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# Freedom of the Press 2014 - Moldova

Press freedom in Moldova remained stable in 2013, despite a political crisis early in the year that resulted in the collapse of the Alliance for European Integration (AIE), the ruling coalition. The dispute between the main AIE parties was resolved in May, and Parliament appointed Iurie Leancă of the Liberal Democratic Party as the new prime minister. His government took a significant step toward European integration for Moldova when it initialed an Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) in November. Nonetheless, a lack of transparency and concentration in media ownership remained key challenges for press freedom in 2013.

The constitution and laws provide for freedoms of expression and the press, but these rights are often limited by other laws and in practice. Moldova decriminalized defamation in 2009, but various groups continued to file civil defamation cases against media outlets in the courts, which have a reputation for being extremely corrupt. Many judges in 2013 were not implementing defamation-related reforms under the 2010 Law on Freedom of Expression, despite a Supreme Court document issued in 2012 to clarify how the changes should be applied. Moreover, in September, Supreme Court head Mihai Poalelungi said he was in favor of recriminalizing the offense after he became the subject of a series of media stories that he felt were defamatory. Local press freedom groups could not assess how many defamation cases were filed against the media, as many courts either refuse to provide the information or lack qualified personnel to respond to the requests. However, no journalists were punished for defamation in 2013. In March, an article published in the newspaper *Ziarul de Gardă* on the illegal sale of military equipment drew a harsh response from anticorruption officials. The article's authors were summoned to the National Anticorruption Center and asked to reveal their sources, as well as the names of other journalists involved in the investigation. The journalists were also asked to submit their video footage.

According to a 2013 World Bank report, more than 10 years after it was adopted, the Access to Information (ATI) Law has not been sufficiently institutionalized. Among other issues, the report points to the absence of an oversight agency to monitor implementation and a lack of enforcement mechanisms. Journalists requesting information from public institutions are often required to pay a fee, a practice prohibited by the ATI law. Compliance also varies from place to place, with a greater amount of official cooperation in the capital than in smaller cities and towns. In July 2013, the government suddenly ceased live streaming of its sessions, a decision ratified by Parliament three months later. Civil society groups took part in discussions on the decision, but the government failed to provide journalists with any alternate mechanisms for obtaining information on the sessions.

In October, the General Prosecutor's Office announced an action plan aimed at facilitating cooperation between state authorities and private internet providers in blocking or shutting down "illegal" websites to prevent cybercrime and adhere to European standards. Media representatives criticized the plan for its vaguely worded definition of illegal content, raising concerns that it could be used to limit free expression online. By the end of October, the government had attempted to pass a draft law that would allow the blocking of websites containing "extremist messages." The cabinet was soon forced to withdraw the legislation amid criticism that the text lacked clarity in a number of areas.

Though some improvement has been noted in recent years, the Audiovisual Coordinating Council (CCA) has been criticized in the past for politicized, nontransparent decision making. The council's 2012 closure of the opposition-oriented, pro–Communist Party television station NIT for a lack of pluralism in opinion was upheld on appeal in 2013. In July, NIT declared its intention to take the case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR); no progress on the case had been reported at year's end. A number of NIT staff have moved to Accent TV, which is owned by a Russian company and produces news reports in both Romanian and Russian. In December, the CCA issued a warning to Accent TV over its alleged failure to provide balanced political and social reporting. The CCA's actions raised concerns that the government was attempting to silence critical stations and limit media freedom.

Nevertheless, media pluralism and the volume of locally produced programming continued to expand in 2013 in response to the improved legal and political environment that the AIE began fostering in 2010. The CCA issued new licenses to eight television stations and five radio stations, while 15 new magazines and newspapers (of which 12 shared the same editor and street address) were registered with the Ministry of Justice. A cable television license was issued to the independent Russian station channel Rain in May. However, a growing number of bloggers on websites like Blogosfera.md and Voxreport.unimedia.md remain excluded from reporting on the government because they are not officially recognized as journalists and cannot receive accreditation.

Intimidation of journalists remained relatively rare during 2013, and local media freedom organizations reported no serious physical attacks. Government officials generally interacted more carefully with reporters, but remained sensitive to allegations of corruption, leaving journalists and media outlets vulnerable to threats and attacks. In November, Parliament member Iurie Muntean sparked an outcry from local press freedom groups after he attacked a Pro TV journalist who was attempting to film him and other Communist Party supporters who had gathered near Parliament to protest. Muntean, who did not want to be filmed, pushed the Pro TV reporter and later threatened to have Publika TV journalist Dumitriţa Ciuvaga fired for covering the incident. In response, Publika TV filed a complaint with the General Prosecutor's Office and ceased all coverage of the Communist Party.

In the separatist Transnistria region, media outlets are highly restricted and politicized. Most of the local broadcast media are controlled by the Transnistrian authorities in Tiraspol, or by companies like Sheriff Enterprises that are linked to the separatist regime. Print media are required to register with the separatist Ministry of Information rather than the internationally recognized Moldovan government in Chişinău. Media pluralism is extremely limited, as any critical reporting on the authorities is promptly suppressed and the journalists responsible harassed, resulting in pervasive self-censorship. Residents increasingly use social-networking websites to anonymously discuss

politically sensitive issues with their counterparts in the rest of Moldova, but users were often unable to access websites reporting on Transnistria in 2013—including Dniester.ru and Tiras.ru—because they were blocked by authorities in Tiraspol or experienced frequent cyberattacks. The year was marked by the closure of the Russian internet news agency Novîi Reghion (New Region), as well as several online forums known for critical discussions about Transnistrian president Yevgeniy Shevchuk. The News of Transnistria web portal, as well as the newspapers *Transnistria*, *Adeverul Nistryan,* and *Gomin,* are the main media outlets of the separatist authorities.

There is a mix of private and public ownership across all types of media in Moldova. Five of the six most popular television stations, as well as two of the top three radio stations, are privately owned. Seven of Moldova's eight major press agencies are likewise in private hands. Ownership transparency is lacking, and any improvement in 2013 was largely due to the transition to digital broadcasting. Parliament discussed a number of changes to the Broadcasting Code that would compel media outlets to make the identities of their owners public information, but the proposed amendments—submitted by the Independent Journalism Center (IJC)—had yet to be approved at year's end. Many private outlets have specific political leanings and are used to advance the business or political interests of their secretive owners rather than to objectively report the news. Private media remain highly dependent on financial subsidies and advertising revenue from affiliated businesses and political groups, rather than market-driven advertising and circulation revenue. Economic pressures continued to force media outlets to cut costs and intensified the shift from print to online operations in 2013.

An underdeveloped telecommunications infrastructure, coupled with high fees for internet connections, has resulted in limited internet usage, though access is generally not restricted by the authorities. Approximately 49 percent of the population had access to the internet in 2013. News portals and social-networking sites have become popular, with about one million users registered on the Russian site Odnoklassniki and some 200,000 on Facebook, according to the IJC.

# 2014 Scores

# Press Status

Partly Free

# Press Freedom Score

(0 = best, 100 = worst)
53

# Legal Environment

(0 = best, 30 = worst)
16

## Political Environment

(0 = best, 40 = worst)
18

## Economic Environment

(0 = best, 30 = worst)
19

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