



**Organization for Security and Co-operation
in Europe
Mission to Moldova**



**Special Representative of the Secretary
General of the Council of Europe**

Benchmarks for the Operation of Public Broadcasters in the Republic of Moldova

1. Public Television and Radio should
 - give a complete, accurate, impartial, balanced and objective overview over political, economic, social and cultural developments in the Republic of Moldova¹;
 - provide a comprehensive picture over the real situation in the country;
 - encourage viewers to form their own individual opinion in a free manner;
 - reflect cultural and regional diversity;
 - respect gender equity;
 - serve all groups of society, including those neglected by commercial broadcasters, such as ethnic minorities and others;
 - respect the dignity of the human being and promote the values commonly shared by the Council of Europe and the OSCE, especially with respect to democracy, pluralism, tolerance and respect for human rights and freedoms.
2. Factual programs shall be impartial, this means they shall be fair, accurate and shall maintain a proper respect for truth. A program may choose to explore any subject at any point on the spectrum of debate, as long as there are good editorial reasons for doing so. It may choose to test or report one side of a particular argument. However, it must do so with fairness and integrity. It should ensure that opposing views are not misrepresented.
3. News reports have to be rigorously sourced and verified. Information should be broadcast as a fact only if it is verified by two independent sources. Acceptable exceptions to the double-source requirement are fact directly confirmed by a reporter of the public broadcaster or significant news drawn from official announcements of a nation or an organization. When a secondary source offers exclusive significant news which cannot be verified by using a second source, the information should be attributed to the originating agency by name.
4. News should be presented with due accuracy and impartiality. Reporting should be dispassionate, wide-ranging and well-informed. It should present a comprehensive description of events, reporting an issue in a reliable and unbiased

¹ It is understood that local or regional public broadcasters should focus on the area of their coverage, but nevertheless they should also provide for information on national developments.

- way. The main differing views should be given due weight in the period of which the controversy is active.
5. In case a number of programs are clearly interlinked and form de facto a series on reports of related issues, impartiality can be achieved over the entire series. Editorial programs, for example, should give over one month approximate equal time to representatives of the government and the parliamentary majority on the one hand and the opposition on the other hand on related issues. In case a number of programs are broadcast under the same title, but deal with separate issues, impartiality has to be reached within every individual program.
 6. Due impartiality is of special importance in major matters of controversy. It should be especially insured that a full range of significant views and perspectives are heard during the period in which the controversy is active.
 7. The public broadcaster should provide live coverage of all or parts of parliamentary debates in which issues of extraordinary importance are discussed. Coverage of debates in parliament has to be balanced. Therefore live coverage of such debates should not be interrupted before or during the intervention of opposition speakers and should not be ended before the leading opposition speakers have replied to the speeches of government officials or representatives of the majority faction.
 8. News should include regular reports on debates in parliament. Reports on parliamentary debates should give equal air time to the arguments of the government and the majority faction on the one hand and the opposition on the other hand.
 9. Reports on activities of the president and the government should include or should be followed by statements and comments by representatives of the opposition and representatives of institutions or organizations directly affected by these activities.
 10. Whenever a program voices strong criticism or charges directed against an individual or an organization, with iniquity or incompetence or when charges or accusations made by third persons are reported in the program, those criticized should be given a fair opportunity to respond. As a rule, the response or balancing information should be included in the first use of a news item or feature containing the material. If the response or balancing information cannot be obtained by program deadline, or the subject of the charge declines to comment, that will be made clear in the public broadcaster's account and the response or balancing information will be broadcast as soon as it is available. In particular, when a government official or member of the parliamentary majority directly criticizes an individual or an organization, the reaction of the individual or organization criticized should be included in the report or should follow immediately. The time provided for reply should as a rule equal the time of the critic.
 11. In case the President, the Speaker of Parliament or the Prime Minister give an interview longer than three minutes or a speech on public TV or Radio the leaders of the opposition parliamentary factions should be given within 24 hours the possibility to comment on the remarks made on public TV or radio respectively.

12. Representatives of non-governmental organizations should be given access to public TV and Radio to voice their opinion on developments or government actions connected to their field of activity.
13. Live talk shows on political, social, economic and cultural issues should form a regular part of the programs of public TV and Radio. Invited participants should always reflect a balanced selection of representatives from government, parliament, political parties, civil society, business community, churches or international organizations, depending on the nature of the topic. The refusal of an organization or an individual to take part in a program should not be allowed to act as a veto. The reasons for the absence of an organization or an individual should be explained and as far as possible a fair representation of the views of the missing contributor based on what is already known should be provided.
14. During election campaigns the public media should provide adequate opportunity, on an equitable and non-discriminatory basis, for election contestants to inform the public about their candidacies and political programs. It should provide active media coverage of the preparation and conduct of the elections and should provide voters with unbiased information and education.
15. Serious factual error should be admitted, clearly, frankly and without delay.
16. Facts should not only be got right, but also language should be fair. Exaggerations should be avoided and language should not be used inadvertently so as to suggest value judgments, commitment or lack of objectivity.
17. The use of unattributed pejorative terms or labels to describe persons or organizations should be avoided at all times. Only when the individuals and groups use those labels to describe themselves or their activities an exception might be made.
18. Commentary should always respect the truth and should never be used to give the audience a dishonest impression of events.
19. In news and other factual programs events should neither be fabricated, distorted or dramatized.
20. Surreptitious recording should only be used as an investigative tool to explore matters which raise issues of serious anti-social or criminal behavior where there is reasonable prior evidence of such a behavior. No "fishing expeditions" should be undertaken. Surreptitious recording might be done also for purely entertainment purposes, but in this case the material shall be used only when the consent of the individual recorded has been obtained afterwards. As a method of social research surreptitious recording might be used only if there is no other method that could reasonably capture the behavior under scrutiny and only if the identities of the individual concerned are disguised by voice-over or blurring. Material obtained by other sources should be used only if consistent with the guidelines mentioned above.
21. When portraying social groups, stereotypes should be avoided. Where prejudice and disadvantage exists they have to be reported and reflected, but nothing should be done to perpetuate them. Non-sexist language shall be used whenever possible.
22. The state audiovisual archives should be regarded as repositories of the nation's audiovisual heritage to be used by public service broadcasters for the general benefit.
23. The government and public bodies should never abuse their custody over public finances to try to influence the content of broadcasts; the placement of public advertising should be based on market considerations.

24. Editorial independence should be guaranteed. Neither political nor commercial considerations should unduly influence the content of a broadcast program. On the editorial independence, a common code of conduct should be reached between the staff and the board of directors on basic journalistic principles. This common *code of conduct* shall at least contain the following principles:
- standing up for human rights;
 - standing up for the fundamental democratic rights, the parliamentary system and international understanding, as laid down in the United Nations Charter;
 - fighting any nationalist or racial discrimination.
25. The selection of staff for the public broadcaster should be based on a transparent, non-discriminatory process without regard to gender, age or ethnic or social origin. The selection should be based on the merit principle, which entails the employment of the most qualified person for any given job and which provides for non-selected applicants the right to appeal against this decision and to ask for a review against the specifications for the position.