

Development of mass media as a factor of good governance

The interpretation of the role of mass media in society, with the diversity of existent points of view, converges in recognizing their fundamental mission of socializing the audience, shaping public opinion and integrating society. A characteristic feature for all countries, the constant interest in the development of mass media can be explained by several reasons: first of all the development of mass media constitutes one of the central, relevant and visible aspects of transition to the democratization of society, secondly, the conditions in which the media system functions, the dominant trends in the activity of mass media their capacity to have a beneficent influence on the socio-political atmosphere in the society constitute an indispensable barometer for understanding and estimating the degree of realizing the transformation processes and the perspective of society's advancement on the way of innovative reforms. The situation of mass media has always been an indispensable indicator of developing democracies – when they show signs of vulnerability and fail to involve the population in the participatory process, the democracy is quite slow in asserting itself. It is the mass media that have the task to value and expand the profound meanings of democracy.

It is worthwhile to point out two aspects of the problems of mass media functioning in the present conditions. Firstly the current status and the perspectives of transforming the media system and its components, determined by social and political changes that have occurred in the society over the last twelve years. Secondly the media impact on the process of transformation of the Moldovan society. Regarded as a whole, both of the mentioned aspects reveal the important role the mass media have in the contemporary society, their profound significance as a support for the democratic development of society. And since the mass media in the country have had a sustained trust of the population – at least this is what an ample and representative opinion poll, done in January 2001 indicates, and that is 53 % of respondents expressed “much and very much trust in mass media”¹ – such an attitude of the citizens, one hand and, implicitly, the potentiality of mass media to serve the interests of the society on the other hand, constitute the premises of mass media development.

Generally, the socio-political context of this development portrays a substantially different reality than the one that used to be a few years ago, the main ingredients of which reflect among other things- a) failure of hyper-centralized economy and advancement of market economy; b) failure of the one-party system and the building of a pluralist democracy through establishing the pluralist party system; c) modified configuration of political sphere, emergence of civil society elements with public debate of societal issues; d) changes in political and ideological attitudes and visions of a significant segment of the population. As these fundamental processes have occurred with the participation, or even more – with the direct involvement of the media, this context is strongly marked by a new stateliness of mass media, by marks of the becoming – procrastinated and lacunary as it may be, but still evident – of a complex information space in which the freedom of speech and the free access to information are not just mere statements but new elements trying to get roots, defying existing barriers.

A significant feature of this period is the fact that the media system is developing concomitantly with the social fragmentation. If this social fragmentation (a generally natural phenomenon in the incipient stage of the self determination of social categories, which used to be quite homogenous in the past) cannot stimulate the emergence of complex political structures, neither could mass media present an

integral picture of reality, interpreting it rather as a mosaic image, the connections of which are hardly perceived by the wide audience. Consequently there is an uncertainty about the points of reference, the attitude of criticism is biased by imperatives of change, the political and media coordinates oscillating through new facts and problems, like links of a chain trying to get together.

Thus, in the recent years the mass media in the Republic of Moldova (like in other countries) have assumed the role of a mirror (often ambiguous) of political confrontation – a fact explained by the tension in socio-political atmosphere, generated by acute crisis the country has plunged into, ‘crisis’ being probably the most frequent word used on the pages of Moldovan publications and also western publications, which also gives the unfortunate statistic figures on Moldovan economy (for instance the falling of the gross domestic product from 470\$ *per capita* in 1995 to 296\$ in 2000, EU assistance in the period 1991 – 2000 was only 21 euro *per capita*, direct investment had one of lowest rates of the neighboring countries – 122 euro² *per capita*).

Consequently, the feeling of uncertainty has a heavy and ineluctable mark on the political and spiritual unchaining, generating tensions that the triumphant statements about the tempos of macroeconomic growth cannot overcome. This is an undeniable fact, proved by the results of the recent sociological surveys. Another predominant feature of the mood of masses is the feeling of frustration, deception and confusion regarding the socio-political developments and as a result paternalistic aspirations gain momentum. The psychology of dependence, skillfully promoted by the ex - soviet state and continuing to show in the Moldovan society in the citizens’ attitude towards the country’s power structures. This kind of mentality is undoubtedly the source of the fear of reforms.

These elements of tension marked the socio-political atmosphere in the Republic of Moldova in 2001, and this tensed political context was favorable for using mass media as a tool in a real political fight. Being involved in the daily process of reflecting the multiple aspects of political life and contributing to the shaping of the agenda of public debates, making a hierarchy of events and persons (it is a known fact: only what appears on TV exists and has social value, and does not exist, even if it’s important, if it does not appear on TV)³, the mass media, spontaneously, (sometimes deliberately) let themselves into the political game, especially that that year started with elections, that is with a total involvement of the press in the election campaign, the political confrontations continuing after the coming of the new government, not in the parliament but in the press.

Governmental policies on mass media

The political pluralism and freedom of press, proclaimed and then enshrined in the *Fundamental Law* (1994) the adherence of the Republic of Moldova to the international acts protecting the rights and freedoms of citizens (the Convention for Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the International Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, etc.), the adoption of a number of laws and the inclusion of important provisions in the normative acts, aligned to the international norms on freedom of expression and access to information (the Law on Access to Information, adopted on May 11, 2000, quite a unique law for the ex-soviet area)⁴ created an evolved and specific legal framework and represent solid premises for the appropriate development of the mass media system in the country.

It is evident that the adoption of the afore mentioned normative acts occurred due to the fact that the power structures of the country recognized the need to align our legislation to the international legal standards of the informational sector, due to the awareness of the local political class of the role of mass media in contemporary society, but also due to the exigencies both from outside (conditions imposed by international organizations) and from initiatives of local non-governmental associations in the field of mass media.

Although there is a favorable legal background and there are normative acts adopted for the free functioning of the press according to the principles of democratic society, still there is no categorical consolidation of mass media activity that can only happen with a considerate application and capitalization of the existing legal base. In other words this is about ability in promoting certain governmental policies in this field.

In this sense the changes in the configuration of the political power in Chisinau after the parliamentary elections of 25 February 2001 and the actions of governance that followed cannot be regarded as auspicious grounds for efficient collaboration between state bodies and media institutions. Those few events reflecting regulatory implications of the government in the information field can hardly be considered coherent and well defined actions of a benefiting strategy. They lack conceptual and systemic vision of the direction for mass media development, denoting lack of a clear and thorough concept of involvement of the power in solving the problems of that accompany the Moldovan press in its navigation through the meanders of transitioning society. In this case the governmental policy is to be deemed duplicitous. On one hand the government cannot underestimate the press, as the collaboration with the mass media institutions is an obligation of authorities, in view of the effort of enhancing the legitimacy obtained in the elections and of exploiting the resources of influence of mass media. On the other hand the actions (or lack of actions) of the present power structures show a manifest negligence for the needs of the media sector in general. Thus the rapid and firm rapprochement of PCRM to the state press is accompanied by a very reserved attitude towards the other media sectors of local media. The oscillation of state authorities between the recognition of and negligence for mass media potential. This could also mean unawareness of the unwritten rules of public communication, which, by definition ensure transparency of governmental actions. However, the appearance of power representatives in mass media is insignificant, being reduced to the same circle of persons every time. Events such as briefings and the like are more rarely covered, (except for those held by the Ministry for Internal Affairs), the spokesman of the Presidency is quite 'anonymous'. Perhaps these kinds of situations can be deemed as pertaining to the governmental policies on promoting transparency and advancement efforts of the informational space. It is true that the TVM channel has a monthly program –*The President's Hour* and the activity of the parliament is also covered, especially in the news programs, dialogues with the listeners are made by the public radio station but the informational weight of all these is not enough and cannot substantially reduce the 'informational shortages' of the population.

It would be wrong to signal the inadvertences of the communication model, adopted by the present government and the inefficiency of actions for improving the conditions for mass media activity in general without admitting that even lacking fundamental decisions on the functioning of the written and electronic press, there was a total absence of media issues in the government agenda. In the course of this year the government considered a series of issues related to this particular field. Thus

a decision was made on restructuring the *official web site of the Republic of Moldova*, which is quite correctly perceived as an instrument for the country's integration in the international political and economic structures, as a way of promoting the favorable image of the country abroad (August 2001). The issue of informational piracy was also discussed in the government.⁵ With regard to the end of mandate of the Coordinating Council of Audiovisual new members have been appointed. The new chairman of CCA is now Ion Mihailo, the 9 members of this body, established in 1994 to coordinate the activity of TV and radio stations, and are appointed, according to the current legislation, by the Parliament, the Government and the Presidency, that is three members by each institution, for a period of 5 years. As of August 16, 2001 CCA issued broadcasting licenses for 179 applicants. One of the first issues approached by CCA was the security of informational system of the Republic of Moldova.

An important and promising decision, in the context of seeking ways to ease tensions in the relations between the government of the Republic of Moldova and the authorities of the self-proclaimed republic in the Eastern districts of Moldova, was the signing by the two sides, on the 16th of May, of an agreement on «free circulation of mass media on the two banks of the river Dniester». An important point in this document was the provision according to which in order to circulate on the other bank the newspapers of Transnistria are not obliged to be registered in Chisinau and vice versa. “However the number of Moldovan periodicals on the Transnistrian market has not increased”⁶, observers report.

The examples presented reveal certain elements of the governmental policies carried out in 2001 in the field of mass media, policies that show ill-assorted or even improvised and inefficient actions.

The journalistic circles – as the journalists are the ones directly affected by these actions – most of the times have reactions of dissatisfaction with the way the officials approach the resolution of mass media problems. Thus, during a meeting of the members of the permanent Parliament Commission for culture, science, education, youth and mass media with the participation of mass media leaders, a number of claims and concerns of many years were expressed. The accuses of the media operators were actually quite grave: “the state does absolutely nothing to save the press”.⁷ Among the claims expressed in that meeting were VAT and advertisement tax exemption and creation of an alternative press circulation network.

In the opinion of some journalists, in the ten years of democratic reforms in the society Moldovan mass media have not succeeded in becoming free media.⁸ The journalists generally think that the authorities violate their professional rights and, to a great extent, restrict access to information. Journalists plead for prohibiting by law any interference in the publishing activity of mass media.

During a meeting of journalists and Josette Durie, PACE rapporteur for Moldova, the reproaches to the authorities were on the fact that they do not use economic leverage to stimulate the independent press, the fact that determines their partisanship, shown by the fact that most publications in the country serve certain political sources, ignoring their fundamental mission to accurately and impartially inform the public. In the opinion of one of the speakers, Val Butnaru, the director of the weekly *Journal de Chisinau* “the state television has turned into a pathetic tool of public opinion manipulation. All the programmes which allowed arguments and in which the opposition parties could express their opinion were closed.”⁹

The national commission for ethics of the Union of Journalists stated the concern about the censorship” which has been installed in the public TV and radio

stations and in the governmental publications” and condemned “the policy of dictatorship promoted by the ruling party at the state company *Teleradio Moldova* by combing out unwanted personnel, suspending programmes of political interest, by covering only the reality favorable to this party that is leading to indoctrination of society and suppressing off political freedoms.”¹⁰

In 2001 the number of reciprocal accuses of journalists and public authorities increased. The journalists are constantly expressing dissatisfaction for the authorities’ actions and the government most of the times is not satisfied with the functioning of mass media. An eloquent example – the Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev accused the mass media of the Republic of Moldova of destabilizing the situation in the country. Without naming the publications he had in mind the prime minister said that some of the mass media institutions in Chisinau “are using information to misinform the population. According to Vasile Tarlev controversial and false information appear many times in the media aiming to disparage the government. Because of different interpretations of the same event in the press, the citizens get disoriented and do not believe them.”¹¹ It is quite evident that this kind of statements, admitting the dose of truth in them, still denote a simplistic understanding of the media phenomenon, they do not indicate awareness of the necessary perspectives in dealing with mass media problems, perspectives that are inherent for the promotion of thorough contemporary policies in the field of information.

Even more vicious are the direct or hidden attempts to suppress the free circulation of information by authorities especially on the left bank of the river Dniester, ruled by Igor Smirnov’s administration. For instance on the 25th of November the inhabitants of the left bank were deprived of the possibility to watch the Russian TV channel RTR, which is resource-broadcast in this region. Later on a statement was made for the press saying that the interruption of broadcasting was due to an ordinary technical checking.¹² But if one takes into account that the re-transmission of this Russian TV channel occurred a few hours before it showed a memorable report on in which Tiraspol authorities were accused taking part, alongside organized crime, in arm trafficking and smuggling, the explanation does not make sense.

In conclusion the relation of governmental policies on mass media to the process of society reforms proves the unstable character of the stage Moldova is now. The real complexity of the democratic becoming marked by contradictions and generators of multiple questions determine the imperative of a pertinent attitude towards the delicate problems like those in the mass media, especially in the conditions when the government has the mission of expressing the interests of the entire society and not only of its electoral segment.

The direct and indirect support to the press

As for the state support for the media sector in the conditions of a poor budget it is unwise to count on subsidies and facilities for the mass media institutions. What the power manages to do is to provide a privileged situation to the media it has under its wing (especially in the case of official dailies *Moldova Suverana* and *Nezavisimaia Moldova*) and that is the rent for office and payment of maintenance services in the Casa Presei (Press House) a fact that is generating reactions from the other editorial offices which are treated as commercial enterprises and having to cope with all the hardships of market economy. It is certain that the economic independence of mass media would be stronger if the National Concept for supporting mass media were

entirely implemented a concept adopted by the Parliament in 1999 and quite forgotten or at least neglected at present.

For the purpose of mentioning some other government actions of support to the mass media in 2001 one could mention the awarding of prizes to 10 journalists for "fruitful collaboration with the cabinet", among the awarded were journalists from *Moldpres*, *Moldova Suverană*, *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, *Kišiniovskii Obozrevateli*, *NIT*, *Radio Moldova*, *Pro TV*, *TVM*.

Another significant event that occurred in this year which had an additional connotation, emphasizing the attention of the government for the development of mass media and also a signal of cooperation coming from it – the establishment and the first awarding of the National Award for Journalism for valuable achievements in the written and electronic press, which had quite a sounding and impact in the society life. The awarding committee was established by a Governmental Decision nr202 on March 13, 2001. The following journalists were the first to be awarded - Boris Marian (*Nezavisimaia Moldova*), Viorica Cucereanu (*State Company Teleradio Moldova*), Valeriu Vasiliță (*Infoprim*).

The enhancing of government support for mass media could further evolve by implementing successful practices of other countries.

The amount of subsidies from the state budget for official publications of local, national and department level for supporting certain categories of publications

In 2002, according to the Law on budget, financial resources were allocated to the informational sector, which is financed from the budget, for the activity of State Company Teleradio Moldova (33287,7 thousand lei) and for the Fund for Support to Editorial Offices (publications for children *Alunelul*, *Noi* and *Florile Dalbe*), 450 000 lei, equally distributed among them¹³. Obviously these allocations (there is no other financing for mass media in the Law on budget) cover only 40 % of the needs of the afore mentioned publications.

It is worth noticing, however, the slight growth in the budget provisions for mass media activity, the finance allocated in 2001, compared to that of 2002 is 274.2 thousand lei and 360 thousand lei¹⁴ respectively. For 2001 the extra-budgetary Fund included 120 thousand lei for financial support of medical magazines, founded by the Ministry of Healthcare, while the Special Fund of extra-budgetary resources included 7 million lei for the State Company Teleradio Moldova.¹⁵

The legal framework for mass media activity. Analysis of the laws and governmental decisions on mass media activity adopted in the period of reference

The evolution of the legal framework of mass media activity established in legislative acts adopted in previous years, has registered attempts to optimize the legislation on press, including the adoption of the Law on access to information, and discussions on the introduction of amendments to the Civil Code.

In 2001 however the legislation in the field of mass media was not radically amended so that to be able to stimulate enough the media sector. The case of CAIRO versus CCA that generated wide debate in the society passed into oblivion, without a major impact, especially due to the conditions in which the majority faction of the parliament at that time "behaved lamentably in a situation when the only thing they had to do was to protect the domestic informational area" ¹⁶ while other issues of

media functioning which needed more legal consideration were left out. An impression could be that the coming to power of legislators, the establishment of a permanent parliament commission for culture, science, education, youth and mass media (a commission of doubtful competences because of the lack of solid initiatives, insufficient for the media, uncertainty in the activity of its members) did not bring any new and significant elements in mass media activity. The parliament adopted a manner of expectation and especially a restrictive attitude in dealing with these issues. Thus, two draft laws on the reorganization of Teleradio Moldova Company into a public institution were rejected. These draft laws had been elaborated by MPs of center-right factions of the previous parliament. In the vision of the members of parliament the first draft law was not accepted because it “is not adequate for the current situation and that it is necessary to adopt a legal framework not only for the Teleradio Moldova but for all institutions of the audiovisual.”¹⁷ The reason for rejecting the second draft law was due to “bad inspiration”¹⁸ from the *Law on the Organizing and Functioning of the Romanian Society of Radio and Television*. Both draft laws stipulated the reorganization of *State Company Teleradio Moldova* into a public service, in the full meaning of this word, i.e. independent from the editorial point of view and with the right for self-management. In the same hearing another draft law on the modification of the Law on Audiovisual was rejected, a draft law adjusted to the afore mentioned two draft laws, which was meant to complete the legislation in this field in case one of the two draft laws had been adopted.

The parliament also rejected the initiative of a group of MPs on the abrogation of the Press Law (enacted in 1994). An amendment to the same law was adopted with the votes of the communist majority and the Braghis Alliance faction, which prohibits the financing or support of any kind for periodical publications by governments of other countries, except for the situations stipulated in bilateral agreements between states. The publications for children, the scientific, didactic ones and those of creative unions are not subject to this prohibition. Opinions expressed in the press say this was directed against a series of publications in Romanian language, among which *Țara* and *Literatura și Arta* which benefitted from financial support of authorities in Bucharest¹⁹. In the autumn of 2001 several amendments were made to the Law on Audiovisual. The decision of the parliament of November 2, 2001 raised negative feedback in the opposition press.²⁰

Mass media was also referred to in the *Decision of the Government of the Republic of Moldova on the state registration of copyright and connected²¹ rights* adopted in the same year.

As 2001 was an election year, the attention granted in the beginning of the year to introducing some regulations on including the mass media in the election campaign. In this context it is worth mentioning the restrictions for the television. Thus a true “media diet”²² was imposed for the pre-election campaign: in order to prevent disguised propaganda all programmes featuring politicians and reports on their activity, even those indirectly covering political issues such as press reviews were not allowed.

In the course of 2001, there were debates around the draft Civil Code. The draft is aimed at filling the existing gaps in the current legislation, protecting the rights of the person to the maximum. From the mass media perspective it is important that this enhanced protection does not substantially affect the activity of the media sector. With regard to the examination in parliament of this act, experts have expressed concerns, insisting that the intended modifications could negatively affect the freedom of press, on one hand because of the self-imposed censorship they would

create and on the other hand due to eventual economic losses or bankruptcy as a result of lawsuits against mass media. According to the provisions of this draft law the reparation of moral damage for violating the non-patrimonial rights of the person (the right to honor and dignity, to private life, etc) is not limited to a fixed amount, it appears as an arbitrary amount, and the term 'limitation' is not present in this document. In the opinion of some journalists this draft Civil Code does not bring any additional positive elements for, the only hope of maintaining the freedom of expression remaining is the European Convention on Human Rights.²³

In conclusion, it is evident that, with all the achievements the legal framework for mass media activity continues to reflect certain controversies, to promote difficult situations, the establishment of the "rules of the game" for mass media on the Moldovan socio-political pitch is a process marked by contradictions and incertitude but, at the same time leaving room for hopes for a future improvement and clarification.

The State's Relation with Mass Media, the Obligations and Responsibilities of the Involved Parties

The communicational scope of the social-political life obtains a special significance in the contemporary society. Mass media receive a totally unique role in the new circumstances, determined by the dynamism and real complexity of transformations. Along with exercising some dedicated functions in the social-political context, it is mass media that contribute today to the social organization of debates and amplify the social democratic dialogue, converting into a prerequisite of the democratic evolution: a statement like "The democratisation of the society goes through the democratisation and pluralization of communication"²⁴, becomes an incontestable and, practically, unanimously recognized truth, all the more that the public opinion, as media experts note, has two sources: one of them is mass media²⁵, and this fact cannot be neglected at all.

The power, cannot, respectively, neglect the media factor; moreover, it considers this factor as inherent in the arsenal of its resources of legitimacy and influence. All the more that in the exertion of administration, the political forces to govern establish, with mass media's help, the feedback with the society, obtaining the necessary information about the effect of the made decisions, thus having the possibility of synchronised correction of the promoted policies, of knowing the real dispositions of the public opinion and of assessing the abilities they dispose of "as transmitters of messages and distributors of symbolic products"²⁶. It is true, the relations of the power with the contemporary media sphere develops more under the sign of counterposing of positions, they appear marked, by conflict situations, - an absolutely real and natural thing within the rules of the game, established by the conceptual democratic view. It is timely to refer, in this context, to the theses set forth in one of the works of Jurgen Habermas, a notorious German philosopher and sociologist. He emphasizes, analysing the contemporary society, two hypostases of the power: the emergent one in the process of communication, and the one exercised administratively: "Two contrary processes meet and cross in the activity of the political community: on one side, the communicational constitution of the legitimate power, which appears within the process of communication, free of any constraints... on the other side – such an ensurance of legitimacy through the political system, with the help of which the administrative power tries to conduct the political communication"²⁷.

As a consequence, the role played by mass media in the society grants, on one side, a higher visibility to the governing activity, this becoming more susceptible of being subjected to pressure, on the other side, it arouses irrepressible attempts on behalf of the power to subdue mass media, or, at least, to find ways of cooperation with mass media. In case of inconsistency of the governance or of lack of offered solutions, and implicitly, in case of loss by the governance of the levers of cooperation or of influence on mass media, the attitude derived from the public space may lead to serious sanctions on behalf of the electorate (to refer to concrete cases, in the case of the presidency of Emil Constantinescu or of the National Peasants Christian Democratic Party in the 2000 elections, in Romania, as well as of the Democratic Agrarian Party of Moldova in the 1998 elections and of the Party of Democratic Forces, Democratic Party, Party of Renaissance and Conciliation of Moldova in the 2001 elections in the Republic of Moldova).

It appears that the awareness of these truths becomes present in the Republic of Moldova as well. When the Prime Minister ascertains, at a meeting with journalists, the need for a pluralism of opinions in a democratic society, which should be ensured by the diversity of mass media institutions, stressing that they should take the Deontological Code as a guide in their activity, and indicates as the main reason for hiring information sources the lack of financial autonomy (actually, a deficiency characteristic not only of the Republic of Moldova), it becomes clear that among the governing circles there has been realized (be it only at a declarative level, most of the times) the opportunity of co-working with mass media, both state, intercepted as megaphones for the governance, and with all other media institutions, the dissidence of many of which is, *volens-nolens*, accepted.

And still it is obvious that, after all, the state's relations with mass media are reduced to the participation of dignitaries in different journalist meetings, to the keeping in check of those from the non-state mass media, on each occasion, to declarations, in the last instance. There is a mutual interest, although rather reserved and specific. Anyway, nobody goes further than mutual accusations and appeals to cooperation that resound from both parts. The break between the governance and, implicitly, the state press, on one side, and the private, independent press, on the other side, deepens more and more. The journalists of the private media sector claim the necessary economic facilities, officially established, invoking the practice existing in other countries, accuse the power's courteous attitude towards the publications it sponsors (and which, in their turn, show obedience), and insist that state mass media, being funded from budgetary sources, should objectively reflect current issues, regardless of the political colour of the governance²⁸, the latter being a desideratum marked rather by the sign of idealism, than by the feeling of reality, since the attempt to model and dominate the flow of information is, probably, congenitally characteristic of a power. No doubt, the attributions of the power naturally reserve it the right to produce and disseminate public interest information. This thing, undoubtedly, favours the power, offering it the possibility of increased chances in the promotion of a favourable image of the governance's actions, fortification of its ideological-doctrinaire message, continuous recruitment of supporters and ensurance of the necessary support on behalf of the audience, all these – through its own press bodies or through those non-state publications with which it has come to terms. Those with which it does not come to terms, either directly or tacitly, are subjected, according to the opinions of journalists, to certain trials of influence, especially affecting the economic situation of the press, but also, in general, its daily activity (refusal of

certain accreditations of newspaper representatives, ignoring the critical interventions of mass media etc). "Maintaining in the state ownership the complex "Press House", where the newsrooms of most Moldovan newspapers are located, constitutes a lever or control on the press from governmental institutions", stated Valeriu Saharneanu, President of the Union of Journalists of the Republic of Moldova.

In the practice of Tiraspol authorities, the relation with mass media, which they promote, demonstrates an attempt to categorically dominate the informational space. The supporters of the current Transnistrian president I. Smirnov, in their attempt to put under control the entire informational space of Transnistria, insisted in 2001 on the adoption of a new version of the law in force in the region *on press and other mass media*. Among the proposed "innovations" there were the interdiction to found mass media by private individuals, cancellation of the right to publish without the registration of newspapers and magazines with a circulation lower than 1,000 copies, interdiction to exercise the activity of editor for individuals without a degree in journalism etc.²⁹

In such a context, illustrated by the above-mentioned cases, the influence exerted by the power on the method of reflection of the authorities' activity takes shape in one of the priorities of the governing approach. In other words, there appears in relief the persistence of a false representation of the country's current leaders, as well as of the previous ones (this phenomenon has rather a general character), that the ovations abundantly hosted on mass media pages constitute a *sine qua non* condition for an efficient governing. While, in reality, starting even from the fundamental, inherent characteristics of mass media, things look totally different.

Specialists actually qualify the phenomenon of joining of mass media with the power as "an incestuous union"³⁰, because from the moment the role of mediator characteristic of mass media is mixed up with the role of power, fortified by the respective political and economic resources, it becomes clear that the conditions of autonomy, professionalism and critical attitude "enter into a short circuit". After all, democracy presupposes the assertion of a critical manifest press. We could talk about a whole series of Moldovan publications that in 2001 ostentatiously professed criticism: publications self-called "independent", that is, first of all, *Săptămîna (Week)*, *Flux (Flow)*, *Jurnal de Chişinău (Chisinau Journal)*, *Accente (Accents)*, *Timpul (Time)*, whether more or less "independent"). Without exaggerating, we can point out the fact that various journalists from these publications have signalled that in their internal forum they feel the identification with the sacramental *watchdog*. The motivation of such an emphasis of the critical position may be different, cases of execution of articles, reportages, commentaries "upon obscure order" cannot be disputed, but essential is that, anyway, through such attitudes the press tries to fulfil its function of supervision of the good, from the point of view of journalists, going of things, of an efficient governance. In other words, even if there is registered a joining of some part of mass media in the governance's force, it is very well that there exists and manifests itself combatively another press, there is a counterbalance.

After all, the mentioned situations constitute some relevant paradigms of the time, proving that the renunciation to the control over mass media does not take place that easily. But the experience of other countries also attests that, actually, nowhere is it easily renounced to the control over mass media, especially over the audiovisual

ones: the example of the Russian Federation is relevant in this sense; during 2000-2001 a visible fortification of the state control over national TV stations took place there. Anyway, the process of denationalization of the press in the Republic of Moldova took place rather rapidly, the share of the publications controlled by state institutions decreasing from 90% in 1990 to about 50% in 1994 (which was anyway interpreted by researchers as “a commanding number of official periodicals” all the more that “this did not contribute in any way to the qualitative improvement of the informational market in the country”³¹, continuing to decrease continuously along the years. However, towards 2001, the state’s control over, practically, the most important means of communication in the country – State Company *Teleradio Moldova* and two governmental publications of national circulation, *Moldova Suverană (Sovereign Moldova)* and *Независимая Молдова (Independent Moldova, Russ.)*- was preserved.

Of interest is, in this context, the problem of existence of official press, traditionally regarded from two different angles: at one extreme being the ones thinking that the government needs a means of communication to acquaint the population with the information on its activity, and at the other extreme – the ones arguing that in a society in which there exists a part of the electorate that did not vote for the government established by the parliamentary majority, there should not exist press funded from the general budget, supported by all taxpayers. The problem is indeed not that simple and reducible to a univocal answer, as it could seem at the first sight.

In order for them to truly fulfil their mission in the society, it is necessary that mass media adopt, as much as possible, a strategy of equidistance, of avoidance of political partisanship. In its turn, it should come to use strategically mass media only as sources for the promotion of initiatives in the field of public policies and not as an instrument of political confrontations (in 2001, a positive example in this connection was offered by the Ministry of Health).

As to the involvement of the independent press in the promotion of such initiatives, as examples can be mentioned the contracts concluded between newspapers and the authorities, providing for the purchase of editorial space for placing official decisions of the authorities, of public publicity, which, one would like to believe, does not affect the publication’s independence. At judet level, a practice confirming such a relation, already established, is illustrated by the experience of the local publications *Business info* in Cimişlia, *Unghiul* in Ungheni.

Anyway, in the situation in which the basic sources of press existence – sale of circulation and sale of publicity spaces – cannot ensure it a decent existence, the stake on external financial injections seems explicable. The informational space becomes an arena of competition for winning subsidies and sponsorships. The independence of mass media is rather mimicked in such a case. All the more that those investing in one publication or another, respectively, “ordering the music” (following, as a rule, doubtless political purposes), prefer to remain behind the scenes. Thus, the real employer of many publications, the one ensuring its survival, despite an elementary economic logic, remains anonymous (the same as the data about the economic indices of mass media enterprises, the real number of the circulation, are camouflaged). Or, the reader (TV viewer, radio listener) knowing that the publication he buys or subscribes, the TV or radio station he follows, belong to that or that oligarch, to that or that firm, would mean an honest game of mass media, played with open cards. For now, however, prevails the situation in which, in many cases, the press that declares itself independent actually serves certain corporative interests, realizing them especially by resorting to the so-called “camouflaged publicity”, rewarded through

occult subsidies. It is difficult to talk in such conditions about a stable political line of the newspaper. Constant with party ones, it appears, many times, fluctuant with those called independent. *Tineretul Moldovei (Moldova's Youth)*, for example, during several years has oscillated among such tendencies as pro-Snegur, anti-Snegur, anti-Lucinschi, pro-Lucinschi, becoming, in the end, pro-Diacov, and in 2001 – pro-Voronin. Certain periodicals, however, try not to depend on the pressures from government or of oligarchic concerns, but, like in other geographical spaces where the fragility of democracy is present, this press, “conceived as a public service for the citizens and not as an instance loyal to the authorities, their magnates or associates, even if it manifests, without doubt, as being influent, it is nevertheless, an exception”³². The political obsequiousness constitutes a real danger, recognized by the journalists themselves as being harmful to the good functioning of mass media: “I meet sometimes with my colleagues that tell me, - a journalist confesses, - about the work environment in some newspaper teams, hard to understand nowadays: journalistic texts must daily pass the test of political obsequiousness”. It is obvious, the untransparency in the activity of mass media will be there for as long as the means of communication will not present a real commercial value. At present, however, an increasing number of periodicals, TV and radio stations that were set up as independent editions and tasted the beneficial air of freedom at the initial stage of democratisation, having come across financial problems, lose their independence and go under the wing of strong economic-financial groupings. A representative image of such an evolution presents the experience of the Russian Federation. The process of concentration of mass media in the hands of strong oligarchic groups is in full process there, involving influential monopolies from the oil industry and gas spheres, such as “Gazprom”, “Lukoil”, financial groups “Onexim-Bank”, “Most”, the one controlled by B.Berezovskii etc. In the analysts’ view, acceding to ruling mass media for these new masters means not a business investment, but “a means of offensive and defence”³³ also having very concrete tasks: “one hour after the day of election is announced, to start moving their mechanisms” (*Аргументы и факты (Arguments and Facts)*, 1997, No. 16: 2). It is obvious that mass media begin to pose, both for governmental institutions, and for business circles, an important mercantile interest, in the perspective of instrumentalizing the influence on the audience. In order to solve their own interests, - a commentator notes, - it is resorted to influence on the public opinion. The informational field becomes in such a way deformed and oriented towards significant events only for 0.0001% of the population”.

Thus, it is obvious that this new situation owed to the ascending status which mass media assume, generates also certain dangers and problems. On one side, mass media create a new and true public space. On the other hand, they can create, at the same time, a false public space, which even in case of referential use, can deviate from reality. There can actually be identified an entire list of “capital sins” of the actual Moldovan journalism, among which are the corporativism, complicity in camouflaging information, intervention in the private life and discrediting of transparency, “embracement” with the power and public opacity of institutions, mental stiffening of journalists, narrow-mindedness in the treatment of the reality, obsequiousness, the lack of sensibility for the problems of ordinary citizens, deficiencies in the penetration of the reflected reality.

Access of journalists to information

One of the conditions of the correct information of the population through mass media, is, first of all, ensuring the access to information for journalists. The most important premise of advancing for a quality press resides, first of all, with the

possibility of the mass media institution to accumulate, in order to be transmitted to the audience, exhaustive, ample, diverse information. Limiting such possibilities for the operators of communication bears the risk of a deficient media activity, of distorting of information. The free, unhindered access to public interest information (for any citizen, including journalists, for whom the opportunity for such a possibility to get informed would not be considered a privilege, in relation with the rest of the world, but rather represents a condition for the adequate exercise of the profession), constitutes, at the same time, an indicator of the democratic development of the society. Unfortunately, obtaining the information whose social significance makes necessary its publication in the press, often poses serious difficulties. There is a unanimous understanding of the purpose and mission of journalism in the society, there exists, in the Republic of Moldova, the respective legal framework, represented, first of all, by the *Law on Access to Information*, and still the journalists' lamentations with regards to the barriers, many times unsurpassable, in the way of obtaining information, are frequent. Exactly this thing was confirmed within a survey, conducted in the period September-October 2001 by the Centre for the Promotion of Freedom of Expression and of Access to Information³⁴. According to the data of this survey, - an ample, multiaspect and concrete investigation of the problem, - the least transparent for journalists aspects of the social-political life are those related to the use of credits received from abroad (indicated by 46,2 % of the respondents), corruption (77,9 %), the concrete use of budgetary resources (39,5 %) etc. The journalists involved in the investigation indicated the fact that public officers often surround their activity with an exaggerated secrecy (that has nothing in common with real and incontestable state secrets), artificially limiting, that is, illegally, as Vasile Spinei, the coordinator of the investigation, shows, the conveyance of objective data regarding, for example, privatisation problems, about the dignitaries' salaries and privileges. In the view of 48.1% of the respondents to the respective questionnaire, the access to the requested information was refused for no reason. Moreover, to the question "How do you think, which of the institutions use mass media to manipulate the public opinion?" besides the fact that 82.6 % of journalists included in this category the political forces, especially during electoral campaigns, 32 % of the respondents considered this thing to be characteristic of authorities, of public institutions in general.

The signalling of a lacunary transparency of public authorities does not constitute a simple observation, but a finding, generating a variety of concerns. The journalists' opinions converge in qualifying as insufficient the reflection of the activity of the President Office, Prosecutor's Office, of some ministries and departments, and the reason for this reserve derives from the emphasis of that unjustified fear of the respective institutions before a larger "opening". Or, the deficiencies of communication, focused on the groundless limitation of the access to information, cannot help affecting the quality of governing, the surpassing of the existent state of affairs, taking the shape of a stringent objective.

Evolution of informational market and consumption of media products in the Republic of Moldova

The *habent sua fata libelli* adage, applied to media realms would mean that each publication has its own destiny. These destinies have different configurations – some have an ascending itinerary and benefit from favorable circumstances, while others ascend and descend in a context of permanent change. Every year new stars appear on the Moldovan media sky, others disappear to reappear again or vanish forever. In this

aspect the year 2000 was more dynamic marking a series of publishing events, bearing both the sign of plus and minus. Thus, the list of weekly publications included some new names: on the 5th of July the first issue of the insolent *Accente* (emphasis) appeared, a publication which by the end of the year was already known as the “most scandalous publication in 2001”; in the autumn appeared the promotional issue of the *Timpul* (the Time) weekly newspaper followed by regular issues, trying to make competition to the already known weeklies; *Gazeta romaneasca* (the Romanian newspaper), conceived as a digest of the press in Romania, the first publication of this kind in Moldova; the publication of *Kishinevsky Obozrevateli* reappeared after one year of absence, having a page in English and a column on the situation of the districts of the left bank of river Dniester and with the traditional columns: mews, politics, economics, (the first issue had 3000 copies); among publications affiliated to politics appeared *Democratia*, a messenger of the Social – Liberal Party; “*Glasul Natiunii*” served the Social –Liberal Union “*Forța Moldovei*”; *Tara* newspaper assumed the status of “information and analysis” publication, no longer stating that it is the publication of the Christian Democrat Popular Party, etc.

Among the publications which disappeared was the *Jurnalul National* daily, due to financial problems, and *Kommersant Moldovi* temporarily closed by the decision of the Prosecutor’s Office.

The field of electronic pres was also marked by changes. As of January 1, 2001 there were 103 institutions of audiovisual in the Republic of Moldova, 19 obtained permission to start operating³⁵ 2001; 150 private ³⁶radio studios were registered in the beginning of February. Two radio stations- *Vox* and *Radio d’Or* ceased broadcasting the Coordinating Council of the Audiovisual (CCA) retrieved the licenses of these radio stations for violating the provisions of the Law on Audiovisual (illegal retransmission of *Maximum* radio and *Avto* radio). In august 2001 CCA warned 40 owners of TV and radio licenses to pay their debts to CCA³⁷. The *Catalan* TV channel ceased its activity as a result of a court ruling also due to debts (300 000 lei for the technical license and 50 000 lei for the broadcasting license)³⁸. The closing of *Catalan* TV channel considerably reduced the spectrum of Moldovan television, especially as the announced opening of *Stil* TV and the municipal TV channel is delayed, while for a period *TVM* had only 6 hours of broadcasting a day.

Several changes took place in the Gagauz Autonomy in 2001as well. In Comrat was launched the supplement of the official newspaper *Vesty Gagauzii* (Gagauz news) and *Komrat I komratchjane* (Comrat and comraters), monthly newspaper with 5000 circulation. There are three publications in Gagauz language: *Halk irlii* (people’s unity), *Gagauz Desi* (gagauz voices), *Sabaa Yildik* (morning star) and five publications in Russian language in different areas of the Autonomy.

An innovation in the media system of the country was the establishment of Omnia Press society (founded by national level newspapers), which assumed the mission of distributing the press completing the activity of the two specialized agencies *Moldpresa* and *Posta Moldovei*. These details introduced some correctives to the current informational landscape of the Republic of Moldova, which consists of multiple and contrasting components, as it is natural for such a complex domain.

The consumption of mass media in the Republic of Moldova is not very substantial. The press circulation, especially in the rural areas is limited. There some areas with an informational vacuum (Ocnita sector) caused by the closing of radio broadcasting). As these situations are caused by technical problems they require more attention.

The figures confirming the status of mass media circulation in the country are as follows: in 2001 the total number of the circulation of the 233 existing newspapers was 45 018 000 copies.³⁹ There were 80 magazines with a circulation of 1 982 000 copies.⁴⁰ In conclusion, related to the total number of population, there is an informational shortage in the society.

However, the number of publications and their total number of circulation show a slight increase as in 2000 there were only 176 newspapers with a circulation of 30 mill. copies.

1. Republic of Moldova, January 2001. *Barometer of public opinion* /Opinion poll carried out by CSOP at the solicitation of Public Policy Institute. – Chisinau, 2001, p. 16.

² Cf.: Chomette Guy-Pierre. *A la frontiere orientale future de l'Union Europeenne. La Moldavie repoussee vers l'Est* // Le Monde diplomatique, 2002, janvier.

³ Livolsi Mario, Volli Ugo. *La comunicazione politica tra prima e seconda repubblica*. – Milano: Uilm, 1998, p. 82.

Your right: access to information / Compilation of normative acts. – Chişinău: Universul, 2002.

5 Cf.: Moldova Suverană, 2001, 16 august.

6 Safonov Andrei. *The Press in Transnistria* // Mass media in the Republic of Moldova. – 2001, December p. 14.

7 Curier media, 2002, nr. 1.

⁸ Cf.: Currier media, 2002, nr. 2.

⁹ News Bulletin *Infotag*, 2002, January.

¹⁰ Currier media, 2001, nr. 14.

¹¹ Currier media, 2002, nr. 2.

¹² Cf.: Currier media, 2001, nr. 23.

¹³ Monitorul oficial, 2001, nr. 24, p. 9.

¹⁴ Monitorul oficial, 2000, nr.160-162, p. 16.

¹⁵ Monitorul oficial, 2000, nr.160-162, pp. 38, 40.

¹⁶ Harabara Nelly. *Faza radiofoniei și meandrele democrației* // Mass media in the Republic Moldova / Analytical bulletin. – 2000, December, p. 2.

¹⁷ Currier media, 2001, nr. 13.

¹⁸ Ibidem

¹⁹ Currier media, 2001, nr. 12.

²⁰ Cf.: *Молдавские Ведомости*, 2001, a Vedomosti

²¹ Monitorul oficial, 2001, nr.108-109.

²² Ciornei Vsevolod. *Impressions* // Săptămîna, 2001, 19 January.

²³ cf.: Pîrțac Olivia. *Draft Civil Code—press perspective* // Currier media, 2002, nr. 2.

²⁴ Noelle Neumann Elisabeth. *La espiral del silencio. Opinion publica: nuestra piel social*. – Barcelona: Paidos Iberica, 1995. – p. 207.

²⁵ Ibidem

²⁶ Del Rey Morato Javier. *Democracia y posmodernidad. Teoria general de la informacion y comunicacion politica*. – Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 1996. – p. 422.

²⁷ Хабермас Юрген. *Демократия. Разум. Нравственность* / Лекции и интервью. – Москва: Наука, 1992. – p. 50.

²⁸ Cf.: Currier media, 2002, nr.2.

²⁹ Safonov Andrei. *The Press in Transnistria* // Mass media in the Republic of Moldova. – 2001, December, p. 14.

³⁰ Morcellini Mario. *Elezioni di TV. Televisione e pubblico nella campagna elettorale '94*. – Genova: Costa&Nolan, 1995. – p. 13.

³⁰ Coval Dumitru. *The Press at the crossroads of contemporary history of Moldova // Moldoscopia / Partea V.* – Chişinău: USM, 1995. – p. 35.

³¹ Toussaint Florence (coord.). *Democracia y medios de comunicacion: un binomio inexplorado.* – Mexico: Jornada, 1995. – p.

³² (cf.: *Cpeđa*, 1998, nr. 6. – p. 6.

³³ Access to information of journalists of the Republic of Moldova. Sociological survey– Chişinău: Acces Info, 2001.

³⁴ Cf.: *Currier media*, 2001, nr. 1.

³⁵ Cf.: *Currier media*, 2001, nr. 3.

³⁶ Cf.: *Moldova Suverană*, 2001, 16 August.

³⁷ Bulletin informational *Basa-pres*, 2001, February.

³⁸ Cf.: *Moldova Suverană*, 2001, 16 August.

³⁹ Source: Department of Statistics and Sociology of the Republic of Moldova.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

Amount of allocations for supporting mass media stipulated by Law on Budget (in thousand lei)

Provision of Law on Budget for support to informational sector, financed by the budget, including	2001	2002
<i>State Company Teleradio Moldova</i>	27471,2	33287,4
Editorial offices support fund	360	450
Total	27831,2	33737,4

Source: Monitorul oficial al Republicii Moldova.

Typology of mass media, circulated on the territory of the country

Classification	Category	Name
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<i>Written press</i>		
Area of circulation	National	Moldova Suverană, Независимая Молдова, Flux, Literatura și Arta, Săptămîna, Florile Dalbe ...
	Regional	Ora locală, Днестровская правда, Вести Гагаузии ș.a.
	Local	Capitala, Gazeta de Vest, Unghiul, Business Info, Кишигевские новости etc.
Status	Official or state, departamental	Moldova Suverană, Независимая Молдова, Monitorul oficial, Oastea Moldovei, Scutul legii, Florile Dalbe ...
	political parties and formations	Comunistul, Luceafărul, Dialog
	Non- governmental organizations	Vocea poporului
	Art unions	Literatura și Arta, Lanterna Magică, Info-Masca ...
	Religious confessions	Altarul credinței, Curier ortodox, Alfa și Omega ...
	Economic ,financial structures	Capital, Ofis, Contabilitate și audit ...
	commercial	Macler
	Independent (private)	Săptămîna, Flux, De Facto, Jurnal de Chișinău, Timpul...
	Private	Integrame, Сканворды, Шанс ș.a.
Topicality	Socio-political	Moldova Suverană, De Facto, Săptămîna, Flux, Timpul, Jurnal de Chișinău
	Literary-publicistic	Literatura și arta, Contrafort ș.a.
	Economics	Деловая газета, Экономическое обозрение, Логос пресс
	Ecology	Natura, Gutta ș.a..
	advertisement	Macler, Reclama, Час пик ș.a.
	healthcare	Tainele sănătății, Домашний доктор, Полезная газета ș.a.
	Sports	Sport-curier
	Entertainment	Integrame, Зеркало ș.a.
Category of audience	children	Noi, Florile dalbe, Micul print, A mic, Gutta ș.a.
	youth	Tineretul Moldovei, Коллаж ș.a.
Periodicity	daily	Moldova Suverană, Flux
	2-3 a week	Țara, Macler
	weekly	Timpul, Săptămîna, Jurnal de Chișinău, Luceafărul ș.a.
	Bi - monthly	Altarul credinței, Cuvîntul vieții ș.a.
	monthly	Most magazines

<i>Press Agencies</i>		
Status	State owned	Moldpres, Infoprim
	Non state	Basa Press, Infotag, Deca Press, ș.a.
Area of circulation	national	Moldpres, Basa Press, Infotag, Flux, Interlic
	Regionale	Deca Press, Infoprim, Olvia Press
Topicality	Universal	Moldpres, Infotag, Flux
	Specialized	Orthopres, Voxpress
<i>Radio Broadcasting</i>		
Status	De stat	Radio Național, Antena C, radio stations administrației publice locale
	Private	Radio Nova, Radio Contact, Pro FM, Hit Fm ș.a.
Area of circulation	national	Radioo Național, Antena C
	Regional	Vocea Basarabiei, Radio Nova
	Local	private radio stations in Chișinău, county radio stations, private provincial radio stations
Topicality	Universal	Radio Național, Antena C
	Informational	Info-radio
	Music	Most of private stations (comercial)
	Religious	Micul samaritean
<i>Television</i>		
Status	State owned	Television National
	Non-state	NIT, TVC 21, TVC 26, Pro TV, provincial TV channels
Area of broadcast	national	TVM
	Regional	NIT
	local	provincial TV channels
<i>on-line Journalism</i>		
Status	Portal	Moldova Azi, Прорыв ș.a.
	Web page	Flux, Săptămîna, Независимая Молдова ș.a.

Publishing of periodicals in 2001

	Nr issues	Annual circulation, thousand copies.
issues - total	120	3431
Including:		
magazines	80	1449
Bulletins	40	1982
newspapers	233	45018

Source: Department of Statistics and Sociology of the Republic of Moldova

Newspaper publication in 2000-2001

	2000	2001	percentage
Number of publications	176	233	+ 32,4 %
Total annual circulation	~ 30 mill.	45, 018 mill.	+ 50,1 %