

The long way to truly 'independent media' in Moldova

In 2017 the media sector situation continued to worsen. Both national and international media organizations' reports confirm this fact. *Reporters Without Borders* placed Moldova in 80th place in 2017 World Press Freedom Index or 4 positions down comparing to 2016. A similar negative trend is reported by *Freedom House*, which labelled Moldova's media as partly free (5.00 points out of 7, where 7 is the worst score).

Challenges faced by the Moldovan media sector haven't seen significant changes: outdated legal framework; excessive influence of politicians and oligarchic groups; high exposure to external and internal propaganda and manipulation; lack of transparency of media ownership; limited independence of the broadcasting regulatory authority; and unfair competition on the advertising market. Government has attempted to 'fix' the media legislation by adding new provisions to already existing laws, while ignoring the proposals to revise and modernize the legislation as a whole, something that has been required for years by media organisations and experts in the field. Quality changes and a setting of clear rules of play in the media sector continues to require a lot of political will from the Government, which has been clearly lacking in all prior governments.

Drafting and adopting a new Broadcasting Law is still a major priority of the broadcasting sector, but the new drafted bill remained blocked in the Parliamentary Commission for Culture, Education, Research, Youth, Sports and Mass Media for debates.

Advertising is one of the most important sources of revenue for independent media outlets. Thus, monopolization of advertising market tops the list of the biggest challenges for the media sector. Experts have signalled 'the unwritten cartel deal' between two major players. Such monopolization seriously affects the entire media sector development, creating impediments for independent media which are almost unable to collect money from advertising. This may, also, lead to the closure of independent media outlets or to limited activity because of lack of financial resources.

Political demonopolization and deconcentration of the media sector is valid only on paper. The regulatory bodies neither prevented the concentration of dominant positions on the media market, nor allocated the licenses based on clear and concrete criteria. Intimidation of journalists has not stopped. On the contrary, in the last 2-3 years the number of cases of media outlets representatives'

intimidation has increased. External propaganda has become one of the major challenges for the media sector. However, in the context of parliamentary elections in autumn 2018, national and international organisations pointed to internal propaganda as the most serious challenge for media sector.

Conclusions...

Most of the Governments which have changed after 2009 have declared the media sector reform as a priority, ensuring media pluralism and guaranteeing access to information to all media outlets. However, almost ten years later, the media is facing the same old issues and challenges. Even if national and international organisations – among which is the EU – have recommended the authorities to act on and implement the reforms needed in the media field, these have remained only as statements. Experts and the media community assert that the reform issues could be easily addressed. All that is needed in this respect is political will.

...and Recommendations

- 🔍 **Encourage the Moldovan Parliament to organize debates on the new draft of Broadcasting Code as soon as possible and adopt the law no later than April-May 2018;**
- 🔍 **The Moldovan Parliament and the Working Group on modernizing the media legal framework should speed up the drafting of the final version of the law on advertising, launch it for public discussion and adopt it no later than May-June 2018;**
- 🔍 **Strengthening media independence based on clear, measurable, and meritocratic criteria for appointing members to the Broadcasting Coordination Council (BCC) and the Council of Observers of the public service broadcaster 'Teleradio-Moldova'. It is, also, necessary to include clear legal provisions in the new draft Broadcasting Code which will address the issue of de-politicisation of media regulatory bodies;**
- 🔍 **Broadcasting Coordination Council (BCC) should seize or monitor domestic media outlets (or use the reports prepared by media organisations) in order to impose fines for breaching ethic principles, broadcasting false information or manipulating public opinion.**