

The 2024 Moldovan State of the Press Index, **published** by the Independent Journalism Center, tells us that we have many laws that facilitate our work. Moreover, new laws entered into force and were approved in 2024. However, **the biggest challenge remains law enforcement**, an area in which we still score low. One example is access to information. Despite the existence of a new law that guarantees this right, authorities continue to respond late, ignore, or refuse requests. Another challenge is the lack of regulation in the online space, which is a frequently discussed topic in the context of adopting a new media law and amending the audiovisual media services code.

In today's edition, we explore the legal challenges journalists face in Moldova and how to combat them. We hear from Anghelina Gaidarji, director of the regional portal TUK, and Tatiana Puiu, a media expert.



**Anghelina Gaidarji**  
Director of TUK

## "The Mayor Insisted That We Send Him the Articles Before Publication."

Since its launch in 2018, the TUK portal has positioned itself as an independent media source by covering important events in the region with two teams of journalists, one in Cahul and the other in Taraclia. In addition to its online presence on social networks, TUK's work can be heard on its online radio station.

"Communication with the authorities is different in Cahul and Taraclia," said TUK director Anghelina Gaidarji. "The local authorities in Cahul understand journalism better, but we have strained relations in Taraclia."

*Note: The mayor of Taraclia was elected in 2019 from the Shor Party and re-elected in 2023 as an independent candidate after the party was declared unconstitutional. Nevertheless, his ties with Ilan Shor are evident in his public activities.*

"At the beginning of his tenure, the mayor insisted that we send him the articles for his approval before publication. We refused because this is censorship, and we are an independent press. Since then, neither the mayor nor other city hall officials have responded to our requests or calls." **Everything continued until the editorial staff won two court cases against them.** The trial lasted two years and cost ten thousand lei. There were many court hearings, and it was stressful. During that time, the newsroom received legal support from the Independent Journalism Center. However, because the legal battle was going to be a long one, the team decided they needed a permanent lawyer to represent their interests.

The abuses by the Taraclia authorities also manifested in public. "During the election campaign, I attended a public meeting with the mayor, who incited the crowd against our reporter. She was shoved and had her phone taken from her. Of course, the reporter was scared. At another meeting I attended, I was called a 'second-rate journalist' and a 'terrorist'."

Add to this the intimidation the team has endured. "We recently published an investigation into a firm that has been winning town hall tenders for five consecutive years, even when offering higher prices. Then, we were sued for 'defamation.'" Anghelina says she is no longer afraid of such situations and considers them a normal part of her job.

Regarding the protection of journalists in the newsroom in relation to these cases, the TUK director believes that it is impossible to fully prepare someone for situations like these. "We teach them how to protect themselves and how to ask for help. We watch live broadcasts and are ready to intervene if necessary. We also have access to psychological support from donors if someone needs it."

Anghelina believes that more work is needed in terms of media solidarity in these cases. Although media organizations react with petitions and statements of support, they do not actually influence the attitude of local authorities. "It would be good, however, to develop a clearer mechanism of solidarity that depends on principles rather than sympathy."

In the lead-up to the parliamentary elections, the editorial staff working in an area with significant support for Russia is under constant pressure, both online and in their personal lives. "Old friends have drifted apart. Discussions always end up turning to politics. I have narrowed my social circle to my family and my dog."



**Tatiana Puiu**  
Media expert

## The challenges of media legislation

### Do we have a sufficient legal framework?

Currently, the legal framework largely covers all the safeguards journalists need to do their jobs. However, having laws is not enough; we must also apply them in practice. When a law guarantees journalists' access to information but they cannot access it in practice, there are systemic problems with the enforceability of laws. Despite the new law on access to information of public interest that took effect last year, the situation has not improved. The biggest problem right now is enforcing the legislation.

### What can journalists do?

Journalists most often report violations to media organizations. They issue public statements condemning the violations, but very few journalists go to the police and file complaints because the proceedings are lengthy and expensive. This is why, in most cases, problems remain unresolved.

### Is public pressure helping?

Absolutely. We must discuss and report all cases, including on international platforms such as the **Council of Europe Platform** for Journalists' Safety. It is a transparent platform where you can monitor the situation in other countries in real time. The situation in the Republic of Moldova is not unique; there are also worrying statistics on journalist safety in the EU. We must report these cases and persevere in filing complaints.

### What is the best way for press regulation to take place?

Rather than relying on regulation, we should strengthen self-regulation and ultimately use legislation. Although we prohibit certain behaviors by law, we cannot postpone the future, as I have said on several occasions. There are already international regulations concerning the online space, and sooner or later, the Republic of Moldova will have to adjust its legal framework to keep pace with these developments. The problem is that legislators usually act reactively. We only intervene when an emergency arises, attempting to integrate new phenomena into an existing legislative framework without a clear, coherent vision. For instance, we incorporate some regulations into the Law on Freedom of Expression and others into related laws.

We are currently discussing the need for a new media law, which I consider to be absolutely justified given that the current law dates back to 1994 and is outdated. The major problem is the overlap of regulations in both the Audiovisual Media Services Code and the Law on Freedom of Expression. Ultimately, I believe we will conclude that a single media code is needed, one that includes clear rules for broadcasting, print media, and other content creators. This integrated document would reflect all the necessary standards instead of fragmenting the legislation further.

### How should we deal with anonymous online sources that are difficult to hold accountable?

The danger already exists and will likely grow because it is an extremely dangerous tool of influence. This is why more and more programs focus on developing critical thinking and media literacy skills. Media literacy represents a major gap that needs to be filled and regulated, including through legislation. A clear public policy commitment is necessary. Only then can action plans, strategies, and other policy papers be developed. Therefore, the first step is a commitment from the authorities.

Regarding transparency in the online environment, we acknowledge that we do not meet the European Union's transparency requirements. To guarantee transparency, specific obligations should also exist for the online press. Currently, media ownership transparency exists only in television, where a register operates and clear legal obligations exist. However, online media is not subject to transparency obligations. In fact, the Republic of Moldova does not have a general register of media outlets. Currently, if you tried to identify all media entities in the country, you would not find a complete record.

### What resources are available to journalists to strengthen their legal certainty?

There are numerous platforms, guides, and sources of legal advice, including media organizations. In the digital age, there is no need to visit a library or pay a lawyer to draft a claim. Information is accessible online, and collaboration among journalists who have experience with these processes could make things much easier. Many actions can be taken without direct support from a lawyer. For those without legal knowledge, there are resources available: guides, explanations, and educational materials for journalists on legal issues.

However, it also requires perseverance. I understand that going to the police or going through the legal process takes time and effort. However, we cannot say that the law does not work if we do not see a case through from start to finish.



### Explaining

**SLAPP** – a strategic lawsuit against public participation. Specifically, it refers to legal actions taken by politicians or companies against journalists, activists, NGOs, or citizens who expose information of public interest. The goal is to intimidate, exhaust, and silence the targets financially. Although no cases of strategic lawsuits against public participation were recorded in 2024, the evaluators emphasized the urgent need for the **new EU anti-SLAPP Directive** to be transposed into Moldovan law, according to the IC's Moldovan Media Situation Index.



### Opportunity!

A symposium on journalists' mental health is scheduled for July 2 in London. The event will also be broadcast online to select newsrooms. Click **here** for more details about the event and participation.



### Get Help!

If you are experiencing ongoing stress and anxiety, you can request a free and confidential consultation with a psychologist using **this chatbot** or by filling out **this form**. You will be connected with a specialist within 48 hours.

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