



Centrul pentru Jurnalism Independent



## **Monitoring Report No. 3**

*Elements of Propaganda, Information Manipulation and Violation of Journalism Ethics in the Local Media Space*

*May 1, 2016 - August 1, 2016*

*The report was developed by the Independent Journalism Center within the **Media campaign against false and biased information - STOP FALS!**, conducted by the Association of Independent Press (API), Independent Journalism Center (IJC) and Association of Independent TV Journalists (ATVJI).*

## I. GENERAL INFORMATION

In the period of May 1 – August 1, 2016, the Independent Journalism Center monitored 12 media outlets in Moldova – news portals and TV channels – in order to identify whether the journalistic materials they broadcast contain violations of ethical rules and elements of information manipulation. Analysis concerned how these media outlets cover events of major public interest in the areas of politics, economy, external policy, etc. and whether they abide by journalism rules on verifying information via several sources and ensuring pluralism of opinions and balance in conflicting news stories. Referral to the Code of Ethics and to important scientific works enabled identification of procedures and devices used to influence the public by spreading manipulating messages.

### *Purpose of monitoring:*

To determine whether the media abide by professional ethics or use manipulation in the coverage of topics of public interest, and to identify eventual violations. To expose the intentional or unintentional mistakes made by journalists while reporting about facts, so that case studies and monitoring reports might play an educational role. Another purpose of monitoring is to contribute to increasing the vigilance of media consumers to the risks of receiving information from unsafe sources. Thus, the monitoring aims to help consumers understand how the media can manipulate so that they be able to see the difference between manipulating media products and those which cover the situation objectively, and encourage citizens to appeal to several sources of information when they doubt the credibility of some media materials.

### *Criteria used to select media outlets for monitoring:*

- **Coverage:** national
- **Language:** Romanian and Russian
- **Impact:** circulation and audience

### *Monitored media outlets:*

**Print media:** Ziarul National, Panorama (online versions of these publications);

**Broadcasting:** Publika TV (news on Publika.md), Prime TV, Jurnal TV, Accent TV, RTR Moldova (newscast Vesti and local news), REN TV;

**Online media:** Gagauzinfo.md, Novostipmr.com, Sputnik.md, Deschide.md.

### *Methodology:*

Political and economic events of major public interest produced during the monitoring period were chosen, and the manner of how they were covered in the media was analyzed, with reference to the Journalist's Code of Ethics and to information manipulation devices. Subject to analysis were also articles on current topics, such as the statements of a former head of division at the National

Anticorruption Center about the schemes and persons involved in fraud at several Moldovan banks or arrest of businessman Veaceslav Platon, accused in the case of the bank fraud. Analysis covered the language and images used by journalists, how they selected events, the correctness of quotes from sources, the tone of presentation, etc. through the prism of the Code of Ethics<sup>1</sup>, of guidelines and recommendations for responsible and high-quality media<sup>2</sup>, and of the notions of **manipulation** and **propaganda**, in the sense provided by the Dictionary of Sociology<sup>3</sup>.

**Manipulation** is defined as follows: *“The action of determining a social actor (person, group, collectivity) to think and act in a way compatible with the initiator’s interests, and not their own interests, by means of persuasion techniques that intentionally distort the truth, leaving the impression of freedom of thought and decision. In contrast with influence via rational persuasion, **manipulation** aims not at more correct and profound understanding of the situation, but at inoculation of a convenient understanding, by misleading with falsified arguments and appealing to non-rational emotional dimensions.”*

**Propaganda:** *“Systematic activity of transmission, promotion or spreading of certain doctrines, theses or ideas from the position of a certain social group and ideology, with the purpose of influencing, changing, creating conceptions, attitudes, opinions, convictions or behaviors. Propaganda is conducted so as to lead to realization of the goals and interests of the group it serves; there is no value-neutral or objective propaganda.”*

#### **Main topics monitored between May 1, 2016 and August 1, 2016:**

- Founding congress of the party led by Maia Sandu, “Action and Solidarity” (May 15);
- Release from prison of Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko (May 25);
- Election of new chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (June 19);
- Visit to Chisinau and Tiraspol of Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Dmitry Rogozin (July 5-7);
- Declaration of Mihail Gofman, former head of a division of the National Anticorruption Center, regarding the scheme of the bank fraud committed in Moldova in recent years (July 12 and 13);
- Apprehension and arrest of businessman Veaceslav Platon, accused in the case of the bank fraud (July 25 – August 3).

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<sup>1</sup> [http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod\\_d\\_rom.pdf](http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod_d_rom.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Ghid de stil cu norme etice pentru jurnaliști, API, [http://www.unicef.org/moldova/Ghid\\_Etica\\_Jurnalist\\_RO.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/moldova/Ghid_Etica_Jurnalist_RO.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Cătălin Zamfir, Lazăr Vlăsceanu, Dicționar de Sociologie, București, 1998, p. 332., p. 457, <http://vignette4.wikia.nocookie.net/nccmn/images/1/1c/Dictionar-de-Sociologie-Catalin-Zamfir-Lazar-Vlasceanu.pdf/revision/latest?cb=20150813042511&path-prefix=ro>

## II. GENERAL TRENDS

Monitoring data have shown that some journalistic materials were produced in violation of professional ethics. As a result, several elements characteristic to propaganda and information manipulation have been identified:

**Selective presentation of facts** – violation found especially in news reports about the release of pilot Nadezhda Savchenko, published by [Novostipmr.ru](http://Novostipmr.ru) and [REN TV](http://REN.TV).

**Omission** of important current topics – violation found at [Publika TV](http://Publika.TV), which failed to introduce into its newscast information about the founding congress of the Action and Solidarity Party (ASP) and the election of former Minister of Education Maia Sandu as chairman of this new political entity of the opposition. The channel also ignored the press conference held by Veaceslav Platon's wife and lawyer, while [Jurnal TV](http://Jurnal.TV) neglected the visit of Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin to Moldova.

**Interpretation/commenting of facts** – violation of the Journalist's Code of Ethics, when reporters impose their own opinion in informative materials; it has been found in the news reports of [REN TV](http://REN.TV) and [RTR Vesti](http://RTR.Vesti) about the release of Nadezhda Savchenko, as well as in the news story on [Sputnik.md](http://Sputnik.md) about the election of a new chairman for the Liberal Democratic Party.

**Ridiculing** by means of tendentious and pejorative language – violation found at two of the monitored media outlets, [Sputnik.md](http://Sputnik.md) and [Deschide.md](http://Deschide.md), in news stories about the ASP congress and about the declaration of Mihail Gofman.

**Elements of propaganda** – found in the report about the release of two Russian citizens in exchange for Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko, aired by [RTR Vesti](http://RTR.Vesti).

**Quoting of experts**, without reference to their credibility – device used by [Sputnik.md](http://Sputnik.md) in a news story about Dmitry Rogozin's visit to Chisinau and by [Publika TV](http://Publika.TV) in a news story about Veaceslav Platon.

**Type of argument “invocation of anonymous authorities”** – [RTR Vesti](http://RTR.Vesti) used this device in the report about the release of Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko.

**Unilateral presentation of facts** – information/statements presented from a single perspective – that of the Russian Federation – were aired by [RTR Vesti](http://RTR.Vesti) (the story about Savchenko) and by [Novostiprm.ru](http://Novostiprm.ru) in the stories about Rogozin's visit.

**Exacerbation of facts** – unjustified emphasis, artificial intensification of the amplex of facts and exaggeration of feelings in order to promote certain messages or discredit persons or groups. Such devices were used by [RTR Vesti](http://RTR.Vesti) in reports about the release of Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko.

**Presentation of opinions instead of facts** – device used by [RTR Vesti](http://RTR.Vesti) in reports about Savchenko's release and by [Publika TV](http://Publika.TV) in a news story about Veaceslav Platon.

**Labeling** – application of nicknames or pejorative or other qualifiers in order to weaken the authority of a person or discredit them. It is considered to be a device of information manipulation, as it contributes to creation of verbal clichés which, in their turn, generate creation of clichés in thought<sup>4</sup>. This device was used by Jurnal TV in reference to politician Vlad Plahotniuc (‘oligarch Plahotniuc’); by Publika TV and Deschide.md about Veaceslav Platon (‘interloper,’ ‘raider no. 1’); by RTR Vesti in reference to servicewoman Nadezhda Savchenko.

**Repeating statements so as to make them perceived as the truth** – this device was used by Publika TV in several reports about former officer of the National Anticorruption Center Mihail Gofman (especially the declaration of anticorruption prosecutor Adriana Betisor about the connection of Mihail Gofman with “Gofma-Consulting” company, while by the time of the newscast this information had already been disproved).

**Replacement of informative news and issues of public interest with some that contain attack on the person, built on the “ad hominem” argument** – device identified in a report about Mihail Gofman on Publika TV.

**Transfer of negative image** – Publika TV, the same report about Gofman.

**Counter-truth that is impossible to prove** – Publika TV, report about Gofman.

**Lack or miming of pluralism of opinions** – violation of professional ethics and of the Broadcasting Code, identified in two reports about Veaceslav Platon on Jurnal TV and in a report about Dmitry Rogozin’s visit on Sputnik.md.

**Manipulation by means of headlines** – violation found on REN TV in reports about the release of Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko; on Sputnik.md in the report about the election of a new chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party; in Ziarul National in a report about the statements of Mihail Gofman and on Publika TV in a report about Mihail Gofman.

### III. DATA ANALYSIS

#### **Subject 1. Founding congress of the party led by Maia Sandu, Action and Solidarity (May 15)<sup>5</sup>**

On May 15, 2016 in Chisinau took place the founding congress of the “Action and Solidarity” Party (ASP), where Maia Sandu, its founder and leader and former minister of education, was elected as chairman. Maia Sandu has been known as an opponent of the current government, and the latest **Barometer of Public Opinion**, of

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<sup>4</sup> Bogdan Ficeac, Tehnici de manipulare, <http://www.docfoc.com/bogdan-ficeac-tehnici-de-manipulare-5654bd36deb8d>

<sup>5</sup> Case Study 1, <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-congresul-de-constituire-partidului-condus-de-maia-sandu-unele-posturi-l-au-ignorat-altele-l-au-ridiculizat/>

April 2016, placed her second after Igor Dodon in people's preferences for presidential elections of autumn 2016 – these facts make the congress an event of public interest. The majority of monitored media outlets covered it, but there were also some – *Publika TV* and *Prime TV* – which totally ignored it in their newscasts and websites. The omission of topics of public interest from the media agenda is a wide-spread form of manipulation<sup>6</sup>.

The event was covered in a pejorative tone by journalists from *Sputnik.md*. In the story titled “[One more savior for Moldova. Maia Sandu founded a party](#),” journalists selected from Maia Sandu's speech excerpts that they interpreted in an ironic tone: “Although she claimed in her speech that she believes not in ‘people's saviors’ but in action and solidarity, the new party leader made it clear that, at the end of the day, she might become such a savior, who would lead Moldova ‘differently.’” Used several times, including in quotation marks, the word ‘savior’ becomes a label and is a device for discrediting and ridiculing the opponent. The use of irony or sarcasm when truth is spoken about, combined with labeling, is identified by specialists as a modern manipulation device used in television and other types of journalism<sup>7</sup>. Also, in this story several words were placed in quotation marks without the purpose of quoting (“differently”, “professional”, “incorruptible”); this device in special literature is described as “a subtle method of casting doubt on an event or discrediting a fact”<sup>8</sup>.

## **Subject 2. Release from detention of Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko (May 25)<sup>9</sup>**

On May 25, 2016, the presidents of Ukraine and Russian Federation signed decrees pardoning three persons detained during fighting in Donbass. Vladimir Putin pardoned military pilot Nadezhda Savchenko, sentenced to 22 years in prison for being an accomplice in the murder of two Russian journalists, and Petro Poroshenko pardoned two Russian citizens, Yevgeny Yerofeyev and Alexander Alexandrov, sentenced by Ukrainian courts to 14 years in prison for terrorism. It was an event of major public interest, as it concerned an exchange of prisoners, in conditions when Russia denies that its armed forces and military equipment are fighting in eastern Ukraine.

Overall, monitored media outlets covered the event in neutral reports, according to journalistic standards. Violation of journalism ethics and manipulation were

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<sup>6</sup> HERJEU, Radu. Tehnici de manipulare, propagandă și persuasiune în televiziune, <https://dorinpopa.files.wordpress.com/2008/04/herjeu-radu-tehnici-de-propaganda-manipulare-si-pers-in-tv.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> HERJEU, Radu. Tehnici de manipulare, propagandă și persuasiune în televiziune, <https://dorinpopa.files.wordpress.com/2008/04/herjeu-radu-tehnici-de-propaganda-manipulare-si-pers-in-tv.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> STAN, Sonia, Cristina, Manipularea prin presă, București: Humanitas, 2004

<sup>9</sup> Case study 2, <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-eliberarea-aviatoarei-ucrainene-nadejda-savcenko-prezentare-selectiva-etichetare-discreditare-propaganda-anti-ucraina/>

identified in the report aired by **RTR** and partly in reports on **REN TV**. **RTR Vesti** aired a report with accusations unsupported by arguments or evidence, which did not contain interview of direct sources. For example, it introduced serious accusations against Nadezhda Savchenko: *“The crimes committed by members of AIDAR, therefore Savchenko, too, have been recorded by international organizations...”*. The author mentioned no international organization that identified “crimes,” and it is a manipulation device based on the *appeal to authority* type of argument: the authority is not named, so information cannot be verified. They also failed to name concrete cases of “savagery” that might prove the “pathologic cruelty” of the Ukrainian servicewoman. That report also used the manipulation device called *negative interpretation of facts*<sup>10</sup>: *“Kiev district court found them both guilty, but the case had been framed up. Terrorism and conduct of aggressive war were ‘pinned’ on the Russians, in addition to illegal keeping of weapons and illegal crossing of the state border, and finally their sentence was artificially ‘blown up’ to 14 years in prison.”* The report is propagandistic, because it presented a single point of view, that of Russian authorities, while accusations launched against Ukrainian representatives were not balanced or verified from independent sources. In presenting information about Nadezhda Savchenko, they **exacerbated** facts and voiced unproven accusations, and in the description of Alexandrov and Yerofeyev’s trial they **presented opinions instead of facts**. **Selective and unilateral presentation of facts** was used to describe the activity of the two Russian citizens, and **negative interpretation of facts and labeling** were used to speak about the ‘spy’ and ‘killer’ Nadezhda. The use in the report of negative words and phrases, serious unproven accusations against some Ukrainian persons and institutions (“beat and tortured them,” “framed-up case,” “pinned terrorism on them,” “pathologically cruel killer”) are **elements of propaganda** against Ukraine.

On May 25, **REN TV** on its website published 46 short reports about the exchange of prisoners, including: [“The plane with Yerofeyev and Alexandrov landed in Vnukovo airport,”](#) [“Savchenko’s sister and mother are coming to Borispol airport,”](#) [“Savchenko won’t serve her sentence in Ukraine.”](#)

The majority of reports omitted information about who Russian citizens Yerofeyev and Alexandrov are, how they got to Donbass, what they did and for what they were pardoned. None of the reports provided complete information about facts and condemnation of Nadezhda Savchenko, nor of Yerofeyev and Alexandrov. Instead, people were informed about every detail related to the signing of pardon decrees, take off of planes with the released people and how they were met, etc. It is a form of disguise interpreted as a “drowning” of relevant information among other information, less significant or even with no connection to the topic<sup>11</sup>. **REN TV** in some reports presented elements of discrediting the opponent by means of **omitting**

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<sup>10</sup> VOLKOFF Vladimir, *Tratat de dezinformare. De la Calul Troian la Internet*,

<https://scorilos.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/vladimir-volkoff-tratat-de-dezinformare1.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*

**some facts and lack of balance** in journalistic materials: [“Zhirinovski: Savchenko should have stayed in prison for 20 years,” “Matviyenko predicted to Savchenko a condemnation by history.”](#)

### **Subject 3. Election of a new chairman of PLDM (June 18)<sup>12</sup>**

On June 18, 2016 in Chisinau took place the congress of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM), where former minister of defense Viorel Cibotaru was elected as party chairman. It happened after former leader and founder of the party Vlad Filat asked – from prison, where he is serving a nine-year sentence for influence peddling and passive corruption – to be dismissed from that position. [Sputnik.md](#) titled the report about this event [“In the party like in the army. PLDM got a new leader”](#) and combined in the text facts with opinions: *“This was predictable, and Sputnik wrote already several days ago that Cibotaru wants to take Filat’s place”*; *“Considering that former PLDM leader and former prime minister Vlad Fiat is subject of investigation for corruption and influence peddling in the case of bank fraud, the statements of his successor in the party’s leadership seem to have overtones.”* The text also contained expressions *“changes seem to have already begun,” “we should also say,”* which make the media product appear subjective, because they show that the *reporter feels as though* a certain fact happened and that it is not true for certain. As a rule, such phrases introduce value judgments.

On [Publika.md](#) the report on this topic was titled [“Viorel Cibotaru, new chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova. Plans for the future.”](#) In addition to informative details, the text contained statements that can be considered declarative, because they were not accompanied by evidence. For example: *“The decision was made at the party’s congress, attended by only several hundred members, while its previous meetings were attended by thousands of people...”* The statement is not followed by figures confirming the decrease in the number of delegates or by explanations from the party’s leadership, so it can be considered baseless and placed into the text in order to suggest that the party is getting weaker. The idea was repeated in the same manner, without concrete information and evidence, three paragraphs later: *“Recently, some mayors, members of regional and local councils severed themselves from the liberal democrats. The party also lost some of its representatives in the parliament. Half of them left the party’s parliamentary group. The latest withdrawal of an MP happened as far as last week. Those who withdraw appear disappointed by the situation inside the party and by the actions of its leadership.”* It is context information that might be true, but it was not presented so as to be credible, with evidence and references to concrete sources.

### **Subject 4. Visit of Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin to Chisinau and Tiraspol (July 5-7)<sup>13</sup>**

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<sup>12</sup> Case study 3, <http://mediacritica.md/ro/alegerea-unui-nou-presedinte-al-pldm-informatie-comentata-si-expunere-tendentioasa/>

In the period of July 5 to 7, 2016, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin visited Chisinau and Tiraspol, where he had meetings with Prime Minister Pavel Filip, Minister of Economy Octavian Calmac, and the leader of the Transnistrian region Yevgeny Shevchuk. At the airport, at the time of the Russian official's arrival, a group of young people organized a protest where they chanted anti-Rogozin and anti-Putin slogans. The topic is of major public interest, because it was the first visit after the incident that happened in 2014, when the plane on which Rogozin was leaving Chisinau was returned from its way by Ukrainian authorities, and the Service of Information and Security confiscated from the Russian official thousands of lists with signatures that he had received in Tiraspol, with which the residents of the separatist region were asking Moscow to recognize Transnistria as a state.

In the first two days of the visit, *Sputnik.md* published at least seven reports about the event, but facts were presented selectively, as none of them contained information about the protest at the airport. Some reports had headlines and phrases that showed positive attitude towards the event: “[The first results of the Filip-Medvedev meeting of April.](#)” In the story titled “[Rogozin: Transnistria can always count on Russia's help,](#)” journalists reproduced some of the Russian Deputy Prime Minister's statements made in Tiraspol, and reported about his visit to the Russian military posts of the peacekeeping forces. Because of the lack of context information explaining the presence of Russian military in Transnistria and brief information, reported with omissions, about the origin of the Transnistrian conflict, the information presented appears from a single perspective, of the Russian Federation.

On the second day of the visit, the same portal published a report titled “[Expert: Not the West, but Russia will solve Moldova's problems,](#)” which quoted the “expert of the Russian Institute for Strategic Research Igor Nikolaichuk.” It spoke about the need for Moldovan politicians to promote a policy of coming closer to Russia, which is “not only Chisinau's way to the future, but also a method of survival in uncertain conditions, hope to transform from a grey zone into a normally functioning country, such as, for example, Kazakhstan.” This report has the characteristics of manipulation, able to convey a certain idea, since the quoting of unknown experts is a **device of propaganda** and manipulation, frequently used in modern media. Thus, journalists did not say what the Russian Institute for Strategic Research de facto is, an NGO or a Russian governmental structure, and in what area the expert commenting Moldova's foreign policy works in, nor did they say where, when and for whom he made that statement. Also, to ensure pluralism of opinions, the portal should have published, in the same report or in a separate report, other opinions, too.

As it is, however, readers were presented a single perspective on the topic, which is contrary to the principles of neutrality and pluralism of opinions. Also, none of the reports published by *Sputnik.md* on this topic contained context information about

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<sup>13</sup> <http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-vizita-lui-dmitri-rogozin-la-chisinau-intre-ridicarea-slavi-guvernarii-si-memoria-scurta-presei/>

the latest visit to Chisinau of Dmitry Rogozin, in May 2014, which ended in scandal, which would have helped consumers understand the entire context and meaning of the event. **Omission of context information** is a manipulation device aimed at obtaining a certain attitude from the public: hostility, affection, resentment, etc.

*Publika TV* treated the topic from exclusively governmental perspective, reporting in detail about the discussions at the Government between Dmitry Rogozin and Minister Octavian Calmac and presenting the visit as a success of the current government. The topic was largely covered in the main newscast, [Newsroom](#), on July 5. Although the topic had been given about six minutes in the newscast, it had no relevant background information about Dmitry Rogozin's person and his relation with Moldova. Here, too, the lack of conflicting information about Rogozin's behavior during his previous visit to Chisinau – information presented [in detail by Publika TV on May 10, 2014](#) – is an omission that can be interpreted as a method of conveying an exclusively positive image of the official and of the events he participated in.

*Jurnal TV* did not cover Dmitry Rogozin's visit in its main newscast at 19.00 on July 5 and 6. No news on this topic was published on [Jurnaltv.md](#) website during the two days, either. **Omission of relevant topics of public interest on the media agenda** is a manipulation device here, too.

*Ziarul National* published on July 5 and 6 two neutral reports about Dmitry Rogozin's visit: “[Increased security measures in Chisinau. Rogozin is coming: ‘Everything has been blocked for two hours’](#)”, Rogozin announces ‘tectonic movements’ in European geopolitics after the UK's exit from the EU and says that Moldova has issues to ‘discuss’ with Russia ‘like two old comrades.’” In these two reports, too, there is no relevant background about the Russian official and the history of his relations with Moldova.

The topic was also covered by Russian-language portals [Rtr.md](#), [Accenttv.md](#), [Gagauzinfo.md](#) and [Pan.md](#): some of them presented in news the main declarations of the Russian official. All these media omitted, however, information about Dmitry Rogozin's behavior in Chisinau in 2014 and, except [Rtr.md](#) “[Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin was met with catcalls in Chisinau](#),” did not speak about the protest at the airport after the Russian official's plane landed.

#### **Subject 5. Declarations of former head of division of the National Anticorruption Center Mihail Gofman regarding the schemes of the bank fraud committed in recent years in Moldova (July 12 and 13)<sup>14</sup>**

On June 27, 2016, former head of the Money Laundering Prevention and Combating Service, part of the National Anticorruption Center (NAC), participated in the “Interpol” talk show on TV7 television, where he spoke about the schemes that were used to withdraw money from Moldova's banking system – fraud known as the “theft

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<sup>14</sup> [Case study 4, http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-subiectul-gofman-omisiuni-atac-la-persoana-transfer-de-imagine-negativa-si-alte-procedee-de-manipulare/](http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiu-de-caz-subiectul-gofman-omisiuni-atac-la-persoana-transfer-de-imagine-negativa-si-alte-procedee-de-manipulare/)

of the billion.” Two weeks later, on July 11, Gofman participated in the same show via Skype, while he was in Washington, and made new declarations. Among other things, he said that Vladimir Plahotniuc, Vlad Filat, Ilan Shor, Veaceslav Platon and other people were involved in the bank fraud. On July 12 and 13, his statements were repeated by the majority of monitored media outlets, and some of them presented them in violation of the Code of Ethics and by using manipulation devices.

A device involving **replacement of informative reports and news of public interest with reports containing attack on the person, built on the ad hominem argument**, together with a device called **transfer of negative image**, were used in the news report on *Publika TV* on July 12, titled “**Mihail Gofman involved in a NEW SCANDAL! The TRUE GOAL of his visit to the USA.**” The *ad hominem* argument has been known since antiquity as a logical error, and it is used to undermine the authority of the person who makes a statement. It combats not the statement and the argument, but the person issuing it. This device is used to attempt discrediting the argument.

The first sentence of that news story said: “*Scandals around the name of the former deputy director of the NAC’s Money Laundering Prevention and Combating Service Mihail Gofman keep coming.*” The text, however, spoke of no scandal. Next, journalists claimed that Gofman had been invited to the US by lawyer John Sandweg, “*involved into a large-scale scandal after being abusively installed to head the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement.*” Authors said nothing about the “large-scale scandal” and did not indicate the source of information. This fact falls into the manipulation device called **counter-truth impossible to prove** (for lack of sources or witnesses). The report also said that the lawyer “*represented in court people accused of pedophilia, murder, tax evasion and rape, and now he specializes in migration law*” and that “*one of the criminals defended by Sandweg strangled his girlfriend in front of her daughter of only four years.*” The listing of words like “pedophilia, murder, rape,” etc. aims at associating the persons referred to in the report with these notions in order to **transfer negative image**, attributed to the American lawyer, onto Mihail Gofman. The American lawyer was also labeled as “the lawyer of criminals.” At the same time, the report had no information showing why Gofman is important for the public, what declarations he had made and why people should know what he was doing in the US.

Information about the public declarations made by Gofman the day before were omitted – both the one in which he said that the bank fraud was for the benefit of Vlad Plahotniuc (owner of *Publika TV*) and Veaceslav Platon (former MP) and the one referring to other schemes of money laundering through our country’s banking system. Hence the conclusion that journalists wrote the report not to provide full and neutral information to the public, but to create a negative image of a person.

Other elements were also **omitted** from that report. Authors made several statements accusing Mihail Gofman but not quoting his reply. Namely, that the former NAC employee went to the US to ask for asylum; that he was summoned three times to the

Anticorruption Prosecution Office in Chisinau and failed to appear there; that he and his brother are controlling a company that provided expertise to Banca de Economii bank. Given that the report appeared on July 12, i.e. the day after Mihail Gofman responded to these accusations in the “Interpol” show in TV 7 – de facto, he made public declarations, – we conclude that its authors intentionally **omitted** these elements in order to obtain a tendentious product delivering negative and unilateral information. The headline, “[Mihail Gofman involved in a NEW SCANDAL! The TRUE GOAL of his visit to the USA](#),” is also manipulating, as it does not reflect the essence of the news, contrary to journalistic rules<sup>15</sup>; instead, it is misleading. From the text, readers do not see what scandal Gofman is involved in or the “true goal of the visit,” but the headline suggests that he is a controversial person involved in scandals, who had some hidden goals.

The majority of reports reproducing the declarations made by Gofman in “Interpol” **lacked context and background information**. It shows that journalists presented only a part of information, which is a **manipulation device**. Thus, the report titled “[Gofman keeps disclosing: The theft of the BILLION isn’t over. How is theft happening in Moldova now?](#)”, published by [Ziarulnational.md](#), lacked information about who Mihail Gofman is, when he worked at the NAC, under what conditions he was dismissed and what the media wrote about him before. This information was also absent in the report titled “[Gofman made new disclosures about the theft](#)” on [Jurnal TV](#). That channel showed the declarations made by Gofman at the press conference that he held in Washington, but it ignored relevant background information, namely, that [Ziarul de Garda](#) wrote that Gofman allegedly has a luxurious house costing more than his legal income, that he owned companies in the past, and in what conditions he was dismissed from the NAC. To ensure correct and full information, especially with such news, when sources provide relevant conflicting information that can cause changes in the course of an investigation or in authorities’ actions, journalists must provide all context information, including information that is necessary for the reader to decide on the credibility of the source.

**Repeating statements to make them be perceived as the truth:** In reports titled “[Sergiu Mocanu reveals: Gofman is a multimillionaire who protects the interests of mafia clans](#),” “[Mihail Gofman involved in a NEW SCANDAL! The TRUE GOAL of his visit to the USA](#)” on [Publika.md](#), about 70% of the text is, in fact, content taken from other reports and represents varied information about Gofman: who invited him to the US, the past activities of his brother, etc. Especially, they repeat this phrase: “*Prosecutor Adriana Betisor said she has information confirming that the company hired by BEM to evaluate pledges is controlled by brothers Mihail and Alexei Gofman.*” Since on July 12, when the information was published, it had already been **disproven** by Dmitri Taraburca, director of “Gofma-Consulting” company, and by

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<sup>15</sup> Ghid de stil cu norme etice pentru jurnaliști (Guide of style with ethical norms for journalists)

Mihail Gofman himself, journalists were obliged by ethical norms either not to publish it or to add the reactions of the people concerned, too.

*Deschide.md* used **tendentious and pejorative language** in a report: “*Gofman came into the spotlight two weeks ago in the INTERPOL show.*”

*Ziarulnational.md* published a report with a confusing headline: “**The US informed the Anticorruption Prosecution Office that Gofman CANNOT appear at hearings after the disclosures he made?**” In the text, authors quote Sergiu Sagaidac, a Moldovan who was in London at the time, who had been head of the Money Laundering Prevention Division at Banca Sociala bank. He said that the Anticorruption Prosecution Office had been informed by an American entity that Gofman cannot participate in hearings. “*An American entity*” does not mean the US as a state, so, even with a question mark, the statement in the headline is manipulating.

### **Subject 6. Apprehension and arrest of businessman Veaceslav Platon, accused in the case of the Moldovan bank fraud (July 25 – August 3)<sup>16</sup>**

On July 25, 2016, prosecutors and employees of the National Anticorruption Center (NAC) made searches at three banks and an insurance company. On the same day, anticorruption prosecutor Viorel Morari announced that businessman Veaceslav Platon is suspected of involvement in the theft from the Moldovan banking system. Also on the same day, Buiucani district Court in Chisinau issued a warrant of arrest for 30 days, and Platon was put on the international wanted list. Immediately after that, in telephone talks with some Moldovan journalists who asked for his reaction, Veaceslav Platon said he had documents and telephone recordings showing that he was not involved and that by means of that investigation “**Vladimir Plahotniuc aimed to divert public attention from the real beneficiary of the theft, i.e. himself.**”

On July 28, the businessman was placed in custody for 40 days by a court in Kiev. On August 2, also in Kiev, his wife and lawyer held a press conference, where they said that Vlad Plahotniuc ordered criminal investigation as revenge for the fact that Platon had refused to surrender to him half of his businesses. The analysis of the news reports produced by the 12 monitored media outlets showed that some of them used information manipulation devices.

The newscasts on ***Publika TV*** and ***Prime TV*** and the websites of the two channels **omitted** the news about the declarations made on August 2 in Kiev by Veaceslav Platon’s wife and lawyer. Since the accused is under arrest and, therefore, cannot speak to the public, and since the case is of major public interest, the defense’s press conference is a chance to obtain and present information from the second source, mandatory for conflicting topics. The news about the declarations of Veaceslav Platon’s wife and lawyer were absent on ***Sputnik.md***, too.

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<sup>16</sup> [http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiul-de-caz-subiectul-veaceslav-platon-ostracizarea-personajului-si-inlocuirea-opiniilor-cu-faptele/](http://mediacritica.md/ro/studiul-de-caz-subiectul-veaceslav-platon-ostracizarea-personajului-si-inlocuirea-opiniilor-cu-fapte/)

The report titled “[Filat made a diplomatic passport for Platon and government counselor credentials for Renato](#),” published on [Publika.md](#) on July 26, quoted blogger Corneliu Gandrabur, who wrote, without any evidence: “*I don’t know exactly when Platon’s diplomatic passport was issued, but it is certain that this document, as well as Renato’s credentials, was issued at the indication of Vlad Filat, ex-Prime Minister of Moldova, condemned for influence peddling and corruption.*” This opinion was not at least balanced with another opinion or verified by journalists, but was presented as information. It was later repeated in other news reports on [Publika TV](#), so the blogger became a source of information: “[Earlier, some bloggers wrote that Platon had received a diplomatic passport from ex-Prime Minister Vlad Filat, condemned for influence peddling and corruption.](#)” In this case, opinions were presented as facts, and it is a violation of the Journalist’s Code of Ethics and misleads media consumers. Another example of use of opinions as facts is the report posted on the website under the headline “[Analyst: Veaceslav Platon tried to speculatively increase the price for Moldova-Agroindbank shares](#),” where statements by a source that has no direct connection with the topic, analyst Victor Gurau, were presented as disclosures and credible information. Journalists did not try to find out and explain to viewers where Victor Gurau had gotten the information he delivered, given that he was not in the management of the bank concerned, was not a shareholder nor had other connections with the activities of this financial entity, so that consumers could understand how credible the source is.

In another report, “[Veaceslav Platon allegedly coordinated the theft from the BEM and stole over 800 million lei](#),” [Publika TV](#) used **labeling**: “*Veaceslav Platon, called raider no. 1 in the CIS....*” Subsequently, it was used as legitimacy: “[CIS’s raider no. 1 was arrested on Monday by Ukrainian services, after Moldovan authorities put him on the international wanted list](#)”; “[After today’s decision, Moldovan anticorruption prosecutors will ask that CIS’ raider no. 1 be brought to Chisinau.](#)” This manipulation device was also used in the news report titled “[Veaceslav Platon arrested in Kiev](#),” published on July 26 by [Deschide.md](#): “*the interloper has been arrested.*”

The news report titled “[Bomb in Platon’s notebook: It lists politicians, bankers, journalists](#),” published by [Sputnik.md](#) on July 29, quoted [Moldova24.info](#) portal, which, in its turn, quotes “*information coming from colleagues in the Ukrainian media*” and “*sources from Ukrainian investigation bodies.*” The report delivers no information of public interest; it only presents assumptions that “*Platon allegedly paid for certain services*” to some “*state officials, bank representatives, journalists, media outlets and administrators of companies,*” so this media product can be also considered a speculation, as it is not accompanied by any evidence, and the information is not verified/confirmed by other sources. The Moldovan Journalist’s Code of Ethics<sup>17</sup> says that the use of **anonymous sources** is justified only when the disclosure of their name puts the source in danger.

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<sup>17</sup> [http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod\\_d\\_rom.pdf](http://consiliuldepresa.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod_d_rom.pdf)

On July 25, *Jurnal TV* aired the news report titled “[Prosecutors’ actions are just a show](#),” which reproduced the comments of three persons regarding the searches conducted on that day by prosecutors at two banks and the issue of warrant of arrest against Veaceslav Platon. All of them – Alexandr Petcov, Stanislav Pavlovschi and Vitalie Calugareanu – supported one idea: these actions are intended to “*distract attention from the real beneficiary*” and “*displace public attention from a letter of American company ‘Frontier Solutions’,*” which had allegedly been sent to authorities in Chisinau, suggesting that “*theft from the Moldovan banking system is investigated in the US.*” Presence in the news report of opinions expressing de facto the same point of view might mean that they had been selected intentionally, in order to **mimic pluralism of opinions**. This device is usually used to discredit an idea or a fact or to emphasize and accredit a rumor, idea, point of view. A news report produced by using a similar device and bearing an almost identical headline, “[Platon’s arrest is just a show](#),” was aired by *Jurnal TV* the following day, July 26, and it reproduced the opinions of participants in the “Hour of Expertise” show that appeared at the same channel.

## CONCLUSIONS

Attempts to violate the rules of ethics and use devices characteristic to propaganda and manipulation, mentioned in the IJC reports of February 2016<sup>18</sup> and May 2016<sup>19</sup>, continued in May, June and July 2016, and in some cases they got amplified and diversified. Some monitored media outlets covered the events in this study in violation of the Journalist’s Code of Ethics, namely: they exaggerated facts, presented them unilaterally, mixed up facts and opinions, used labeling, and failed to ensure pluralism of opinions. As a result, media consumers obtained unilateral, tendentious, unbalanced media products.

Cases of violation of ethical norms and use of information manipulation devices were especially found in the production of conflicting materials (news presenting situations of conflict, accusations) concerning domestic and foreign news.

Replacing the news story of public interest with those containing personal attacks in order to discredit the source / protagonist, transfer of negative image, repeating statements so as to make them perceived as the truth, omission, exacerbation of facts are techniques used by some media outlets.

Elements of information manipulation and propaganda were most often found in the news reports of *Publika TV, RTR Vesti, REN TV, Jurnal TV, Sputnik.md* and in a smaller degree in those of *Deschide.md* and *Ziarul Național*.

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<sup>18</sup> [Monitoring report no. 1, http://media-azi.md/sites/default/files/CJI\\_Media\\_Monitoring\\_Report\\_Nov.2015-Jan.2016\\_RO.PDF](http://media-azi.md/sites/default/files/CJI_Media_Monitoring_Report_Nov.2015-Jan.2016_RO.PDF)

<sup>19</sup> [Monitoring report no. 2, http://mediacritica.md/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Raport\\_trimestrial\\_de\\_monitorizare\\_CJI.pdf](http://mediacritica.md/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Raport_trimestrial_de_monitorizare_CJI.pdf)

In the coverage of political topics, some monitored outlets favored certain political figures and disfavored others, by means of text and images, thus presenting facts in a distorted manner.

Russian monitored channels rebroadcast in Moldova present to local consumers topics about Ukraine in a tendentious and propagandistic manner, exclusively from the perspective of the Russian Federation, to the detriment of complete and neutral information.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In selecting topics, producing news reports and making up newscasts, media outlets should take into consideration the degree of public interest of every topic and be guided exclusively by the norms of the Code of Ethics and by quality standards in journalism, in order to correctly cover the reality and provide the public with objective, neutral and clear information.

Media outlets should refrain from attacking and denigrating sources of information – people, institutions, parties; instead, they should take up, verify and neutrally transmit information/statements made public by these sources.

Journalists should give up the practices of unilateral presentation of facts, use of anonymous sources without verifying information, and commenting of information if it is not presented in opinion shows or sections.

The owners and managers of media outlets should refrain from transforming their outlets into tools of propaganda and manipulation.

The Broadcasting Coordinating Council should monitor how broadcasters ensure pluralism of opinions and comply with domestic legislation and with European standards in broadcasting in the part concerning correct, objective and pluralistic information, and should take notice of violations, if any should occur.

Independent media organizations should manifest a trenchant position, via public declarations or events denouncing wrong practices, if there are signs that a media outlet is spreading false, unverified information or participating in denigration and political revenge campaigns.

Media consumers are recommended to critically approach information and to research information in several media sources, in order to avoid the risk of obtaining wrong and manipulating information.