



Centrul pentru Jurnalism Independent



## **Monitoring Report No. 7**

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

***June 1, 2017- August 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 June to 1 August 2017, the Independent Journalism Center monitored 12 media institutions – news portals and TV channels – to identify whether their media content breached ethical norms and comprised elements of information manipulation. Monitoring team analyzed the way these media institutions covered public interest events in politics, economy, foreign policy, and other fields, and, also, if journalists observed professional and ethical norms, such as fact-checking with several sources, diversity of opinions, and balance in news about conflicts, etc. Thus, taking the Journalist Code of Ethics and other specialized academic works as reference, it was possible to identify information manipulation processes and techniques.

The analysis was based on the assumption that news stories are the primary media product used by media consumers as a source of information in their daily life. Therefore, irrespective of media owners' views on political or economic matters, news stories must contain exclusively facts and not journalists' opinions, should be written in a neutral and accessible language, and should reflect reality as accurately as possible, and observe balance of sources.

### **The Purpose of Monitoring**

The monitoring aimed at finding whether media observed professional ethics in addressing issues of public interest, and used any manipulation techniques. Specifically, the monitoring focused on exposing the mistakes made by journalists intentionally or unintentionally when reporting facts, so that case studies and reports could serve an educational purpose. Another objective of the monitoring was to help increase media consumers awareness of risks involved by relying on unsafe information sources. Thus, the monitoring helps consumers understand how media can manipulate, and enables them to distinguish between a manipulative journalistic story and a one that covers reality in an unbiased 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](http://Publika.md)), Prime TV, Canal 2, Jurnal TV, Accent TV, RTR Moldova (newscasts produced in Republic of Moldova), NTV Moldova;

Online press: [Ziarulnational.md](http://Ziarulnational.md), [Noi.md](http://Noi.md); [Gagauzinfo.md](http://Gagauzinfo.md), [Sputnik.md](http://Sputnik.md), [Deschide.md](http://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. The language and images used by journalists, the selection of events for coverage, the accuracy of source quoting and the tone of reports were analyzed in terms of the Journalist's Ethical Code<sup>1</sup>, of the guidelines and recommendations in the field of quality and responsible media<sup>2</sup>, and confronted against the notions of **manipulation** and **propaganda**, based on the Dictionary of Sociology<sup>3</sup>.

**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 at a more accurate and deeper understanding of the situation but at imprinting a convenient understanding, resorting to misleading by using forged arguments and by appealing to emotional non-rational levels of conscience*'."

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

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

- Publication of the Venice Commission Report on the draft law introducing the mixed election system in the Republic of Moldova (19 June 2017);
- Conviction of Ilan Șor, Mayor of Orhei (21 June 2017);
- Extension of arrest warrant for Chisinau Mayor Dorin Chirtoacă (22 June 2017);
- European Parliament's decision to provide up to €100 million in macro-financial assistance to the Republic of Moldova (4 June 2017);
- Approval in final reading of the legislative changes for Republic Moldova to switch to mixed election system (20 June 2017).

---

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

<sup>2</sup> Style Guidelines with Ethical Rules for Journalists, API,  
[http://www.unicef.org/moldova/Ghid\\_Etica\\_Jurnalists\\_RO.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/moldova/Ghid_Etica_Jurnalists_RO.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> 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>

## II GENERAL TRENDS

Monitoring data showed that journalists from several of the monitored media institutions continued breaching ethical norms when producing their news stories. Both elements indicative of information manipulation and propaganda, and infringements of the Code of Ethics were identified:

**Omission of facts in news stories** – NTV Moldova (in the news item about the Venice Commission Report);

**Omission of stories in newscasts** – RTR Moldova (the Venice Commission Report and the conviction of Ilan Șor news stories), Sputnik.md (the Venice Commission report news story), NTV Moldova (the news on European Parliament's decision to provide financial assistance to the Republic of Moldova);

**One-sided presentation** – NTV Moldova, Accent TV (in news story about the Venice Commission Report), Publika TV (in the news story about European Parliament's decision to provide financial assistance to the Republic of Moldova);

**Selective presentation of facts and opinions** – Publika TV (in the news story about the Venice Commission Report); NTV Moldova, Sputnik.md, Noi.md (in the news story on the extension of the arrest warrant for Dorin Chirtoacă), Jurnal TV, Publika TV (in the news story about European Parliament's decision to provide financial assistance to the Republic of Moldova and the approval of mixed electoral system), Canal 2, NTV Moldova, Accent TV (in the news story on the approval of mixed electoral system);

**Lack of the right to reply** – Canal 2, Sputnik.md, Noi.md (in the news story about the extension of arrest warrant for Dorin Chirtoacă), Publika TV, Canal 2, Jurnal TV (in the news story about mixed electoral system);

**Mixture between facts and opinions** – Publika TV, Canal 2, Accent TV (in the news story about the approval of mixed electoral system);

**Reference to sources that are impossible to verify** – Canal 2 (in the news story about the approval of mixed electoral system);

**Spread of false information** – NTV Moldova (in the news story about opposition's protest against the approval of mixed electoral system), Sputnik.md (in one of the news stories on the approval of mixed electoral system);

**Emphasis on details at the expense of essence, along with blurring** – NTV Moldova (in the news story about opposition's protest against the approval of mixed electoral system);

**Mockery at the opponent**– Accent TV (in the news story about opposition's protest against the approval of mixed electoral system).

### III DATA ANALYSIS

#### **1st Subject. Publication of the Venice Commission Report on the draft law introducing a mixed electoral system in the Republic of Moldova (19 June 2017)<sup>4</sup>**

On 19 June 2017, the European Commission for Democracy through Law--also known as the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe--published its opinion concerning the amendment of Republic of Moldova's law on elections, changing it to a mixed electoral system. The amendments were backed by the Democratic Party and Socialists' Party. In the report published on [venice.coe.int](http://venice.coe.int), the Commission noted that "while the choice of an electoral system is a sovereign decision of a State", this change is not advisable "at this time."

**NTV Moldova** broadcast a news story delivering PSRM's position concerning these recommendations, at the same time **ignoring** the actual recommendations and provisions of the Commission report. Viewers did not learn that the report was published and what it contained. In turn, the opinion of socialist MP Vasile Bolea, member of a parliamentary delegation who participated in the Commission's work, was covered extensively. In this way, media consumers were manipulated, as they were given only the standpoint of one stakeholder (the socialists) on the matter (report conclusions and recommendations), instead of the fact itself--the actual report. Journalists should have quoted the direct source, namely the report, whereas opinions about the document should have been requested from all relevant sources, namely parliamentary fractions. **The subject got one-sided coverage**, which is a breach of Moldovan Journalist Code of Ethics<sup>5</sup>, as journalists must request the opinion of "all parties involved in the matter" and present information in an honest and balanced manner.

This subject was covered in a similar way by **Accent TV**, which hasn't broadcast even a single news story about the report. Instead, the channel broadcast the commentary of President Igor Dodon about the report of the Venice Commission. As a consequence, viewers haven't learned anything about the actual recommendations given by members of the Commission, but were only announced that the President would ignore these recommendations and would further support the bill.

---

<sup>4</sup> Case study 1, <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-publicarea-raportului-comisiei-de-la-venetia/>

<sup>5</sup> Moldovan Journalist Code of Ethics,

[http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod\\_d\\_rom.pdf](http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod_d_rom.pdf)

**Publika TV** in its main newscast of the day **presented in a selective manner** the recommendations of the report, highlighting technical aspects (the way constituencies would be formed, Diaspora representation, gender-balance representation) and avoiding core issues that directly refer to the main goal put forward by authors of the bill: to bring the Parliament closer to people and increase MP's accountability towards the electorate. It becomes apparent that reporters chose to present viewers only with the recommendations that the bill's authors--PDM representatives--found suitable. Further, media consumers were told there are some other recommendations to which the Democratic Party did not assent, without specifying what these were: "The Venice Commission also noted that the electoral system may be changed when a broad consensus is reached, with no polarization around the issue. In turn, Adrian Candu, Speaker of the Parliament, wrote on his blog that this part of the report contained recommendations with a certain degree of subjectivity." By presenting the opinion of a single political actor the reporter tried influencing the audience.

On **Canal 2**, the news story contained the same technical recommendations as on Publika TV, except that the opening clearly presented the Commission's conclusion: "The implementation of a mixed electoral system is not advisable in a society where part of the people oppose the electoral reform."

On **Prime TV** the news story was featured in the same way as on Publika TV and Canal 2, only the opening was changed: "Today the Venice Commission published its recommendations for the draft law on electoral reform in Moldova. Experts consider that any change of that kind require a broad public debate and consultations with civil society. Also, the Commission noted in its report that changing the electoral system is a sovereign decision of a State."

The news story broadcast by **Jurnal TV** featured a large number of recommendations of the Venice Commission, the opinion of Andrian Candu, Speaker of Parliament, and briefly in the background reporters reminded of the position of opposition parties and civil society towards this bill.

The portals **Deschide.md**, **Noi.md** and **Ziarulnational.md** posted the full version of the report, provided quotes from the report and summarized the main recommendations. Deschide.md hasn't published any comments by politicians.

The TV channel **RTR Moldova** (in the main newscast of the day broadcast at 7.45 PM) and the portal **Sputnik.md** haven't informed their viewers about the Commission's conclusions. Taking into account that this was an issue of great significance for the society, this should be treated as **an omission** of important matters in the daily agenda.

## 2nd Subject. Conviction of Orhei Mayor Ilan Șor (21 June 2017)<sup>6</sup>

On 21 June 2017, Chișinău court (Buiucani district), sentenced Mayor of Orhei and prominent businessman Ilan Șor to 7 years and 6 months of imprisonment for concurrence of offences: causing material damage in large proportions to the owner by fraud or abuse of trust, if the deed is not a misappropriation, and money laundering. However, the defendant was brought to court under charges of swindling in the 2014 bank fraud case, for actions he had allegedly committed while he presided over the Board of Directors of Banca de Economii. Most media institutions monitored covered this subject without presenting relevant background/context information, seeing that the subject concerns the disappearance (and possible recovery) of USD 1 billion from several national banks.

The news stories on **Jurnal TV** lacked background information--namely, that the self-incrimination of Ilan Șor led to former Prime-Minister Vlad Filat's arrest and subsequent prosecution, as well as the fact that his name was mentioned in the first report issued by Kroll, the company that investigated part of the actions that contributed to the bank fraud.

The news story broadcast on **Publika TV** and **Canal 2** lacked background information, but also specific information about the offences for which Ilan Șor was convicted, which points to **documentation deficiencies**. Media consumers didn't understand what was Ilan Șor found guilty of, specifically.

Nor did the reporters of **Deschide.md** specify for which offences Ilan Șor was convicted.

**Accent TV**, during the program Acces Info, broadcast a short news story about the sentence, lacking both context information and background, whereas **Ziarulnational.md** failed to provide enough context information despite having live coverage of event.

The news story posted on the portal **Noi.md** ignored significant details, such as the fact that Ilan Șor left the courtroom before his sentence was pronounced, but also the fact that he would stay at home until the decision is final. Context information was also missing, including the fact that Șor self-reported against Vlad Filat.

Reporters from **NTV Moldova** broadcast two sequences of the discourse: one of the prosecutor and one of the lawyer, without shedding light on other relevant facts, including the context of this conviction. Similar to news reports in other media, nothing was said about what Ilan Șor was convicted for. Banca de Economii was never mentioned.

---

<sup>6</sup> Case study 2, <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-condamnarea-primarului-de-orhei-ilan-sor-reporterii-nu-au-inteles-pentru-ce-infractiuni-fost-gasit-vinovat-omul-de-afaceri/>

As for **Sputnik.md**, it was not clear in their news story that the crimes were related to the bank fraud. Banca de Economii, which went into bankruptcy as a consequence of the fraud, was not mentioned at all, even though Ilan Șor was Board Chair at this bank. Other context information was also missing. Of the three newscasts on **RTR Moldova**, two in Romanian and one in Russian, the news story about the conviction of Ilan Șor was missing, which may be interpreted as an omission of relevant subjects from daily agenda. In turn, on the next day, the channel broadcast the position of Ilan Șor's lawyer who held a press conference.

### **3rd Subject. Extension of arrest warrant for Chișinău Mayor Dorin Chirtoacă (22 June 2017)<sup>7</sup>**

On 22 June 2017 Chișinău court prolonged with 25 days the home arrest of Dorin Chirtoacă, Mayor of Chișinău, investigated for influence peddling. The event is relevant for public opinion, as it concerned acts of corruption, but also because the defendant made his first statements concerning the charges filed by prosecutors only after the sentence was read out. During the court hearing, a group of members and supporters of Liberal Party participated in a demonstration in front of Chișinău court (Buiucani district) to support the mayor.

TV channels **Publika TV**, **Prime TV**, **Jurnal TV**, **RTR Moldova** and **Accent TV**, and the portals **Deschide.md** and **Ziarulnational.md** covered the event in rather balanced manner, presenting most facts and information from appropriate sources. At the same time, several TV channels and websites such as **NTV Moldova**, **Canal 2**, **Noi.md**, and **Sputnik.md** had a biased coverage of the event.

**NTV Moldova** channel in its 7.00 PM newscast presented the main information and positions of both the prosecutors and the defendant, but hasn't mentioned anything about the meeting in support of the mayor organized by liberals in front of the Court building, which reveals **selective presentation of facts**. As well, technically reporters ensured balance of sources, however from Dorin Chirtoacă's statement reporters selected a less relevant sequence as compared to the accusations of influence peddling brought by prosecutors. "The fact that certain statements concerning me were made, and also other aspects that were mentioned, I would say they are not relevant and even absurd," this is the only quoted statement of the mayor, and as it can be noticed, it doesn't directly refer to the accusations of influence peddling that have been brought against him and have constituted official charges. Most media institutions broadcast the main message expressed by Chirtoacă after the hearing: "I haven't committed any influence peddling and have done nothing else by fulfill my working duties in relation to this specific case and all other cases.

---

<sup>7</sup> Case study 3, <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-prezentare-unilaterala-neasigurarea-dreptului-la-replica-si-informatii-inexacte-stirile-despre-prelungirea-arestului-lui-dorin-chirtoaca/>

My conscience is clean. I hope I will be able to prove that both towards criminal investigation bodies and courts." Thus, it may be concluded that **NTV Moldova** reporters selected a less relevant sequence from mayor's discourse, aiming to blur the main message that mayor considered himself not guilty.

On **Canal 2**, the news story broadcast on the day of court hearing didn't contain any of mayor's statements on the decision to extend his home arrest, which can be explained by the timing the news was broadcast (4 PM). The channel presented mayor's position, who said he was not guilty and denied committing influence peddling, only on the next day. The news story broadcast on 23 June titled "25 more days of home detention for Dorin Chirtoacă," contained the following paragraph: "the mayor was going to receive 13% from parking business, in return for promoting the project managed under the counter by millionaire Alexandru Pincevschi." This paragraph contained two accusations: one against the mayor and the other one against businessman Alexandru Pincevschi; the news wasn't balanced because the concerned persons were not granted the **right to reply**.

The portal **Sputnik.md** posted 3 news stories on this matter on the day the home arrest was extended, and most information was repeated. Facts were presented in a **selective manner**, as the news story didn't mention anything about either the meeting in support of defendant, or mayor's statements in his defense. This is a violation of Code of Ethics provisions concerning the **right to reply**. Apart from that, Sputnik.md reporters presented incorrect information about the duration of the, as the detention was extended by 25 days and not 30 days as mentioned by reporters.

The portal **Noi.md** published two news items about the event: one news report announced that detention was extended, which did not contain defendant's statement/position, and the second item contained Dorin Chirtoacă's explanations of his leaves from home during home arrest. The fact that journalists avoided to present defendant's position, who stated he was not guilty and didn't commit any influence peddling, reveals bias and non-observance of ethical norms on balance, inquiry from several sources and the right to reply.

#### **4th Subject. European Parliament's decision to provide up to €100 million in macro-financial assistance to the Republic of Moldova (4 June 2017)<sup>8</sup>**

On 4 July 2017, European Parliament adopted the decision to provide up to €100 million in macro-financial assistance to the Republic of Moldova, preceded by a plenary debate on 3 July. Many European MPs criticized the Chişinău government and asked for conditions, including observance of the recommendations of the Venice Commission on PDM and PSRM's draft laws introducing a mixed electoral system. Other MPs insisted that it is a sovereign decision of the state to decide what

---

<sup>8</sup> Case study 4, <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-decizia-parlamentului-european-de-acorda-republicii-moldova-un-ajutor-macrofinanciar-de-100-de-milioane-de-euro/>

system to introduce, and they supported the decision to grant money. It is a topic of public interest because the European Parliament postponed approval of the assistance until the Venice Commission issued its conclusions.

On **Jurnal TV** the subject was covered in an **unbalanced way**, and **facts were presented in a selective manner**. Of 12 sequences with European MPs speaking, 11 consisted of critical remarks towards the Government and PDM leader Vlad Plahotniuc. One MP featured in the news story spoke in favor of the Government. During the plenary debates in the European Parliament, there were also neutral and positive opinions towards the authorities of the Republic of Moldova, which for the purpose of news balance and accuracy of information should have been included. Opinions were presented in a selective manner. Additionally, if the opinion of local politicians about the decision taken in Strasbourg was required, the reporter should have asked for comments from other politicians and government representatives as well besides that of PDA leader Andrei Năstase.

On **Publika TV** sequences of discourses of European MPs were also presented in a selective way, depending on their message. There were several neutral and pro-governmental statements, and only two critical opinions towards the Chișinău authorities. The sequences when MPs talked about corruption in the Republic of Moldova, oligarchs and Vladimir Plahotniuc were bypassed. As well, the comments on the decision were **one-sided**, as only government representatives Andrian Candu and Pavel Filip were asked to express their opinion. Opposition representatives were not interviewed.

On **Canal 2** and **Prime TV** there was a light imbalance in selecting opinions of European MPs: of 5 direct speeches in the news story, three favored Chișinău government.

On **Accent TV** the news was regarded as barely newsworthy, as the presenter read a text of about 20 seconds that was not accompanied by any images. The channel ignored the debates in Strasbourg, treating the subject as something unimportant.

**NTV Moldova** ignored this subject in its newscast on 4 July 2017.

Media institutions: **Deschide.md**, **Ziarulnațional.md**, **Sputnik.md**, **RTR Moldova** and **Noi.md** observed professional norms in covering this subject.

## **5th Subject. Approval in final reading of legislative changes for Republic Moldova to switch to mixed electoral system (20 June 2017)<sup>9</sup>**

---

<sup>9</sup> Case study 5, <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-adoptarea-lectura-finala-modificarilor-legislative-prin-care-republica-moldova-trecut-la-sistemul-de-vot-mixt/>

On 20 July, 74 democrats, socialists and several non-affiliated MPs approved in final reading the bill on the amendment of the Election Code enabling the change of electoral system of Republic of Moldova. The change implies the election of members of Parliament on both single-member constituencies and party lists. The change was strongly advocated and supported by the Democratic Party and the Party of Socialists, but was challenged by opposition and not recommended by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission), which has issued an opinion on this bill. While MPs voted for the bill, two meetings were taking place simultaneously in front of the Parliament building: one group organized by the government supported the mixed system, while another group organized by opposition parties were against this system.

On **Publika TV** the facts on the vote and the protests were **presented in a selective and unbalanced manner**. Reporters announced that communist, liberal and liberal-democrat MPs left the plenary hall before the vote, however sequences with MPs motivating their decision to leave were not featured. In spite of the fact that all opposition parliamentary parties spoke at the tribune, viewers of Publika TV were given only the position of the Communists voiced by Vladimir Voronin. As well, the protest of the Opposition was barely covered; the channel didn't display any images of the protest and didn't mention demonstrators' demands. In contrast, the demonstration favoring the mixed vote was covered extensively, featuring discourses on the scene and several voices from the crowd. In addition, facts were slighted commented upon: one of the opposition leaders, Andrei Năstase, was said to have allegedly committed a "provocation" at the meeting in the support of the mixed electoral system by blocking access to the microphone for one PDM representative, as well as having "made a show." Such statements are assessments by authors and are not facts by themselves. Another deviation from ethical norms is the **lack of right to reply**. Journalists haven't asked Andrei Năstase for comment.

On **Canal 2**, during the newscast at 7.00 PM, the news about the vote on the bill had the same content as on Publika TV. Other news stories about this event were presented in a **biased way**. Reporters featured demonstrators against the mixed vote as violent and provocative, without interviewing anybody from the crowd about their participation the protest. As well, **facts were mixed with opinions** ("Andrei Năstase Made a Show", "Opposition Protest Failed"), the **right to reply** was missing and **reference sources were impossible to verify**: "Direct election of MPs is supported by 60% of Moldovan society. The most recent poll revealed that 6 of 10 Moldovans believe that MPs must be elected as single-member constituency or mixed electoral system." Reporters didn't specify what kind of poll they referred to, who conducted it and when. By such wording, viewers might have been presented false information concerning a non-existent poll, as long as a specific source was not cited, and consumers could not verify if reporters' statements were accurate. Such manipulation technique - referring to an unknown or impossible to verify source - is often used to give credibility to an idea. Also, in background information the Venice Commission recommendations were presented in a selective way.

Channel **Prime TV**, with small exceptions, committed similar deviations as Publika TV and Canal 2, namely one-sided coverage by favoring mixed electoral system and shedding negative light on demonstrators who were against the change of electoral system.

On **NTV Moldova**, in the news story at 7.00 PM, more coverage was granted to the opinions of socialist MPs and President Igor Dodon about the mixed electoral system, while ignoring the opposition. Facts were presented in a selective way: the reporter said nothing about liberals, liberal-democrats and communist MPs leaving the plenary hall to express their disagreement with the vote on the bill. In the news story about the demonstration in front of the Parliament building, facts were presented in a selective way: the meeting in support of mixed electoral system, from visual and informational point of view, received incomplete coverage as it didn't contain any images from the scene or sequences from speakers' discourses. The only image from the scene featured a woman shot from behind, talking into the microphone. Experts qualify such coverage as a manipulative trick: "hiding or selecting information based on criteria of usefulness for the manipulator, without any connection with the objective truth<sup>10</sup>." At the same time, of the chants of meeting participants against the mixed electoral system, **NTV Moldova** reporter selected only the one of the National Unity Party: "Unification! Great Romania within old borders." The **reporters spread false information and misled** the audience. He said: "Meanwhile, the supporters and members of PCRM, PLDM, Our Party, the Party of Action and Solidarity, and the DA Platform attended the meeting. Together with members of the National Unity Party they demanded unification of Moldova and Romania." None of the representatives of the above mentioned parties were featured in images displayed demanding "Unification!". This word has been chanted by a group of eight persons, including Ana Guțu, leader of the National Unity Party, while holding Romania's flag. Therefore, the statement that "members of the PCRM, PLDM, Our Party, the Party of Action and Solidarity, and the DA Platform" allegedly chanted together with the NUP "Unification!" is **false**. This was an attempt to divert attention from the real motive of the protest--namely, stopping the change of the electoral system--and to project an image of demonstrators as a group of persons with a single wish: Unification with Romania. Otherwise, this was an anti-governmental and anti-mixed vote protest, whereas the chanting about Unification was only one sequence, the event had a different essence and it was bypassed in the news story.

As well, the news story highlighted non-significant details of the "random facts" category--images with Andrei Nastase's wet pants, Maia Sandu holding her cell phone--to the detriment of relevant, core facts. This is a manipulation technique described by Vladimir Volkoff in "Misinformation Treaty" as **blurring**: "This process consists of drowning the main fact under a mass of other facts

---

<sup>10</sup> Transilvanian University of Braşov, PhD Thesis, Techniques of manipulating voters through marketing research, <http://www.unitbv.ro/Portals/31/Sustineri%20de%20doctorat/Rezumate/Vierasu.pdf>

without any connection to the core event, and if possible, able to better stir public interest<sup>11</sup>.” Details were selected in such a way as to present only unfavorable, discrediting facts for the opposition and to influence viewers. The audience was not informed about the motives behind the demonstration in front of the Parliament building, nor were their arguments presented, as viewers only learned secondary details that were irrelevant to the event.

**Jurnal TV lacked balance in covering events on 20 July.** The entire newscast at 7.00 PM was dedicated to this subject—nearly 50 minutes. Despite covering all relevant facts, reporters focused on the opposition’s actions and the meeting against the mixed electoral system. As well, one of the news stories **ignored the right to reply** of representatives of several town halls and that of “Termoelectrica” company from Chişinău, accused of forcing its employees to attend the meeting in support of the mixed vote. Reporters requested the opinion (and inserted it in the news story) on this matter of Andrian Candu, Speaker of Parliament, however in this case it would have been necessary, also for information verification purposes, to inquire a comment from managers of companies involved.

In the newscast at 07.45 PM, **RTR Moldova** covered most of relevant facts on this subject.

**Accent TV** covered this event in a **biased manner**, praising the benefits of a mixed electoral system, thus **mixing facts with journalist’s** opinions. Reporters ironically commented the facts presented in the news story. Employing irony or sarcasm when talking about truthful events is a modern manipulation technique, employed in broadcast and other types of journalism<sup>12</sup>. The demonstration of the mixed vote supporters, similarly to that on **NTV Moldova**, was shot fragmentally, making it unclear who talked in front of the participants. This reveals again **the technique of hiding and selecting information for manipulation purposes**.

**Ziarulnațional.md**, **Deschide.md** and **Noi.md** covered most of significant facts of the events on 20 July.

**Sputnik.md** portal posted several news stories on this subject, both about what happened in Parliament and the demonstrations. One of the news reports was **false**, as the information presented didn’t match the truth: „Premiere for Moldova. It will be possible to dismiss MPs from office.” Reporters claimed that the amendment to the Electoral Code introducing the mixed vote will allegedly also contain a provision allowing for dismissing MPs through local referendums. In fact, such a provision was included in the bill on single-member constituency at the stage of examination

---

<sup>11</sup> Vladimir Volkoff, “Misinformation Treaty”, <https://scorilos.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/vladimir-volkoff-tratat-de-dezinformare1.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> HERJEU, Radu. Techniques of manipulation, propaganda and persuasion on TV, <https://dorinpopa.files.wordpress.com/2008/04/herjeu-radu-tehnici-de-propaganda-manipulare-si-pers-in-tv.pdf>

within parliamentary committees, but was later removed in May 2017, and is absent in the law on the mixed vote.

## CONCLUSIONS

Many of the monitored media continue to ignore news writing and reality coverage norms, providing public with incomplete, biased and one-sided information. Thus, both elements of information manipulation and breaches of Journalist's Code of Ethics were recorded.

The channels Publika TV, Prime TV and Canal 2 disseminated, with small exceptions, the same content in their news stories on major public interest events, and especially on political subjects, presenting facts from a single standpoint favoring the Democratic Party. News stories broadcast on these channels featured manipulation techniques and breaches of Journalist's Code of Ethics – **selective presentation of facts, ignorance of the right to reply, mixing facts and opinions.**

**Accent TV** and **NTV Moldova** covered part of the analyzed events in a biased and one-sided manner from Socialist's Party perspective, **presenting facts in a selective way, omitting relevant information in the news story, mixing facts with opinions, employing irony towards opponents.** In one case, **NTV Moldova** communicated **false information**, and in another **omitted an important subject** in the newscast.

**Jurnal TV** displayed elements of selective presentation of facts, lack of balance and right to reply.

**Sputnik.md** and **RTR Moldova** omitted several relevant subjects from their daily agenda, failing to cover them in their news. **Sputnik.md** and **Noi.md** failed to provide a right to reply.

Generally speaking, certain portals and TV channels tend to ignore journalist's duty to grant the right to reply to persons featured in a negative context.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Broadcasting Coordination Council, pursuant to article 4 of the Broadcast Code, should report on and initiate monitoring of TV channels whose content disseminates manipulative information, to find breaches and apply sanctions.

Editors at TV channels are encouraged to verify that editorial content complies with the mission of the press to report truthfully on reality rather than following the desires of politicians to promote their interests and destroy the opponent.

Reporters are encouraged to cover on site all relevant facts in a balanced manner, with fact-checking, not in a selective and one-sided way.

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