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# ROMANIA

Romania had a troubled 2015, marked by political tension and increasing polarization of the public. Many observers pointed to the local and general elections that are scheduled for spring and fall of 2016 as the primary cause. While the anti-corruption bodies kept up the fast pace of their work, and important figures were called to justice—including former Prime Minister Victor Ponta, accused of being an accessory to money laundering—corruption remained a hot issue. Citizens held mass public demonstrations protesting the poor response of emergency and health services and the institutional corruption believed to have contributed to the disaster at Club Colectiv in Bucharest in October. More than 60 young people were killed and 100 injured due to the fire.

The protests and the strong emotional reaction of the public have deeply shaken the Romanian political establishment, forcing government officials to resign. A new government led by Dacian Cioloș, a former European Commissioner for Agriculture with no political affiliation and a reputation for efficiency and honesty, was installed in November. The new government has a limited mandate, mainly tasked with organizing the elections of 2016 and keeping Romania functioning. But they are widely viewed by the public as hope for transparency, accountability, and exposing and fighting corruption.

Throughout this tumult, the media sector was largely stagnant, maintaining the previous year's trends: decreasing sustainability for media outlets, use of the media for political and economic ends, and depopulation and lower professionalism within newsrooms. At the same time, however, online media and social media are on the rise. This trend became very visible during the Colectiv crisis. Public support for the victims, including securing health assistance from abroad, was organized voluntarily via Facebook.

# ROMANIA at a glance

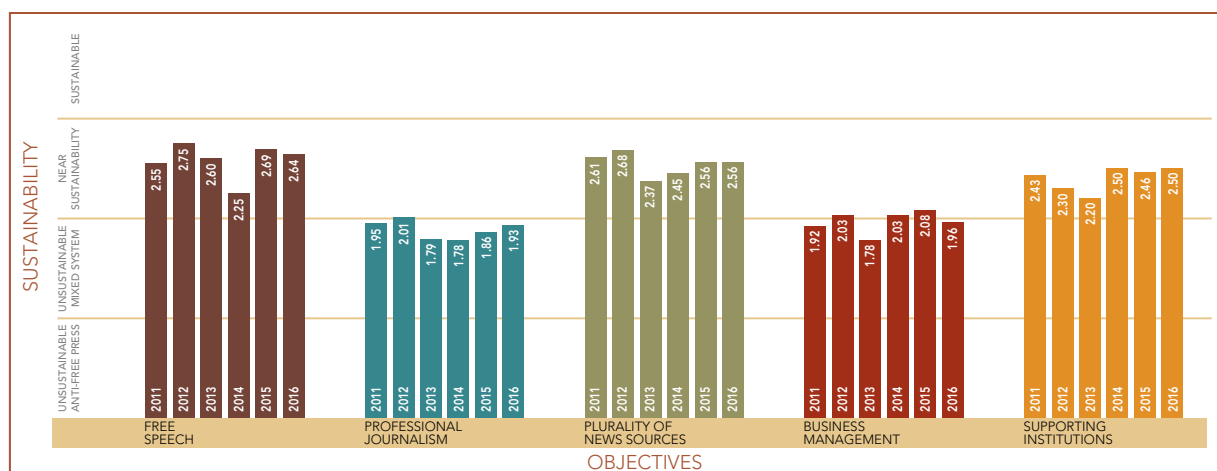
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 21,666,350 (July 2015 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Bucharest
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Romanian 83.4%, Hungarian 6.1%, Roma 3.1%, Ukrainian 0.3%, German 0.2%, other 0.7%, unspecified 6.1% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Eastern Orthodox (including all sub-denominations) 81.9%, Protestant (various denominations including Reformed and Pentecostal) 6.4%, Roman Catholic 4.3%, other (includes Muslim) 0.9%, none or atheist 0.2%, unspecified 6.3% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Romanian (official) 85.4%, Hungarian 6.3%, Romany 1.2%, other 1%, unspecified 6.1% (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2014-Atlas):** \$189.5 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2016)
- > **GNI per capita (2014-PPP):** \$19,020 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2016)
- > **Literacy rate:** 98.8% (male 99.1%, female 98.5%) (2015 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Klaus Iohannis (since December 21, 2014)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active media outlets:** Print: number unknown, 98 publications audited by BRAT; Radio Stations: 595 (licenses for terrestrial broadcasting, 28 satellite broadcasting (CAN Report 2016)); TV stations: 432 licenses (cable and satellite), Internet news portals: number unknown, (119 news portals and niche websites audited by SATI)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation *Click* (circulation 115,915, daily private tabloid), *Ring* (circulation 95,152, daily private tabloid, free), *Libertatea* (circulation 86,376, daily private tabloid)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three television stations PRO TV (3.3%, national), Antena 1 (2.9%, national), Kanal D (2%, national) (paginadedia.ro, January 2016)
- > **Main news website traffic:** www.stirileprotv.ro (671,071 unique visitors/day), www.romaniatv.net (479,855 unique visitors/day), www.adevarul.ro (396,144 unique visitors/day), www.realitatea.net (390,764 unique visitors/day)
- > **News agencies:** Mediafax (private), Agerpres (state-owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** an estimated of €322 million (€16 million print market, €205 million TV market, €18 million radio market, €56 million Internet, €27 million OOH) (mediafax.ro Media Fact Book 2015)
- > **Internet Usage:** 11.2 million (2014 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: ROMANIA



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2016: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



### CHANGE SINCE 2015

▲ (increase greater than .10) □ (little or no change) ▼ (decrease greater than .10)

**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.

Scores for all years may be found online at [http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE\\_msiscsres.xls](http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscsres.xls)

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Romania Objective Score: 2.64

The Romanian constitution guarantees freedom of expression, as do the civil code and other media-related laws. Freedom of expression has its restrictions, but they are linked to the protection of legitimate aims such as national security, defamation, privacy, and the right to one's own image. The constitution prohibits explicitly defamation of the nation, incitement to war, aggression, public violence, territorial secession or discrimination, obscene conduct, or hate speech based on nationality, race, social class, or religion. Although it appears in the constitution, no law in force punishes defamation of Romania. Participants noted that the legal framework is sound, but legislators made several attempts to pass restrictive measures in 2015. Răzvan Martin, program coordinator at Active Watch, said, "The legal framework is quite good. We haven't had insult and calumny in the Penal Code since 2007, but there are legislative attempts to re-introduce them." The same idea was supported by freelance journalist Cătălin Striblea, who said, "Irrespective of the ruling party, no government has managed to escape media scrutiny."

All participants agreed that freedom of expression is not "socially protected," as Romanians do not attach a social value to it and take it for granted. Freelance journalist

### 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 or registration of media protects a public interest and is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > The law protects the editorial independence of state of public media.
- > 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 available; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media, journalists, and citizens.
- > Media outlets' access to and use of local and international news and news sources is not restricted by law.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

Gabriel Bejan said, "Part of society is not convinced of the importance of this democratic principle. I cannot explain otherwise the electoral success of various local barons who attempted to control the media in their counties."

Ioana Avădani noted that, apart from the obvious legislative methods, in recent years various non-media gatekeepers have made numerous attempts to restrict the freedom of expression. Panelists said that laws regarding information security, online gambling and adult content, data retention, and communication for surveillance are limiting the freedom of expression beyond legitimate protective aims. One panelist said, wishing to remain anonymous, "We managed to stop or annul some of these laws, but it happened far from the purview of the general public and sometimes the media. When it comes to cyber security, there are media outlets that openly support the intelligence services' stances, which invites some questions, especially knowing that some of the authors of the articles graduated courses offered by the National Intelligence Academy."

The National Audiovisual Council of Romania (Consiliul Național al Audiovizualului, or CNA) is an autonomous body that controls broadcast licensing and enforces the legal obligations of broadcasters, and is formally under parliamentary control. According to the CNA's statutes, its role is to "ensure that Romania's TV and radio stations operate in an environment of free speech, responsibility and competitiveness." The government leader and parliament appoint its 11 members with staggered mandates, so their terms do not coincide with the general elections.

Despite the legal guarantees for autonomy, all participants agreed that CNA is still heavily politicized, hence its credibility has been eroded. Some of its members vote according to the interest of the parties or entities that nominated them, rather than according to a consistent philosophy respectful of the public interest. Costin Juncu, the managing director of the Romanian Association for Audience Measurement, put it this way: "You know the legal norm, but you cannot guess what the final outcome would be. The whole process [of licensing and sanctioning] is unpredictable."

The politicization of CNA has led to some extreme forms of polarization, including members belonging to a certain "faction" refusing to attend council sittings just to prevent a quorum. Even more notorious is the case of CNA Chair Laura Georgescu, who in 2014 was placed under criminal investigation, accused of taking bribes in order to favor a television station belonging to a politician. In an attempt to unlock CNA operations, an amendment of the Broadcast Law was passed in 2015, allowing Parliament to fire the council chair if the annual activity report is rejected. Previously, parliament protected CNA from any intervention in its

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membership for the whole duration of members' mandates. However, panelists perceive the new amendment as a step back and a further politicization of the institution.

As bad as the amendment was, it was not followed by any practical results. Parliament never discussed the 2014 CNA activity report, although it was duly submitted in April, and Georgescu is still chairing the Council. "This is a very serious matter. They passed a law for an individual," said blogger Petrișor Obae. He also noted some positive developments, as CNA decided that its members would take turns in chairing the council, breaking the absolute power of the chair over the agenda. "There is more order, there are no longer topics that enjoy [protection] from debate. The council started to thaw on topics with no political connotation, such as tabloidization exceeding advertising quotas. It's more than last year [2014], when nothing happened," he said.

Panelists agreed that Romania has no special market entry conditions for the media, but the discretionary application of the law is definitely a problem. One example is the fiscal law. Striblea said, "The fiscal authorities are an instrument used to intervene in the media market." Some media companies enjoy preferential treatment in paying overdue debts, while others see their accounts frozen shortly after their debts become due. "Public media are treated more leniently than the private ones when it comes to debts to the state," said Toni Hrițac, editor-in-chief of *Ziarul de Iași*.

Fiscal authorities have another instrument of pressure: the "reconsideration" of independent contracts, such as those structured to pay author's a usage fee, into regular work contracts. Such contracts are more heavily taxed and can even double initial debts. While fully legal, reconsideration was not consistently or generally applied, which attracted accusations of arbitrary use against critical media outlets. In 2015, the government approved an emergency ordinance that wrote off some debts and prohibited the fiscal authorities to "reconsider" contracts signed between 2010 (when the legal provisions regarding "the reconsideration" were approved) and June 2015. However, a new fiscal code, adopted in 2015 and entered into force in January 2016, now addresses "independent activities." The code includes newer, clearer, and more specific criteria, which will make the reconsideration less dependent on the arbitrary judgments of the fiscal inspectors.

Value-added tax (VAT) for the media stayed at 24 percent, which is the level generally applied in Romania. The tax was down to 20 percent as of January 1, 2016. As Valentin Moisă, vice-president of Mediasind, pointed out, the level is higher than in other countries in Europe. Only the VAT for the distribution of print media is reduced to 9 percent. "The broadcast community in Romania does not benefit from

any such incentive," claimed Daniel Dincă, director of Radio Semnal. Martin pointed out also that commercial companies can claim back their VAT, but the public media institutions cannot, which results in significantly higher operating costs.

There are not many crimes against journalists, but if something happens to a media member, the authorities do not react effectively. For example, local journalist Sorin Țiței found his late wife's tomb desecrated at the end of May 2015. This was not the first such incident, and he said he could clearly connect the vandalism to the publishing of his articles exposing the corrupt activities of a local politician. The authorities did not investigate the case properly, although Romania's largest coalition of media professional associations requested a thorough investigation.

A more serious case involved some environmental activists that were documenting alleged illegal deforestation in a national park, together with journalists from the German television broadcaster Deutsche Welle. They were attacked with bats and stones by local workers who were led by the owner of the company responsible for the deforestation. Trying to escape the attack, the activists and journalists fled, hitting the owner with their car. The police are still investigating the case.

The most recent case is the one of Cătălin Tolontan, editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Sporturilor* and the owner [www.tolo.ro](http://www.tolo.ro), one of the most followed blogs in Romania; he publishes investigations on topics that most mainstream media do not tackle. Tolontan led a series of thorough investigations into the Club Colectiv fire. He published articles revealing the responsibility of the authorities, who operated emergency units poorly and did not provide sufficient medical care to the surviving victims. In November, Tolontan was targeted in surveillance operations carried out by several unidentified people. "This type of intimidation is not very well covered by the media, these are topics that almost nobody reports upon," said Martin. Striblea also mentioned that the pressures and the threats are a fact of life in Romanian newsrooms and that requests to remove a nosy journalist may appear, especially if the journalist is important or influential. Panelists agreed that one problem is that journalists rarely turn to the justice system to solve cases of attack or harassment. "The public itself either doesn't care, or accuses the journalists of 'having asked for it'. The only ones still protecting the journalists are the professional associations," said Hannelore Petrovai, editor-in-chief, [HunedoaraMea.ro](http://HunedoaraMea.ro).

The editorial independence of public media is protected under the laws regulating public radio SRR, public television TVR, and news agency AGERPRES. While political control over these institutions is maintained via the politically appointed

members of their boards, the effects on the content are not necessarily very visible. However, board members can be dismissed if parliament rejects the annual reports. This provision has turned into a very efficient instrument for political control over these outlets. In the case of TVR, not a single board has finished its mandate—not even in 2015, when the board and its president were sacked less than two years into their four-year mandate after the annual report was rejected in September. Parliament has not yet discussed the SSR report, although the due date was April.

The National Agency for Integrity has found that several members of the board are holding other positions that pose conflicts of interest with their board positions. Natalia Milewski, a lecturer in journalism at the University of Bucharest, held the view that “the political interests are more visible when a new board is appointed. It is then when the heads of departments are changed [by order].” Juncu said, “No party has a genuine will to cease the political control over the TVR board. All those who came to power did the same thing: appoint somebody who had supported them during the campaign.” Hrițac added: “At local level, one can see the same phenomenon: the heads of the local stations of the public media are political appointees, even if the law protects their editorial independence.”

Carla Tompea, TVR’s newly appointed news director, said that indeed the law “encourages politicization,” but she added that the law is old and does not reflect the current realities of the public media. “We cannot function properly based on a 21-year old law. All the changes brought to it until now have been mere cosmetic amendments, not fundamental ones.” She also said that, apart from the law, the under-financing of public television is also a serious problem. “Together, these aspects limit the capacity of the organization to perform its public mandate, as well as the freedom of the journalists who want to do their jobs well.” SRR board member Maria Țoghină said that the lack of a managerial contract with clear performance indicators adds to the problems: “People are sacked when politicians want, not when they did something wrong.” She also mentioned the situation of the national news agency AGERPRES, which is functioning under the Ministry of Finance. The journalists are paid from the state budget, which turns them into public servants subject to administrative laws.

Libel is no longer a criminal offense in Romania and such cases are civil matters. In cases of defamation, the plaintiff is exempted from paying the taxes on damage awards that are required when demanding other types of reparations. In 2015 lawmakers introduced two worrying legal initiatives that might result in the criminalization of libel. One is straightforwardly asking for the re-introduction of libel and calumny in the criminal code. The other is meant to

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sanction “social defamation,” seen as any act or statement that might create a sense of inferiority of a group defined by race, nationality, gender, political affiliation, religion, sexual orientation, age, or social status. Both laws include prison sentences. The head of the Social Democrat Party (the largest party in Romania, in opposition since November 2015) has promoted the defamation law, which was adopted without debate by the Senate in October 2015, and is pending debates in the Chamber of Deputies.

Access to public information is governed by Law 544/2001, which grants access to information produced or held by public institutions. Journalists enjoy special treatment, as their questions have to be answered on the spot or within 24 hours. Despite these generous legal provisions, the panelists agreed that the law is largely unobserved. “We have a law and it is good, the problem is that they don’t obey it,” Petrovai said. Some government employees still do not know the law, or claim that they do not.

Monitoring conducted by various organizations has demonstrated that only a minor fraction of requests are answered properly. In general, organizations are more successful than mere individuals, and larger organizations that are more aggressive in suing for their right to information often get quicker and more complete answers. Juncu added that a recent trend is for the authorities to provide ironic answers, or ones that only mimic the releasing of meaningful information. A major drawback is the tacit refusal of some public institutions to provide public information to journalists when it relates to important people or sensitive topics. “They know exactly that if they don’t give you the info in time, they kill your article,” Bejan said.

Bejan cited the case of Sidonia Bogdan, a journalist from a national daily, who tried for three months to obtain from the Ministry of Education a list of the Ph.D. theses coordinated by the Vice Prime Minister Gabriel Oprea in his capacity as professor at the National Intelligence Academy.

The ministry repeatedly answered that they are working on her request, but they did not provide any other information, said Bejan. "Another problem is that, if they answer at all, they send the information very late, or in an un-editable format so that you cannot process it in a timely manner," said Silvia Vrînceanu Nichita, editor-in-chief of *Ziarul de Vrancea*. Hrițac added that bloggers, especially those who critically cover the public administration, seem to be discriminated against by the authorities when it comes to requesting information.

Panelists agreed that, at the same time, some newsrooms do not know the law or do not use it at all, and claim that it is useless for journalists, given the delays. Usually, newsrooms put up with the silent rejection of their requests and refrain from suing the authorities, in order to not antagonize them.

In 2015 the government published a new draft of the public procurement law. The law no longer contains any provisions regarding the compulsory publicity of public advertising contracts. Legislators introduced those provisions in 2005 in order to curb the arbitrary allocation of state advertising. The 2015 draft also eliminated the provision that expressly makes procurement files freely accessible to the public under access to information legislation. The draft was submitted to Parliament and must be adopted by April 2016. As it transposes a European directive, a failure to adopt it will result in the European Commission initiating infringement proceedings against Romania.

The new government installed in November 2015, following street protests against corruption, made transparency and access to information their priorities. Prime Minister Dacian Cioloș created a new Ministry for Public Consultation and Civic Dialogue and appointed longtime NGO leader and transparency advocate Violeta Alexandru as its head.

Access to information from foreign sources is in no way restricted; however, copyright issues persist, and often material from the Internet is published without the requisite citation of sources. All the panelists agreed that the copyright is not respected in Romania. Despite this, the affected journalists or media seldom open cases on copyright infringement. "There is unlimited access to news of all kinds—local, national, international. Unfortunately, some journalists do not use this freedom in good faith. Whole articles, photos and all, are appropriated by others without any citation or a mere link to the original," said Petrovai.

Access to the journalism profession is free and unrestricted. Yet more and more voices, including from the professional field, see this as a problem and are asking for some sort of licensing procedures, in order to secure a minimum quality of those practicing journalism.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Romania Objective Score: 1.93

Public-interest journalism continues to deteriorate, due to media houses' economic problems, the increasing political control, and the Romanian public's poor media education. Because the media market lacks a real, healthy competition, consumers tend to trust fake investigations or other similar low-quality materials, said freelance journalist Iulian Comănescu.

The media publish many articles that are biased and one-sided, Hrițac claimed. Some journalists publish unverified or even invented news. They do not check the information from more than one source, and often the "experts" that are invited to talk about a topic are not experts at all. For example, artists talking about earthquakes, said Petrovai.

The panelists said that media members suffer from a deficit of competence and honesty that is worse than professionals in other industries. "The lack of professionalism is encouraged and the decrease in quality is deliberate," said Striblea. Many media owners do not want well-trained journalists. They want to work with people that obey their orders and do not discuss them and do not fight back. But Manuela Preoteasa from Euractiv.ro said that most of the journalists know the technical aspects of their work, although they lack ethics. "It isn't totally their fault, the companies they work with don't have ethics. The discussion

### 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 and retain qualified personnel within the media profession.
- > 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 exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

about the journalists' ethics is useless if we don't equally talk about the professional and ethical standards of the media outlets," said Preoteasa.

"A large part of the media does check the information they publish, but there are a lot of newspapers, websites, and even TV stations that publish false news. An example is the news that was published on November 21st by several news portals about a dramatic event: an Italian being shot by mistake in France, because the policemen mistook 'Andiamo al bar' ('let's go to the bar') for 'Allahu Akbar.' This was, in fact, a joke made by a satirical Italian newspaper, but the humor was lost on many Romanian outlets," said Bejan.

At the same time, the panelists agreed that many journalists do their job honestly and ably and it is unfair to penalize the entire profession for the mistakes of some. "In addition, I would note that there is an increase in the quality of media products. Paradoxically, this is not thanks to an improvement of newsroom life, but to the fact that journalists got access to grants or left the newsrooms to create their own outlets," Martin concluded. The panelists agreed that even these "quality cases" of responsible journalism could include serious ethical violations. For example, Digi 24, which panelists considered one of the best news providers in today's Romania, conducted a sustained campaign in support of its parent company's bid to enter the energy market. The campaign extended for days in their general and economic news programs.

Regarding professional standards, all the panelists agreed that ethical codes do exist and are in accordance with international norms, but journalists and editors do not observe them consistently. Avădani said that journalists do not think in terms of "ethical standards"—most of them act out of a sort of mannerism. Petrovai said that most journalists do not even know what an ethical code is.

In the newsrooms, the process of discussing an ethical issue is almost non-existent. "The journalists accept gifts and suspicious payments and the editors, many of them, no longer distinguish between advertorials and editorial articles," said one of the panelists. There are several reasons why this is happening. In most cases, the journalists violate the ethical norms in order to serve their personal interests or those of their employers, or out of ignorance. In some other cases, journalists that know the rules and claim to respect them also violate those same rules, saying you cannot survive otherwise.

Stirblea expressed the belief that the worst is already behind Romania and that a network of journalists that remains true to the profession is about to emerge. "We walked through a Valley of Sorrow, but good things appear, more and more of them," she said. The same opinion is shared by Obae: "New media products appear, gathering around them

good journalists, and we will see how they evolve." Martin, however, noted that the number of cases against journalists on grounds of defamation, assassination of character, and even blackmail are on the rise.

Even if they do not respect the rules against plagiarism, journalists know them. "The disapproval is not publicly displayed yet, but we have started to have discussions about plagiarism in the profession. Also, the readers can check the news, especially online, and they can now sanction this lack of professionalism," said Milewski.

The panelists expressed the belief that self-censorship is practiced frequently. "Journalists and editors do practice self-censorship. Most media outlets have political owners and the journalists and heads of the newsrooms are in the service of the owner. Sometimes they even exceed their tasks and do more than they were asked in order to defend the interests of the owner, interests that became their own," Petrovai said. Alexandru Lăzescu, editor-in-chief of the magazine 22, said that one of the biggest problems is that journalists who violate professional rules and practice self-censorship "don't even think about it, they do not have the feeling that they are doing something wrong."

Striblea deplored the lack of mentoring in the newsrooms. "As the older generations leave, we lose a lot of expertise, and the young journalists don't have mentors to learn from. And orders coming from the higher-ups are obeyed without opposition, because 'it's normal,'" he said. Yet, Bejan says that there are many shades of grey in this respect and that one cannot generalize. "There are still people who fight to impose their point of view, even in newsrooms that are deeply controlled from above," said Bejan. Vrâncăanu said that the precarious economy is the root of all self-censorship, a view shared by Dincă. Milewski elaborated: "It's mostly survival self-censorship. It can be ideological, it can be linked to certain beliefs or professional opinions, but in many newsrooms it's just plain fear: the fear of losing your bread-earning job."

All the participants agreed that no subject is "untouchable" in Romania. Generally, all the media cover the important events. An outlet deciding not to report on an event is rare and mostly connected with a problem that the owner might have; for example, when he or his associates face legal troubles. If the topic is important, the rest of the media will cover it, so the scandal cannot be ignored. For example, in the summer of 2015, some journalists discovered that Vice-Prime Minister Gabriel Oprea coordinated several Ph.D. theses but that most of the content was plagiarized. For months, the subject remained marginal, with only a couple of journalists writing about it. By November (and with Oprea's resignation), most of the media had reported the story. Hirțac said that although the media cover all



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stories, their angles of reporting can affect the way the public receives the information, especially because people rarely cross-check their information. Another problem is the lack of resources—financial, human, and time. Thus some topics may be left unreported or only marginally covered, especially those that are difficult to produce.

The situation of minority reporting has not changed markedly since last year. Such topics are still marginal and marred with stereotypes. The Roma minority is still depicted in mostly negative terms, while the LGBTQ community is almost absent from public discourse (with the notable exception of the annual Gay Pride parade, when coverage is mostly negative). Moreover, even when online media address the topics in a balanced and fair manner, public comments are full of derogatory terms, hate speech, and even instigations to violence. This year, immigration topics entered the public agenda, but the materials were largely biased—full of stereotypes, hate speech, and nationalism. There were exceptions, though, as journalists from alternative media outlets that documented the subject covered the immigrants' camps, talked to the immigrants, and produced ample, well-documented, and balanced materials.

The panelists agreed that journalism professionals are underpaid. As a rule, salaries in the capital city are higher than those in the provinces, and those in television are higher than those in print. Online media are hardly economically sustainable, and apart from some "stars," bloggers cannot live off of the proceeds of their blogs. Salaries for journalists do not appear to be lower than in 2014, as they were kept around the national minimum wage. In the mainstream popular media, salaries might be reasonably high, but they are paid after long delays (two to three months). Because journalism salaries are lower than those of public officials, journalists frequently leave the profession to become spokespersons for the local authorities. Others find jobs in public relations, advertising, or political consultancy. Some journalists complement their media revenues with other activities, which sometimes place them in situations with conflicts of interest.

The taxation of labor is quite high in Romania. Income tax, taxes for social security, pensions, and unemployment funds, are paid by both employee and employer and amount to 50 percent of total payroll. In order to ease the tax burden, employers have adopted various forms of employment, such as paying authors for intellectual property usage, and journalists registered as micro-enterprises. Sometimes journalists have legal work contracts for just 2 hours per day but they work for 8 or 10 hours daily. Thus the money they receive is "black money"—journalists do not declare the income nor pay taxes on it, and as a result do not enjoy full social benefits.

Although entertainment programming has a very important role, it does not eclipse news in the Romanian broadcasting market, panelists said. The market includes several all-news television stations, and all the general stations produce at least one main news program. The panelists agreed, however, that many news programs have a tabloid format, with serious ethical and professional violations. But Milewski said that in Romania, as everywhere in the world, entertainment is part of news programming, but it does not diminish its importance, because entertainment cannot compete with the hard news.

Some newsrooms have modern technology available, but many struggle with financial problems, curtailing their investments in new technologies, software, and skilled technical people. Ștefan Voinea, director of *Gazeta de Sud*, said, "We don't have an IT developer nowadays, after many years in which we were working with one or two. Their prices went up and we couldn't afford them anymore. Now we are using WordPress, which doesn't function well and we can't keep up with our more developed competitors." Striblea said that television stations also see dramatic problems with equipment, giving the example: "People bring lamps from home to light the studios."

For many journalists, especially in the provinces, it is almost impossible to get out in the field to cover a story. They do not have cars, gas, or money for bus tickets, and the newsrooms do not provide such assistance. The only possibility is to produce the news from their desks, thus the main criteria for a story becomes the ease of obtaining information and not the public interest.

The panelists agreed that practicing professional journalism is impossible without having the proper technology. "The reporters subsidize the media they work for, using their own mobile phones, cameras, cars, even gas" said one of the panelists. Petrovai said that things are simpler for local online publications. "You can take photos or videos with a not-so-expensive camera, with a laptop or a decent desktop you can write the text and a good Internet connection is all you need for finishing your job," she explained.

Niche articles and specialized programs do exist, but the panelists agreed that quantity and quality both need to improve. "You can find them more in print and online media," said Hirțac. Investigative journalism is more present in alternative media outlets, a bit less in the mainstream ones, and even less so in local media. Mainstream media outlets have a general tendency to reduce or even cut investigative departments, for financial reasons, but the Romanian media sector does not lack for important investigations. Striblea spoke of the positive trend in this area: "there are more and more [investigations], there are also niche websites, places

in which one can find important information.” But Avădani noted that while the online media present lots of relevant information on all imaginable topics, visitors need to know where to look for it or have to spend time searching—which is not the case with regular media consumers.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Romania Objective Score: 2.56

The Romanian media market might be very populous, but this does not guarantee a plurality of news. Comanăescu said that the Romanian media have been leveled by the flow of official information through electronic channels, in press releases, and at press conferences of political parties, state institutions, and even private companies. “The journalist is no longer the one who follows the news. The news comes to him in these forms. Once the journalists lost the initiative of communication, the media agenda no longer meets the public interest—or at the very least, its curiosity,” added Comănescu.

Petrovai said that the media are not always neutral. “This way, anyone can choose the media they consume according to their political orientations,” she said. “However, the biggest problem is that the media don’t publicize their political orientation, as happens elsewhere, but behave as if the information they provide is completely unaltered and unbiased. Basically, they lie to their public.” Voinea had the same opinion: In reality, there are not as many sources of information as there are sources of misinformation.

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

#### PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet, mobile) exist and offer multiple viewpoints.
- > Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted by law, economics, or other means.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for media outlets.
- > Private media produce their own news.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the 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
- > The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues.

Tompea noted that social networks have started to impact, and put massive pressure on, the journalism sphere when writers do not live up to the standards of the profession, or do not meet the public’s expectations. Social media users share content, praising what they consider to be useful and slamming the media outlets that fail to cover important topics, and the user base continues to grow. At the end of 2015, Facebook had 8.6 million users in Romania, with 7.6 million of the accounts held by people over 18 years old. Most people use Facebook as their main source of information. Twitter has 380,000 accounts, but only 28,000 are active users, and those are primarily professionals. YouTube has a little more than 820,000 Romanian accounts, while Instagram has around 330,000 accounts, 207,000 of which are active. These statistics point to social networks as potential growth areas in the near future.

Romanian law does not restrict consumers’ access to the media. Some limitations can stem from poor access to technology, with a large part of the country lacking Internet service. Romania is last in Europe with regard to Internet penetration, with service to 51.66 percent of the country in 2014.<sup>1</sup> The divide is even starker in rural areas, where the Internet penetration is lower (33.6 percent of households, compared with the national average of 63.4 percent in urban areas).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, some 99,000 households<sup>3</sup> still have no electricity, with their inhabitants (1 percent of the population) having very limited access to information. These limits lead to part of the population being dependent on traditional platforms, which have documented links to political interests.

The transition to digital terrestrial television broadcasting was scheduled for June 17, 2015, but has been severely delayed by the lack of infrastructure. As a result, 170 television stations with analog licenses are at risk of needing to cease operations. The National Audiovisual Council agreed to amend the licenses in order to allow stations to operate via cable or satellite. According to national telecom agency data, the rate of the penetration of retransmission networks (cable, direct-to-home [DTH] satellite, and Internet protocol television) is very high: 92.4 percent of Romanian households subscribe to one of these services. In urban areas, 80 percent of households have a cable television subscription, while in rural areas, 61 percent receive their

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.economica.net/romania-ultimul-loc-in-ue-la-penetrarea-internetului-cum-poate-ajuta-coala-accesul-la-informatiile-digitale\\_100403.html#ixzz3y8zuv4eo](http://www.economica.net/romania-ultimul-loc-in-ue-la-penetrarea-internetului-cum-poate-ajuta-coala-accesul-la-informatiile-digitale_100403.html#ixzz3y8zuv4eo)

<sup>2</sup> ANCOM, report for January-June 2015, <https://statistica.ancom.org.ro:8000/sscpds/public/alldocuments/report?title=&year=&lang=ro&ext-gen1010=&yearSelect=&page=1#page-1>

<sup>3</sup> Data from 2012, Romanian Government, [http://www.minind.ro/PROPUNERI\\_LEGISLATIVE/2012/august/hg\\_electrificare\\_23082012.pdf](http://www.minind.ro/PROPUNERI_LEGISLATIVE/2012/august/hg_electrificare_23082012.pdf)

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signal via DTH.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the cable operators are key players in access to information for a major part of the population.

The Internet and cable market is dominated by telecom company RCS & RDS, with some 53 percent market share. The company also provides mobile phone services, and operates a network of all-news television stations across the country, three sports channels, one pay-TV movie channel, three documentary channels, a music channel, and four radio stations.

Romania has public radio and television services that are established and operating under the same law, but have rather different financial results. The public television station TVR has major financial problems, having accumulated debts of more than €154 million<sup>5</sup> as of December 2014. The public radio station SRR is in better shape, with a financial surplus of €1.5 million.

Public television is often accused of serving the interests of politicians in power. The panelists said that because these outlets are politically controlled, they do not always work in the public interest and cannot always offer objective or impartial information. In September 2015, even TVR President and General Director Stelian Tănase admitted that he had been called by Vice Prime Minister Gabriel Oprea, who was unhappy with TVR's coverage of the plagiarism accusations against him.

The panelists did make a positive note of the public media's many quality programs and features, and even investigations that are not politically connected, and said that they observe and meet professional standards. Hrițac said that he sometimes finds more balanced points of view in the public media than in private outlets, and that they cover the breadth of the political spectrum better—although they place a definite emphasis on the ruling party.

Public radio news programs remain less affected by political turmoil. Striblea said that although the perspective on the current affairs is balanced, the general feeling is that coverage is getting softer, as if going under the radar. Țoghină said that, unlike public television, public radio has benefitted from a stable board. "Even if the radio fee is the lowest in Europe, the public radio managed to end 2015 with a profit and keep its leading position in terms of people's preferences," she added.

However, public television staff continue to complain repeatedly about inadequate funding. The TVR fee is also the lowest in Europe (about 80 eurocents per month). The fee was last updated in 2003, and it is collected by electricity companies that retain a commission up to 30 percent. Moreover, TVR has to contribute 15 percent of its advertising

revenues to the National Film Fund and cannot reclaim the 24 percent VAT. (By comparison, commercial television outlets have to contribute only 3 percent and can reclaim the VAT). Striblea is not convinced of these arguments: "I don't believe public media are under-funded. They enjoy preferential treatment in the market, and they had a head start compared with the private media."

The problems of the major independent news agency Mediafax continued into 2015. In 2014, the Mediafax Group, of which the agency is part, was subject to several investigations on allegations of tax evasion. Several members within senior management were arrested and employees were called in for questioning. By the end of 2014, the Mediafax Group declared its insolvency and the general manager left after eight years in the position. At the beginning of 2016, most of the editorial team from Mediafax resigned, among them the editor-in-chief, the editorial director, chiefs of departments, and many senior reporters. All had been a part of the Mediafax team for many years.

The problems that Mediafax faces are all the more troubling given its dominant position in the market. The only other relevant news agency in Romania is the state-owned AGERPRES. It is making a much-needed comeback, modernizing and diversifying its services. It has the unbeatable advantage of rich historical archives of stories and photos that it can monetize. AGERPRES also has the most extensive network of local correspondents across Romania, and via partnerships with other national news agencies, it can provide news from across the world. However, parliament appoints the AGERPRES general director (with the current director appointed in 2013) and its employees have the status of public servants.

The managers that attended the panel discussion mentioned another problem with news agencies: The newsrooms, especially at local media, can no longer afford subscriptions to agency services. Currently, there is a widespread practice of journalists "finding inspiration" from the news that agencies provide for free on their websites. But not all of them cite the agency as the source.

Broadcasters produce their own news, but the quality of the newscasts varies greatly from outlet to outlet. "The content produced by the local media is, in many instances, done less professionally and is often biased and partial," Hrițac said. In general, all the newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and online media outlets from a certain area broadcast the same news, and exclusive news is very rare. "The local reporters practice pack journalism. They cooperate in exchanging information about all the events of the day, they share venues and tasks and, at the end of the day, information about what happened. This helps them fend off pressure from their editors on why the competition had a story that

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<sup>4</sup> National Agency for Administration and Regulation in Communication, annual report on 2014, available at [http://www.ancom.org.ro/uploads/links\\_files/Raport\\_Anuar\\_2014\\_RO\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ancom.org.ro/uploads/links_files/Raport_Anuar_2014_RO_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> TVR annual report for 2014, [http://media.tvrinfo.ro/media-tvr/other/201504/raport-de-activitate-tvr--2014\\_83170600.pdf](http://media.tvrinfo.ro/media-tvr/other/201504/raport-de-activitate-tvr--2014_83170600.pdf)

they didn't have. This kills journalism," said Petrovai. Panelists agreed that managers encourage this kind of practice so that their outlets have the same level of information as others, even with a drastically reduced number of staff.

Transparency of broadcast media ownership is guaranteed under the law, and CNA regularly publishes a list of shareholders in any media company owning a license. Romanian law has no similar provision for print media, but most newspapers openly declare their publishers. The situation is more difficult for online publications and blogs, where anonymity is the rule. Still, panelists agreed that the increase in transparency often does little to change the public's attitude.

Avădani said that Romania is unique from this point of view: The media owners that have won the largest audiences are in prison or have criminal cases against them. The public knows this information but is not very interested in it, so the outlets are not impacted negatively; ratings have not dropped after owners have been arrested.

Moreover, those citizens that are more knowledgeable about media, such as journalism students, are not interested in ownership and do not know who owns the outlets in Romania, said Martin. Politicians own most local and national media, directly or through intermediaries, or have total control through financial levers. They do not appreciate or stimulate journalists' professionalism or editorial independence. "Officially or unofficially, we know who owns what in most of the cases. But there are also websites that publish revealing and sensitive information that we know nothing about—neither the owners nor the publishers," said Bejan.

Social issues are, in general, reported well. Romanian law calls for the national minorities to have media outlets in their official languages. The state budget, via the Culture Ministry, funds the outlets, but the money is insufficient and the publications are very low-profile. The Hungarian community has the highest number of outlets (print, radio, television, and online), functioning as commercial or community operations, followed by the German community. The Roma community does not have an outlet in its language, as all the attempts at building one died very soon after their start due to lack of funding. In addition, such a publication would have huge difficulties in reaching its intended audience, as Roma people do not live in concentrated communities, nor do all of them speak Romani.

In general, the national media allocate very little space to information from rural areas. Another problem, Hrițac said, is that the national television outlets are almost the exclusive source of information in the countryside. Most of the rural population is deprived of information on their communities, and sometimes it is only bloggers that focus on very important local issues in smaller towns.

Romanian media report on international events just as rarely and unprofessionally, though there are some notable exceptions. Reinforcing this trend was the coverage of the wave of refugees to Europe, which an important segment of the media treated with a negative bias, Bejan said. Vrânceanu noted that another relevant aspect is the lack of information on European issues in Romanian media. This absence is particularly problematic as many public policies in the country are based on EU decisions.

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Romania Objective Score: 1.96

The sustainability of media companies in Romania "is history," according to the panelists. With a few exceptions, almost all of them lose money. Insolvency cases multiply every day. Government advertising has become more and more important for media outlets as a source of income due to the depressed private advertising market and drops in circulation/viewership.

Bejan said that most media organizations are managed poorly, and this is visible in the avalanche of insolvencies, layoffs, and shrinking newsrooms. "They try to survive, this is their only business plan," added Bejan. Petrovai supported this view: "Most media outlets in Romania are not profitable anymore," she said. "They are generally used to promote and protect the interests of their owners, who fund them from their other businesses. This is especially true for local media; these people have no interest in making the media business profitable."

### MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

#### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > 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.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.

Hrițac said that local media have found it very difficult to cope with the abrupt fall in revenues that has occurred over the past five to eight years. Income is down to less than 50 percent of what it was in 2008. "Even if we have revenue from different sources, it is not enough to keep the business alive. The media companies are not financially sound, most of them are dependent on the owners' money," he said. At the local level, the media outlets financed by municipalities and county councils using public money are fully subordinated to the political will of those who secure the budget.

Dincă said that most of the radio stations are in a poor financial state, accumulating big debts to the state budget and copyright bodies. The copyright holders negotiate their fees for broadcasting their copyrighted materials (mainly music) only with the largest and most popular radio stations. These sums sometimes even exceed the total income of smaller radio stations and there are cases when stations have been closed for not being able to pay. In Dincă's view, the national radio stations push independent local radio stations to bankruptcy through anti-competitive practices.

The situation is different for the national media because they have larger audiences and have consistent and profitable access to advertising. But even with those advantages, few of them finished the year in the black. For print media, sales are constantly going down, and subscriptions are not profitable, and do not even recoup their costs. Distribution is slow, costly, and unreliable, and alternative sources of income are few and unstable at best.

One of the most important revenue sources, especially for local media, is advertising from government agencies and other public institutions. Public contracts are allocated under the rules of public procurement, with some additional transparency requirements introduced in 2005 in order to curb the arbitrary distribution of advertising funds. However, the provisions for state advertising (including EU money) are becoming more and more relaxed. As a result, authorities can distribute contracts under €30,000 through direct allocation mechanisms, and they can issue larger contracts to the lowest bidder, without any criteria related to the number of people reached or cost per person. The panelists agreed that most of the time, public advertising is spent in this discretionary manner, depending on how close and how loyal a certain media outlet is to the head of the respective institution. "For example, in a city in Hunedoara county, the mayor has a TV station and the entire advertising budget of city hall goes to the mayor's TV station; the head of the county council has a newspaper and a TV station, and all the advertising budgets from his public institution as well as several other institutions and city halls go directly to the media organizations under his control," said Petrovai.

Even with this advantage, the funding from owners or political supporters is just enough to survive, not to grow. Dincă added that this politically controlled advertising distribution extends to commercial advertising, saying "access to funds is secured in closed political circles."

The Romanian media have tried to break this vicious cycle by exploring new forms of funding, such as sponsored content. However, Striblea said that this has created more problems than it has solved. "It's a new species of journalism; programs come with sponsors, so the public interest is of no relevance. Or the whole program is 'externalized'—you produce it, you bring in a sponsor, and the outlet just airs it. It's a loop in time. Ten years ago, we were fighting to get marketing out of the newsroom. Now it is not the owner or a business professional negotiating with sponsors, it's the journalist. Somehow it became acceptable for the journalist to do it." A publisher that answered the questionnaire said: "There are various levels of hell: should I allow a journalist to bring in advertising contracts, should I lay off more people, or should I close down the business?"

The big advertising agencies show a clear preference for national media. Local media rarely get any attention. "From our point of view, the advertising agencies are as good as non-existent," said Petrovai. Other panelists working with local media added that the offers they get from these agencies are so ridiculously low as to be unacceptable. The advertising/sales ratio is nowhere near "classical standards," Hrițac said. Paradoxically, the decline in advertising budgets hit the most solid pre-crisis publications hardest, particularly those who relied on a hefty 80 percent of their revenues coming from advertising. Bejan illustrated this with the case of *Romania Liberă* newspaper, once an uncontested leader in classified advertisements. While the revenues from advertising and classifieds are still there, the newspaper has not been on time with the payment of salaries once over the last four or five years.

The year 2015 brought a novelty for the Romanian media: the first state aid scheme offered by the government in more than 20 years. The state aid is directed to "stimulate economic operators in the broadcast field that produce and broadcast informative, cultural, and educational programs of public interest." According to the Emergency Ordinance 18/2015 that modified the Broadcast Law, the total budget for this aid is €15 million and the scheme will cover the period from July 1, 2015 to December 31, 2016, meaning the pre-electoral and electoral periods. The initial draft stated that it should benefit the 12 biggest television operators on the market, which attracted fierce criticism from a multitude of stakeholders. Under public pressure, the plan was dropped and CNA was tasked with drafting the allocation details, which has not happened as of February 2016.

All in all, the emergency ordinance did not produce effects outside of increasing the suspicions related to political interference in the media market. Moreover, it creates legal confusion as it allows state aid to go to information programs, while the broadcast law states the opposite, that these programs cannot be sponsored or funded by entities other than the broadcasters themselves.

Market studies are rare for the national media, and most local media outlets do not do them at all. The publishers of some local media outlets are not inclined to invest in studies, as they do not conduct their business seeking profit, but rather influence and clout. Some studies regarding media consumption habits or the access to new technologies of Romania are conducted by international organizations, as part of their European or global research, and this amounts to almost all of the audience or market research in the country.

The Romanian Transmedia Audit Bureau (BRAT), a well-established industry organization, audits circulation statistics for print publications. BRAT is composed of 186 members (publishing houses, advertisers, and advertising agencies) and audits 98 titles and 205 websites of various content. BRAT performs circulation audits every six months (data is publicly available), as well as a National Readership Survey, an in-depth study containing socio-demographic figures of readers per publication. It is also responsible for the Study of Internet Audience and Traffic (SATI), and the Monitoring of Investments in Advertising Study. All of the results are available to members and third parties for purchase.

The Romanian Association of Audience Measurement conducts surveys for television stations. Costin Juncu, its managing director, explained that audience figures for national outlets are measured independently, and the methodology is in line with international standards. The association selects the company performing the measurement via public bid every four years. Bids are reviewed by a commission composed of five representatives of the television stations, five representatives of the advertising agencies, and five CNA members, with a foreign independent company performing an audit. Many online media publications prefer the less expensive traffic.ro measurement to the professionally done but expensive SATI, or even internal measurement using Google Analytics.

Once again, the local media are disadvantaged in this arena. BRAT only audits 21 local publications; audience measurement for local television stations is very costly, and therefore is not performed; and radio station owners do not even think of conducting surveys. The only local outlets that have data available are websites, but they use that data mostly for getting advertising from GoogleAds. "Nobody is interested in figures," Petrovai concluded.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Romania Objective Score: 2.50

In 2015, Romanian media associations were largely more engaged than in past years. The Convention of Media Organizations (a loose alliance of around 30 associations of media professionals, owners, and trade unions) started to be more active as a result of a Center for Independent Journalism project. However, the participants in the panel continue to believe that the professional associations are small, inefficient, and even irrelevant. The big groups, such as the Romanian Association for Audiovisual Communications, represent the major broadcasting corporations and not local stations, which are thus far unable to organize to protect their interests, Dincă said. According to one panelist, "Another problem is that there are some professional associations that do not represent the profession, but the interests of their members. And I'm talking about personal benefits."

Trade unions for media professionals exist, the largest and most active being MediaSind, which is well networked with European and international organizations. These international organizations have voiced their concern over Romania on various occasions.

The situation of the trade unions and of journalists in general took a turn for the worse in 2014, when the collective work agreement for mass media expired. Due to changes in legislation, the media sector was assimilated into the "Culture" industry, meaning that journalists and

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

#### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of media owners and managers and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights and promote quality journalism.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs exist providing substantial practical experience.
- > Short-term training and in-service training institutions and programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, cable, Internet, mobile) are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

**“There is no incentive for professionalism, other than the journalists’ own willingness and determination,” said Avādani, adding that some of the trainees in the CIJ courses are asked to take several days of leave to attend professional courses, which is untenable for many.**

trade unions must negotiate alongside actors, librarians, musicians, and other similar professions. Many of these professionals are state employees, making it very difficult to find a common denominator in terms of labor conditions. Moreover, the owners’ associations are weak and cannot gain the required legal representation (a court has to attest that they do represent a certain percentage of the owners in a given field) in order to participate in the collective bargaining process. As a result, journalists no longer have the legal protection of the collective work contract, with no potential to remedy this situation via another contract in the foreseeable future.

Romania has just a handful of NGOs defending the rights of journalists, the Center for Independent Journalism (the organizer of this study) and ActiveWatch (a media monitoring agency) being the most relevant. Bejan said that their efforts are mostly directed towards the national media. “More action has to be done in local media, because they are more vulnerable to local barons or mafia,” he added. Petrovai said that the only ones who really protect the freedom of speech and the independent media are media NGOs. They have succeeded in stopping or changing legislation, protecting journalists from abusive authorities, and organizing training programs to teach journalists how to protect their own freedom of speech. The panelists mentioned that, despite the NGOs’ successes, their lack of steady, predictable funding is a serious problem.

Romania has 20 journalism programs offered by both state and private universities. More than 2,500 young journalists graduate every year. The panelists said, however, that the quality of these programs is generally poor. The journalism schools are weak, and panelists pointed to the lack of competition for places in the programs as an initial part of the problem of producing capable, competent journalists. The results of these programs are not encouraging, with students not very well prepared, and many not even understanding the nature of a journalist’s job. “Most of the graduates of journalism faculties with whom I came into

contact were superficially prepared. There were exceptions, but very few,” said Striblea. At the same time, however, there is very little serious interest from media managers in hiring young journalists. “For a lot of the managers, students represent, at best, cheap labor you can use for a short time,” added Striblea.

Currently, short-term courses or training programs for journalists hardly exist. A few years ago, NGOs such as CIJ delivered these types of services on a larger scale, but the efforts have largely stopped. The reasons for the decreasing number of participants are numerous. But most significant are the lack of funding for such projects from private donors, and media owners’ reluctance to pay for such training programs. In many cases, owners and managers point to claims of understaffed newsrooms, making it difficult to let journalists take absences to seek professional development for even a couple of days. In other cases, as stated before, many owners do not necessarily want to run their media outlets for the purpose of the media, and thus do not want well prepared, hard-to-control journalists.

For the journalists’ part, such courses can be seen as a waste of time for all but the most idealistic, as neither the public nor employers necessarily appreciate the acquisition of additional skills, and they hardly ever lead to increased salaries. “There is no incentive for professionalism, other than the journalists’ own willingness and determination,” said Avādani, adding that some of the trainees in the CIJ courses are asked to take several days of leave to attend professional courses, which is untenable for many.

The sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, unrestricted, and not monopolized. However, distribution remains one of the Romanian print media’s biggest problems. Rodipet, the former state-owned distribution company, was poorly managed and fraudulently privatized in 2003. It declared insolvency in 2009, leaving huge debts to publishing houses and a network of kiosks now in ruins.

Kiosks are also problematic for other distributors. In some cases, mayors have prohibited the placement of kiosks owned by “unfriendly” publications or have withdrawn the licenses of street vendors.

Regarding printing, Hritac said, “The number of printing facilities has somehow decreased. Concentrating printing in just a couple of hubs puts pressures on the closing time of newspapers and may delay their distribution, which creates yet another set of problems.”

Cable operators play an equally important role in securing access to media products. The panelists deem the major

operators as politically neutral. Operator RCS & RDS dominates the cable market, with a 53 percent market share; followed by UPC, with a 30 percent market share. While apolitical, these two companies can decide what local television stations they carry and where in their program grids they place it. Some local television stations have raised complaints with RCS & RDS for its refusal to carry their programs. RCS & RDS has its own local stations (Digi TV) and allegedly does not want to encourage competition.

Internet infrastructure is present across Romania, but is focused mainly in the urban areas. Romania has 3.9 million fixed broadband connections, with an average of 2.7 persons per household, and 10 million mobile connections. Still, Internet traffic on mobile connections amounts to only 1 percent of the total Internet traffic. The Internet penetration rate per household sits at 47.4 percent (national), with 61.1 percent in urban areas and 29.7 percent in rural areas. The penetration of Internet mobile connections sits at 52.1 percent of the total population.

## List of Panel Participants

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

**Gabriel Bejan**, freelance journalist; former deputy editor-in-chief Romania Liberă, Bucharest

**Iulian Comănescu**, freelance journalist and media analyst, Bucharest

**Daniel Dincă**, editor-in-chief, Radio Semnal, Alexandria

**Cristi Godinac**, president, Mediasind, Federation of Journalists' Trade Unions, Bucharest

**Toni Hrițac**, editor-in-chief, Ziarul de Iași, Iași

**Costin Ionescu**, editor, Hotnews.ro, Bucharest

**Costin Juncu**, managing director, Romanian Association for Audience Measurement, Bucharest

**Alexandru Lăzescu**, editor-in-chief, 22, Bucharest

**Răzvan Martin**, program coordinator, FREEEX Active Watch, Bucharest

**Natalia Milewski**, lecturer, University of Bucharest, Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies, Bucharest

**Adrian Valentin Moise**, vice-president, Mediasind, Federation of Journalists' Trade Unions, Bucharest

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**Petrișor Obae**, blogger and media analyst, Paginademedia.ro, Bucharest

**Manuela Preoteasa**, director, Euractiv Romania, Bucharest

**Hannelore Petrovai**, editor-in-chief, HunedoaraMea.ro, Hunedoara

**Cătălin Striblea**, freelance journalist, Bucharest

**Carla Tompea**, news director, Televiziunea Română, Bucharest

**Maria Țoghină**, vice-president, Clubul Român de Presă, Bucharest

**Ștefan Voinea**, director, Gazeta de Sud, Craiova

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