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*It seems that the Romanian media's structural problems—lack of ethics, unreliable and abusive ownership, and tabloidization—impede the expected progress. Several years ago, our panelists were waiting for some form of normalization, but the depressing conclusion for 2008 is that there is no normalization within sight.*



ROMANIA

Romania joined the EU in 2007, registering a major success after an unsteady transition from communism. But the EU accession made little difference in media's freedom. It was the internal political situation that counted the most. Prior to 2004, the powerful executive branch, led by Adrian Nastase, had threatened freedom of speech with a coherent strategy of buying or intimidating vocal critics. The change of government in 2004 improved the situation, but the country found itself in a devastating political battle between the president, Traian Basescu, and the prime minister, Calin Popescu Tariceanu. The political crisis became unmanageable in January 2007, immediately after the festivities marking the new EU membership. Tariceanu made an alliance in parliament with the opposition Social Democrat Party and impeached Basescu, but this act failed to pass a popular referendum. The political climate remained tense until the December 2008 election. The situation took its toll on media, which were affected by the politicians' hysteria on one hand and the obvious political involvement of many media outlets on the other. The conflicts between journalists became a daily occurrence, with each side accusing the other of being manipulated, and even paid, by various political factions.

The process of ownership concentration continued in 2008, with several people controlling an overwhelming majority of mainstream media. Many are questioning their genuine interest in developing media as profit-making businesses. Businessmen Dinu Patriciu and Sorin Ovidiu Vintu—two of the “top five” wealthiest Romanians—are under investigation for a series of financial misdoings. Together, they own an estimated €100 million in media investments, and their media empires are still being expanded. Dan Voiculescu, also among the wealthiest Romanians, mixes business and politics; his media trust, Intact, openly supports his small party while furiously attacking his political enemies, such as President Basescu.

The president himself has a bizarre relationship with the media, which he uses to disseminate his messages while at the same time accusing them of supporting the owners' hidden interests. The profession blatantly ignores ethical standards, and various journalists accused by colleagues of lacking ethics seem to take pride in the accusation. As one MSI panelist remarked, “The word ‘deontology supporter’ became an insult in Romania.” It was used mainly by journalists working at Intact to attack other journalists who dared to draw attention for disregarding codes of conduct.

Thus, the tabloid media enjoy an increasing audience because they avoid political scandals. The only foreign trust ownership generates profit and audience by remaining politically neutral and adopting an almost completely tabloid format.

Four of the five objectives registered small decreases, while only Objective 2, professional journalism, increased marginally. Although not dramatic—indeed the decrease is almost negligible—the decrease is

# ROMANIA AT A GLANCE

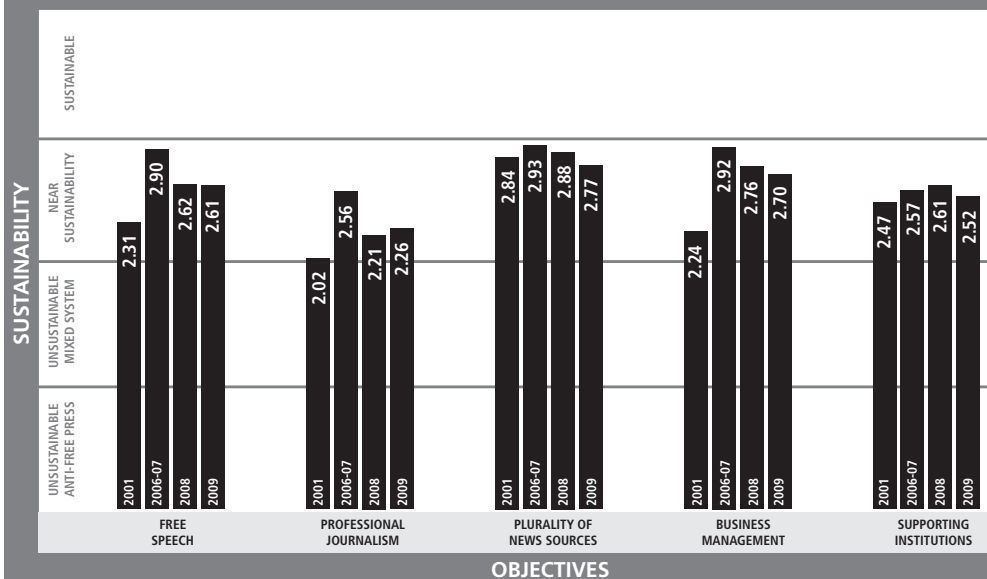
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 22,246,862 (July 2008 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Bucharest
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Romanian 89.5%, Hungarian 6.6%, Roma 2.5%, Ukrainian 0.3%, German 0.3%, Russian 0.2%, Turkish 0.2%, other 0.4% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Eastern Orthodox 86.8%, Protestant 7.5%, Roman Catholic 4.7%, other (mostly Muslim) and unspecified 0.9%, none 0.1% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Romanian 91% (official), Hungarian 6.7%, Romany 1.1%, other 1.2% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2007-Atlas):** \$132.5 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **GNI per capita (2007-PPP):** \$10,980 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **Literacy rate:** 97.3% (male 98.4%, female 96.3%) (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Traian Basescu (since December 20, 2004)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 1000+, exact numbers not available; Radio: N/A; Television Stations: N/A
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top ten papers have a combined circulation of approximately 757,000 (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2008)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** top three television stations: Pro TV (2.6%), Antena 1 (1.6%), Acasa TV (1.1%) ([paginademedi.ro](http://paginademedi.ro))
- > **News agencies:** Mediafax (private), Agerpress (state-owned), NewsIN (private)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** Approximately \$768 million ([paginademedi.ro](http://paginademedi.ro))
- > **Internet usage:** 12,000,000 (2007 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ROMANIA



Annual scores for 2002 through 2005 are available online at [http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI\\_EUR/archive.asp](http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_EUR/archive.asp)

### Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

### Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

### Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

### Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

paradoxical in a country that recently joined the EU and enjoyed seven consecutive years of economic growth. It seems that the Romanian media's structural problems—lack of ethics, unreliable and abusive ownership, and tabloidization—impede the expected progress. Several years ago, our panelists were waiting for some form of normalization, but the depressing conclusion for 2008 is that there is no normalization within sight.

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

### Romania Objective Score: 2.61

The panelists observed a discrepancy between the legal framework on one hand and the social norms concerning the protection of free media on the other hand. The legal protection is generally satisfactory, but its implementation is deficient. "The legislation exists, but it is not implemented in all cases; there are problems, and they are solved only after some public outcry," said Catalin Moraru, editor of a leading local newspaper. Another panelist, Ciprian Stoianovici, news editor at a radio station, said he believed the economic environment was jeopardizing media freedom: "The media corporations control a large share of the market and thus suffocate this freedom." Panelists consistently point out the unreliable legal protection and foggy interests of an increasingly concentrated ownership. These problems also exist in highly regulated areas, such as broadcast media.

The National Council of Broadcasting (CNA) controls broadcast licensing and nominally is an autonomous body subordinated to the parliament. The 11 CNA members are appointed by the president, the government, and the parliament. Over the years, MSI panelists have expressed doubts that this mechanism ensures the autonomy of the institution. There were no political wars around CNA in 2008, as was the case in previous years, when the political dispute among the president, the government, and unstable political alliances took its toll on the functioning of CNA. In previous reports, panelists doubted the fairness of the licensing process. This was a not problem in 2008 because CNA had no more aerial licenses to grant. "We are lucky they finished the licenses in the previous years," said Moraru.

When it comes to digital licenses (not limited in number), the registration process is much easier, and CNA refuses this right only in exceptional circumstances. This was the case with Becali TV, named after Gheorghe Becali, a controversial politician and soccer club owner with extremist views. Becali wanted to start a television station, but CNA denied the license on procedural grounds. Returning to traditional licenses, a problem remains with selling those already

registered. CNA grants this right after a complex procedure that includes details about future editorial content and programming. But the state does not control editorial content and programming in cases where the company owning a license is later sold. Thus, a sort of trafficking occurred when companies having good political connections obtained licenses and later sold them.

Stoianovici, whose radio station had an expansion policy, said the station was offered such licenses, especially obtained in order to be sold but refused the offer. Romania is in the process of transferring all licenses to digital. An odd fight occurred between two ministries for passing new legal provisions regarding the transfer. CNA and the Culture Ministry worked transparently to draft a law that granted the former the right to manage the process (as was previously the case). At the same time, the Communication Ministry prepared another draft granting this right to a subordinate agency. CNA won this battle—the government assumed its draft. However, the situation raises serious doubts about how Romania will be able to manage the complex process of transferring licenses.

In 2008, CNA remained active in combating some of the most extreme breaches of decency in the television industry. CNA's most prominent "client" is OTV, owned by Dan Diaconescu. OTV is an independent television station, although rumors suggest it was sold to one of the big media owners. OTV has a long history of offering Romanians extreme forms of infotainment. Its formal owner organizes long talk shows with bizarre characters, and the main topic is various crimes and disappearances. From 2007 to 2008, OTV organized several hundred so-called episodes about the disappearance of Elodia Ghinescu, a lawyer who married a police officer. In one episode, Diaconescu instigated a hacker to break into Ghinescu's e-mail inbox and show her personal messages on the air. Ghinescu became a popular icon, although she continues to be missing. Meanwhile, the mainstream media took over the case and followed OTV's example in revealing personal details about her family.

CNA tried to tame OTV by fining it several times and even interrupting the transmission for three hours. But Diaconescu fought back, launching a campaign against CNA with the slogan "Hands-off-the-people television." Although it was able to remove the station's license, CNA did not take this radical step. Another CNA "client" is Mircea Badea, a television host who uses injurious language when commenting on political and social matters. Public opinion is split about CNA's attempts to limit such behavior. Some believe CNA should stop such obviously abusive reporting, while others doubt CNA's integrity and motivations. The long history of suspicion about CNA does not help the institution.

At the same time, other CNA actions raises doubts even from the public, which otherwise would support the organization's actions against filthy media. For example, CNA forbade a television advertisement that showed a group of workers destroying some architectural artifacts. The motivation was that the clip could encourage such behavior. Another example is the warning issued by CNA in January 2009 after the anniversary of "national poet" Mihai Eminescu. Several radio hosts read a trivialized version of an iconic poem by Eminescu, which CNA considered unacceptable behavior. Although many considered it to be only bad taste, serious doubts were expressed about CNA's willingness to endanger its credibility by picking petty fights.

In 2008, CNA faced two similar situations when parliament voted for laws that went against the spirit of media freedom. Two MPs from different parties (the liberal Ioan Ghise and the nationalist Gheorghe Funar) proposed a law requiring broadcasters to show "positive news" and "negative news" in equal proportions. They argued that the bad news affected the development of young people and the mental health of the population. The definitions of "positive" and "negative" were not specified, and the law was supposed to be implemented by CNA, which condemned its passage. The law was not promulgated by the president and changed very little after the strong public outcry. All of the panelists considered the law to be aberrant and raised concerns about the mood in parliament, which passed such a bill.

The same parliament passed another bill with more serious consequences. Before the December 2008 election, the broadcasting law was modified to make television stations charge money for the presence of candidates in the electoral debate. The broadcasters' associations had dual positions, since the stations would have benefited from the law. But the journalists and editors raised concerns about the unacceptable mixing of criteria in inviting the candidates and organizing the debates. CNA was put in the awkward position of implementing a law it disagreed with. In the first instance, many took this as CNA's initiative and blamed the institution for the new situation. Panelist Iulian Comanescu, media analyst, said this was "a time bomb which exploded in CNA's hand before the election." It is obvious that the mix of advertising criteria (tariffs) and content criteria (impartiality, independence, etc.) had lethal effects on the credibility of talk-show hosts, talk shows and television stations that sold policy positions for money during the campaign.

Market entry for a media business is no different than for other businesses, with the exception of the above cryptic licensing process for broadcasters. The legislation for registering companies is still complex, but this is the case for all areas and could be turned into a barrier for media only

if abused during the implementation. With the Romanian media hit by financial crises, some panelists felt that the state should use indirect ways to help the industry. Adrian Voinea, owner and editor of a regional newspaper, believed the VAT for advertising should be reduced to zero as a way both to help media and to encourage companies and consumers to spend. Another proposed policy was to reduce the VAT for media selling (currently 9%). These ideas have little chance of being implemented; Romania began 2009 with severe financial crises, and the budget deficit jumped to a surprising 5.2% for 2008. Stoianovici said, "We always say one industry or another is the top priority, but the media will never be such a priority. We are hit by the crises, and the advertising budgets are the first to be cut." Petrisor Obae, who started the media-dedicated website paginademedi.ro, warned that such a rescue plan for the industry could jeopardize its independence: "We have the mentality that a rescue plan would have some demands from the government attached to it." Some panelists said they decreased the rating for this indicator because the media industry is disadvantaged as the state helps other industries.

While cases of extreme violence against journalists are rare in Romania, the various harassments continue, and the panelists complained about a hostile environment against the profession. *Evenimentul Zilei* newspaper published a series of articles under the name "Cupola" documenting the links between former communist secret-police networks and current businesspeople. In June 2008, one of the involved journalists received death threats.<sup>1</sup> In the spring of 2008, Bucharest hosted the NATO summit. There were no massive public protests, which usually follow NATO gatherings, but small groups of demonstrators (some of them foreign citizens) tried to organize anti-NATO manifestations. The police overreacted and summoned up the youngsters in order to check their documents. It was an inability to deal with such manifestations that triggered overwhelming protests. In one incident,<sup>2</sup> a journalist who reported the news was taken into custody and spent several hours at the police station. Panelist Rasvan Martin, who heads media-freedom projects within Media Monitoring Agency, was present at the incident to document police intervention. He was also taken into custody without clear justification and was freed after several hours. Although they claimed the intervention was solicited by the owner of an establishment where anti-NATO protesters gathered, the police were obviously overreacting in this case.

The MSI panelists believed that a social intolerance against the journalists was more and more visible. "Nobody reacts. The crimes against journalists do not cause public scandal,"

<sup>1</sup> *Evenimentul Zilei*, June 30, 2008, "Ziarist EVZ amenințat cu moartea"

<sup>2</sup> *Romania Libera*, April 3, 2008, Petre Badica, Alexandra Radu, "Brutalitate politieneasca in numele NATO"

said Voinea. As an example, he described what happened in Craiova, where a group of dubious characters from the underground economy became aggressive toward some journalists who were reporting a funeral gathering, and the police intervened to “protect them from us.” Stoianovici confirmed that “nothing serious happened, but the situation worsened terribly—first, because of a lack of reaction from authorities over small things. When media show up, with the average person violence is the rule: the press is the one poking its nose into your business. There is a clear aversion to media.”

Speaking about underground businesses, Moraru noted that the number of reports about this fell dramatically because journalists are afraid. He also believed that “the punishment of the ones who molest journalists is late or nonexistent. Fortunately, the aggressions are rare, but when they happen the public is not impressed. We don’t count on its reaction.” To make matters worse, the conflict among journalists sometimes becomes aggressive. “Mircea Badea says he will break the neck of X journalist once he catches him,” said Stoianovici, referring to a popular television showman who had this reaction after reading something negative about himself in the media.

Some panelists blamed politicians for instigating against journalists. “After PSD attempted to politically control the media until 2004, now the political class has discovered that it is more efficient to set the people against the media,” said Stoianovici, while Moraru observed that the two electoral campaigns in 2008 made the politicians more aggressive. We

#### LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

##### FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

asked the panelists if the intrusive methods of some media outlets could explain the public reaction. Stoianovici rejected this explanation, saying this situation was rare.

Public media include Romanian Television (TVR, with six channels), public radio (four channels), and the public news agency, Rompres. The president, the parliament, and the government appoint the boards of national radio and television stations, according to the 1995 law. While a public debate took place in 2005 over efforts to change the law, no changes were ultimately made. The NGOs working for media protection participated in these debates and endorsed the final draft prepared by Raluca Turcan, head of the Media and Culture Committee of Parliament. After she was caught in the middle of the political conflict between the president and the government in 2006–2008, Turcan was not able to put the draft on parliament’s agenda. After the 2008 election, with a new majority, she expressed the intent to use the momentum to push for a new law.

Currently, public television still functions according to the outdated 1995 law, which makes the institution dependent on the electoral cycles. After 2004, a serious attempt was made to break the vicious circle with the appointing of the independent film director Tudor Giurgiu as president. He started some serious reforms in an institution plagued by immobility, waste, and politicization. Independent personalities were involved in hiring new people, especially in the highly sensitive news department. But the political crises created a huge amount of pressure and led to various scandals that we explained in previous MSI reports. Finally, Giurgiu was sacked and replaced with a high-ranking member of the Social Democrat Party, Alexandru Sassu, the first-ever head of TVR coming openly and directly from the staff of a political party.

Until then, parties used to appoint independent public figures close to their views or linked to their leaders through social ties. Sassu started to appoint all the new people who came to TVR in the past several years, surrounding himself with yes-men. He used the same strategy to remove “undesirable” people: to circumvent the legal protection they enjoyed, he simply changed their job title. The former head of the news department, Rodica Culcer, and the former head of the programming department, Cezar Ion, were replaced by this method. They both started lawsuits against TVR, and the former already prevailed.<sup>3</sup> Ioana Avadani, director of the Center for Independent Journalism, said that “Sassu’s intervention led to the ‘elimination of some TV shows.’”

<sup>3</sup> Evenimentul Zilei, Andreea Vadan, January 16, 2009, “Televiziunea publică pierde în instanță”

But Sassu's actions are only the tip of the iceberg. The real problem is the politicization of TVR's board. Each party appoints its representative there, and they behave as such. The most extreme case involved the representative of the Conservative Party, which despite the name is a left-leaning party led by Dan Voiculescu, a big media owner. His party appointed to TVR's board one of the managers of its private television station,<sup>4</sup> a direct competitor of the public television station. With the politicians supervising the editorial policy, the MSI panelists again raised doubts about public television. "Public television does not enjoy independence by law, and it was never so evidently politicized. Every crack in legislation to control the institution was exploited," said Stoianovici.

The past several years saw a significant decrease in TVR's audiences and advertising revenues (this will be discussed later in the report). Thus, the politicization is worsened by incompetence and chaotic management. In the second half of 2008, TVR launched two new channels, a regional one and a news-dedicated one. Both have been launched in a rather experimental form, with poor quality and secondhand content (TVR Info, the news channel, mostly transmits live static images from several public locations). Media analyst Comanescu summarized the situation as such: "We could consider the considerable income of public television, which comes from subscriptions, to be a judicial distortion, while the TV station does not serve the public interest or have a high rating. It is rather bizarre to finance with tens of millions per year of public money a TV station that gets high ratings only for football games. For such a thing, it is more logical and fair to have a pay-per-view system. The presence of a former PSD member in the top management of public television raised questions at that time over the political non-involvement of TVR, even though its later evolution shows a lack of expertise of the director-president Alexandru Sassu rather than manipulation tendencies."

The Romanian parliament passed a law in 2006 eliminating prison terms for libel. However, the Constitutional Court reversed this decision on the grounds that the honor of a person cannot be defended only by receiving money. The Court's decision cannot be overruled, and it makes it compulsory for parliament to maintain the libel law in the penal code. However, for now the Parliament has not taken any action to re-introduce libel as a criminal offense into the penal code. The situation may muddle interpretation of the law, even for legal experts. However, in 2008 there were no cases of journalists punished with prison for violating the libel law. Instead, there have been cases where journalists have been fined exorbitant amounts for material damages. One

such case pitted a journalist against the powerful mayor of Constanta, Radu Mazare, who strongly controls the political institutions in his region. Journalist Feri Predescu works for one of the few independent newspapers in Constanta. Predescu wrote a story that expressed some legitimate suspicions about the mayor's connections to a controversial businessman. She was charged with libel and sentenced to pay a more than €20,000 in damages to Mazare.<sup>5</sup> Ironically, Mazare became a public figure as journalist in the 1990s, when he himself became the target of judiciary vendettas.

Another high profile case had a different ending. In 2008, President Basescu opened a case against Cristian Oprea, a journalist working for Cotidianul. While Basescu is attacked on a daily basis in other media outlets, he chose to start this lawsuit after an article which, though it was evidently biased, was relatively harmless. Basescu asked for a symbolic amount in material damages, however the judges rejected the president's complaint.<sup>6</sup>

Romania adopted a Freedom of Information Act in 2001. It was inspired by the American model and is thus liberal compared to the region's standards. In 2006, the law was significantly improved with the inclusion of all national companies and state-owned firms. Problems continued to occur in the law's implementation, however, since authorities tend to interpret it restrictively in order to hide embarrassing or politically controversial information. Razvan Martin said the 2006 amendment covering the national companies is not well-known and some companies still invoke the law so as not to release information. One case involved Mr. Martin's NGO and the Romanian Post Company. The NGO filed a law suit and won in court. However, going to court is not a solution for journalists who want the information rapidly. Mr. Stoianovici said "the trial is not a solution from a journalist's point of view. You just waste time and do not get the information. As a journalist I will not go in court." "A solution is to threaten a law suit, said newspaper editor Moraru. "But it doesn't work every time." Avadani, director of the Center for Independent Journalism, said "the trials are (often) concluded in favor of those who request information."

Panelists did not consider access to international media to be a problem for Romania. The only possible problem is price.

"Even for central media, but especially for the local ones, access to foreign sources is conditioned by price. Fortunately free information is even more abundant on the Internet" said Iulian Comanescu, a freelance journalist and blogger.

<sup>4</sup> Declaration of interests for Razvan Barbato, [http://www.cdep.ro/camera\\_deputatilor/declaratii\\_interese/institutiitvr/barbatorazvan.pdf](http://www.cdep.ro/camera_deputatilor/declaratii_interese/institutiitvr/barbatorazvan.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *Cuget Liber*, November 25, 2008 "Feri Predescu a fost condamnată pentru delict de opinie anti-Mazăre"

<sup>6</sup> Cotidianul, January 20, 2009, "Traian Bănescu pierde procesul intentat jurnalistului Cristian Oprea și publicației Cotidianul"

There is no need for a special license to practice journalism in Romania. The state does not control who can enter the profession and journalists are subject to legal working contracts as any other employees are. As panelist Ciprian Stoianovici ironically noted, "The only reason not to be a journalist is to not want to be so."

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Romania Objective Score: 2.26

This year's panelists continued to express negative views about the quality of reporting in Romania. The pessimistic mood prevalent in the previous report deepened this year: "Editorial products show even low quality this year," said Avadani. Stoianovici offered the example of Realitatea TV. Once marketed as the Romanian CNN, this news station has descended into infotainment and tabloid style content. Stoianovici also said Romanian media is split into categories: those that try to follow some standards and those who only seek audiences without paying any attention to standards. "We are talking about two types of journalists. Ones that try at least to do their job and others who do not even wonder about their work," Stoianovici said.

One of the preferred methods noted by the panelists is the selection of talk show guests. "The experts are selected to prove opinions already well defined by journalists," Obae said. These experts serve as analysts for a television station or another media outlet. In addition to speculating about the news and providing opinions, analysts' political biases are visible. For example, a Romanian television show hosted a well-known novelist as a monster expert. Another repeatedly insisted that a media analyst participate in a football show, Comanescu said.

As an example, the panel discussed the case of Intact Trust, one of the biggest ownership concentrations in Romania media, which owns the second-largest commercial TV station, a TV news channel, the biggest sport newspaper, radio stations, and several other publications. Intact is owned by the family of Dan Voiculescu, the head of the Conservative Party and a former Securitate informer. The media outlets owned by Voiculescu tend to protect their owner's political allies and attack his enemies. President Basescu, who has long conflicted with Voiculescu, is often attacked on Antena 3, Intact's news television station. In Voiculescu's case, said Comanescu, "A connection between the owner's political interests and some issues raised by newspapers or TV station is easily done. Intact Trust functions as an instrument of political PR, you have no chance to work correctly inside this company" Stoianovici added.

Romania has many different professional codes developed by various organizations and associations. The discussions between various NGOs and professional associations to adopt a unified code and implementation mechanism led nowhere. In 2006, an ethical code was imposed as an annex to the collective contract for the media industry, signed between a trade union and some owners' associations, but so far this has had little impact on the profession. The gap between norms and their implementation is summarized by panelist Comanescu: "the norms exist in different versions but they are not assumed and there is confusion about them. There are diverse violations from speculation in news to an aggressively defiant presence in Romanian media. CNA sanctions do not improve the situation."

Bogdan Chireac was the first Romanian journalist to resign following a conflict of interest. Chireac was deputy editor and a share-holder in the influential *Gandul* newspaper, and a daily presence as a security and foreign affairs analyst on numerous TV shows. At the same time, he owned a company that intermediated sales of communication equipment to the Romanian secret services. He resigned from *Gandul* after the information became public. But the scandal affected his career only in the short term. In 2008, he reappeared as an analyst almost daily on political talk-shows. Obae questioned this professional evolution: "All journalists accept Bogdan Chiriac as an analyst. But this is not about competence, it is about morality. He is a journalist who at one moment was involved in activities worth millions of euro with the state and wrote articles in the area where his company worked."

Another explanation for this indicator's decreased score is the tabloidization of mainstream media, which covers crimes, rapes and other acts of violence in an intrusive and

## JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).



disrespectful manner. George Ene, general-secretary of the Romanian Press Club, offered details about the case of an 11-year-old girl, who was raped by her uncle and became pregnant. Media reported the case using her initials, the name of her village, and her parents' names, making moot any effort to keep her identity anonymous. Another example which sparked debate was the murder of a child by his social assistant. In this case one of the mainstream TV stations said viewers could see images with the child on its Web site (thus avoiding the CNA's sanctions). Obae also drew attention to the fact that "media exploits funerals. There is no question about respecting human dignity." The line between serious media and tabloid media is not clear: "What is really scary is that media which consider itself to be of high quality and are breaking the rules to a great extent," Avadani said. "There is no quality press in Romania, there is nothing comparable with The Guardian, there is no radio, newspaper, article without non-quality articles." Stoianovici said.

But journalists are not the only ones to be blamed for this tendency: "Each year our readers prefer more articles about homicides, rapes. We see this from focus groups we conduct to find out what people read in our newspaper," said Moraru, editor in chief of the newspaper *Monitorul de Botosani*.

Participants agreed that the ownership structure and involvement of media owners in politics and businesses that operate with public money create conditions that may cause journalists to practice self-censorship. "It is clear that big media groups owned by magnates with penal problems include voices based on political affinities," Comanescu said.

"We don't have the habit of resigning. Romanian journalists do not resign. Why is Vladu Petreanu is still working there?" Stoianovici asked in reference to a respected journalist working for Intact's news television station and who tries to objectively report on his shows, but is an exception in a station dominated by virulent and biased shows.

Ene doubted that media owners are setting the news agenda: "I don't see the magnates meeting with news editors in chief and telling them what to do. That is not how their influence works." Avadani pointed out that this is the essence of self-censorship: "There is no need to be asked, you know very well what is expected of you."

Another problem is that journalists often seek good relations with politicians in order to get a job in an administration: "At the country level, one quarter of the civil servants are former journalists who self-censored while writing about politicians and ended up becoming advisers," Moraru said.

In other cases, advertisers put pressures on journalists. In the Cupola case, where a journalist received dead threats, an advertiser also used an economic weapon: "There were

problems and pressures but they were not recognized by the newspaper. Per my information a client mentioned in one of the articles threatened to cut publicity from the newspaper. The newspaper decided to end the series for other reasons—the articles needed to be analyzed by the legal department to avoid lawsuits. They talked about a new series at another time, however, for the moment the articles remained unpublished," Obae said.

A controversial case occurred during the electoral campaign, when a former police officer accused Home Affairs Minister Cristian David of consuming drugs. Martin, from Media Monitoring Agency, said TV stations did not follow up on the story, including the public television station. This could be explained by the strict rules applied to political reporting during the electoral campaign; thus TV stations preferred to avoid the story. "Only Realitatea FM (a radio station) developed the story, and TV stations were afraid to air it. Their own cowardice and incompetence in interpreting the law are the reason for this situation," Martin said.

Although the panelists agreed there are no taboo issues for Romanian media, they observed some tendencies to avoid various subjects. Comanescu said there is a tendency to rely too much on official information, and to simply retransmit political opinions without looking for original stories or opinions. Inevitably this results in TV stations and newspapers carrying the same stories and information. "You have hurdle style journalism—the same story taken from one station to another. News is checked with competition." Obae said. Manuela Preoteasa, who worked for years as a TV investigative journalist and currently is editor of an online media outlet, said investigations are almost totally absent on TV. But, she said, "The most important issues do not remain uncovered. We have the Internet so that information gets to the public." Ene agrees that it is not the lack of information that is the problem, but the quality of reporting. "Journalists relate the most important events, but they are doing it very poorly," he said.

The panel unanimously said there is no direct connection between pay levels and being vulnerable to corruption. This is not necessarily good news, as corruption, or at least vulnerability to it, persists when wages are decent. "There are reporters who would sell themselves no matter how much they are paid," Moraru said. "It's not the payment that make the journalists vulnerable, but the culture and the environment," Ene added.

The trend in 2006-2007 to increase media salaries stopped in 2008. Some media outlets even announced a reduction of salaries as a result of the financial crises. Intact Corporation reduced its wages 20 percent. Despite this recent development, salary levels remain decent in comparison

to Romanian standards. This is a direct result of major investments made in the industry in the last several years by powerful businesspeople. "One of the few good effects of investments made by some controversial businessmen in media since 2005 is the rise of salaries to levels close to those in democratic countries or even exceeding those. In some cases salary creates the adverse effect of raising suspicion about journalists who might sell their services. Media markets in Romania faced a crisis of human resources starting in 2006. People like Sorin Ovidiu Vintu and Dinu Patriciu (some of the richest Romanians, who are both controversial and involved in problems with the judiciary) up to now have probably invested more than €100 million in their new media assets. Some professionals must split between more than one editorial staff, newcomers are insufficiently educated by universities and have little practical background," Comanescu said.

The trend of media tabloidization continued in 2008. Newspapers continued to expand, and benefited from heavy investments and a competitive market. Only the first three tabloids—*Libertatea*, *Click* and *Can-Can*—represent 53 percent of the total print media market and their share is increasing.<sup>7</sup> Comanescu offered a gloomy perspective on the recent evolution: "Only entertainment and tabloid formats have good ratings, especially as they neglect serious issues. The phenomenon is visible especially with dailies where in 2008 three tabloids prospered compared with one in 2006. Quality papers instead have reduced sales."

But the problem simply is not the existence of tabloid media but in the unclear border between it and the serious media. There is an obvious pressure towards tabloidization: "Which news programs? They are entertainment," Obae said. Moraru, editor a local newspaper that is struggling to preserve some standards explained this trend is a result of a lack of resources: "Most local news papers, including the one I am working with, can't afford to pay a decent salary to people working on one or two articles per month. I think journalists should know how to conduct an investigation for better or for worse. But reporters want something easy."

Panelists did not perceive the media's technical capacity to be a problem, given the broad access to high technology in Romania. "The new technologies are easily adopted in transition countries and they are cheap. Excepting local media, only television has a gap compared with countries (with more advanced media) but this gap is closing," Comanescu said.

The market for niche publications is developed and continues to grow. Specialized magazines for IT, cars, women, fashion,

<sup>7</sup> Iulian Comanescu, *Evenimentul Zilei*, December 2008, "Marile schimbări din media în 2008"

and pets are strongly market-oriented and flourish. The most developed are those dedicated to women's issues, where the competition among 15 publications is fierce.<sup>8</sup> In 2008 the Romanian editions of *Marie Claire* and *InStyle* were launched.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Romania Objective Score: 2.77

More than 17 Bucharest-based daily newspapers are on the market, and three to four local daily newspapers are available in Romania's other main cities. The free newspaper market is developing with three titles in Bucharest, one of which is expanding its territory. The public television station operates six channels, two of which launched in 2008, though the overall audience has sharply decreased in the last two years. There are three private news-dedicated TV channels and one public (launched at the end of 2008, which still experimental).

Urban areas receive a variety of television stations via cable, and in recent years, more cable firms have penetrated the rural areas. The concentration of media ownership is a problem. There are five major media conglomerates:

- **Sorin Ovidiu Vantu:** A highly controversial businessman who built his fortune through an investment fund that bankrupted 300,000 Romanians of their life savings, Vantu organized a media empire using various intermediaries. He controls (without owning on paper) 14 print outlets, three television stations (including the leading news channel), a radio network, and the second biggest news agency. Vantu has a criminal record for fraud and, under the Romanian broadcast law, cannot own a broadcast license, hence his need for intermediaries.
- **Dinu Patriciu:** The richest Romanian, another highly controversial businessman, and former politician, Patriciu is involved in the oil industry and is being prosecuted for manipulating the stock exchange. He adopted an aggressive expansionist strategy, allotting more than €3 million for one newspaper's marketing strategy.
- **Adrian Sarbu:** His conglomerate includes five television stations -- among them the most popular commercial one, Pro TV -- several Bucharest-based publications, two radio networks, a network of local newspapers, and the main news agency.
- **Voiculescu family:** (See above for details about Dan Voiculescu.) Five television stations, six Bucharest-based publications, and a number of radio stations are controlled by this family.

<sup>8</sup> IBID

- **Ringier:** A foreign company based in Switzerland, it is the biggest foreign investor in Romanian media, with three newspapers (among them the most circulated Romanian newspaper, the tabloid *Libertatea*), an economic weekly, and several magazines.

According to a 2007 report, those five conglomerates controlled 90 percent of national newspapers (in terms of circulation) and 45 percent of the television audience market, but this percentage likely increased in 2008 given the decline of public television.

The panelists expressed their concerns that such a concentration reduced the options for journalists in a media market dominated by several people: "The problem is that you can't leave if you enter in conflict with the owner. The concentration solely does not affect the independence because media is more solid as a business but journalists have very few options," Preoteasa said. Opinions about controlling the news agenda were more diverse. Ioana Avadani said: "Property concentration is a natural process. We have five conglomerates so there is no monopoly danger. What could be dangerous is cartelization. Such was the case with anti-Basescu orientation when the Parliament impeached the President." Ene disagreed and said there were no evidence the media owners reached an agreement on that case. Martin said three out of five big media owners have a pending court case, implying that this could affect their media's coverage.

Internet penetration is estimated between 30 percent and 40 percent (there are several studies with different results).

#### MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

##### PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

But the online world is developing fast and has started to compete with mainstream media. The online news portal Hotnews.ro became an influential voice on the public agenda and hired some reputable journalists from radio and TV who had fallen out of favor with big media owners.

Panelists agreed that access to media in Romania is not a problem. The legislation sets absolutely no restrictions on access to foreign news. The only limitations are prohibitively high prices, but this could be overcome with the use of the Internet. The distribution of print media in rural areas is still deficient.

Public television registered a sharp decline in its market position in recent years. While it once authoritatively dominated the TV market, TVR fell to seventh place with audiences in urban areas. An astonishing 73 percent total audience decrease was registered between 2004 and 2008.<sup>9</sup> The station has more than 3,158 of employees with significant salaries, strict rules which prevent any reform, and a politicized management structure. Sharp competition from private stations found TVR unprepared, and exposed it as black hole where public money enters without significant outcome. TVR is financed by three sources: a special tax paid by the public, transfers from state budget, and advertising. The tax income is problematic since tax evasion is rampant and TVR does not have any convincing arguments to present to the public for paying taxes. Until 2006, the tax was collected by the state-owned electricity company. When that company was privatized the new owner refused to collect the special tax for TVR and the institution started to register financial difficulties. In 2008, it cashed a total of €20 million from advertising.<sup>10</sup> The financial deficit for 2007 was €8.8 million.

While the previous managers were sacked for far less than that, the current one enjoys enough political support not to be held accountable. Alexandru Sassu is a former politician who lost a bid for a seat in Parliament on the Social Democrat party list, and was instead granted this job, not having had any previous experience in media. The politicization of TVR was only doubled under Sassu by blatant incompetence. But his management only covers the real structural problems of this institution. The human resources situation is dominated by a perverse system of incentives. While wages are substantial, they do not depend on performance. On the contrary, the most preeminent personalities in TVR were forced to leave the institution

<sup>9</sup> Petre Barbu, *Adevarul*, January 22, 2009, "TVR este în criză de bani și audiență"

<sup>10</sup> Estimation of *Adevarul* newspaper, idem

after conflicts with management. This situation is further complicated by powerful unions and highly restrictive rules for hiring, promoting, punishing and terminating people. As Stoianovici put it: "Inside people and immobility do not offer the opportunity to succeed. If you want tomorrow to reform you have no chance because of inside opposition. I don't see how or who would assume restructuration." Both Martin and Obae blamed unions for the situation. As for autonomy from politics, Stoianovici added: "They are equidistant, and serve anyone. They are obedient by nature. There are some very good professionals and their talents are lost because they are not doing anything worthwhile. They stay because of a good salary and less work than is required in the private sector." However, Obae said TVR should be praised for producing some quality cultural programs.

While less exposed to political scandals and pressures, public radio is in only a slightly better situation. The young and reformist manager appointed in 2005 resisted in function with the price of preserving the status-quo and limiting the reformist initiatives only to surface changes. Again, the perverse system of incentives takes its toll: "The tragedy is that for them it is good, for the journalists. They have at least a 50 percent higher salary. They have also bonuses for stories that are broadcast, foreign language and there are a lot of people coming to work only to cash in their salary. They are employees who only know how to cut the tape, as used to be done in the old days, they do it and are paid although they are not needed anymore," Stoianovici said. Ms. Preoteasa said, however, there have been some positive changes in public radio's programming.

The most important news agency is the privately owned Mediafax, which has been the only relevant player on the market for the past decade. A new agency, NewsIn, entered the market in 2006 with big promises, and is supported by the powerful media group controlled by Sorin Ovidiu Vantu. This competitor forced Mediafax to be more flexible and decrease its prices. The opinions within the panel about NewsIn's impact were diverse. Comanescu said the market is still dominated by Mediafax. Both representatives of local media, Voinea and Moraru, believed NewsIn is better than Mediafax, and has a chance to topple the hierarchy.

The state-owned news agency is formally controlled by the parliament, but its market position is rather poor. The name of the institution was changed from Rompress to Agerpress in 2008 by a law passed in Parliament. In July 2008, the editor of the Internal Politics section accused the manager of censorship. An internal scandal occurred, with some employees organizing a union and supporting the editor. The manager responded by organizing a parallel union. Ene said the scandal

had political motivations, as the manager's legal term expired and the editor was seeking to replace him. In any case, Ene said the agency is rather neutral to political forces.

All television stations produce their own news programs. Most radio stations do so also. The panelists' discussion underlined the problem of quality, since journalists tend to practice so-called "herd reporting:" "The same information (or non-information) is visible all over, with the starting point being the political agenda of the parties and authorities which is swallowed by the media as a commodity, out of obedience, and due to a lack of resources and professionalism."

While the transparency of media ownership was a problem several years ago, important progresses were registered. Transparency is not a problem for most of the panelists, since ownership became a subject for the media itself. The competition in media led to open conflicts between outlets and journalists attacking each other with references to each other's owners. The advantage for the public is widespread knowledge of who the owner is and what links exist between owners' interests and editorial content. The down side of this is that trust in media is declining and the public's skepticism of journalists is increasing. It is a common fact that comments below the articles in on-line editions tend to attack journalists based on readers' perception of journalists' self-censorship or other corruption. The broadcasting law requires transparency of ownership, but there is no such legal requirement for print or Internet media.

The panelists observed a tendency in the mainstream media to report on the same subject when it is put on the public agenda, especially by politicians. This leads to "a stereotype regarding media given especially by editorial vision. The stereotype does not manifest at a social level. Niche mass-media are less developed, with the exception of blogs which become numerous (a few thousand are active) and relatively read (a few hundred or thousand visitors daily) since 2006."

The coverage of Roma issues and the image of this minority is biased against them, though violent attacks that continued to be registered up until several years ago has now become rare. Public television introduced for the first time translation of news programs for deaf persons. Martin said that "alternative culture, issues related to broad social categories (young, persons working in agriculture, research) are not covered by media."

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Romania Objective Score: 2.70

The concentration of ownership in Romanian media led to a professionalization of the industry although that does not mean it is more effective in terms of business profits. A big owner cannot directly control each aspect of activity, as was the case with small owners, thus the need for professionalization. The interest of big businesspersons (the so-called "moguls" as they are known in Romania) in entering this market created an investment boom in recent years. Massive investment provoked not only a human resources crisis (same people worked in several media outlets) but also created an unequal balance between profit and competition. There are media groups who face major losses. As a result, their presence in the market creates an overly competitive situation in which the competitive advantage of older media products is shadowed by the explosion of new assets, Comanescu said.

The media landscape is a mix of outlets that are profit-oriented and others that seek profit only as an incidental goal, but which are primarily developed in order to ensure their owners a political and economic instrument. Being supported by other businesses, the later put pressure on the market and gain more and more influence.

The global financial crisis hit the Romanian media, but the full impact remains to be seen. An insider in the print media industry said the total amount of advertisement money spent on print media would decrease 20 percent in 2009, and probably a quarter of local media will go bankrupt.<sup>11</sup> The Media Pro Corporation proceeded with layoffs at the end of 2008 and closed some of its publications or transferred the content to the Internet.<sup>12</sup>

An estimated €593 million were spent on advertisement in Romania in 2008, with the largest share (€383 million) going to TV stations. Print media earned €87 million and radio earned €39 million. The biggest advertisers are multinational companies with Procter & Gamble, L'Oréal, Unilever, and Coca-Cola leading the top. The first Romanian company comes in at eleventh place.<sup>13</sup> With a disproportionate share of money going to TV, print media must compete harshly for advertising. The Bucharest-based newspapers are at an advantage as they have direct access to the companies and advertisement agencies. The panelists agreed that local

newspapers tended to depend disproportionately on sales and subscriptions. Moraru warned that in the current crisis the dependence on subscriptions to produce revenue for local newspapers would increase: "The reputed local press disappears without subscription sales. Also big newspapers with long-established traditions could disappear."

There are many advertising agencies active in Romania. Among them there are the big international players: McCann Ericsson, Grey, Saatchi & Saatchi, Leo Burnett, BBDO, and Young and Rubicam among others. Despite a large number of indigenous agencies, some 80 percent of advertising money is circulated among these international agencies.

As we previously mentioned the local print media tend to depend too much on subscriptions. For the central media, advertising constitutes the largest share of revenues. For glossy magazines, advertising accounts for as much as 80 percent of revenue. Comanescu said reduced consumer spending causes prices for sold copies to be minimal.

Private television stations fiercely compete for advertising money, since they are totally dependent on this revenue source. In 2008, TV stations owned by Media Pro had 36 percent of the total TV advertisement volume consumed in Romania, while the rival group Intact reached 18 percent.<sup>14</sup> But the overall audience for mainstream television has decreased 8 percent in 2008 in favor of niche stations.

There are no direct subsidies for media outlets in Romania. In previous years, the MSI identified state advertising as a form of a hidden subsidy. After the 2004 elections, the new government quickly passed a law to establish a more transparent and competitive mechanism to allot and pay for state advertising. As an indirect result, the total amount spent by the state on advertisements sharply decreased. There were no other scandals concerning this issue in recent years. The panelists agreed this is no longer a problem for media freedom in Romania. Some other small-scale economic interventions in the media market could be considered preferential subscriptions made by local authorities for some media outlets. The scale of this phenomenon has not yet been documented.

Although the profit-oriented media uses market studies to calibrate editorial content, this method is considered to be a standard media practice in Western Europe, Comanescu said. The most advanced outlets seem to be commercial radio stations which are using this instrument to establish play listings. For those companies willing to do so, there are instruments and companies to provide such research and even some local newspapers do so, such as Moraru's newspaper.

<sup>11</sup> Catalin Tolontan, interview for [www.iqads.ro](http://www.iqads.ro), January 27, 2009, "Ziarele nu au murit si nu vor muri"

<sup>12</sup> Doinel Tronaru, *Evenimentul Zilei*, December 16, 2008, "Media, lovită in plin de criză"

<sup>13</sup> Alfacont quoted by [www.paginamedia.ro](http://www.paginamedia.ro)

<sup>14</sup> Petre Barbu, *Adevarul*, January 13, 2009, "Cum a fost împărțit tortul reclamelor TV"

Last year's MSI indicated that panelists had serious doubts about the accuracy and honesty of market research. These warnings were confirmed in 2008 by several scandals. The Romanian Audit Bureau of Circulation (BRAT) was founded in 1998 as an independent, not-for-profit organization. Many advertising agencies have set the existence of a BRAT certificate as a precondition for allocating any advertising contract. Also, BRAT developed the National Readership Survey (SNA), research that approximates the total number of readers for publications and establishes the demographic data. But this approximation is contested. Moraru said that in the case of his newspaper SNA estimated a copy was read by seven to eight readers, then the numbers fell suddenly to three people. Voinea was faced the opposite situation: "They told me that with a circulation of 3,000 issues I have 12,000 readers." Although advantaged by the numbers, he found them to be exaggerated.

The Association of Local Owners and Editors organized a meeting with BRAT where some errors were recognized and explained that some operators did not follow the methodology and rules.

Through the broadcast law adopted in 2002, the state interfered with the broadcast rating system by allowing CNA to select a single rating system, which is currently in place. The system functions as a private operation and not all ratings data are freely accessible. The professional organization which gathers televisions and advertisers is ARMA. The organization signs contracts for media measurement with research companies. Last year the bidding was acquired by GfK. At the end of 2008, a conflict occurred between ARMA and GfK after an audit showed flagrant mistakes in data gathering. ARMA confidentially informed

its members there is a possibility they will remain without reliable audience data in 2009.<sup>15</sup>

In 2008, BRAT also started an audience measurement program, SATI, for Web sites. This service is also contested in the industry since SATI refuses to publish information about referrals, raising the question of whether some sites practice spamming to increase their audience numbers.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Romania Objective Score: 2.52

The journalistic community in Romania remains generally skeptical of joining a trade union. Although started with promise, the MediaSind union did not make significant progress and remains a marginal voice. In 2004, it signed a collective labor agreement for the media industry. The contract establishes the clause of conscience as one of the fundamental labor rights for journalists. Despite all the problems underlined in this report, there was not a single case of a journalist who used this clause in a conflict with his owner.

The Association of Local Publishers gathers the most important local newspapers in terms of circulation. The traditional organization representing both the media industry and journalists is the Romanian Press Club (CRP). The Club experienced a self-imposed revolution in early 2008, which caused a radical transformation. The then-president of CRP, Cristian Tudor Popescu, started a process to separate the journalistic side of CRP from the media owners. The separation resulted in the creation of the Association of Romanian Journalists (AJR) that took from CRP the representation of journalists. Despite the promising beginning, AJR failed to take off and its current activity is rather dormant. As for the Club itself, which now includes only media owners, its profile suffered after Popescu renounced his position. The new president does not command the same respect and is largely seen as someone who is obedient to the media companies. Some members accused her of being a puppet for Media Pro trust, where she works, and that the Club is largely inactive due to her management. Ene, general-secretary of the Club, said the internal elections were held by secret ballot and the suspicions are not grounded.

Broadcasters have their own organization called ARCA, but it does not deal encompass editorial matters. There are some 40

## INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

<sup>15</sup> Information leaked to the highly reliable media blog [www.tolo.ro](http://www.tolo.ro), January 19, 2009.

journalists' associations, but most are low-profile, inactive, or immature. Several exist only on paper.

The most important NGOs dealing with media freedom are the Center for Independent Journalism (CIJ), Media Monitoring Agency, and the Romanian Helsinki Committee. They act as an informal coalition and on numerous occasions have defended press freedom. The groups also keep international observers informed, and have succeeded in placing media on the agenda of international organizations. Since they are largely dependent on international support, there are concerns about these groups' survival now that Romania is a full member of the EU. The attention of international donors is moving toward other parts of the world. As was expressed at the 2008 MSI discussion, the panelists expressed concerns that an internal critical mass is not yet developed enough to protect media freedom against the pressures of politicians and owners.

There are around 20 journalism university programs across Romania, both state-supported and private. The average number of students per class is 60. Consequently, a huge number of new journalists floods the market every year. But the panelists who work in top editorial positions said they are not impressed by the newcomers. "In the last two years I saw 400 CVs, about 60 to 70 percent graduated from journalism faculties and I have hired none. They have huge attitude problems" said Stoianovici, who the journalism faculty at Iasi University is an exception because it emphasizes field practice. Moraru agreed with the general skepticism: "Many students graduating from journalism faculties do not intend to practice. They want to directly become VIPs. They want to write in a newspaper to tell people their experiences."

#### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

##### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

"There is a gap between journalism faculties and the profession—and at the same time a lack of practical education in universities. Professors do not have professional background and they reject the competence of journalists and vice versa" Comanescu concluded.

After the closing of the BBC School in 2001, CIJ remains the main short-term training provider. CIJ provides courses for journalists, journalism students, and students in related fields, such as political science, economics, and law. CIJ also provides targeted assistance to media outlets. Visiting professionals from abroad (mostly from the U.S.) also provide instruction at CIJ. A newcomer is Media Management Institute, which provides training, business consulting for media and organizes media-dedicated conferences.

Panelists agreed that newsprint and printing facilities are widely available. Most newspapers own a printing house in order to reduce costs. A single newsprint factory exists in Romania. Its owner is a very controversial businessman and politician but its impact on the industry is limited because of competition from imports. Printing facilities constituted a significant share of media sector investments in the last year. "The printing industry is developed. At least two printing houses of big capacity were created last year," Comanescu said.

Comanescu said there are no political constraints on media distribution but structural shortcomings still exist. "The former national network of distribution for print press, Rodipet, is collapsing, and on a private level distribution is probably the weakest segment in Romanian media. Print press barely reach rural areas," he said.

Local media, which depends on subscriptions, consistently complains about the inefficiency of the Romanian Post Company. In January 2008, the Association of the Local Publishers (APEL) and the Post were at odds because the company sent local newspapers an ultimatum asking them to accept new contracts which doubled the Post's commission for distribution. The Bucharest-based newspapers, as they were in a better financial situation, did not receive such notifications. Stoianovici said "the Post attacked local press because in Bucharest it has no influence." APEL petitioned the government and the Competition Council, and conducted several rounds of negotiations with the company. The matter remains unresolved.

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## List of Panel Participants

**Adrian Voinea**, director, *Gazeta de Sud*; vice-president, the Association of the Local Publishers, Craiova

**Catalin Moraru**, editor-in-chief, *Monitorul de Botosani*, Botosani

**George Ene**, general-secretary, Romanian Press Club, Bucharest

**Ioana Avadani**, executive director, Center for Independent Journalism, Bucharest

**Iulian Comanescu**, freelance journalist and blogger specialized in the media, Bucharest

**Manuela Preoteasa**, editor, EurActiv.ro, Bucharest

**Ciprian Stoianovici**, editor-in-chief, Radio 21, Bucharest

**Razvan Martin**, program coordinator, Media Monitoring Agency, Bucharest

**Petrisor Obae**, editor, paginademedia.ro, Bucharest

## Moderator and Author

**Cristian Ghinea**, journalist, *Dilema Veche*, Bucharest

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