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Status: Partly Free

Legal Environment: 17

Political Environment: 19

Economic Environment: 19

Total Score: 55

Status change explanation: Moldova improved from Not Free to Partly Free to reflect a range of policies enacted by the new ruling coalition, the reformist Alliance for European Integration, including laws providing increased protection for press freedom and journalists' rights, as well as reform of the regulatory framework. In addition, management at the state broadcaster was professionalized and new private broadcast media outlets opened, leading to less political control over content and greater media diversity.

Press freedom improved significantly in 2010 as the new ruling Alliance for European Integration (AEI) coalition of pro-Western parties approved important legal amendments, reigned in the police and security forces, and appointed professional managers to public media outlets. These changes significantly improved the safety of journalists following April 2009, when the then-ruling Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) under President Vladimir Voronin falsified parliamentary elections and violently cracked down on journalists and prodemocracy activists in a desperate effort to remain in office. The AEI won a second round of parliamentary elections in July 2009 and proceeded to implement some reforms, despite fierce opposition from the pro-Russian PCRM and active interference by the Russian government. Meanwhile, the country remained in a political deadlock throughout 2010 because the PCRM used its votes in the parliament to prevent the reformist coalition from nominating a president, as required by the constitution.

The AEI bloc in the parliament – under the leadership of Prime Minister Vladimir Filat and Acting President Mihai Ghimpu – worked with civil society media experts to draft and then approve a series of amendments strengthening legal protections for journalists. In April 2010, the parliament approved a Law on Freedom of Expression that strengthened the protection of sources, prohibited censorship, proclaimed the freedom to criticize state officials, and established the presumption of innocence in freedom of expression cases, the Chisinau-based Independent Journalism Center reported. In June, the parliament approved amendments to the Electoral Law that clarified the regulation of media coverage during election campaigns. Reporters obtained a greater amount of public information because more officials in Chisinau, the capital, were complying with the Access to Information Law, but compliance remained poor in smaller cities and towns, according to a study conducted by Access-Info, a local nongovernmental organization. Moldova had moved toward decriminalizing libel in 2004, and ended criminal defamation entirely by 2009. Prosecutors also pressed criminal charges against

several police officers suspected of attacking journalists and protestors during the April 2009 protests. Media pluralism significantly expanded in response to the improved legal and political environment. For example, investors launched two new television stations, Jurnal TV and Publika TV; authorities negotiated the return of the Romanian television station TVR1 to the air after its license was improperly revoked in 2007; and four new radio stations were launched: Radio Sport, Publika FM, Prime FM, and Aquarelle FM.

State-sponsored intimidation of journalists and politicized defamation lawsuits against the media declined significantly in 2010. The cases that were filed reflected individual or institutional efforts to suppress news reporting, particularly by politicized judges or other government officials left over from the former PCRM government. On June 28, the Buiucani District Court in Chisinau acquitted a police officer, even though a prosecutor presented evidence that the officer had beaten up and taken two video cameras from journalist Oleg Brega when he was reporting on antigovernment protests in April 2009, the *StireaZilei* news website reported. In July, an official from the Center for Combating Economic Crimes and Corruption attacked Jurnalul TV reporter Victor Ciobanu as he was filming the Chisinau Court of Appeals, damaged his camera, and confiscated his memory stick with footage of the attack. The official was later convicted of physical assault and fined 100 lei (\$8).

In the separatist Transnistria region, media are highly restricted and politicized. Most local broadcast media are controlled by the Transnistrian authorities or by companies like Sheriff Enterprises that are linked to the separatist regime. Print media in Transnistria are required to register with the separatist Ministry of Information in Tiraspol, the region's capital, rather than the internationally recognized Moldovan government in Chisinau. Any critical information regarding the separatist authorities is promptly suppressed and the journalists responsible harassed. The Transnistrian State Security Ministry intensified harassment of the region's few remaining independent-minded journalists ahead of December 2010 elections for the separatist parliament and 2011 elections for the separatist presidency. In April, security officers arrested journalist Ernest Vardanian in Tiraspol because he refused to stop working for media outlets based in Chisinau – the newspaper *Puls*, the Romanian-language service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and the Russian Internet news agency Novy Region. Transnistrian authorities pressed charges of treason against Vardanian, confiscated his computer and notebooks, instructed his wife to not speak with the media, and appointed a defense lawyer who refused to speak to the media or with the journalist's wife. On December 16, the separatist Transnistrian Supreme Court sentenced Vardanian to 15 years in a high-security prison. Vardanian's arrest and imprisonment intensified pervasive self-censorship among Transnistrian journalists. The pro-Tiraspol Union of Transnistrian Journalists refused to assist Vardanian throughout his detention and trial, according to local press reports.

There is a mix of private and public print and broadcast media, but there is still a lack of transparency in ownership. The reformist government appointed new managers to the state broadcaster, Teleradio Moldova, which received high marks from the Chisinau-based Electronic Broadcasters Association (APEL) for its balanced news coverage during a September national referendum and November parliamentary election that maintained the political deadlock in the country's legislature. State media regulators also improved their professionalism and took more initiative to enforce regulations, but at times remained highly politicized. In October, the Broadcasting Coordinating Council failed to enforce media regulations requiring somewhat balanced election coverage by the blatantly pro-PCRM national television channel NIT. That same month, the council awarded 10 of 11 television frequencies to a single television station and 4 of 7 radio frequencies to a single radio station. Journalists expected broadcast media regulation to improve in 2011, when parliament is scheduled to appoint three new members to the Broadcasting Coordinating Council. The AEI also took steps to reduce government influence over some 40 state-owned national and regional newspapers, approving a plan to strengthen their editorial independence and privatize them in 2011, the Independent Press Association reported.

Although the underdeveloped telecommunications infrastructure and high fees for internet connections have resulted in limited usage, access is generally not restricted by the authorities, and approximately 40 percent of the population had access to the

internet in 2010. The global economic crises and painful economic reforms imposed by the International Monetary Fund in October 2009 forced media outlets to become more efficient and intensified the rise of advertising revenue for websites and the decline of such revenue for print media. In the separatist Transnistria region, the public increasingly used social networking websites that enabled them to anonymously discuss politically sensitive issues with individuals from the government-controlled section of Moldova.

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