



## **Monitoring Report**

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

***October 1–December 31, 2017***

*This monitoring report has been prepared by the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) as a partner in the project Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion, and Accountability in Moldova (MEDIA-M) funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Internews. The MEDIA-M project aims to promote the development of independent and professional media in Moldova, offering citizens access to a variety of perspectives and contributing to greater media resistance to political and financial pressures.*

---

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

From October 1 to December 31, 2017, the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) monitored 12 media outlets—news portals and TV channels—to identify whether the material disseminated contained any breaches of professional rules or elements of information manipulation. The monitoring team analyzed how the outlets covered events of public interest in politics, the economy, foreign policy, and other fields and whether they complied with professional and ethical standards such as verifying information through several sources, pluralism of opinions, and balance in news reports about conflicts. By using the Journalist’s Code of Conduct and relevant academic works, they identified information manipulation procedures and techniques.

The analysis was based on the assumption that news is the primary media product that people consume in search of information about daily reality. Therefore, irrespective of a media owner’s views on political or economic issues, news must contain facts exclusively and not journalists’ opinions, it should be written in neutral and accessible language, and it should reflect reality as accurately as possible observing a balance of sources.

### **Purpose of Monitoring**

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

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

- Coverage: national
- Languages: Romanian and Russian
- Impact: circulation and audience

**Broadcasting:** Publika TV (news on Publika.md), Prime TV, Canal 2, Jurnal TV, Accent TV, RTR Moldova (newscasts produced in Moldova ), NTV Moldova.

**Online media:** Ziarulnational.md, Noi.md, Gagauzinfo.md, Sputnik.md, Deschide.md.

### **Methodology:**

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

**Manipulation** is defined as: "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."

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

**Main topics monitored** from October 1 to December 31, 2017:

- Cessation of European Union (EU) funding for the justice sector of Moldova (October 11, 2017);
- Appointment of Eugen Sturza as Minister of Defense in the Government of the Republic of Moldova (October 24, 2017);
- Vitalie Proca's interview for Jurnal TV (November 2);
- The 5<sup>th</sup> Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit and signing of the agreement on the EU offering macro-financial assistance (MFA) of 100 million euros to Moldova (November 22–24, 2017);
- Opening of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Liaison Office in the Republic of Moldova (December 8, 2017).

## I. GENERAL TRENDS

---

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

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

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

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

Monitoring showed that journalists from some media outlets deviated from professional standards when they wrote news items. We identified elements characteristic of both propaganda and manipulation and of breaches of the Journalist's Code of Conduct.

**Labeling:** [Prime TV](#), [Publika TV](#) and [Canal 2](#) in Vitalie Proca's interview for Jurnal TV; [NTV Moldova](#) and [Accent TV](#) in the news about the appointment of Eugen Sturza as Minister of Defense

**Omissions:** [NTV Moldova](#), [Accent TV](#) and [Jurnal TV](#) on the opening of the NATO Liaison Office in Moldova

**Selective presentation of facts, opinions and statements:** [NTV Moldova](#) in the news about the 5th EaP Summit and the EU offering 100 million euros in MFA to Moldova; [Accent TV](#), [RTR Moldova](#) and [Jurnal TV](#) on the opening of the NATO Liaison Office in Chisinau

**Lack of the right to reply:** [NTV Moldova](#) in the news about the cessation of EU funding for the justice sector; [Jurnal TV](#) in the news about Vitalie Proca's interview for Jurnal TV; [Prime TV](#) in the news about the 5th EaP Summit and the EU offering 100 million euros in MFA to Moldova

**Mixture of facts and opinions:** [Sputnik.md](#) and [Accent TV](#) in the news about the appointment of Eugen Sturza as Minister of Defense; [NTV Moldova](#) and [Sputnik.md](#) in the news about the 5th EaP Summit and the EU offering 100 million euros in MFA to Moldova

**References to sources that cannot be checked:** [Prime TV](#) in the news about the cessation of EU funding for the justice sector; [NTV Moldova](#) in the news about opening the NATO Liaison Office in Chisinau

**Spreading false information or statements:** [NTV Moldova](#) and [Accent TV](#) in the news about the appointment of Eugen Sturza as Minister of Defense; [Canal 2](#) in the news about the 5th EaP Summit and the EU offering 100 million euros in MFA to Moldova

**Generalization:** [Prime TV](#) in the news about the 5th EaP Summit and the EU offering 100 million euros in MFA to Moldova; [NTV Moldova](#) in the news about opening the NATO Liaison Office in Chisinau

**Suggestion:** [Publika TV](#) and [Prime TV](#) in the news about the cessation of EU funding for the justice sector; [Accent TV](#) in the news about opening the NATO Liaison Office in Chisinau

**(Internal and/or external) enemy technique:** [NTV Moldova](#) and [Accent TV](#) in the news about opening the NATO Liaison Office in Chisinau; [Prime TV](#) in the news about the cessation of EU funding for the justice sector

**Priority information technique:** [Accent TV](#) and [NTV Moldova](#) in the news about the 5th EaP Summit and the EU offering 100 million euros in MFA to Moldova; [Publika TV](#) in the news about the cessation of EU funding for the justice sector of Moldova

## II. DATA ANALYSIS

### Topic 1. The cessation of EU funding for the justice sector of Moldova (October 11)<sup>4</sup>

On October 11, 2017, the EU Delegation to Moldova announced in a press release that it would not transfer the last installment of 28 million euros to the Moldovan state budget to support reforms in the justice sector. According to the official statement, the cessation of funding was due to, “... insufficient commitment to implementing reforms in the justice sector in 2014 and 2015. With insufficient allocation of funds and staff, the necessary reforms were not implemented. As a result, the progress registered was insufficient.” It was also noted that Moldovan authorities did not meet the EU requirements to benefit from this last transfer from the justice reform program.

On [Prime TV](#) in the main newscast at 21:00, the news on the cessation of EU funding for the justice sector was covered tendentiously using several elements of information manipulation and violations of the principles of the Journalist’s Code of Conduct. They included **labeling** which was used along with the **scapegoat technique** in which the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (LDPM) was presented as the entity responsible for the problem while the Democratic Party of Moldova (DPM) was shown as the party that would solve it. **Prime TV** did **not offer the right to reply** to those targeted directly in the news (LDPM in this case). The journalists of this station referred to sources that were impossible to check, “... an hour ago, the current Minister of Justice Vladimir Cebotari announced on his official Facebook page that the arrears of 2014–2015 were removed in 2016–2017, and **official reports prove it,**” but they failed to actually name those reports. Furthermore, the **results of opinion polls were presented in a tendentious manner** aggregating two categories of data (the citizens had “a lot of trust” and “some trust” in justice) into one (general trust).

The news on [Publika TV](#) had the same content as that on **Prime TV**, and the items were presented similarly as well. Journalists from this media outlet also made use of the **priority information** technique when they emphasized the information that the **LDPM** was allegedly to be blamed for the cessation of EU support for justice, only later mentioning **authorities** in general. Thus, viewers first accepted all the primary information, and although additional (valid) information eventually appeared, their subconscious could no longer grasp this detail.<sup>5</sup> Like **Prime TV**, **Publika TV** did not offer the

---

<sup>4</sup> Mediaticritica.md, Case Study. Cessation of the EU funding for the justice sector of Moldova, December 28, 2017, <http://mediaticritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-sistarea-finantarii-ue-sectorului-justitiei/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ion Bunduchi, The ABC of Manipulation Techniques, May 25, 2016, <http://mediaticritica.md/ro/abc-ul-tehnicilor-de-manipulare/>.

right to reply to those concerned: “Moldova lost 28 million euros for lack of reforms in the justice sector especially during 2014–2015 when the Ministry of Justice was headed by the LDPM. This is what the EU delegation to Moldova announced in a press release today.”

[NTV Moldova](#) and [Accent TV](#) presented the topic in a **one-sided** and **unbalanced manner**. They mentioned the general information regarding the EU’s official press release, but only the opinions of MPs representing the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM) were mentioned while the opinions of authorities and/or the government were completely ignored. The reporter cited Vasile Bolea, a Socialist MP who directly accused authorities of, “...inefficiently spending the money obtained from this structure [EU],” and they **did not offer the authorities the right to reply**.

[Jurnal TV](#) provided relatively balanced and objective coverage; however, in one instance its journalists **mixed facts with personal opinions**: “... **the Ministry of Justice did not appear to be disturbed by the fact** that the sector it runs was left without 28 million euros.”

[RTR Moldova](#) and [Gagauzinfo.md](#) covered the topic exclusively on the basis of the EU’s official statement without quoting other sources. [Ziarulnational.md](#), [Noi.md](#) and [Deschide.md](#) covered the event in an objective and balanced manner for several days (October 11, 12, 13, and 17).

[Canal 2](#) and [Sputnik.md](#) did not include this topic in their newscasts.

## **Topic 2. Appointment of Eugen Sturza as Minister of Defense in the Government of the Republic of Moldova (October 24)<sup>6</sup>**

In September, Prime Minister Pavel Filip twice proposed the candidacy of Eugen Sturza, Vice-President of the European People’s Party of Moldova (EPPM) for the post of Minister of Defense which had been vacant since December 2016. The proposal was rejected by President Igor Dodon. Subsequently, the government approached the Constitutional Court to clarify the situation, and on October 19, the court determined that it was possible to have a person act as interim president for a specific case, and that in such cases this duty is to be exercised by the Speaker of Parliament or the Prime Minister. As a result, on October 24, 2017, Eugen Sturza was appointed Minister of Defense by a decree signed by Speaker of Parliament Andrian Candu who temporarily acted as the interim head of state.

Given the complexity of this issue and its duration, coverage in the media was monitored for several days as media outlets covered the news and related events on October 17, 19, 20, 23, 24, and 26.

---

<sup>6</sup> Mediacritica.md, Case Study. Appointment of Eugen Sturza as Minister of Defense in the Government of the Republic of Moldova, December 26, 2017 <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-numirea-lui-eugen-sturza-functia-de-ministru-al-apararii-guvernului-republicii-moldova/>.

The majority of media outlets provided generally unbiased coverage of the event with a few exceptions (**Accent TV** and **NTV Moldova**). Online media were the most active in covering this topic: **Ziarulnațional.md** with over 20 news reports/articles, **Noi.md** with over 15 news reports/articles, and **Dechide.md** with over 10 news reports/articles. The event highlighted the political preferences of the media outlets representing two different camps: on the one hand those associated with PSRM (**Accent TV**, **NTV Moldova** and **Sputnik.md**) and on the other hand, the television stations associated with the Democratic Party (DPM) (**Prime TV**, **Publika TV** and **Canal 2**).

**NTV Moldova** and (especially) **Accent TV** covered the event tendentiously arguing that President Igor Dodon was right and that he was almost intimidated by the country's executive and legislative authorities who, "...serve the interests of the DPM and oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc." At the same time, they **presented and spread false information** promoting the idea that Eugen Sturza represented the DPM and not the EPPM as Minister of Defense. Most of the news reports on **NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV** included only statements by the president of the country; thus, the **balance of sources was not respected**. Igor Dodon was present (directly or indirectly) in about 80% of all the news reports related to the event and was shown exclusively in a positive light. Both media outlets used **labels and denigrating descriptors** for Eugen Sturza: "unprofessionalism," "incompetence" and "lack of experience," "office reformer," "Vlad Plahotniuc's candidate." At the same time, **Accent TV** resorted to **distorting statements**. For example, Andrian Candu mentioned that "... Eugen Sturza was born in the army. His father is a professional military man, and Sturza ... he played **among** ammunition and tanks," but **Accent TV**, without checking Andrian Candu's statement and the way it was worded, quoted Igor Dodon as stating that, "... Eugen Sturza played **with** tanks."

**Accent TV** and **Sputnik.md** resorted to the **technique of mixing facts and opinions** contrary to professional ethics: "He is also the one who will administer the oath of office to the newly appointed Minister of Defense **who has very vague knowledge of the national army in particular and of defense in general**" (**Accent TV**); "But the constitutional authority **apparently** did not solve the problem of the oath ceremony ... **we might expect** that Eugen Sturza will take his oath of office in the Speaker's presence, too" (**Sputnik.md**).

**Prime TV**, **Publika TV** and **Canal 2** presented the event as a game and/or a victory for Parliament and the government represented by Andrian Candu and Pavel Filip over the presidency represented by Igor Dodon ("A blow under the belt for President Dodon," **Canal 2**, October 18; "The intrigue around the Minister of Defense's chair has ended," **Canal 2**, October 24). In most cases, both the speaker and the prime minister were presented in a positive way ("The Speaker of Parliament Andrian Candu rushed to defend the judges," **Canal 2**, October 19) which quoted him directly while Igor Dodon was presented in a negative context ("Igor Dodon threatens to take revenge on the magistrates of the high court ...," **Canal 2**, October 18) and was paraphrased or even ignored, even when he was directly targeted in the news.

**Jurnal TV** transmitted a **false message** that circulated in almost all news reports on the topic under review: the station presented Eugen Sturza's candidacy for Minister of Defense as "proposed by the DPM," and not by the EPPM. **RTR Moldova** and **Gagauzinfo.md** broadcast/published news on this topic without any deviations from the rules for news writing.

### **Topic 3. Vitalie Proca's interview for Jurnal TV (November 2)<sup>7</sup>**

On November 2, Jurnal TV broadcast an exclusive interview from Jilava Penitentiary in Romania with Vitalie Proca who was sentenced to 21 years and 8 months for attempted murder. He accused Democratic Party (DPM) leader Vlad Plahotniuc saying he was the one who had ordered the assassination of Gherman Gorbuntov. The Prosecutor's Office for Combating Organized Crime and Special Cases and the law enforcement authorities are, however, carrying out an investigation on the hypothesis that the murder could have been ordered by Renato Usatii, the leader of the political party Our Party.

The monitoring period covered the days November 3 (after the interview was broadcast) and November 7 when DPM leader Vlad Plahotniuc, who was accused directly in this interview, made statements to the press commenting on the accusations Proca had made.

On **Jurnal TV**, the newscast on November 3 was dominated by material related to the interview. The content of the news reports based on it amounted to 28 minutes which accounted for 70% of the entire newscast. The first report on it lasted for 10 minutes and included an edited version of the most important statements made by Vitalie Proca. **Jurnal TV did not give the right to reply** to the people mentioned in the report and/or **used statements/sources selectively**. In addition, **Jurnal TV** reporters **mixed facts with personal opinions**: "After the accusations made by Vitalie Proca against the DPM leader, instead of investigating the facts behind his statements, the authorities either rejected them or did not comment on them. **What makes it worse**, some officials have **accused us of suggesting** to the interviewee the name he should mention in the interview."

**Prime TV**, **Publika TV** and **Canal 2** presented the topic similarly and had the same approach. The focus was on the idea that the information provided by Vitalie Proca was false. To support this thesis, the media outlets sought to deny all the allegations one by one, so they addressed and interviewed all the people Proca mentioned in his interview. All three television stations used **labels** extensively (see the following table), and **mixed facts with opinions**: "Disturbed by the questions of journalists, **Usatii tried to intimidate the uncomfortable press...**" (**Canal 2**); "Renato Usatii's goal **seemingly** is to cover his tracks and to indicate another person as the one who ordered the attempted murder he is accused of" (**Publika TV**). **Prime TV** used the technique called **image transfer** (in this case a

---

<sup>7</sup> Mediacritica.md, Case Study. Vitalie Proca's interview for Jurnal TV, January 10, 2018, <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-interviul-lui-vitalie-proca-acordat-televiziunii-jurnal-tv/>.

NEGATIVE one) from one person to another by showing a photo collage featuring Igor Dodon, Maia Sandu and Vitalie Proca through which they:

- tried to suggest that Maia Sandu and Igor Dodon defended a person convicted of attempted murder;
- hoped to equate the images of Sandu and Dodon with that of Proca to persuade media consumers that they all belonged in the same category (attempted murderers).

At the same time, although **Igor Dodon and Maia Sandu** were targeted in news, they **were not given the right to reply**. None of the three channels (**Prime TV, Publika TV and Canal 2**) broadcast any images from Proca’s interview and only quoted and/or paraphrased his statements.

**Words used to describe the persons mentioned in the Proca Interview**

	<b>Jurnal TV</b>	<b>Prime TV</b>	<b>Publika TV</b>	<b>Canal 2</b>	<b>Ziarulnațional.md</b>
<b>Vitalie Proca</b>	Killer, convict	Killer, criminal, murderer	Killer, criminal, murderer, assassin	Killer, murderer	Notorious
<b>Vlad Plahotniuc</b>	Oligarch, head of DPM, leader of DPM	leader of DPM	leader of DPM, president of DPM	leader of DPM	leader of DPM
<b>Renato Usatîi</b>	-	Criminal, runaway	Criminal, runaway	Criminal, runaway	-
<b>Gherman Gorbunțov</b>	Banker	Banker	Russian banker, businessman	Banker	“Black banker,” banker
<b>Victor and Viorel Țopa</b>	-	Criminals, runaways, convicts	Criminals, runaways	Criminals, runaways	-

[RTR Moldova](#) covered both the information on Vitalie Proca’s interview and the statements in Vlad Plahotniuc’s press briefing. Both were presented neutrally with airtime and the right to reply provided to all parties involved. [Ziarulnational.md](#) covered the information about the topic objectively and without bias. All the parties, institutions and persons concerned/involved were given the right to reply; however, like other media outlets, [Ziarulnational.md](#) used **labels**.

[Noi.md](#) and [Gagauzinfo.md](#) published only one news story each based on Vlad Plahotniuc's statements at the press briefing. [Deschide.md](#) and [Sputnik.md](#) as well as [NTV Moldova](#) and [Accent TV](#) did not cover this issue.

#### **Topic 4. The 5th Eastern Partnership Summit and signing of the agreement on the EU offering macro-financial assistance (MFA) of 100 million euros to Moldova (November 22–24)<sup>8</sup>**

The 5th Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit took place in Brussels on November 24, 2017. The event marked the achievements of the past two years in the EU's relations with EaP countries and the preparation for the implementation by 2020 of 20 actions that would bring tangible benefits to their citizens. Moldovan Prime Minister Pavel Filip participated in the summit, accompanied by several officials. During his visit, he had meetings with European officials including Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations; and other heads of state and governments. The Memorandum on EU Macro-financial Assistance to Moldova was signed on November 23 in Brussels. It provides for a grant of 40 million euros and for a loan of 60 million euros. The money will be transferred in three installments in 2018 depending on the progress made in meeting the EU's 28 requirements for good governance in the public sector; good governance in the financial sector; combating corruption and money laundering; reforms in the energy sector and the business environment and the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and the EU.

In order to get a complete picture of the topic, the content and information disseminated by the media outlets between November 22 and 27 was analyzed. In terms of quantity, during the 6 days of monitoring most of the news and information on this topic were presented by **Ziarul Național** (10 items), **Deschide.md** (9 items) and **Publika TV** (9 items). There were also media outlets that ignored the topic (**Gagauzinfo.md**). In terms of quality, some media outlets covered the event in an exclusively positive context (**Prime TV, Publika TV, Canal 2**), while others presented it negatively (**Accent TV**) or partially negatively (**Jurnal TV**); some media outlets had a neutral and unbiased approach (**Noi.md, Ziarul Național**).

Even though the EaP Summit was one of the most important national topics in the week of November 19–26, 2017, [NTV Moldova](#) ignored the event at the time. A few days later, however, **NTV Moldova** broadcast a news report that contained only comments and statements by President Igor Dodon about the results of this event. At the same time, **the station failed to mention** the signing of the MFA memorandum for 100 million euros. Among other manipulative elements, **NTV Moldova** also used the **technique of multiplying a personal opinion in order to impose opinion as fact/truth**: “European integration is an illusion,” an idea repeated by the presenter, the reporter, and the only source for the

---

<sup>8</sup> Mediaticritica.md, Case Study. The 5th Eastern Partnership Summit and signing of the agreement on the EU offering macro-financial assistance of EUR 100 million to Moldova, January 19, 2018, <http://mediaticritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-al-v-lea-summit-al-parteneriatului-estic-si-semnarea-acordului-privind-asistenta-macrofinanciara-de-100-milioane-euro-care-va-fi-acordata-republicii-moldova-de-ue/>.

news, Igor Dodon. Also, **facts were mixed with opinions**: “As for Moldova’s accession to the EU, **Pavel Filip did not have much to say. He mentioned only that the EaP does not offer any prospect of joining the European space.**”

[Accent TV](#) presented the event in an exclusively negative context. It made use of the **priority information technique**, broadcasting the first news report based on the views of political analysts that they had voiced earlier on a program on this station. In this report, journalists said that, “We might as well forget about the European future of Moldova and of other countries in the EaP. The statements were made by the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood Policy Johannes Hahn. However, Moldovan authorities are trying to mislead the population, speaking about the success of our country in the process of reform and European integration.” Only in another report near the end of the newscast did they speak about the EaP Summit and about the content of its fifth edition. Thus viewers first got some opinions—**mostly negative**—about the summit and only later heard about facts. In another news report, **Accent TV did not offer the right to reply** to the target institutions (government/Prime Minister). **Accent TV** presented the EU in an exclusively negative context using the **external enemy technique** and suggesting that it might be responsible for the internal problems and challenges of the Republic of Moldova.

[Sputnik.md](#) presented information on this topic neutrally and objectively in some reports but tendentiously in others. The information on Prime Minister Pavel Filip’s visit to Brussels was covered neutrally and impartially. In another report, however, which included Igor Dodon’s statements on the work of the EaP Summit, **Sputnik.md** made use of these manipulation techniques: **insisting on opinions/statements that are intended to be presented—by repetition—as facts/truths** (“European integration of Moldova is equal to zero”); **manipulation with intertitles** (“The Europeans’ disillusionment with Chisinau is constant,” “Moldovans are being manipulated – the EU does not want to expand,” or “Lessons for the government”), and **mixing facts with opinions**.

[Prime TV](#) used these elements of information manipulation.

- **False information.** In one of the November 24 news reports, the journalist mentioned that Pavel Filip had had a meeting with Johannes Hahn, “...in which he was assured Moldova will receive the promised MFA by the end of this year,” which was denied by a press release from the EU delegation.
- **Scapegoat or internal enemy technique.** In a news story on November 26, **Prime TV** shifted the emphasis by blaming the opposition for the lack of success: “The release of MFA for Moldova should be a political lesson for the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) and several other opposition parties that have moved our internal political struggle to European ground.” At the same time, PAS, which was directly targeted in the news, **did not benefit from the right to reply**.

[Publika TV](#) and [Canal 2](#) mostly had the same content as **Prime TV**, and the manipulation elements were the same with the addition of **references to sources and polls without mentioning what these were** (Pavel Filip said the **latest polls** showed a significant increase in the number of people opting for the integration of the country into the European Union” [**Publika TV**]) and **false information** (“... the EaP countries will receive the MFA money without delay” [**Canal 2**]).

[Jurnal TV](#) broadcast reports on the topic in newscasts on November 24 and 27. The information was presented selectively as the station focused more on government criticism and almost exclusively on the subject of MFA conditionality. **Jurnal TV referred to sources that cannot be verified and mixed facts with opinions**: “... and some economic experts say that **triumphal headlines** about the disbursement of economic assistance are inappropriate in the current processes.” At the same time, **Jurnal TV did not offer the right to reply** to these persons and/or institutions (the DPM and/or Vlad Plahotniuc).

Most of the news reports broadcast by [RTR Moldova](#) were neutral and unbiased; however, sources were quoted somewhat selectively. Thus, even though Pavel Filip and Johannes Hahn, Federica Mogherini and Jens Stoltenberg were the main sources and/or actors in the event, they were never quoted directly in the news on **RTR Moldova** but only paraphrased while Igor Dodon was quoted directly.

[Ziarul National](#), [Deschide.md](#) and [Noi.md](#) did not demonstrate any deviations from the rules on news writing. All three media outlets covered the topic in question in detail. [Gagauzinfo.md](#) omitted the topic.

### **Topic 5. Opening the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Liaison Office in the Republic of Moldova (December 8)**

On December 8, 2017, the NATO Liaison Office in Moldova was inaugurated in Chisinau. The event was attended by Moldovan Prime Minister Pavel Filip and NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller. The Agreement on the Opening of the NATO Liaison Office in Moldova was signed in November 2016 by Pavel Filip and Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General, and was ratified by the Moldovan Parliament in December 2017.

The monitoring was largely based on the content published or broadcast by the media on the day of the event; however, in order to have a complete picture of the topic, the content on the previous day and on the day following the event were also analyzed. All the outlets monitored had at least one news item on the topic. Some of them breached professional rules and presented the topic with elements of information manipulation. In terms of quality, the opening of the NATO office was one of the most geopoliticized topics monitored for this report. Some media outlets presented the information in a

positive context, presenting the event as a success of the government (**Prime TV, Publika TV**) and/or of the country in general (**Deschide.md**) while other outlets covered it in a exclusively negative context focusing on the “demonization” of NATO (**Accent TV, NTV Moldova**), and still others presented the subject neutrally and without bias (**RTR Moldova, Ziarulnațional.md, Noi.md**). There were also outlets that tried to take the event out of context and to present information and sources selectively (**Jurnal TV**).

**Accent TV** presented the opening in a tendentious manner and put it in an entirely negative context. The TV station dedicated three news reports to the event which took about one third of the total time of the newscast. A number of attempts at manipulation were observed.

- **Suggestion technique:** “After amendments to the Broadcasting Code were adopted yesterday, Pavel Filip and the NATO Deputy Secretary General cut the ribbon of the NATO office in Chisinau. The inauguration ceremony was attended by several ambassadors, including those of Romania and the USA. The situation displeased the members of the largest opposition party in the country. After more than a year of protests by the Socialists against the opening of the liaison office, today the official inauguration ceremony took place against a background of harsh slogans against NATO’s intervention in Moldovan internal politics.” The suggestion to the media consumer is that there is a causal link between the opening of the NATO office and the modification of the Broadcasting Code which will impose certain restrictions on the media content produced by Russian television stations; in this respect, the main “culprits” are allegedly the West and, in particular, the USA and Romania (“Many ambassadors, including those of Romania and the USA, took part in the inauguration ceremony”). At the same time, the PSRM is allegedly the only institution fighting this “evil”: “The situation dissatisfied the members of the largest opposition party in the country.”
- **Mixture of facts and journalists’ opinions:** “...today, the official inauguration ceremony took place against a background of **harsh slogans against NATO intervention** in Moldovan internal politics”; “... in this way, the socialists announced that a national referendum is expected to be held in 2018 in which Moldovans will decide on the most appalling and, according to them, unjust decisions adopted by the government, including the question of opening the NATO office in Chisinau.”
- **External enemy technique:** A manipulation technique that attempts to induce in media consumers a sense of danger coming from the outside (in this case, the external enemy being **NATO**), also suggesting that there is someone else who can defend them against this danger (in this case the **PSRM**).
- **Biased selection:** With this technique, **Accent TV** broadcast only the negative opinions from the *vox populi* poll: “We have come here because we know NATO is an alliance based on principles that can cause war. We believe that for Moldova as a neutral state it is very important not to overlook this fact ...”; “We don’t want to repeat the fate of those countries like Libya, Syria, or Yemen ... We don’t want to participate in genocide”; “Moldova has received about

100 million euros for this step, but this money will not compensate for the lives of our young people.”

- **Lack of right to reply/opinion:** Although NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller was one of the main sources for the news, **Accent TV** did not broadcast any direct quotes (although the operator captured images clearly showing that the TV station had access to both the official event and the meeting of President Dodon with Deputy Secretary Gottemoeller). Both statements by the NATO Deputy Secretary General and Prime Minister Pavel Filip were paraphrased. Thus, the **information presented was distorted and selective**, providing direct access to only a single source.

[NTV Moldova](#) broadcast two news reports on the opening of the NATO Liaison Office with contents and approaches similar to those of **Accent TV**. **NTV Moldova** referred to **sources and polls without specifying what they were** (“According to the most recent sociological survey, 68% are strongly opposed to joining NATO”) and used the **generalization** technique (“The NATO Liaison Office was inaugurated in Chisinau today. The event was met with protests **by the opposition** but also by those citizens who do not like the country’s proximity to this political-military bloc.”) Both **NTV Moldova** and **Accent TV** focused more on the interpretation of the event and on information about NATO than on presenting facts.

[Sputnik.md](#) presented the event in a neutral way but with a few exceptions. This media outlet avoided including direct statements by the main sources (those of NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller and Prime Minister Pavel Filip) and instead used a lengthy quote from [Igor Dodon’s statements](#).

[Jurnal TV](#) opened the December 8 newscast with an “exclusive” interview with NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller. This sort of presentation could give viewers the impression that the Deputy Secretary General had come to Chisinau primarily to offer an interview to **Jurnal TV** and only incidentally to participate in the opening of the NATO Liaison Office in our country. The second part of the report spoke about the opening of the NATO office with an emphasis on its mission and the achievements to which this institution would contribute. **Jurnal TV** made use of the **omission technique**, completely ignoring the government’s official opinion/statement on the opening of the liaison office although Prime Minister Pavel Filip also attended the event.

The content of the information presented by [Prime TV](#), [Publika TV](#) and [Canal 2](#) was nearly identical, and in places it was the same on all three stations; however, the information about both the official opening of the office and about the protests organized by the PSRM was covered in a neutral and unbiased manner. Also, the stations mentioned President Igor Dodon’s “...concern about the opening of the NATO office in Chisinau.”

[Deschide.md](#) covered the opening neutrally; however, the portal committed some deviations by **mixing facts with opinions**: “**The Party of Socialists, led de facto by Igor Dodon...**” “If the current government fails to do it, the NATO office will be closed by the Party of Socialists after they win the parliamentary elections in 2018, **socialists boast.**”

[Gagauzinfo.md](#) published a single news story in which the information was presented in a neutral and unbiased manner and all the sources involved (the government, the presidency, the NATO representative) were mentioned. [Ziarulnațional.md](#) presented the information in an objective, neutral, and diverse manner offering the right to reply to all persons targeted in the report. [Noi.md](#) published several reports about the opening of the NATO office, approaching the topic neutrally and without bias with some minor exceptions. For example, in the headline of one report, [Noi.md](#) journalists **mixed facts with opinions**: “NATO is to blame! Limited access to pedestrians on several streets in the capital city.”

[RTR Moldova](#) broadcast two news reports on the topic: The first presented information about the event; the second covered the protest organized by the PSRM. Both reports were presented neutrally and without bias. All sources and points of view were covered. In both reports [RTR Moldova](#) presented citizens opinions through *vox populi* polls; however, the polls in both reports contained only negative opinions about NATO.

## CONCLUSIONS

Several of the media outlets monitored ignored the rules on news writing and on factual coverage and disseminated incomplete, tendentious, and/or biased information. Monitoring revealed violations of the Journalist's Code of Conduct and also techniques for manipulating information.

Television stations **Accent TV** and **NTV Moldova** covered the topics in a one-sided and tendentious manner, directly favoring the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM). In many cases these outlets presented information and statements selectively, they failed to provide the right to reply to persons targeted in news reports, they mixed facts with opinions and several times they resorted to the internal or external enemy technique.

Television stations **Publika TV**, **Prime TV** and **Canal 2** mostly delivered the same news content, often favoring the Democratic Party of Moldova (DPM). In the news reports of these outlets monitoring revealed manipulation techniques and violations of the Journalist's Code of Conduct: labeling, lack of the right to reply, mixing facts and opinions, references to sources that are impossible to check and the techniques of priority information and of scapegoating.

**Jurnal TV** showed elements of selectively presenting facts, lack of balance and lack of the right to reply.

**Sputnik.md** omitted several relevant topics from its daily broadcasts and failed to cover them in news reports. The other outlets covered the events monitored neutrally and without bias.

**A common problem** among the majority of the media outlets monitored was that journalists intentionally or unintentionally ignored the principle of granting the right to reply to persons targeted in news reports in a negative context.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Under Article 4 of the Broadcasting Code, the Broadcast Coordinating Council (BCC) should take note of the above information and should initiate the monitoring of the television stations whose content showed signs of manipulation in order to identify violations of legislation and to apply relevant sanctions.

The editors at television stations are urged to supervise the editorial content of their outlets so that it corresponds to the media mission of informing the public and accurately covering reality instead of bowing to the desires of policymakers to promote their interests and destroy their opponents.

Reporters are urged to report all relevant facts in an impartial manner, not selectively or with bias, and to verify information prior to reporting it.

Media consumers should seek information from several media sources to avoid the risk of receiving incorrect or manipulative information.