



## Media Monitoring Report: Reporting on minority issues and diversity in the media

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## **Introduction**

Mass media, both traditional and new, have a special role to play in society by providing opportunities for different actors to contribute to the strengthening of social cohesion. Media outlets have an enormous potential to spread information by providing an opportunity to communicate and exchange information in different languages and by expressing the views of various minorities and groups in society. Their voices can thus reach as broad an audience as possible to help promote better understanding of minorities and acceptance of diversity.

With the dramatic changes in the media market in recent years, especially thanks to the Internet, live interaction is possible through online media offering the possibility to express opinions on certain topics. However, in addition to offering possibilities to participate in public debates, the new media also provide easy access for those who, under the pretext of the right to freedom of expression, can violate the rights of those who are different. Anonymity, accessibility, speed, and lack of regulation provide fertile soil for those who want to distribute hate speech. They can use the media as a forum for stigmatizing and perpetuating prejudices and stereotypes. In addition, virtual discussions with such content, constantly perpetuated, can lead to the exclusion and marginalization of groups and even to incitement of hatred against them.

Media outlets can also shape reality by the way in which they report events – selecting topics, providing context for framing, and highlighting or omitting details to give meaning (priming) – and can thus spread prejudices and stereotypes about certain minority or disadvantaged groups.

## **Methodological framework**

*Purpose of monitoring:* to determine how media in the Republic of Moldova report on topics related to ethnic minorities and other groups vulnerable to hate speech<sup>1</sup> by assessing media content and comments posted by readers of news portals.

*Monitoring period:* 7 May–7 June 2019

*Selection criteria for TV stations:*

- public or private;
- national or regional coverage;
- audience and web page on which TV material is distributed.

*TV stations monitored:* Moldova 1 (main news bulletin), PRO TV (main news bulletin and [www.protv.md](http://www.protv.md) website), Publika TV (main news bulletin and [www.publika.md](http://www.publika.md) website).

*Selection criteria for online press:*

Romanian and Russian-language media that:

- broadcast news and other informative content;
- produce informative content every day;
- *provide* readers an opportunity for online commenting.

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<sup>1</sup> “Hate speech: any form of expression that causes, propagates, promotes or justifies racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance.” Law on Freedom of Speech.

*Online portals monitored:* unimedia.info, jurnal.md, deschide.md, noi.md, newsmaker.md, kp.md, and sputnik.md.

*Object of monitoring:* All material and comments related to representatives of ethnic groups and other groups vulnerable to discrimination and hate speech – refugees/migrants, LGBT community representatives, persons with physical and psychosocial disabilities – were analyzed to determine to what extent different aspects of inter-ethnic and inter-regional relations were reported and the degree of tolerance towards different categories of diversity. Also, materials that addressed subjects from the Gagauz Yeri Autonomous Territorial Unit and Transdniestria were analyzed.

Articles were analyzed according to the following criteria:

- placement on page/in bulletin;
- size;
- gender balance;
- emphasis;
- topics/themes;
- protagonists.

Content produced by journalists and comments by readers were assessed to find derogatory words, discriminatory expressions, labels, stereotypes, appeals to aggression or other forms of expression that spread hatred and intolerance towards certain minorities and social groups.

*Indicators assessed in relevant articles:*

- genre (news, editorial, commentary, interview, long article/feature, other);
- size: very short (up to 500 characters), short (500–1000 characters), medium-sized (1000–2500 characters), long (2500–5000 characters) and very long (more than 5000 characters);
- topic (ordinary subjects based on daily events including examples of good assimilation of minorities, civil society actions to ensure human rights, state policies on minorities, negotiations on the Transnistrian conflict, others);
- primary or secondary emphasis;
- comments and their character (relevant, irrelevant, discriminatory);
- protagonists mentioned or cited by ethnicity (Romanians, Ukrainians, Gagauz, Russians, Bulgarians, Jews, Romani, other);
- Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, Transdniestria;
- protagonists mentioned or cited by gender (male, female, other).

*Content analysis:* The correctness/incorrectness and the tolerance/intolerance of the journalists or online media readers towards representatives of minorities and disadvantaged groups were evaluated. Cases in which the media incorrectly handled topics or readers' comments were examined in detail.

## **Monitoring data**

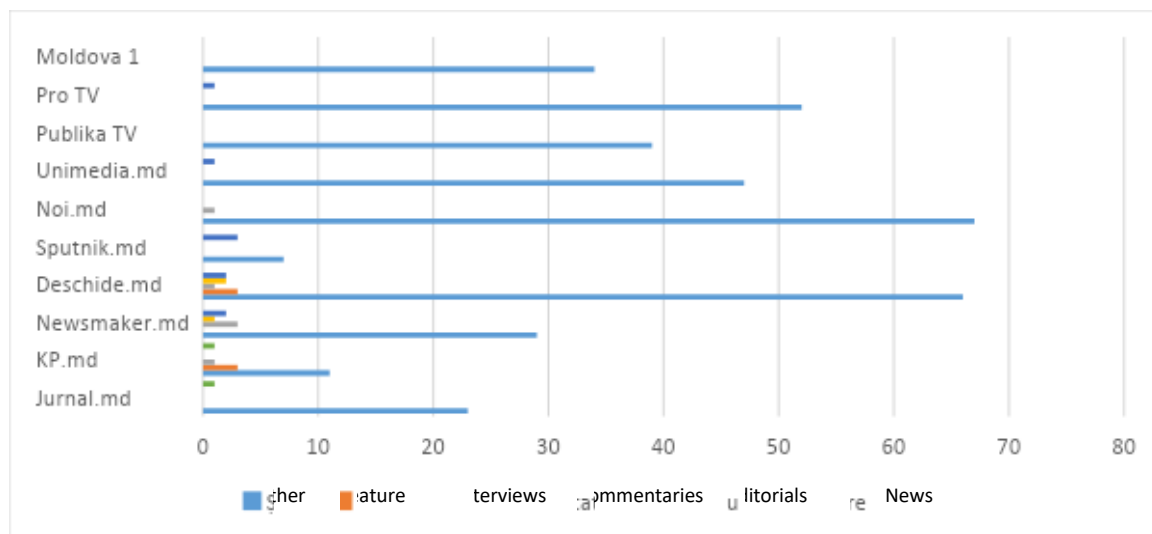
The monitoring conducted between 7 May and 7 June provided sufficient data to determine whether or not relevant topics were part of the daily media agenda and to identify common

elements in reporting and common mistakes such as labeling, stereotyping or spreading hate speech.

During the reporting period, 10 media outlets monitored published/broadcast 347 relevant articles: 244 - on web portals and 103 - on TV.

*Genre.* Most of these articles were news items (318), while 9 were long articles/features, 6 were editorials, 5 were commentaries, 3 were interviews and 6 belong to other categories. This shows that the mass media has little interest in topics related to minorities as they are often part of news broadcasts instead of original programs that present diversity in a detailed and multidimensional way.

*Number and genre of articles broadcast /published by media institution.*



*Allocated space.* The news items were often short (130) or medium-sized (164); long and very long ones were published rarely (33 and 13, respectively). This is explained by the fact that most of the time the outlets monitored preferred to report on minorities in articles that only briefly described certain problems without dealing with in-depth topics in reports, interviews or long features. Thus, there is not enough information to help majority groups better understand the problems that minorities live with.

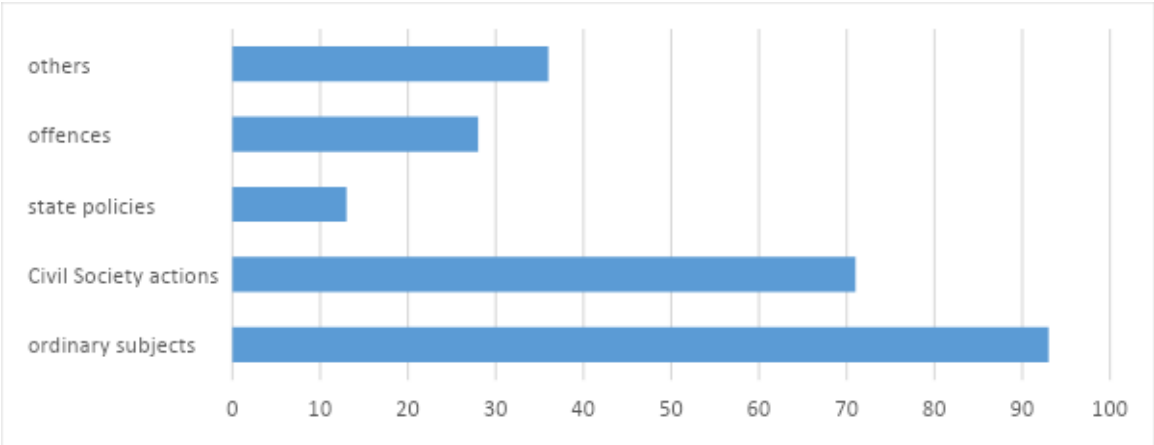
*Sources.* Most of the time, especially in online media, articles (155 articles) were reprinted from other sources such as national and international press agencies. In 119 cases, articles were not attributed to a journalist and were published either under an editorial signature or without a signature.

*Titles.* In the vast majority of cases, titles were relevant, fair, balanced, and informative, reflecting the essence of the topic and connected with the content. However, journalists used sensational or discriminatory titles to capture the reader's attention in 35 cases.

*Images.* The absolute majority of news stories was accompanied by images, mostly photos (in online media) that were often relevant and did not transmit discriminatory messages. Some had video/audio accompaniment to illustrate relevant topics. The media monitored did not use caricatures or other illustrations that trivialized the subject matter.

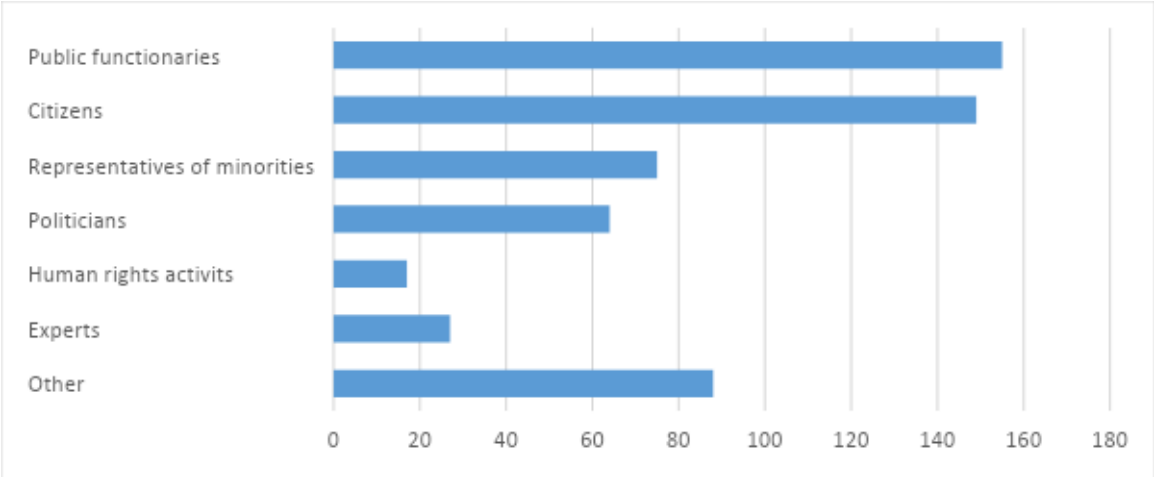
*Themes.* Among the themes discussed, most (104 articles) were about general topics related to everyday life, such as elections of the Governor (Bashkan) of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia and other events in the autonomy (44). Also, 97 articles from/about Transdnistria, including the the Transdnistrian settlement process, were published during the reported period. Other topics were related to events organized by national and international civil society in support of human rights: 71 focused on the LGBT Solidarity March “I’m OK” held in Chisinau; 25 referred to the participation of Romanian citizens of Moldova in the European Parliamentary elections, 28 covered offenses involving representatives of minorities, and 13 on state policies on minorities.

Number of articles disaggregated by theme in 10 media institutions.



*Protagonists.* Most often the protagonists cited or mentioned were public functionaries (155), citizens (149), and representatives of minorities (75) though it should be noted that some media outlets did not offer those representatives the possibility to express their opinions directly even when they were the focus of the article.

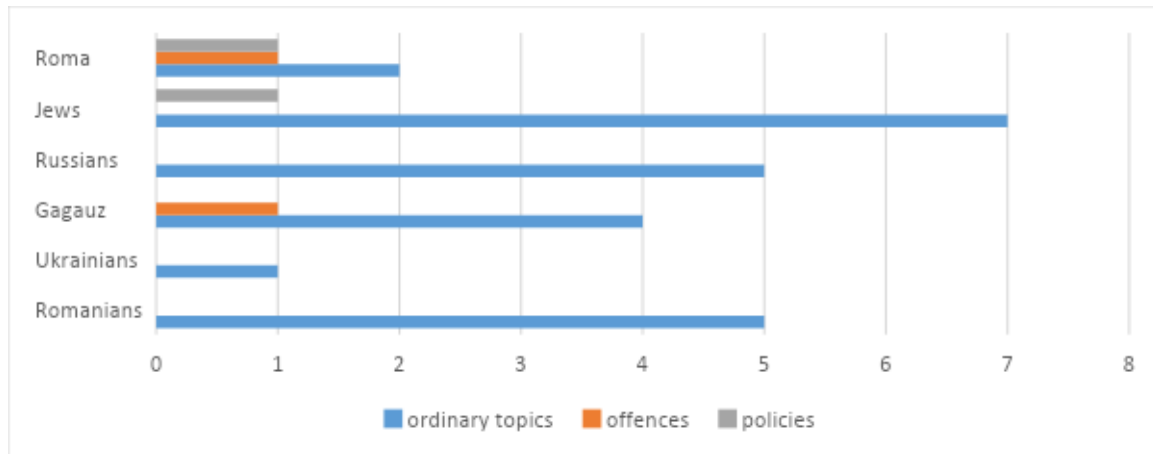
Number of protagonists cited, paraphrased or mentioned by 10 media institutions.



Among ethnic minorities, representatives of the Jewish community were most often mentioned, paraphrased or cited (eight articles), followed by the representatives of the Romanians, Gagauz and Russians communities (five articles about representatives of each ethnic group). The Romani people were targeted in four and the Ukrainians in one. The context of the articles on the Roma was much more negative focusing on crime and begging. News articles about other ethnicities focused on more general topics and the issue of peaceful coexistence: national day

of folk costume (Ukrainians, Romanians, Gagauz), launching of a Gagauz and Bulgarian minority party, and celebration of the Day of Romanians Everywhere in different regions.

Number of protagonists, representatives of ethnic minorities, and the context of articles in 10 media institutions.



Comment sections and hyperlinks are designed to offer a reader additional context to better understand a topic, even if they are secondary to the general message, and may shape reader's attitude towards certain messages. The monitoring data revealed that a large part of the media didn't use hyperlinks. Some of the media outlets, which were monitored, closed a comments section while others do not always efficiently moderate the comment sections. This created an avenue for posting and sharing discriminatory comments, some of which can be qualified as hate speech about ethnic and LGBT communities. Allowing readers to post comments which link minorities with criminals, violence, or aliens can facilitate promotion of stereotypes and prejudices that can degenerate into discriminatory attitudes towards a whole community or a group.

*Tone.* The content of the news articles did not deviate from professional and deontological standards except for several cases, where t labeling, filtered information or lack of coherence between a text, title, and images were spotted.

## TV Stations

### *Moldova 1*

According to its mission and objectives, national public broadcaster Moldova 1 should meetr informational, educational, and entertainment needs of different categories of the population and promote respect for humanity, dignity, tolerance, and universal human rights.<sup>2</sup> The station is obliged to ensure a diversity of opinions in news bulletins and talk shows and to provide access to information to all categories of citizens, including resident ethnic groups. The station should also encourage an exchange of opinions among different categories of the population as well as social cohesion among citizens.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.audiovizual.md/files/Codul%20serviciilor%20media%20audiovizuale.pdf>

From 7 May to 7 June, Moldova 1 had 34 relevant news broadcasts. All of them were part of news bulletins with the exception for the 23 May piece about the population's perception of discrimination which was opened the bulletin, which underlined the importance of the subject.

There were 19 short and 12 medium-sized programs while 3 were long ones featuring various protagonists and offering more details. All TV programmes and news bulletins were attributed to certain journalists; visuals and the content of news stories were relevant, neutral and coherent.

The protagonists were mainly citizens, state officials, representatives of minorities, or experts followed by politicians and human rights activists. Moldova 1 gave direct voice to protagonists who were cited 62 times, paraphrased 5 times and mentioned 13 times.

There was gender balance among protagonists: 32 men and 41 women were cited, paraphrased, or mentioned. The large number of female protagonists is explained by the number of mothers of sick children and of social workers in long broadcasts about disadvantaged groups/people with disabilities

*Ethnic minorities.* Representatives of ethnic groups were directly featured in three broadcasts: celebration of the Universal Day of the Romanian Blouse by a group of young people; an exhibition of dolls dressed in Gagauz folk costumes; and the possibility of creating a party of Gagauz and Bulgarian representatives in Comrat.

ATU Gagauzia. Most broadcasts focused on the overall developments in the Gagauz region, including the election of the governor.

Transdnistria. There were broadcasts about Transdnistria, including the settlement of the Transdnistrian conflict.

*Regional communities/groups.* Moldova 1 also covered elections to the European Parliament and voting by the Romanian citizens in Moldova.

*Vulnerable groups.* The public station had a relatively large number of programs about the problems of people with disabilities (7), and the LGBT Solidarity March "I'm OK" was covered on the day of the event.

The broadcasts did not deviate from ethical rigor and journalistic standards; however, the vast majority of reports covered the topic superficially without detailed examination of the themes related to ethnic minorities. There was also lack of stories about different communities, which would improve understanding of the minority groups among the ethnic majority.

### ***PRO TV Chişinău /[www.protv.md](http://www.protv.md)***

From 7 May to 7 June, the portal [www.protv.md](http://www.protv.md) and the prime time evening news bulletin (8pm) on PRO TV Chisinau posted and broadcast 52 news items in which topics related to ethnic minorities, LGBT community, or people belonging to disadvantaged groups were presented directly or tangentially. Five that were posted on the website were not included in the prime time news bulletin while the others appeared on both platforms and the stories from new bulletin were split in separate stories on the website and occasionally supplemented by additional details. The portal doesn't offer the possibility for readers to comment online.

All the information was presented as news items that ranged from 1<sup>st</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> place on the main page of the portal. All news bulletins were signed by a journalist, but the source was not

indicated on the website except for some information from other sources (four posts). Most of the news was informative and neutral. As for protagonists, citizens were most often featured followed by state officials, politicians, human rights activists, and minority representatives.

*Ethnic minorities.* Most materials referred directly or indirectly to the participation of Romanian citizens in Moldova in the European Parliamentary elections, to the conditions for voting for Romanian citizens in Moldova, to the voting process. PRO TV featured ethnic minorities in a broadcast on 2 June in the news bulletin about the Japanese language and culture in the context of a cultural event held by the representatives of this minority group in Moldova and again on 4 June in the news bulletin on the Bacalaureate exam in Romanian for Alolinguals. In this case, all ethnic/linguistic minorities studying in Moldova were concerned. Both broadcasts were informative/neutral and did not discriminate against protagonists.

It is worth mentioning a prime time news bulletin entitled „*Omorât înainte de a juca nunta fiicei*” (“Killed before his daughter’s wedding”) which was broadcast by PRO TV Chişinău on 3 May. The subject concerned a fatal incident in a Roma community. All the protagonists, witnesses, and those who appeared in the pictures were representatives of this ethnic group; one even spoke the Romani language at one point. The reporter didn’t refer to ethnicity or language and didn’t discriminate against this community in any way. The issue was presented exactly the same way if it involved ethnic majority. Nevertheless, at one point in the text, a source said that if the Prosecutor’s Office didn’t investigate the case, the whole village would unite and punish the suspected murderers. This statement was repeated twice and can be categorized as an incitement for violence. The TV station should have been careful about broadcasting such statements so as not to be an intermediary in a violent action.

Migrants were another diversity category that PRO TV Chişinău news targeted directly or indirectly during the monitoring period. The TV station had six broadcasts about foreign citizens who were carrying out illegal activities in Moldova and how they were either expelled or tried. In five of these broadcasts their citizenship or ethnicity was mentioned.

The Style Guide of Ethical Norms for Journalists has a section on „Tolerance and Non-Discrimination,” which recommends the following: “We will avoid highlighting the ethnicity or the illness of a suspect, an accused, a defendant, a convict, a criminal or any other person suffering from disease in a negative context; we will not allow the formation of a distinctive negative stereotype about an entire ethnic group.” Mentioning the ethnicity of individuals, especially in the title, is therefore regrettable given that in all the above-mentioned cases the context in which they appear is not a positive one. In such situations, journalists are urged not to attract attention to sensitive aspects such as ethnicity, illness or belonging to a minority and/or disadvantaged group.

*ATU Gagauzia.* PRO TV also covered Irina Vlah’s registration in the electoral roll of the Autonomous Region of Gagauzia was also broadcast.

*Transdnistria.* PRO TV also covered the Transdnistria in four items with primary or secondary emphasis, including the possibility for the people in the area to benefit from Russian passports following the model of separatist regions in Ukraine; the electoral program of a Romanian candidate in the European Parliamentary elections in which he promises to solve the Transdnistrian conflict.



*Vulnerable groups.* It should be noted that most broadcasts that referred directly or indirectly to LGBT community covered the International Day of Families and the Solidarity March. Deleterious or discriminatory expressions or words were not used in any of them. As for people with special needs, there were nine broadcasts all of which treated the protagonists fairly using correct terminology with a reference to these disadvantaged groups.

### ***Publika TV/www.publika.md***

During the monitoring period, Publika TV, a station with a national coverage, and its website [www.publika.md](http://www.publika.md) broadcast/posted 39 articles referring to the monitoring topic. A total of 34 were news items including 3 long features, 1 portrait, and 1 show, 23 of which were broadcast on TV (20 news items, 2 features and 1 show) in the main news bulletin. Nearly half (18) were short while the other half (18) were of medium size.

In most cases, the postings did not contain hyperlinks. The vast majority were not commented upon, but eight were: in six cases the comments were irrelevant while in two others they were rather discriminatory. In most cases, the visual context was informative or neutral.

In all, 92 protagonists were cited, paraphrased, or mentioned: citizens (24) were followed by state officials (15), and others (14). Politicians and representatives of minorities were cited, paraphrased, or mentioned 10 times, and human rights activists 5 times. From a gender perspective, the news was unbalanced as in 48 cases protagonists were men while in only 28 they were women. total of 7 of the 39 publications had discriminatory or sensational titles.

*Ethnic minorities.* The station also covered the participation of Romanian citizens in Moldova in the European Parliamentary elections and mentioned the ethnicity of protagonists in some publications, although it was not relevant to the subject. For example, in the report about beggars on the Day of Rejoicing, one of the sources mentioned that they were of Roma ethnicity (7 May), and another presented information about the expulsion of three Uzbek citizens who were running an illegal business in Moldova. In these cases, the authors did not take into account the provisions of the Journalist's Code of Ethics according to which, "The journalist should mention the ethnicity, political opinions, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or other sensitive information about a person only when it is relevant from an editorial point of view."

*Transdnistria.* The topics most frequently discussed on Publika TV during the reporting period concerned Transdnistria. In addition to news about the settlement of the conflict, relations between Tiraspol and Chisinau, and the OSCE position on certain subjects, ordinary topics were covered too like barring a former Tiraspol administrator from boarding an airplane because he appeared to be drunk. Unlike the text posted on the website, a TV voice over said the following: "Vladimir Iastrebeac disgraced himself at the Chisinau Airport. For many years, Vladimir Iastrebeac hasn't held position of a so-called minister of foreign affairs in Tiraspol. Even so, according to the Code of Ethics, a journalist should report on the private behavior of a public person who exercises a public function without his/her consent only when such behavior affects his or her ability to exercise the public function or there is another well-founded reason to inform society about this."

*Vulnerable groups.* Publika.md provided space for articles about civil society actions to promote human rights, in particular about the organization of the Solidarity March "I am OK." "The Vice-President of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) supports the HOMOSEXUALS' MARCH" highlighted the support of PAS deputy Mihai Popusoi for the

“homosexuals’ march” and mentioned that the “LGBT community supports the PAS. During the election campaign in 2016 when Maia Sandu was running for president, LGBT activist Angelica Frolov encouraged people to vote for the PAS leader.” The comments by readers (a total of three) were discriminatory: *O nu, sustin drepturile omului???? Jos cu acest bloc murdar* (Oh no! They are fighting for human rights???? Down with this dirty block!); *Multi din Blocul Somerilor ACUM, sustina acest lucru don simplu fapta ca si ei sunt cum sar zice cu alta orientatie* (Many persons from the Bloc of the Unemployed ACUM support them for the simple reason that they have the same orientation).

## Online Portals

### *Deschide.md*

From 7 May to 7 June, the news portal *deschide.md* posted 74 relevant articles largely in the Transnistria section that is updated daily. Of those, 66 were news items, 3 were editorials, 2 were interviews, 1 was a commentary, and 2 were long features. The space devoted to these subjects was not, however, large as the vast majority were short (34) or medium-sized (23) with a primary emphasis in 67 cases and a secondary emphasis in 7. Most (68) were accompanied by photos in which the visual context was mostly neutral, and 6 were supplemented by both video and audio.

Most protagonists cited or mentioned were state officials at 34 followed by politicians at 13, representatives of minorities at 12, and other categories at 24. Most of those cited were men (52); 14 were women. *Deschide.md* did give voice to a majority by paraphrasing them 49 times and citing them directly 29 times. In 19 cases they were just mentioned.

The majority of postings did not include hyperlinks and were not accompanied by comments (63); however, when readers did comment, in 2 cases there were irrelevant, in 6 cases they were neutral, and in 3 they were discriminatory.

ATU Gagauzia. There were 10 articles posted by the media outlet about the Gagauz region. Information on the Gagauz autonomy mostly focused on ordinary, everyday topics/subjects as well as on the election for governor of the region. Romanian citizens in Moldova were the focus of articles about the voting process for the European Parliament and the electoral platforms of some candidates. From the perspective of journalistic content, the portal did not seriously deviate from ethical and professional standards: titles were mostly relevant though in some cases they were sensational. For example, on 7 May *Deschide.md* posted “Elections in Gagauzia: He wanted to ban the Chisinau parties, and now he wants to become Bashkan.” Although the text itself is neutral, the title is tendentious and reflects the author’s attitude towards the protagonist.

Transnistria. Most postings (33) were about the Transnistria. Transnistrian reporting included events involving Tiraspol and Chisinau authorities, the work of the Joint Control Commission, the celebration of Europe Day in Tighina and Tiraspol, and the end of the school year in Romanian schools in Transnistria. It is worth highlighting an article posted on 28 May entitled “Krasnoselskii announces they want to sue the Republic of Moldova for terrorism acts in 1992”. The article has only one point of view offered by the Tiraspol leader. Taking into account that the conflict is a sensitive subject, the opinion of the Chisinau authorities should

also have been included. The posting was accompanied by unmoderated comments, that contained such expressions as “a pig”, “rats”, “terrorists”.

*Ethnic minorities.* The portal posted four news items that directly or indirectly targeted ethnic minorities: news about the intention of a former Gagauz deputy to create a new party; the celebration of the Day of Romanians Everywhere in Comrat; the change of leadership within the Jewish community; and the celebration of the Day of Japanese culture in Chisinau.

In addition, deschide.md posted articles about migrants/refugees as protagonists in various crimes. In most cases, the deontological provisions that stipulate that a person’s ethnicity should not be mentioned if it is not directly related were not taken into account.

*Vulnerable groups.* In the monitoring period, Deschide.md published 10 materials concerning civil society actions to promote human rights. The portal also covered the LGBT Solidarity March “I am OK” in five postings that directly or tangentially concerned it. On 18 May in the article titled “*The Moldovan Metropolis marched in the streets of Chisinau with Dodon at the forefront,*” an obscene comment was inserted without any moderation by the editorial board.

### ***Jurnal.md***

During the monitoring period, Jurnal.md published just 24 articles that referred directly or indirectly to minorities or disadvantaged groups. It should be noted that five covered events/situations abroad which denotes the relatively scant interest of the portal in the topics monitored.

In all, 20 of the relevant items were medium-sized or short accompanied by informative and neutral images; in 3 cases, the material was accompanied by video recordings. The articles were not signed, and in the news items hyperlinks were used in only two cases. The titles of all were relevant and explicit without any elements that would discriminate or stigmatize the people they referred to. Most (22) didn’t have any comments from readers, but in the two that did, the comments were descriptive and the language used was neutral.

The relevant material on Jurnal.md had 39 protagonists, mostly citizens both female (15) and male (14) though in some cases there were no names and/or gender. In all, 23 were directly cited (in text or video), in 14 they were mentioned without being cited, and in 2 cases they were paraphrased. It should be noted that the total number of protagonists is large due to the article “*Voices of Democracy in Varnita: We are missing a free passage to Transdnestrria,*” which contained a video of interviews with 15 people. With some exceptions, in other relevant material there was only one protagonist.

*Ethnic minorities.* The portal posted 11 articles about the EU Parliamentary elections and the participation of Romanian citizens in Moldova in them. Often, the material either directly or indirectly concerned monitored categories in the context of certain offenses (4 cases) whether representatives of these categories committed the offenses themselves or were victims of the offenses (migrants arrested for attempting to cross the border illegally or having fake documents, people with disabilities, victims of illegal activities). Most of the time the ethnicity of these people was mentioned which contravenes deontological provisions.

*Transdnestrria.* The situation in Transdnestrria was discussed in three articles, including the visit to Moldova of the OSCE Special Representative for the Transnistrian Settlement Process and

the exercise of the right to vote by citizens from the region in Moldova in the context of allegations of voter corruption.

In the material published during this period, the journalists of Jurnal.md did not use terms or expressions that discriminated against disadvantaged groups or minorities, and the tone was always neutral.

### ***KP.md***

From 7 May to 7 June the website [www.kp.md](http://www.kp.md) (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*) posted 17 items, 11 of which were news bulletins, referring to relevant topics.. The portal also published three editorials, a long article, a commentary, and a text in another journalistic genre. One third was of medium size (7), 6 were long, 3 were short and 1 was very long.

Nine had hyperlinks that led to informative material while in three they led to sensational/discriminatory content. In all, 16 had comments from readers of which 6 were discriminatory. The articles were generally accompanied by photos that in most cases were informative and/or neutral though in three they were sensational/discriminatory.

In all, 29 protagonists were cited, paraphrased, or mentioned: citizens and state officials 7 times, politicians 5 times, representatives of minorities 5 times, and other sources (diplomats, state institutions, press releases) 13 times.

From a gender perspective, protagonists cited, mentioned or paraphrased in 16 cases were men while in 3 they were women. In 10 cases, the gender was not mentioned referring instead either to the function of the person or to institutions.

Six of the articles had relevant titles, three were irrelevant, and the other eight were discriminatory or sensational.

*Ethnic minorities.* Kp.md published in the monitoring period one material on ethnic minorities issues, Entitled «Почему в Молдове поддерживается дискриминация по языковому признаку: директора детских садов под разными предлогами закрывают русские группы» (“Why is language discrimination supported in Moldova: kindergarten directors close Russian groups under various pretexts”), the text refers to a post on a social network, and contains the author’s opinions:

In one of the Russian-language kindergartens in Botanica Sector, there is a new director whose mission is to transform the kindergarten into a Romanian one. (...) Isn’t this language discrimination? Why are people deprived of choice? As usual, double standards are applied.

It appears that the author did not make the effort to check the facts in the Facebook post and completed the text with his own opinions. This is contrary to the Code of Ethics that states: “Opinion-based and factual materials must be separated so that anyone can easily make the appropriate distinction between them.”

ATU Gagauzia. The Gagauz region was reflected in three news reports.

Transnistria. Kp.md reflected the reality of Transnistria through several news (9) which dealt with common issues or were related to the Transnistrian settlement process. Most of the materials were without deviations from deontological provisions. In some cases, sensational titles were noticed, such as: «Назад в лихие 90-е: В Одесской области связанным и со следами пыток найден труп мэра столицы Приднестровья – гражданина Молдовы»

(“Back in the wild 90s: In Odessa Region, the corpse, with traces of torture, of the mayor of the Transnistria capital city, who is a Moldovan citizen, was found”). In addition to the crime-related title, the item contains crime-scene photos that are too graphic. This contravenes the Code of Ethics according to which “The journalist does not provide morbid details about crimes, accidents and natural disasters to the public, or details about suicidal techniques. The same rules apply for visual materials (photos, videos).”

*Vulnerable groups.* Four materials published within the monitoring period referred to the solidarity march, organized by LGBT community. One of the discriminatory titles contained the author’s views referred to funding for the LGBT community: «Караул, в Молдове геїв фінансування лишають: Чому марши ЛГБТ превратились в удел избранных и чем это им грозит» (“Hey! In Moldova, gays are deprived of funding: Why did LGBT marches become the fate of the elect and what does it threaten them with?”) The journalist referred to the fact that the LGBT community could be left without funding if citizens of Moldova became more tolerant of LGBT community representatives. Readers made 67 comments, some of which were discriminatory, containing such expressions as *perverse persons*, *pedophiles*, *necrophiliacs*.

Another opinion-based discriminatory title tangentially involved the LGBT community: «Пасха мертвых» в Молдове: Почему почитателям гей-парадов не нравится, что Поминальные дни давно стали скромными и негромкими» (“Day of Rejoicing in Moldova: Why do the fans of gay parades dislike the fact that memorial days have become modest and quiet?”). Although it is a text about the Day of Rejoicing, the author included the following remark: *Не нравятся наши традиции, наши православные ценности? Пишите тогда о гей-парадах и прочих «евродостижениях»! Не нравится наша православная Пасха и то, как отмечают в Молдове Поминальные дни? Тогда толерантности вам в хвост и в гриву!* (Don’t you like our traditions, our Orthodox values? Write then about the gay parades and other “European achievements”! Don’t you like our Orthodox Easter and the way Moldova celebrates memorial days? Then be tolerant with might and main!) The emphasis in this text is a secondary one, and the author mentions the LGBT community in an irrelevant context.

### ***Newsmaker.md***

The news portal [www.newsmaker.md](http://www.newsmaker.md) posted 37 articles during the reporting period of which 29 were news items. The portal also published smaller numbers of commentaries, interviews, and feature articles. Approximately half of the posts (19) were short news bulletins. The portal also published 10 articles of medium size, 4 long ones and 4 very long ones. In 34 cases, the emphasis was primary, and in 3 it was secondary covering minorities only tangentially.

In all, 27 articles were signed by the authors, and 10 were published under the signature of the editorial board. In 30, pictures accompanied the text, and in 7 video elements were included. Both titles and videos were informative, neutral, and without sensational or discriminatory elements.

Nine articles included hyperlinks to other material giving readers the possibility to get more information about the topic, but Newsmaker.md did not give readers the possibility to post comments.

The topics analyzed were varied but mostly referred to actions by national and international civil society groups promoting human rights (14) followed by 9 covering ordinary, everyday subjects including representatives of minority or disadvantaged groups. State officials were cited 16 times and representatives of minorities were cited or mentioned 14 times as protagonists followed by citizens and sources from other categories. Thirty protagonists were male and 13 were female; the rest were communities, organizations, etc. Protagonists were paraphrased 25 times and directly cited 21 times while in 13 cases they were just mentioned. Newsmaker.md thus gave voice to vulnerable categories by diversifying sources.

*Ethnic minorities.* During the reporting period, the portal posted several articles that directly concerned ethnic minorities: news about the intention to create a new Gagauz and Bulgarian party in Comrat; a Holocaust monitoring report; and two items about the anti-Semitic comments of the director of a Lyceum in Grigoriopol posted on a social network in the context of the results of the elections in Ukraine (18 and 19 May).

ATU Gagauzia. Four articles about the Autonomous Region of Gagauzia were published.

Transdnistria.. Negotiations concerning the settlement of the Transdnistrian conflict were analyzed in eight articles, but other relevant topics were posted too.

*Vulnerable groups.* Newsmaker.md has published several materials on the rights of disadvantaged categories, giving them space to express their opinions. The march of solidarity organized by the LGBT community was reflected in several materials on the day of the event, with large materials being published focusing on human stories.

From the point of view of respecting ethical and journalistic standards, no deviations/problems were noted. The portal correctly and equitably informed readers about various subjects, cited minority representatives, and covered not only ordinary topics but also subjects that were not found on the agenda of other media outlets.

### ***Noi.md***

Between 7 May and 7 June, [www.noi.md](http://www.noi.md) published 68 articles that directly or tangentially referred to ethnic minorities, migrants/refugees, LGBT community and to persons belonging to disadvantaged groups. The information was presented in the form of news items (67) and one commentary in sizes ranging from very short (6) and short (19), to medium-sized (38) and long (4) as well as very long (1). The content was mostly taken from other sources (in the case of 47), but 21 were by noi.md although 14 did not indicate the name of the author while 7 were signed. The main protagonists were public functionaries followed by citizens/human rights activists, experts, and politicians.

*Ethnic minorities.* The portal posted several news that refer to Gagauz minority: the possibility that a former deputy from Gagauzia would create a new political party; the Ukrainian minority: Vyshyvanka Day (the day of the embroidered shirt celebrated by Ukrainians in Moldova); and the Moldovan Jewish community. Articles on the Russian community in Moldova were posted on 22 and 26 May and 6 June about three cultural events organized for/by this community (Days of Slavic Writing and Culture, the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Aleksander Vertinsky, and the 220<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Alexander Pushkin). All of them correctly presented the topics, and none was followed by comments. The items were informative/neutral with no discriminatory elements.

Three articles posted on [www.noi.md](http://www.noi.md) during the reporting period referred to migrants. The first reported the illegal work of three Uzbek citizens in Moldova who were captured by the authorities and expelled from the country (16 May). The second discussed the attempt of two foreign citizens to illegally cross the Moldovan-Romanian border (21 May), and the third was about a Romanian citizen who intended to smuggle cigarettes over the border (22 May). In all three cases, the citizenship and ethnicity of the protagonists were mentioned and in two cases were highlighted in the titles which is not recommended by the Style Guide of Ethical Norms for Journalists. Considering the negative context in which the events are reported, mentioning ethnicity can create or intensify negative stereotypes.

ATU Gagauzia. Noi.md also posted 21 items on the Gagauz autonomy, 10 of which were about the elections of the Bashkan including 1 commentary. The others focused on ordinary topics. The texts were informative/neutral without any nuances of lack of tolerance or of discriminatory attitudes towards ethnic minorities; however, some comments posted by readers contained discriminatory and offensive attitudes, expressed through such words as, Jewish snout, ungrateful Gagauz.

Transdnistria. Most relevant items referred to Transdnistria: 28 news reports focused on this topic with particular emphasis on negotiations to settle the conflict, meetings and discussions between Moldovan officials and OSCE representatives in Moldova, and the political and/or current economic situation in the region. The news texts generally used informative/neutral though sometimes stiff language often taken from press releases and did not contain discriminatory, defamatory or inflammatory words or expressions in relation to the population on the left bank of the Dniester. Readers' comments are allowed on [www.noi.md](http://www.noi.md) and accompanied 15 of the 28 items, but not all of them were relevant to the topic (9), and some were discriminatory and intolerant threatening representatives from the Transnistrian region, using such terms *as a pig, a criminal*, etc.

*Vulnerable groups.* During the monitoring period, [www.noi.md](http://www.noi.md) also posted four news items with a direct or indirect reference to LGBT community (17, 19, and 28 May). Although they don't directly incite hatred or intolerance, both the titles and emphases were not designed to help build tolerance towards LGBT community in Moldovan society: "They condemn the actions of homosexuals, still supporting the traditional family"; "Because of the LGBT march, the capital city center is paralyzed"; "the gay march organized by the LGBT community." This negative tendency was supported by insulting, discriminatory, inflammatory comments by readers that were not moderated by the editorial board, that contained words as *parade of deviants, villains*.

Six news items were about people with special needs; five were taken from other sources and one was by noi.md. All were informative/neutral, did not discriminate, and did not have any comments from readers.

### ***Sputnik.md***

During the reference period, the news portal [www.sputnik.md](http://www.sputnik.md) posted news about actions by national and international civil society organizations in four articles, events related to the Transdnistria in three, activities/policies regarding minorities in one, and news on a political subject tangentially related to the monitored categories in one.

There were no articles about ethnic minority groups or about people with disabilities, and the portal did not have any material about the Gagauz region. All texts were accompanied by images, and three of them had both video and audio accompaniment. The protagonists were male politicians in four postings, female politicians in one, state officials in three and groups of people in one. The portal offered readers the possibility to comment on the news, but no comments were posted on any of the material monitored.

*Vulnerable groups.* Most of the materials published by sputnik.md referred to the Solidarity march organized by the LGBT community and to the March of Silence, organized by Orthodox priests in support of the traditional family. With one exception, the titles were relevant and corresponded to the content. The title that posed tendentious problems concerned the news published on 17 May 2019: “*Homosexuals’ march in the center of the capital: the police issue a summons*” which announced that the police had a detailed plan to ensure the security of the participants in the march. In contrast, the report on the March of Silence on May 18 noted that, “The police have not issued a communiqué about the traditional family march,” revealing the bias of the reporter. “Homosexuals’ march” was a label attached by the editorial board as the event that took place on 19 May was not titled that way by the organizers or by the participants themselves.

It should also be noted that when that march took place, Sputnik did not publish any news about it, but on 18 May, Sputnik did post a report about the pro-traditional family March of Silence organized by the Moldova Metropolis that again revealed the attitude of the reporter who meditated a bit on the subject of love between a man and a woman: “‘There is nothing, if there is no love,’ said Marin Preda in his novel The Earth’s Most Beloved Son. The great Romanian writer referred to the pure and unconditional love between a man and a woman which makes the human being perfect and gives continuity to life. This love is the basis of the traditional family, the place where we discover faith, kindness, empathy – values that guide us for the rest of our lives. Without the traditional family, life becomes hostile and dangerous to humans. This is the message sent by the participants in the March of Silence every year.” The rest of the article was in accordance with linguistic and structural norms.

### ***Unimedia.info***

During the monitoring period, Unimedia published 47 articles about all the categories monitored: 46 were news items and 1 was a detailed report about the performance of an athlete with disabilities. Almost half were placed on the main page; all of them had relevant and informative headlines.

Most of the materials were not signed. In all, 24 texts contained hyperlinks with references to the original source or to the original material from which the content was taken, 35 were presented with photos, 10 of them had video content, and 2 included maps, infographics, live videos and other multimedia elements.

Politicians were the protagonists in 14 articles followed by the representatives of minorities and state officials in 5 each. Human rights activists, ordinary citizens, experts, ambassadors, and political parties were cited/mentioned less often. There was an obvious imbalance in terms of gender as in only 5 cases the protagonists were women (vs 14 for men); in 20 cases the subjects were people in general or institutions.

The texts and titles were informative, in accordance with ethical and deontological provisions. The portal did, however, have a serious problem with moderating the comments attached to 39



of the 47 articles. Some contained discriminatory remarks and hate speech and others used obscene language and were written in a provocative style. If we analyze the content of these comments and attacks, we can say the majority were written by trolls who were not seeking to express an opinion but rather to attack and sow as much discord as possible.

*Ethnic minorities.* In the monitoring period, the portal posted an article on Jews (about a film about Jewish cemeteries in Moldova broadcast by Free Europe), one on the Roma about a newly created party in Hungary that criticizes them, and one about the Baccalaureate exams Alolingual students had passed. Other 12 materials described the participation of Romanian citizens in Moldova in European Parliamentary elections. The texts were written without deviating from the journalistic standards. However, comments that were posted by readers contained discriminatory comments on Jews and Russians: for example, in a news item posted on 7 May quoting a statement by politician Ilan Shor about the opposition, some comments critical of him also contained hate speech against Jewish people. In the news about the March organized by the Party of Socialists on 9 May, there were insulting comments with hate speech against the Russians. The same attitude also appeared in a comment about a news item posted on 1 June about the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact.

ATU Gagauzia. Three articles were published during the monitoring period, including about the elections for the function of baskhan and general developments.

Transdnistria. Of the 47 materials, 7 articles referred to events in Transdnistria, which focused on the negotiation process between Chisinau and Tiraspol, but also on general developments.

*Vulnerable groups.* 13 materials targeted actions of local and international civil society for the promotion of human rights. Unimedia reporters informed readers in detail about the LGBT Solidarity march including through a photographic montage and live broadcasts. Materials were written without any deviation from professional standards. But the comments contained words that may be qualified as hate speech. The most aggressive comments on Unimedia were made about the news about the solidarity march posted on 20 May: *Trimasi pe o insula din ocanul Pacific cam spre nord si o sa piara toti (...)*. (They must be sent to an island in the Pacific Ocean, to the north, where all will perish (...)).

Note: The portal did not pay enough attention to moderation of comments section which, according to both the Code of Ethics (recent version) and national judicial precedents (cases *Brega vs Privesc.eu* and *Gender Doc M vs PRO TV*), is the responsibility of online platform administrators. National legislation also prohibits the spread of hate speech, including through the media.

## **General Conclusions**

Media outlets in the Republic of Moldova don't pay enough attention to topics related to minorities and to diversity. As a rule, topics that are tangential to these themes are reported in the news without an in-depth, detailed and multifaceted analysis that would allow the majority to be informed and learn more about minority groups.

Ethnic minorities rarely become the theme of media reports. When material on them is published, the theme is usually related to current events, cultural activities, or crimes. Often, people suspected of committing crimes are labeled by their ethnicities. Such practices can contribute to strengthening prejudices and can lead to discrimination.

In most of the relevant material published/broadcast by the media monitored, the authors used balanced, neutral, news-specific language. The content did not promote hate speech against ethnic minorities, LGBT community, or disadvantaged groups. To a large degree, the journalists complied with deontological norms when writing and editing news about the groups monitored. Isolated cases were recorded on some portals in which the language contained stereotypic words or expressions.

Not all online media offer readers the possibility to comment on subjects they post, and some that do don't moderate the content effectively. As a result, there are comments that may perpetuate prejudice and stereotyping and incite hatred.

The most vulnerable to hate speech in online media in Moldova are Russians, Jews, and LGBT community. Negative attitudes appear in press reports about conflicts involving representatives of these groups or when the information presented is linked with politics.

### **Recommendations**

Media outlets should include original material on diversity, minorities, and human rights in their programming. Articles should pass an in-depth analysis and provide the public with as much information as possible about the subject.

The Audiovisual Regulatory Authority should constantly monitor how minorities and human rights are respected by broadcasters and should encourage them to respect the Code of Ethics as well as the Audiovisual Media Services Code.

Newsrooms should pay more attention to moderating readers' comments taking into account the provisions of the Journalist's Code of Ethics and the recommendations of the [Style Guide with Ethical Norms for Journalists](#).

Regular training for journalists responsible for managing online content is needed to help them distinguish hate speech and expressions in readers' comments.

Websites in Moldova with large amounts of news and comments should have specific employees for moderating comments and maintaining civilized discussions among readers.

Civil society should continue to be involved in actions/campaigns to combat hate speech. The responsibility of the media to build the reality of minority groups and concepts about them is crucial; therefore, they must be constantly monitored to encourage them to create realistic and accurate images of minority groups in society.