



Monitoring Report No. 8

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

August 1, 2017- October 1, 2017

*The report was developed by the Independent Journalism Center within the **Media campaign against false and biased information** [STOP FALS!](#), conducted by the Association of Independent Press (API), Independent Journalism Center (IJC) and Association of Independent TV Journalists (ATVJI).*

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

From 1 August 2017 to 1 October 2017, the Independent Journalism Center monitored 12 media institutions – news portals and TV channels, to identify whether disseminated media content breached ethical norms and contained elements of information manipulation. Monitoring team analyzed the way these media institutions covered events of public interest in politics, economy, foreign policy, and other fields, and also if journalists observed professional and ethical norms, such as verification of information from a range of sources, diversity of opinions, and balance in news reports about conflicts, etc. By making reference to the Journalist Code of Ethics and other specialized academic works, it was possible to identify information manipulation processes and techniques.

The analysis was based on the assumption that news stories are primary source of content people consume to inform themselves about daily reality. Therefore, irrespective of media owners' views on political or economic matters, news stories must contain exclusively facts and not journalists' opinions, they should be written in a neutral and accessible language, and reflect reality as accurately as possible, and observe balance of sources.

The Purpose of Monitoring

To establish whether media observed professional ethics in addressing issues of public interest, and used any manipulation techniques. More specifically, the monitoring aimed to expose the mistakes journalists made intentionally or unintentionally when reporting facts. Thus, case studies and reports would have an educational role. Another purpose of the monitoring was to enhance media consumers' awareness of risks of unsafe information sources. Thus, monitoring helps consumers understand how media can manipulate, enables them distinguish between a manipulative journalistic story and a story that covers reality in an equidistant manner.

The selection criteria of the media outlets monitored were:

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

Broadcast media: Publika TV (news on the website Publika.md), Prime TV, Canal 2, Jurnal TV, Accent TV, RTR (newscasts prepared in Republic of Moldova), NTV Moldova;

Online press: Ziarulnational.md, Noi.md; Gagauzinfo.md, Sputnik.md, Deschide.md.

Methodology

The report focused on political, economic and social events of major public interests that occurred during the monitoring period, and analyzed the way media covered these events, by looking at the language and images used by journalists; the mode of selecting events for coverage; accuracy of source quoting and tonality of presentation in line with the guidelines of the Journalist's Ethical Code¹, guidelines and recommendations in the field of quality and responsible media,² and notions of **manipulation** and **propaganda**, based on the Dictionary of Sociology³.

Manipulation is defined as: *"the act of making a social actor (person, group, community) think and act in a manner compatible with the interests of the initiator and not with his/her interests, by using persuasion techniques that intentionally distort the truth giving the impression of freedom of thought and decision. Unlike the influence of the rational persuasion type, **manipulation** is aimed not to a more accurate and deeper understanding of the situation but to imprinting in the mind of a convenient understanding, falling back both on the misleading by using forged arguments on emotional non-rational levels'."*

Propaganda: *"the systematic activity of transmission, promotion or dissemination of doctrines, theses or ideas from the standpoint of a particular social group and ideologies, in order to influence, change, form concepts, attitudes, opinions, beliefs and behaviors. The propaganda is performed in such way as to lead to the realization of the goals and interests of the group it serves. There is no value-neutral or objective propaganda."*

Main subjects monitored between 1 August 2017 and 1 October 2017:

- Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin was declared to be persona non grata in Moldova (2 August 2017);
- The dispute between the Government and the President over the participation of military staff in the military drill in Ukraine (5 September 2017);
- The anti-government protest organized by the Opposition (17 September 2017);
- The meeting against the Government and in support of President, organized by the Socialists (24 September 2017).

II GENERAL TRENDS

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

² Style Guidelines Containing the Ethical Rules for Journalists, API, http://www.unicef.org/moldova/Ghid_Etica_Jurnalists_RO.pdf

³ Catalin Zamfir, Lazar Vlasceanu, 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>

Monitoring data showed that journalists from several monitored media institutions continued to breach ethical norms when making news stories. Following elements featuring information manipulation, propaganda and infringements of the Code of Ethics were identified:

Lack of balance in reports – [Publika.md](#), [Accent TV](#) (in the news stories about declaring Dmitri Rogozin to be persona non grata), [Publika.md](#), [Prime TV](#), [Canal 2](#), [Jurnal TV](#) (in the news story about the protest on 17 September); [NTV Moldova](#) (in the news story about the participation of military staff in military drill in Ukraine; the story about Socialists' meeting); [Accent TV](#), [Noi.md](#) (in the news story about Socialists' meeting).

Blurring – [Accent TV](#) (in the news story about declaring Dmitri Rogozin to be persona non grata).

Lack of reply of a person concerned in a story about a conflict – [Accent TV](#) (in the news story about declaring Dmitri Rogozin to be persona non grata); [NTV Moldova](#) (in the news story about the participation of military staff in military exercise in Ukraine); [Prime TV](#) (in the news story about Socialists' meeting).

Mixture between facts and opinions – [NTV Moldova](#) (in the news story about the participation of military staff in military drill in Ukraine; in the news story about Socialists' protest).

Quoting anonymous experts – [NTV Moldova](#), [Accent TV](#) (in the news story about the participation of military staff in military exercise in Ukraine), [Prime TV](#) (in the news story about Socialists' meeting).

Selective presentation of facts and opinions – [NTV Moldova](#) (in the news story about the participation of military staff in military exercise in Ukraine), [Publika.md](#), [Noi.md](#) (in the news story about the protest on 17 September).

Ignorance of certain facts in news stories – [Accent TV](#) (in the news story about the protest on 17 September).

Generalization – [Publika.md](#), [Canal 2](#), [NTV Moldova](#) (in the news story about Socialists' meeting).

III DATA ANALYSIS

1st Subject: Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin was declared to be persona non grata in Moldova (2 August 2017)⁴

On 2 August 2017, Moldovan government declared Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin to be persona non grata, motivating its decision by Rogozin's offensive public statements about Moldova and its people. The decision was a consequence of Rogozin's failed attempt to visit Chisinau and Tiraspol a week earlier due to Romania restricting access to its airspace for the plane which had him on board, based on a 2014 ban by the European Union. A part of monitored media institutions (**Noi.md**, **Ziarulnational.md**, **Deschide.md** and **Sputnik.md**) presented the most relevant facts when covering this subject, but offered little background information. At the same time, **Jurnal TV**, **NTV Moldova** and **RTR Moldova** didn't report on this subject as they had no newscasts on 2 August 2017.

[Publika.md](#) covered the subject in detail during their Newsroom show, presenting Government's arguments justifying its decision and the response of President Igor Dodon, who criticized it. The subject was presented in a slightly **biased** manner, by praising – through the voices of government representatives and political analysts – the government's decision, on one hand, but without taking into account the context and background of this decision. The news background ignored relevant details from the past, namely the relation between Rogozin and Moldovan Government, including the fact that last year Russian Deputy PM met with Moldovan PM Pavel Filip and Octavian Calmîc, Minister of Economics. This detail would have enabled viewers to analyze objectively Government's decision concerning this representative of the Russian Federation authorities in Moscow in charge of settling the Transnistrian issue.

[Canal 2](#) briefly presented this subject in the newscast at 19.00, including information from the Government meeting and Igor Dodon's response, without providing context. The news story on [Prime TV](#) contained the same information as on Publika.md, except that Prime TV also broadcast the response of Kremlin authorities.

[Accent TV](#) presented the subject in a negative light, **lacking balance**, highlighting the comments of President Igor Dodon and those of political analysts who qualified Government's decision as a political mistake. From the statement that caused Dmitri Rogozin to be declared persona non grata, only the one referring to Vladimir Plahotniuc was cited in the text: *"In the interview with TV Channel Russia 24, the Russian official expressed the view that behind the failure of his visit to Moldova would be the leader of the Democratic Party, Vlad Plahotniuc, who according to Russian Deputy Prime Minister is the leader of mafia that controls entire Moldova."* Thus, it was suggested that the decision was Moldovan Government's response to Rogozin's critical remarks towards the PDM leader, hinting that it was a reckoning between politicians. Additionally, another manipulation technique described by Vladimir Volkoff as **blurring** was employed, consisting of deliberate overfeeding with

⁴ Case study, <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-declararea-vicepremierului-rus-dmitri-rogozin-persona-non-grata-pe-teritoriul-republicii-moldova/>

information by presenting exclusively positive facts⁵. **Accent TV** reproduced a series of statements and pieces of information about the allegedly beneficial plans that Dmitri Rogozin would have implemented if he were allowed to enter Republic Moldova. Therefore, his offensive behavior towards Republic of Moldova alleged by the authorities should have gone to the background, if the benefits lost following the ban imposed on the Russian official were to be taken into account. This was an attempt to manipulate the viewers by distracting their attention from facts Mr Dmitri Rogozin was blamed for, by highlighting alternative and allegedly positive facts. Also, at least two accusations lacked response from concerned persons, which is a breach of deontological rules⁶. According to the reporter, Rogozin said that Vladimir Plahotniuc is the "*mafia leader who controls entire Moldova*" and "*he is the one behind the failure of his visit to Moldova and Transnistrian region,*" without requesting any comments from the PDM leader.

2nd Subject: The dispute between Government and President over the participation of military staff in the military drill in Ukraine (5 September 2017)⁷;

On 5 September 2017, President Igor Dodon announced that he rejected the Defense Ministry's request to allow 57 Moldovan military personnel to participate in an international military exercise in Ukraine, under the aegis of the USA. On the second day, on 6 September, the Government approved the decision on the departure of military staff, whereas the presidency qualified this act as a defiance, announcing that it suspended the decision and appealed it to the Constitutional Court. On the evening of 6 September, the Defense Minister announced that military staff went to Ukraine. Media covered this subject several days in a row on 5, 6, and 7 September. The largest share of monitored media institutions covered this subject in a balanced way, however didn't provide enough background information regarding the nature of the exercise the military staff were attending, which would have helped remove the confusion – intensively promoted by certain media – that this was a NATO exercise. **Prime TV**, **Publika.md** and **Canal 2** tackled this subject with a slight emphasis on the victory of PM Pavel Filip in the dispute against Igor Dodon. Portal **Deschide.md** used a title that may be considered favorable to the prime minister: "Filip left Dodon high and dry. He took charge of military staff participation in the exercise in Ukraine." **Sputnik.md**, **Ziarulnational.md**, **RTR Moldova** and **Noi.md** produced several news reports on this subject consistent with norms of news writing. **Jurnal TV** didn't cover this subject in its 19.00 newscast on 5 September nor on 6 September, which may qualify as **ignorance**.

⁵ Vladimir Volkoff, Disinformation treaty, <https://fr.scribd.com/doc/10034683/Vladimir-Volkoff-Tratat-de-Dezinformare-Cartea-194-Pagini>

⁶ "The journalists must request the opinion of "all parties involved in the matter," Article 2 (2), Moldovan Journalist Code of Ethics, http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/fisiere/Cod_deontologic_al_jurnalistului_din_Republica_final.pdf

⁷ Case study, <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-disputa-dintre-guvern-si-presedintie-privind-participarea-militarilor-moldoveni-la-aplicatii-militare-ucraina/>

[NTV Moldova](#) and to a lesser extent [Accent TV](#) covered the subject in a biased manner, supporting the idea that President Igor Dodon opposed the participation of Moldovan soldiers in a NATO exercise and that Republic of Moldova risked losing its status of neutral state. Specialized literature qualifies this practice as "exaggeration of a cause or questioning false causes",⁸ and is a "manipulative tactic that attempts either at giving credibility to a statement, or at generating certain attitude by focusing the attention on nonexistent, secondary or irrelevant problems."

Reporters from [NTV Moldova](#) **mixed facts and opinions** and left several negative statements without **granting the right to reply to the concerned person**, in this case to Deputy Defense Minister Gheorghe Galbură. In the news story broadcast on 5 September the reporter stated that "*in the request submitted to the President, Deputy Defense Minister Gheorghe Galbură replaced the term "military exercise" with a more neutral one "training", thus hoping to convince the Commander in Chief.*" Same technique was used in a [news report broadcast on the next day, on 6 September](#). An example from **NTV Moldova**: "*After the suspension of the **scandalous** decision by the Commander in Chief of Armed Forces, the Government has recourse to **a new abuse**. Through the spokesperson, the Executive announced that, in spite of President Igor Dodon's decision, Moldovan soldiers would participate in the military exercise in Ukraine.*" An example from [Accent TV](#): "*The speed with which Government decision was published in the "Official Gazette" showed its importance for Filip's Government.*"

Selective presentation, in case of experts' opinions, is another information manipulation technique employed by [NTV Moldova](#). In the newscast on 6 September, the report featured similar opinions by two experts on the subject of Moldovan military staff joining the Ukrainian exercise, thus lacking **balance of sources**. A similar technique was employed in a [vox-populi](#) prepared by journalists from NTV Moldova on 6 September, where all participants said that President should have had the final word in the dispute with the Government, and that Republic of Moldova should be a neutral country. The question asked by the reporter is not clear. According to the rules of conducting street surveys⁹, all speakers should be asked the same question and balance should be observed when giving opinions. In this case, it may be concluded that opinions were selected based on their message, i.e. only views favoring Socialists and President Igor Dodon were included. The reporter asked one participant a **manipulative** question, thus conveying a **false message**: "*As a citizen, what is your opinion, should Moldova participated in NATO drills or should it remain a neutral country?*" Participation in military drills together with NATO member states does not imply Republic of Moldova joining this military block; the reporter however, through his wording, induced this idea. Also during [the newscast on 6](#)

⁸ PhD Thesis, Transilvania University of Brasov, Manipulation Techniques of Electorate Through Marketing Research, <http://www.unitbv.ro/Portals/31/Sustineri%20de%20doctorat/Rezumate/Vierasu.pdf>

⁹ Ion Laza, University of Oradea, Press Genres, <https://fr.scribd.com/doc/25149536/CURS-Genurile-Presei-TV>

[September](#) **anonymous experts were cited**, making it impossible to verify the accuracy of the message. This manipulation technique – **quoting anonymous experts** – may be employed to convey the messages desired by the manipulator: "*Security experts mentioned that any approximation of Republic of Moldova to NATO would immediately impact the situation in Transnistrian region and would dispel any chances of peaceful settlement of this conflict.*" Same technique was also used by **Accent TV** in a [news story broadcast on 7 September](#): „*It is noteworthy that Government's decision to go against the will of the President elected by the people is considered by several analysts to be nothing else than fulfilling an order from the West.*”

3rd Subject: The anti-government protest organized by the Opposition (17 September 2017)¹⁰

On 17 September 2017, opposition parties Dignity and Truth Platform (PDA), Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) and Liberal-Democratic Party organized a rally in front of the Parliament building demanding to repeal changes to the electoral system and the legal provisions transforming the money which disappeared following the bank fraud into state debt, and also requiring the Opposition be given periodically airtime on national television. Demonstrators marched towards the headquarters of public TV station Moldova 1, where a minibus that the organizers later reported carrying sound equipment had reached, through the crowd, in front of police cordon. This act was communicated by the police to press as "*an attempt at breaking the police cordon.*"

The news stories about the protest on [Publika.md](#), [Canal 2](#) and [PrimeTV](#) had similar content and approach: facts were presented in a judgmental manner, which is a manipulation technique known as **mixture between facts and opinions**. In the beginning of the news stories broadcast by the three channels, journalists said that few people attended the meeting and that clashes with police occurred at the headquarters of the national TV station. [Publika.md](#) and [Canal 2](#) didn't convey essential information, such as why participants were discontent and what were their demands. [Prime TV](#) announced that it was a protest against the mixed voting system. In this way, the channel shifted the focus: journalists didn't cover the protest as an essential event/fact (according to professional norms, journalists should present facts, not opinions in news stories); instead they created a new fact – the number of participants at the meeting – and built the news story around this element. **Facts were presented in a selective way**, while sources were chosen according to reporters' purpose. Thus, the news stories contained neither sequences of speakers' discourses from the meeting stage nor scenes with participants chanting. Reporters didn't interview the meeting participants to find out why they came to the meeting; instead they included sequences with exclusively negative messages, where several angry demonstrators were swearing at the shooting team. As well, people from the streets who were discontent by the traffic jam caused by the demonstrators' march were used as sources for this news story. In this case, sources were selected in a way as to express only negative opinions. As

¹⁰ Case study, <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-protestul-anti-guvernare-organizat-de-opozitie-la-17-septembrie/>

a consequence, the viewers of the three TV channels learned that there were only a few participants at the meeting and that they had an aggressive behavior: this is the image built by reporters. However, the audience didn't learn why people took again to the streets, why they were discontent, what their demands and chants were, how opposition leaders motivated the protest and what their commentaries about the incidents with police were. Journalists have the professional duty to present facts in an unbiased way and reflect reality as accurately as possible.

TV channels **RTR Moldova**, **NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV** didn't cover the event during the day it occurred, as they have no newscasts on Sundays. [RTR Moldova](#) briefly reported on the event on the next day through text and images that contained basic facts about the meeting. [Accent TV](#) broadcast a brief news story on the next day, presenting **incomplete information and in a fragmented way**, thus **ignoring** a part of facts – participants' demands, leaders' comments, but also framing the image of participants as violent.

[Jurnal TV](#) provided live coverage of the event, with a number of pauses in the telecast. On the next day, the meeting was covered during the newscast, but it lacked balance of sources, favored demonstrators, and featured long sequences of discourses of speakers from the stage, as well as vox-populi from the crowd, and, sometimes, insignificant details from the event.

[Ziarulnational.md](#) and [Deschide.md](#) reported on the event during the day it took place, providing live coverage and observing, by and large, the norms of fact telling.

[Noi.md](#) portal posted two news stories: the first one announcing that a protest was going to take place, and the second news story presenting a press release by police about a minibus that allegedly dragged into the crowd, complemented by a video sequence from **Publika.md**. Thus, the event was covered in a **partial and selective** manner, while a considerable share of facts was ignored.

4th Subject: The meeting against Government and in support of the President, organized by the Socialists (24 September 2017)¹¹

On 24 September 2017, the Socialist Party organized meetings in three towns – Bălți, Cahul and Anenii Noi – entitled as meetings in support of President Igor Dodon, portraying him as a lonely fighter against the "governing regime." The participants approved a resolution to demand organization of anticipated elections and granting additional powers to the President.

The news story on [Prime TV](#) was **negatively commented**. The anchor said: *"Political analysts consider that right wing Opposition competes with left wing Opposition in number of meetings, as*

¹¹Case study, <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-protetul-anti-guvernare-si-pro-presedinte-organizat-de-socialisti/>

they have no specific solutions for citizens' problems," failing to quote any specific analyst. As earlier mentioned in this report, **quoting anonymous experts/analysts or referring to sources impossible to verify by readers/listeners** is a manipulation technique.

The news story about the meeting on [Canal 2](#) was the first one in the newscast and started with the sentence "*socialists broke free to protests*," which revealed reporters' attitude towards the event. The news story had the same content as on Prime TV, except that the sentence about "political analysts" was complemented by Petru Bogatu's opinion. In this way, **generalization** was employed as a manipulation technique, to give credit to the idea that an entire community has the same opinion. In reality, the opinion of only one political analyst was presented.

[Publika.md](#) covered the subject similarly to [Prime TV](#) and [Canal 2](#), featuring as well the sentence about political analysts who believe that Opposition is protesting because "they have no solutions to society's problems." **Generalization** was employed in this case as well.

[NTV Moldova](#) granted an overwhelmingly large share of airtime to this subject in its newscast on 25 September: 25 of 45 minutes of the newscast. Texts were rather commentaries than facts, thus allowing a **mixture between opinions and facts**. A dedicated news story was allotted to the opinion of the capital residents about transforming Republic of Moldova in a presidential republic, an initiative contained in the resolution approved by meeting participants. Contrary to the norms on how to organize vox-populi, only voices supporting the initiative were included, without featuring any neutral or negative opinions in the news story. Thus, the vox was **biased** and **lacked balance**. Additionally, another manipulation technique was employed: **generalization**. It should be noted that five people who expressed a certain opinion can not represent by any means all the residents of the capital city, as the introduction announced by the anchor would lead one to believe. Another news story featuring the opinion of independent experts about a presidential governing system also **lacked balance**. Guest Serghei Misin, Doctor of Law, spoke only about the advantages of such a system and avoided talking about the risks.

[Accent TV](#) provided extensive coverage of the event. This subject was given 12 of 34 minutes of the newscast. News stories **lacked balance**, featuring sequences of discourses of speakers from the stage and of participants from the crowd praising President Igor Dodon and his initiatives, without requesting opinions from those who were criticized (government representatives or comments from independent political analysts).

[RTR Moldova](#) covered the event in its newscast on the second day, on 25 September, in two news stories about the meetings in Bălți, Anenii Noi and Cahul, using sequences from discourses but without using voices from the crowd. In a separate news story, the reporter spoke about Igor Dodon's Facebook message thanking his supporters. News stories were **lopsided**: there were no independent

opinions or opinions from government representatives concerning the proposals put forward by Socialists during the meeting (holding anticipated elections and organizing a referendum to switch to a Presidential Republic).

[Ziarulnational.md](#) and [Sputnik.md](#) published each a news story about the meeting, presenting basic facts about the subject. However, journalists did not inquire opinions outside the Socialist Party concerning the demands and resolutions approved by meeting participants.

[Jurnal TV](#) did not cover the event, as the channel has no newscasts during weekends.

Noi.md posted two news stories. [The first one](#) looked like a press release of the Socialist Party, announcing that a meeting was going to take place, including specific details about the place of event. The portal **became a platform for calling people to protest**, ending the first news story with this sentence: "The Socialist Party invites all active citizens of the Republic to join the rally, encouraging them to support the President elected by the people and his initiatives concerning protection of the state, restoring of equity, and social and economic development of the country." Thus, **journalists didn't cover the subject in a balanced manner; instead they promoted a political action**. The [second](#) news story consisted of the entire text of the resolution approved at the meeting, without any opinions from outside or comments from independent experts.

CONCLUSIONS

Compared to the previous monitoring period, between 1 August and 1 October 2017 the news reports of the monitored media institutions contained fewer manipulation techniques, but some journalists did not refrain from using these techniques.

Media institutions whose owners belong to or adhere to political parties continued transmitting, through news reports, biased and manipulative content that served the interests of a given party.

Information manipulation techniques were mainly recorded on **NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV**, and to a smaller extent on **Publika.md**, **Prime TV**, **Canal 2** and **Noi.md**.

Journalists employed manipulation techniques especially when covering political subjects, in cases of clashes between Government and the Opposition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on Article 4 of the Broadcasting Code, the Broadcasting Coordinating Council should initiate inquiries and start monitoring the TV channels whose content is reported as a source of manipulative information, to detect violations of the legislation and address these by way of sanctions.

TV channel editors are encouraged to supervise the editorial content ensuring that it is consistent with media's mission of informing the public and accurately reflecting reality, and not serving the desire of political circles to promote their interests and beat their opponents.

Reporters are encouraged to report facts and refrain from inserting in the news their own comments or those added by editors or other superiors in the editorial office.

Journalists should not forget about their ethical duties of reporting facts in a complete and unbiased manner. Journalists should remain neutral observers of the reality, not hostility carriers in favor of politicians.

Media consumers are recommended to get informed from several media sources, in order to avoid the risk of receiving erroneous and manipulative information.