of the Parliament and Maia Sandu to be head of the Government. Socialists to hold no offices... ”;
- **Disproportionate airtime for statements:** PSRM had almost three times as much airtime for the statements of its representatives, while ACUM was disfavoured, being given much less airtime.

Accent TV delivered three news reports about the negotiations between PSRM and ACUM. The information was presented in an unbalanced and tendentious manner. PSRM appeared in a positive light, as a constructive party, while ACUM representatives - exclusively in a negative light. **Accent TV** used the following techniques:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “It appears that ACUM negotiators did not even try to have a look at socialists’ proposals”; “The position of ACUM was taken to pieces by Ghenadie Vaculovschi, too... ”;
- **Failure to ensure the right to reply:** In the story about the post-event statements of the two political entities, **Accent TV** offered airtime only for PSRM statements, while failing to grant ACUM the right to reply;
- **Unilateral and tendentious selection of opinions: Accent TV** included only the opinions of experts who supported the idea that PSRM “*showed openness and maximum flexibility*”, while “*the position of ACUM is unrealistic and doesn’t meet the expectations of its supporters*”;
- **Tendentious headlines / Generalization:** “Experts took the position of ACUM to pieces”.

Televiziunea Centrală used **ironic and tendentious headlines** (“*Resentment, heated arguments, and trading of offices. This is what the first PSRM-ACUM meeting looked like*”); **referred to sources that cannot be checked (obscure sources)**; and resorted to **negative image transfer** (“*Also, they [political experts and analysts - author’s note] underlined that ACUM was created in order to save Filat, Platon, and Topa from jail*”). Having delivered these accusations (even if they came from “*some experts*”), **Televiziunea Centrală** had the obligation to offer the right to reply to ACUM representatives, which it failed to do.

PRO TV Chişinău covered the topic in a neutral and unbiased manner, having committed no violations of professional ethics and having used no manipulation techniques. **TV8**, too, presented the topic of negotiations in a mostly neutral and unbiased manner. However, this television had one case of **irony**: “*The miracle has happened. For the first time ever, ACUM and PSRM met face to face, but discussions came down to sharp phrases thrown to the opposite side of the table*”. **In the Mesager newscast on April 11, 2019**, the public television **Moldova 1** presented the information in a neutral and unbiased manner. **Jurnal TV** approached the topic in the same neutral and unbiased manner, having offered airtime for statements to all actors involved. This media outlet had no apparent violations of professional ethics and/or use of manipulation techniques.

Sputnik.md published two news stories about the negotiations between PSRM and ACUM. **One** of them referred to the meeting of the two political entities on April 11, 2019, and **the other one** presented the opinion of a political analyst (Valeriu Renita) about the negotiations. **Sputnik.md** used the “**priority information**” **manipulation technique**, having included an opinion in the headline of a news story (“*Decided: The PSRM-ACUM coalition will not exist*”), and then in the text mentioned that the issues that PSRM and ACUM had discussed will be analysed “*by the PSRM Republican Council*”.

Kp.md did not have its own content on the monitored topic. However, **Kp.md** published [an official press release](#) of PSRM, and four news stories taken from **AiF.md**. In its turn, **Unimedia.info** delivered [live video and text](#) from the negotiations between PSRM and ACUM. This portal did not violate professional ethics and did not use manipulation techniques in the information it published.

Topic 2. The Family March and the “I’m OK” Solidarity March

Background: On May 18, 2019, a “March of Silence” took place in Chisinau in support of the traditional family (the Family March), organized by the Metropolis of Moldova. The following day, May 19, the “I’m OK” Solidarity March took place in Chisinau, too, organized by the LGBTQI community of Moldova.

General conclusion: The two marches (the Family March and the march of the LGBTQI community) were used by some media outlets to exert a political impact on certain parties. For example, while Prime TV and Canal 3 used the “I’m OK” March to discredit some PAS representatives (Maia Sandu and Dumitru Alaiba) and to show them in a negative light, NTV Moldova and Accent TV used the Family March to cast a positive light on President Igor Dodon. Other media outlets covered these events in a somewhat discriminating manner (Sputnik.md, Kp.md).

Prime TV aired news about the [“I’m OK” Solidarity March](#) in its newscast on the same day. Overall, **Prime TV** presented information in a neutral manner, but at the end of the report it committed manipulation (**suggestion technique**) by including irrelevant information: “...Last March, a similar manifestation was attended by the PAS leader Maia Sandu”. Given that in Moldova the majority of the population perceives such events in a negative context, it is obvious that the station tried to make a **negative image transfer** from a social group onto a politician, suggesting that the PAS leader is part of this community. **Canal 3** aired news on both events, [the Family March](#) and the [“I’m OK” Solidarity March](#). In [one of the reports](#), **Canal 3** - just like **Prime TV** - used the **suggestion technique** as a means of manipulation: “The PAS president Maia Sandu is also solidary with the LGBT community. On March 8, 2018, she participated in a manifestation in support of their rights. In addition, in the autumn of 2016 the leader of a well-known organization promoting sexual minorities appealed to homosexuals and lesbians to vote for Maia Sandu in presidential elections” (**negative image transfer**).

PRO TV Chişinău covered both events, [one in the newscast on May 18](#), and [one the following day, May 19](#). **PRO TV Chişinău** presented information in an unbiased, neutral, and fair manner, avoiding manipulation or violation of professional ethics. The same was the coverage of the [Family March](#) and of the [“I’m OK” Solidarity March](#) on **TV8** and on **Moldova 1**, in the Mesager newscast on May [18](#) and [19](#).

Televiziunea Centrală and **Jurnal TV** did not cover any of the two events in their newscasts on May 18-20, which can be qualified as **omission**.

NTV Moldova presented both events in a tendentious, unbalanced and biased manner. While the two reports about the Family March had about seven minutes of airtime, the report about the “I’m OK” Solidarity March took 1.40 minutes. **NTV Moldova** politicized both events, having used the following techniques:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “...they prayed and carried slogans against the sin of homosexuality”;
- **Tendentious and ironic headlines:** “IN STEP WITH LGBT”;
- **Negative image transfer:** The television tried to suggest (**suggestion technique**) that the society perceives the events organized by the LGBTQI community negatively, and then claimed that the representatives of ACUM (Dumitru Alaiba and Maia Sandu) attend and support them;
- **Imbalance of sources and tendentious coverage:** While in the coverage of the Family March **NTV Moldova** included direct statements from its participants and organizers, the entire report about the “I’m OK” Solidarity March was based on the journalists’ paraphrasing of statements and information, with no direct statements by a source.

[In the main newscast of May 20, 2019](#), **Accent TV** covered only the Family March, in the same manner and according to the same scenario as **NTV Moldova**.

Sputnik.md published [a story about the Family March](#) on May 18 and [a story about the “I’m OK” Solidarity March](#) on May 19. **Sputnik.md** used pejorative and discriminating language, with several value judgments: “*The march of homosexuals in the center of Chisinau: Police issues an appeal*” (**generalization**); “*Where there is no love, there is nothing*”, said Marin Preda in his novel “*The Most Beloved of Earthlings*”. The great Romanian writer meant the pure and unconditional love between a man and a woman, which fulfils the Man and gives continuity to life”.

Kp.md published three materials on the monitored topic. [One of them](#) was a report about the funding of the “LGBT community in Moldova” (in the context of the March), but the text was not properly marked (news, opinion article, report) and was full of value judgments, mixture of facts with opinions, and irony.

Unimedia.info published five news stories/reports about the two events. The portal presented information in a neutral and unbiased manner, without violations of professional ethics or manipulation techniques.

Topic 3. The protest organized by ACUM against the fuel price increase and the counter protest organized by a group of young people

Background: On May 21, 2019, the electoral bloc ACUM announced that on May 23 it would organize a flash mob in front of the Government titled “Cut the Prices!” against the substantial increase of prices on fuel and on some foodstuffs. On the day of the protest, a group of young people organized in the same place a counter protest against ACUM.

General conclusion: Change of accents and the blurring technique were the violations of professional ethics committed by several of the monitored media outlets. Another violation was the reversal of the importance and course of events in the coverage of the topic: the counter protest was presented as the main news (Prime TV, Canal 3, Televiziunea Centrală), while the main event - the protest of ACUM - was presented on the second place. Other outlets used techniques of manipulation by means of video or audio (Prime TV, Jurnal TV), trying to deliver value judgments in addition to information and facts. At the same time, some outlets (NTV Moldova, Accent TV, Sputnik.md) ignored both events (*omission technique*).

Prime TV presented information in a tendentious and biased manner, committing several manipulation techniques and violations of professional ethics, such as:

- **Priority information technique:** **Prime TV** changed the logical course of the news/event, placing the emphasis on the counter protest and omitting the main news: “*The flash mob of PAS and PPDA against high prices on fuel*”. Thus, **Prime TV changed accents in the news**;
- **Repeated labelling:** “*The godson of the runaway criminal Victor Topa, PPDA leader Andrei Nastase relapsed*”; “*Instead, Nastase accepted to answer the questions of Jurnal TV, the television belonging to his godfather, runaway criminal Victor Topa*”; “*The puppet of runaway criminals Victor and Viorel Topa has intimidated the Publika TV reporter Oxana Bodnar...*”;
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “*Everything began at noon, when the leaders of PAS and PPDA brought only several dozens of people in front of the Government to protest against the growing fuel prices. They did so despite the fact that as MPs they have the competence to get involved and come up with solutions to this problem. Soon after, hundreds of young people organized a protest against ACUM, which got on the nerves of Andrei Nastase, who wrenched the microphone from a fellow member of his party*”;
- **Generalization:** “[*Andrei Nastase, author’s note*] *cursed at citizens*”. At the same time, **Prime TV** did not mention that the action of the young people was a provocation and was full of obscene messages (**selective presentation of facts**);
- **Internal enemy technique:** The event served as an opportunity to discredit a political entity (ACUM) and present it in a negative context;
- **Manipulation by means of video and sound:** **Prime TV** used video footage of Andrei Nastase during the manifestation, but it was edited, alternating black-and-white and colour images. Also, the television manipulated by means of sound. Such techniques were aimed at presenting Nastase in an exclusively negative context.

Canal 3 covered the events largely according to the same scenario and with the same approach as **Prime TV**. Thus, **Canal 3** committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“The leaders of PAS and PPDA expected to be joined at noon by people to protest against the growing fuel prices, but got unwanted guests instead”*;
- **Change of accents:** **Canal 3**, like **Prime TV**, placed the emphasis on the counter protest of the young people, failing to speak objectively about the reason of the action organized by ACUM;
- **Priority information technique:** At the same time, by the order of and approach to the coverage of events in the newscast, **Canal 3** intentionally manipulated the public. Thus, it first aired the comments and opinions of oil suppliers regarding the “political pressure from some parties and politicians”, and only then reported about the protest of ACUM (reversing the logic of events and information);
- **Manipulation by means of photos:** **Canal 3** [selected and published photos from the protest](#) where ACUM protesters appeared unattractive (e.g., ACUM leaders with their tongues out or mouths open, with aggressive expressions on their faces);
- **Internal enemy technique:** In the story about *“the explanations of oil suppliers”*, **Canal 3** claimed that *“politicians’ pressures [author’s note: it is obvious that they meant the representatives of ACUM] might leave the country without fuel”*. Thus, the representatives of one political entity (ACUM) appeared in a negative light and context, as the ones who wish to throw the country *“into crisis”*.

PRO TV Chişinău covered both events in a neutral and unbiased manner. **TV8** did the same, but [in the report](#) on this topic, it committed one violation of professional ethics, by **failing to offer the right to opinion/reply** to the representatives of the Democratic Party and/or to Vlad Plahotniuc, who were mentioned or accused by some sources in the report. **Moldova 1** placed the [news](#) in the middle of the newscast of May 23, 2019, which may be qualified as the **blurring technique**, given that for the majority of media outlets it was top news.

Televiziunea Centrală presented the topic in a tendentious manner, having committed violations of professional ethics and manipulation techniques.

- **Priority information technique:** **Televiziunea Centrală** anticipated the protest of ACUM with a report on *“the appeal of oil suppliers”*, who asked for pressure against them to stop, *“or the country will get into crisis”*;
- **Dissemination of unverified information and figures:** *“About 40 members and supporters of PAS and PPDA... were catcalled by several hundred counter protesters”*;
- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“...the members and supporters of PAS and PPDA organized a political action, speculating on the topic of prices...”*;
- **Change of accents:** **Televiziunea Centrală** focused a lot on the information about the counter protest, and in covering the protest of ACUM it presented truncated and very ambiguous information. Its news was that *“Sandu and Nastase were catcalled in front of the Government”*, and not that ACUM and its supporters organized a protest against growing prices on fuel and other products (**blurring technique**);
- **Selective presentation of information and statements:** The station included only the information and statements that referred to the counter protest, and no statement of ACUM representatives.

Kp.md published [a single report](#) on the monitored topic. The information was presented mostly in a neutral and unbiased manner. However, **Kp.md** committed the following violations:

- **Dissemination of unverified information and figures:** *“At noon, Andrei Nastase and Maia Sandu brought their 50 ACUM supporters”*; *“A loud column started into the direction of the Government. It was more numerous, with 200-300 people”*;
- **Suggestion:** *“The police, who were there in bigger numbers than ACUM supporters, formed a wall that divided protesters”*. The **Kp.md** reporter **suggested** that the protest of ACUM was not representative and had no impact.

Unimedia.info published ten news reports about the protest and counter protest of May 23. In some of them, **Unimedia.info** committed violations of professional ethics:

- **Presentation of unverified information:** *“A former MP from the Democratic Party, Constantin Tutu, was in front of the bikers who came to the counter protest against ACUM. They were the ones who blocked the flash mob organized in front of the Government against the growing prices on fuel and potatoes”*;

- **Labelling:** “Dozens of suspicious young people with covered faces appeared in front of the Government and are crying out offensive words.” “Suspicious” here is a pejorative qualification;
- **Lack of the right to reply/opinion:** **Unimedia.info** mentioned about a person who, according to some sources (PAS member Sergiu Litvinenco), allegedly coordinated the counter protest of the young people. **Unimedia.info**, however, did not try to find out the opinion of the former in order to ensure his right to reply.

Jurnal TV also committed several violations of professional ethics:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “Tutu, protester under cover”;
- **Presentation of unconfirmed facts:** “The bikers who jammed with their noise the protest organized by ACUM... were most probably led by the former Democratic Party MP Constantin Tutu. There are at least three signs that betrayed him despite his wearing a helmet”; “...one of the protesters, who allegedly was the Democratic Party MP Constantin Tutu.” However, **Jurnal TV** tried to check the information and to offer the right to reply to the persons referred to in the news, who “did not answer the telephone”;
- **Manipulation by means of audio:** The images of Constantin Tutu, selected from social networks, were accompanied by a soundtrack;
- **Ironic headlines:** “Cavcaliuc is guessing.”

NTV Moldova, **Accent TV**, and **Sputnik.md** did not cover the protest organized by ACUM or the counter protest of the young people, which can be qualified as *omission*.

Topic 4. Investiture of the Government led by Maia Sandu

Background: On June 8, 2019, 61 MPs of the PSRM and ACUM convened a meeting of the 10th Parliament of Moldova. At the meeting, the new parliamentary majority, formed of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova and the ACUM Electoral Bloc, chose Zinaida Greceanii as speaker, and President Igor Dodon nominated Maia Sandu for the position of prime minister. On the same day, the new Government was invested and took the oath of office.

General conclusion: Some media outlets presented facts in a totally biased manner, resorting to tendentious headlines, labels, and selective presentation of information (Prime TV, Canal 3). Other outlets used generalization and blurring and failed to offer the right to reply to the people referred to in their content (Accent TV, Televiziunea Centrală). Presentation of events through the prism of political preferences of owners is still the main challenge for the monitored media outlets. Thus, for some media the investiture of the Government was a “strange” and “illegal” fact (Prime TV, Canal 3, Televiziunea Centrală), while for others it was a “victory” (Jurnal TV, NTV Moldova, Accent TV).

Prime TV covered the investiture of the Sandu Government in a tendentious and biased manner, insisting on the “*illegality*” of the event. In fact, **Prime TV** committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions/Labelling:** “...strange things are happening at the Parliament, speaking about the pseudo-alliance of PSRM and ACUM... which is bizarre and strange”;
- **Lack of the right to reply:** **Prime TV** did not offer the right to reply/opinion to the representatives of ACUM, although they were repeatedly mentioned/accused in the news;
- **Selective presentation of information, footage, and statements:** **Prime TV** included direct statements of the Democratic Party members regarding the event, but failed to present the opinions of ACUM;
- **Tendentious and manipulating headlines:** “*Illegal meeting.*”

Canal 3 covered the event like Prime TV, truncating information, presenting opinions rather than facts, and limiting the right to reply of those concerned. The station committed:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “ACUM MPs met at the Parliament, where, in violation of the law, they chose those who would hold public offices”; “Sandu swore to respect the Constitution at the very time when she was violating it”;
- **Labelling:** “Her colleague in the binomial, Andrei Nastase, was appointed as deputy prime minister and minister of internal affairs. Obviously intentionally, he forgot to kiss the flag...”;

- **Suggestion:** “...both before and after the investiture, Igor Dodon shook Maia Sandu’s hand. During consultations, however, Maia Sandu and Andrei Nastase categorically refused to shake **his** hand”;
- **Manipulation by means of video:** The video fragment where Maia Sandu and Andrei Nastase refused to shake hands with Igor Dodon during consultations was inserted several times, one time showing that footage in slow motion;
- **Failure to ensure the right to reply/opinion:** Canal 3 failed to offer the right to reply to the representatives of ACUM, although they were referred to either directly or by other sources in the news.

[PRO TV Chişinău](#) presented the investiture of the Sandu Government in detail and did it in a neutral and unbiased manner, without violations of professional ethics or manipulation techniques. **Jurnal TV** delivered, on its online platform and on television, [live text with video inserts](#), including the ceremony of investiture of the Sandu Government, presenting information in a neutral and unbiased manner. **TV8** did the same, covering the event on television and on its online platform in a neutral and balanced manner. [In the special edition of June 8, 2019](#), **Moldova 1** covered the investiture of the Sandu Government in a neutral and unbiased manner.

On June 8 and 9, **Televiziunea Centrală** published on its website three articles that directly or indirectly referred to the investiture of the Sandu Government. However, all of them were taken from other media platforms (Stiri.md, the Facebook page of the MP Ion Ceban, the website of the Constitutional Court). At the same time, [in the newscast of June 10](#) **Televiziunea Centrală** covered the event in a tendentious manner and with several violations of professional ethics:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “...despite the Constitutional Court decision obliging Igor Dodon to dissolve the Parliament, PSRM and ACUM met the same night, created an alliance and distributed offices”; “so, socialists are singing to a different tune now, soon after the head of state declared we would have early elections”; “what they could not decide in three months, they decided overnight”;
- **Generalization / Reference to sources that cannot be checked:** “...only on Saturday night the Parliament voted for a new prime minister, which is, according to analysts, in violation of the Constitution”;
- **Ironic and tendentious headlines:** “Enemies turned into allies”;
- **False information:** “According to the Constitution, the 10th Parliament had to end the formation of the Government on Friday, June 7, 2019”. In fact, the Moldovan Constitution provides for three months, and not 90 days, for this purpose.

NTV Moldova published [one story](#) about the investiture of the Sandu Government, taken from **Noi.md**. In addition, on June 8, 2019, **NTV Moldova** had [a special newscast](#), in which it covered the event in detail. The information was presented without violations of professional ethics.

[In the newscast of June 8, 2019](#), **Accent TV** had two stories about the investiture of the new Government. The information was presented very briefly, and only at the end of the newscast. This can be qualified as an attempt to **blurring and selectively presenting information**. In addition, **Accent TV** committed the following violations:

- **The “national saviour” technique:** The president appears as the only person who solved the political crisis and fought back: “...After the Parliament’s leadership was elected and the Government was invested, President Igor Dodon came up with a word of guidance, underlining that today is a historic day for Moldova”;
- **Failure to ensure the right to reply:** In her speech, Maia Sandu accused the Democratic Party and Vlad Plahotniuc of usurpation of power in the state. **Accent TV** should have included the opinion of the party concerned, which it failed to do.

Sputnik.md, **Unimedia.info**, and **Kp.md** published three news stories about the investiture of the Sandu Government. The information was presented in a neutral and unbiased manner, without noticeable violations of professional ethics.

Topic 5. Collapse of a residential building in the town of Otaci

Background: In the evening of June 19, a nine-story residential building in the town of Otaci, Ocnita district, collapsed partially. During the day, anticipating the events, the employees of the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations evacuated the residents - 46 people. The next day, on June 20, the situation in Otaci was discussed at the Government meeting, and President Igor Dodon visited the site of the accident.

General conclusion: Several of the monitored media outlets focused on the tragedy and the drama of the event, appealing to the emotions of media consumers above all, and only then seeking to inform them. Several media outlets (Prime TV, Canal 2) took advantage of the tragedy to discredit certain political entities or politicians. For this, they used manipulation techniques and violated professional ethics, by resorting to labels, mixture of facts with opinions, tendentious headlines, manipulative selection of statements and information, suggestions, or the “national savior” technique.

Prime TV politicized the topic, taking advantage of it to discredit and/or accuse certain political entities and/or politicians (ACUM, Maia Sandu, Andrei Nastase, Igor Dodon). The information was presented in a tendentious manner. **Prime TV** broadcast a news story (“*The chairs have priority*”), suggesting (**suggestion technique**) that the Government (implicitly the parties PAS and PPDA) is somehow guilty of the tragedy and does nothing to solve it. **Prime TV** also committed the following violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** “*The leaders of PAS and PPDA are more concerned with offices than with the citizens’ problems*”; “*The government led by Maia Sandu and her deputy Andrei Nastase met today in Chisinau to decapitate several public institutions. It proves that appetite for chairs is at the top of the Government’s agenda. The prime minister did not find it necessary to convene an emergency meeting dedicated to aid for the victims, nor did he know whether he would go to Otaci*”;
- **Ironic and tendentious headlines:** “*The chairs have priority. The Sandu Government is watching the victims in Otaci from afar*”; “*Airplanes come first. Nastase wants to control civil aviation again*”;
- **Manipulation by means of images and of the structure of the news story:** **Prime TV** divided the screen into two, showing on one half intentionally selected footage from the Government meeting, where the members of the Cabinet appeared relaxed, smiling, shaking hands, and so on, while on the other half it showed footage from Otaci, with the collapse of the building and with people panicked and crying. By contrasting these images, **Prime TV** suggested that the Government and its members are not interested in the future of the Otaci residents and in their problems (**suggestion technique**). At the same time, journalists exacerbated the situation by manipulating the context and making tendentious comparisons: “*It is 11.00, and the members of the Sandu Government are ready to enter the air-conditioned meeting room and sit in soft chairs. The Government’s agenda has only one issue - the one of staffing. The crisis in Otaci was discussed briefly, and no concrete solutions for the victims were proposed. Distant and cold, Maia Sandu said the situation was under control and that she was managing the crisis over the phone. Immediately after checking this topic, they went on to discuss offices, which is the greatest concern for the current Government*”;
- **Failure to ensure the right to reply and opinion:** **Prime TV** did not include any direct statement of the Government members regarding the emergency in Otaci, although it was the main topic of the news. Moreover, reporters paraphrased and distorted the information - including statements - presented by the Government regarding the accident in Otaci;
- **Removal of statements from the context / tendentious editing of statements and images:** **Prime TV** manipulated by the manner in which it selected and edited statements. For example, it showed footage from the Government meeting, with Maia Sandu speaking about the dismissal of the head of a public institution, and immediately after that it included the statement of a victim, with him crying or saying he no longer has a home;
- **Labelling:** Referring to Andrei Nastase: “*[civil aviation... the sector he wants to capture again, like he did in 2000s together with his godfather, the runaway criminal Victor Topa*”;
- **Suggestion / “National saviour” technique:** **Prime TV** mentioned that Maia Sandu would not go to Otaci to analyse the situation on the site, suggesting that she has other priorities. At the same time, the journalists underlined that last year, when there was an explosion in an apartment in Chisinau, which took the lives of five people, “*the prime minister at the time, Pavel Filip, came onto the site soon after the tragedy, and the next morning he convened an emergency meeting*”.

Canal 3 covered the events in Otaci in the same manner and according to the same scenario as **Prime TV**, using approximately the same manipulation techniques and committing the same violations:

- **Mixture of facts with opinions:** *“At 11.00, over 12 hours after the tragedy in Otaci, the ministers led by Maia Sandu hurried to the Government’s meeting room. The agenda had a single topic, the one of staffing. The tragedy in Otaci was addressed as an aside, while dozens of people in that town... were waiting for help from the government”;*
- **Suggestion / “National saviour” technique,** the image attached onto Pavel Filip: *“When such incidents happen, the government usually creates crisis cells or convenes the emergency commission, like the former prime minister Pavel Filip did after the last year’s explosion in Chisinau”.*

PRO TV Chisinau, **TV8**, and **Jurnal TV** included stories about the accident in Otaci into their newscasts on June 20, 2019. The three televisions presented the information in detail, in a neutral and unbiased manner, without manipulation or violation of professional ethics. **Moldova 1** and **Televiziunea Centrală** presented the topic in the same manner.

NTV Moldova and **Accent TV** gave to the monitored topic about one third of their newscast on June 20, 2019. The two televisions placed a positive accent on the involvement of PSRM and its representatives, especially of President Igor Dodon. Such interpretation of the event can be qualified as the **“national saviour” manipulation technique**.

Sputnik.md published seven news stories on the monitored topic on June 19 and 20, 2019. It focused on the drama and the tragedy of the event: *“Terrifying: A nine-story building collapsed in Otaci - Video”*; *“Terrible images: The moment of collapse of the building in Otaci - Video”*.

Sputnik.md appealed to readers’ emotions, which is not allowed in news, the primary purpose of which is to inform the public. **Kp.md**, which published five news stories and reports on the topic, also chose in some of these materials to focus on the drama and the tragedy of the event: *“Fear and terror in the North of Moldova: A nine-story building collapsed”*; *“The chief emergency officer of Moldova: There could still be people in the collapsed building”*.

Unimedia.info published six news stories about the accident in Otaci. The information was presented in a neutral and unbiased manner, without violations of professional ethics or manipulation techniques.

CONCLUSIONS

In the reporting period, April 1 - June 30, 2019, all the 12 monitored media outlets committed violations of professional ethics and/or used at least one manipulation technique in the coverage of the five selected topics. The main violation, committed by all 12 outlets, is the mixture of facts with opinions. The second most common violation is selective presentation of facts, opinions, and statements, as well as failure to ensure the right to reply to the persons referred to or accused.

Tendentious and ironic headlines were used more often by some outlets (**Prime TV**, **Accent TV**, **Televiziunea Centrală**, and **NTV Moldova**), and for some televisions the most common problem is labelling (**Prime TV**, **Canal 3**). The negative image transfer technique was also quite frequently used against some politicians (**Accent TV**, **NTV Moldova**, **Canal 3**, **Prime TV**), followed by change of accents, which nearly caused distortion of news (**Televiziunea Centrală**, **Prime TV**, **Canal 3**). In addition, between April 1 and June 30, 2019, cases of manipulation by means of video and/or sound were the most numerous of the past two years of monitoring (**Prime TV**, **Canal 3**, **Jurnal TV**). Furthermore, in certain topics, some media (**Sputnik.md**, **Kp.md**) focused on the tragedy and the drama of events, seeking to play on the public’s emotions rather than to provide information.

In this monitoring period, several media outlets again failed to avoid generalizations (**Televiziunea Centrală**, **Prime TV**, **TV8**), while others omitted some topics (**Canal 3**, **Televiziunea Centrală**, **NTV Moldova**, **Accent TV**, **Sputnik.md**) or blurred some pieces of information (**Accent TV**).

Politicization of topics and their presentation from the perspective of political preferences of media owners have continued. For example, **Prime TV** and **Canal 3** had nearly the same news content, favouring the Democratic Party and its representatives and showing in a negative light the electoral bloc ACUM. In their turn, **NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV** favoured in their news the Party of Socialists and President Igor Dodon.

Sputnik.md had violations such as mixture of facts with opinions, omission, and priority information technique; **Kp.md** used suggestion and published unverified information/figures. **Jurnal TV** politicized some topics, favouring ACUM and certain politicians (Andrei Năstase, Maia Sandu). The public television **Moldova 1** blurred information in some topics. **PRO TV Chişinău, TV8, and Unimedia.info** provided mostly fair, neutral, and unbiased coverage of the topics. However, **TV8** and **Unimedia.info** had small errors: ironic accents and generalizations (**TV8**), unverified information and lack of the right to reply (**Unimedia.info**).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Broadcasting Council (BC), based on article 75 (*Responsibilities of the Broadcasting 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, 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.