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FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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Moldova

[Moldova](#)[Freedom of the Press 2013](#)

Press freedom remained stable in 2012 as the center-right ruling coalition, the Alliance for European Integration (AIE), was hampered by internal disagreements and devoted less attention to media reforms. In March, Parliament broke a nearly three-year deadlock and elected a new president—63-year-old judge Nicolae Timofti—after three lawmakers defected from the opposition Communist Party and voted for the nominee. The election stabilized the government, but politics remained highly polarized, with 70,000 Communist Party supporters protesting Timofti’s inauguration and refusing to recognize him as the head of state. Throughout the year, the government made limited efforts to continue reforming the public broadcaster, Teleradio Moldova (TRM); struggled to implement defamation reforms; and was lenient in prosecuting corrupt media regulators. However, the ruling coalition did invite media freedom groups to testify in Parliament for the first time and made some improvements in the regulation of broadcast media, and physical attacks against journalists continued to decline.

The constitution and laws provide for freedom of expression and of 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 2012 were not implementing the defamation-related reforms of the 2010 Law on Freedom of Expression, which had strengthened the position of journalists, and in May the Supreme Court issued a draft document for judges to clarify how the legal changes should be applied. In July, two former convicts filed defamation cases against the Chisinau newspaper *Ziarul de Gardă*, seeking 100,000 lei (\$8,200) and 300,000 lei (\$24,800), respectively, after the newspaper published an article questioning why the country's acting president in 2011 had pardoned two women who had engaged in multiple fraud schemes. Both cases were pending at the end of the year. Local press freedom groups could not assess how many defamation cases were filed against the media because some courts either refuse to provide the information or lack qualified personnel to respond to the requests.

The AIE-led Parliament passed two notable legislative measures during the year. In July, it amended the Law on Freedom of Expression to ban Communist symbols and the promotion of totalitarian ideologies. The Communist Party, which still uses the hammer-and-sickle emblem, said it would not comply with the law. In November, Parliament also amended the criminal code to forbid censoring public media and punish those who obstruct, threaten, or assault journalists with a fine of up to 2,000 lei (\$165). Anyone exploiting an official position to commit such offenses can lose their right to hold that position for up to five years.

Reporters in the capital were able to obtain a greater amount of public information due to increased compliance 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. Some politicians continued to blame the media for exposing credible allegations of government corruption. In November 2012, two senior Democratic Party officials strongly criticized *Ziarul de Gardă* after it published an investigative story on the personal wealth of an anticorruption official.

The Audiovisual Coordinating Council (CCA) has been criticized in the past for its politicized, nontransparent decision making, but in 2012 the agency was commended by the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) for making more professional and transparent judgments. In April, the CCA shuttered the

pro-Communist television station NIT after it exhausted other options to reprimand the station for its propagandistic programming, leaving journalists and media advocacy groups divided about the propriety of the decision. NIT appealed the ruling in court, and the case was pending at the end of the year. Authorities were lenient with two senior CCA officials being prosecuted for bribery: the junior official was convicted in April and sentenced to four years' probation, while the charges against the senior official were dropped in August after he retired and became seriously ill. The Electronic Broadcasters' Association (APEL) had prepared a draft broadcast law in 2011 that would limit media concentration and improve transparency regarding media ownership, but in 2012 Parliament passed only three narrow amendments to the old broadcast law that primarily focused on strengthening advertising-related regulations.

Media pluralism and the volume of locally produced programming continued to expand in 2012 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 10 new magazines and newspapers were registered with the Ministry of Justice. However, the 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 continued to decline during 2012, in part due to aggressive reporting by media outlets like Publika TV, and local media freedom organizations reported no serious physical attacks. Government officials generally interacted more carefully with reporters, but remained sensitive to reporting on allegations of government corruption, leaving journalists and media outlets vulnerable to threats and attacks. In April, the broadcasting equipment of a television network in central Moldova, Rezina-based Elita TV, was largely destroyed or stolen after the station's owners refused to sell it to a group of local politicians and continued reporting on a politically sensitive lawsuit. In August, Jurnal TV reporter Victoria Ocară was hospitalized with a head injury after being struck by stones while covering confrontations in the northern city of Bălți between advocates and opponents of union with Romania. Police officers often fail to properly investigate attacks in such cases, but were reported to have identified suspects in both incidents.

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 the self-declared capital of 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 in Tiraspol rather than the internationally recognized Moldovan government in Chişinău. Media pluralism is extremely limited, as any critical information regarding 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 2012—including Dniester.ru, Tiras.ru, and Safronovpmr.com—because they were blocked by authorities in Tiraspol or experienced frequent cyberattacks. The election of Yevgeny Shevchuk to the separatist presidency in December 2011 polarized the local media, leading to the creation of more websites and press services for separatist agencies, as well as reduced access to public information as agencies required that all requests be made in writing.

There is a mix of private and public media in Moldova, but ownership transparency is still lacking, with many outlets employed to advance the business or political interests of their secretive owners. TRM managers appointed by the AIE government have been commended for the broadcaster's balanced news coverage, but the departure of two senior executives in early 2012 and the nine-month search to replace them, along with a two-year delay in appointing three members to the TRM Supervisory Board, effectively stalled the public broadcaster's internal reforms during the year. The AIE made limited progress in reorganizing, privatizing, or shuttering some 40 state-owned local newspapers. Due to the global economic downturn, private media remained 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.

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 43 percent of the population had access to the internet in 2012. News portals and social-networking sites have become popular, with some one million users registered on the Russian site Odnoklassniki and some 200,000 on Facebook, according to the IJC.

2013 SCORES

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Partly Free

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