

## Freedom of the press in Moldova Fact Sheet

According to the Democracy Index 2022 of the Economist Intelligence Unit, Moldova has flawed democracy and ranks 69 out of 167 countries with a score of 6.23 out of 10:

- Electoral process and pluralism: 7.42
- Functioning of government: 5.36
- Political participation: 7.22
- Political culture: 4.38
- Civil liberties: 6.76<sup>1</sup>

The EIU has shown a worsening in Civil Liberties. This trend is worrying, as the category Civil Liberties regards the freedom of the press, the plurality of information, and the freedom of expression.

- The 2014 census recorded that ethnic Russians make up 4.1 per cent of the population, though the proportion of Russian speakers (14.5 per cent) is considerably higher. Furthermore, the prevalence of a Russian-speaking identity amongst other groups accords the Russian language and identity a more significant role in the republic than numbers alone would suggest.<sup>2</sup>
- As in other countries that come from the authoritarian regime of the Soviet Union, the contribution of civil society in Moldova is still very low. Building an effective civil society sector in the Republic of Moldova began only after these countries gained independence. In a survey of 2021, only 22% of Moldovans felt trust in NGOs in their countries.<sup>3</sup>

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1 The Economist Intelligence Unit (2023). Democracy Index 2022. Frontline democracy and the battle for Ukraine, p. 50.

2 World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples. Moldova. Russians and Russian-speakers. <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/russians-and-russian-speakers/>

3 Alina Iovcheva (2023). Implementation of EU values in transitional democracies: experience of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. <https://ahpsxxi.org/index.php/journal/article/view/86/70>

- According to the Global State of Democracy Initiative, Moldova has been significantly improving most of the indexes that measure the state of democracy in the last few years. However, three indexes have not been growing over the past five years, and they demonstrate how Moldova is far from being a real democracy: access to justice (score of 0.53), judicial independence (0.56), and civil society (0.57).<sup>4</sup>
- Moldova is rated **Partly Free** in Freedom in the World 2023, Freedom House's annual study of political rights and civil liberties worldwide: **concerns over the independence of the Audiovisual Council (CA), Moldova's media regulator, have surfaced in recent years.** Parliament amended the audiovisual-services code in 2021, making it easier to dismiss CA members. In a 2021 report, the OSCE noted that the amended code increased parliamentary control over the CA and the public broadcaster, TeleRadio-Moldova. Moldovan authorities restricted access to Russian media after Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022. In June, President Sandu promulgated the Informational Security Law, which banned Russian television news programming from being broadcast in Moldova. Under the law, 50 per cent of television content must be sourced from the European Union member states, the United States, and countries that ratified the European Convention on Transfrontier Television. The Intelligence and Security Service (SIS) used emergency powers to block two websites later in 2022. In December, the CSE suspended the licenses of six television stations after the CA said they offered inaccurate information on the war.<sup>5</sup>
- The National Democratic Institute reports that 42% of the Moldovan citizens strongly disagree with the decision to suspend TV licenses of the six channels.

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4 Global State of Democracy Initiative. Republic of Moldova.

<https://idea.int/democracytracker/country/republic-moldova>

5 Freedom House. Freedom in the World 2023. Moldova.

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/moldova/freedom-world/2023>

- As per the Nations in Transit report of the independent research institute Freedom House, **the Republic of Moldova is ranked as a Transitional or Hybrid Regime. According to the report, the democracy rate is only 35.71 per cent out of 100, and the democracy score is 3.14 out of 7.** Despite the reform of adopting a pre-vetting mechanism in the rule of law, the executive appointments in several legal institutions, including the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, had likely been orchestrated. After receiving the EU candidacy status, the government reassured the population that the country was heading in the right direction. Moldova has prioritised European integration in the energy, agriculture, and transport sectors, especially after suffering from an energy crisis and inflation due to the geopolitical destabilisation caused by the Russian war in Ukraine.<sup>6</sup>
- **Judicial independence remained a problem in Moldova, although a law should guarantee it. The main issues are related to corruption and selective justice, in which the law was not applied equally to all and was often selectively enforced for politically motivated reasons.** Several prominent politicians detained during the year alleged selective justice and abuses of their right to a fair trial. The ECHR issued 68 rulings involving Moldova in 2021 and found 69 violations of the European Convention on Human Rights. The most frequent violations found by the ECHR involved the right to a fair trial, property rights, inhuman detention conditions, and inhuman or degrading treatment. Authorities did not always respect freedom of expression for the press. Some journalists were subjected to harassment, intimidation, and frequent lawsuits.<sup>7</sup>
- The Amnesty International report underlines that no visible progress was made in addressing institutional causes of torture and other ill-treatment in detention.<sup>8</sup>

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6 Freedom House. Nations in Transit 2023. Moldova.

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/moldova/nations-transit/2023>

7 U.S. Department of State. 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Moldova.

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/moldova/>

8 Amnesty International. Moldova 2022.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/moldova/report-moldova/>

- **IREX Vibrant Barometer Information 2022:** gave an overall score of 22/40, which positions the country within the category "somewhat vibrant". The analysts have identified some weaknesses in the system. In the general overview, panellists agreed that the media offered quality information on several topics. However, they went downhill, mirroring the political reshuffles, the gas crisis, and the government's dismal handling of the pandemic. The analysts found several shortcomings in the category's *information quality* (score of 21/40), and in how *information flows* (24/40). In the information quality category, analysts observed that the local coverage of the news is often weaker than in the national media. An important consideration is made regarding misinformation and the role of the media: "Panelists criticized the media's performance in countering misinformation. Politically aligned media organizations continued to overshadow those that produce fact-based, well-sourced, and objective content." Instead, for the category *multiple channels: how information flows*, panellists highlighted that there were some difficulties obtaining information to produce the news: "Some panellists faulted the bureaucracy and obstructionist officials that invoke privacy and data protection laws to restrict access to information of public interest. When they come, responses are often late or incomplete, making it problematic for journalists to do their work."<sup>9</sup>
- Repressions against independent media and journalists occur in countries such as Belarus, Georgia and Turkey, where severe suppression of freedom of speech and freedom of the press happens. Only in 2022, the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) reported 32 cases of detentions of journalists and 55 cases of searches of journalists' homes or editorial offices. In Türkiye, legal provisions against insulting the President or spreading "fake news" are used.<sup>10</sup> The Council of Europe Platform also registered two physical attacks on media workers in Georgia, where the founder and the executive director of Pirveli TV were assaulted and slapped by two members of Parliament.<sup>11</sup>

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9 Vibrant Information Barometer 2022. Moldova. [https://www.irex.org/VIBE\\_2022\\_Moldova](https://www.irex.org/VIBE_2022_Moldova)

10 Safety of journalists platform. Annual Report 2023 by the partner organisations to the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists. [https://cpj.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CoE\\_report\\_03-07-2023.pdf](https://cpj.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CoE_report_03-07-2023.pdf)

11 Safety of journalists platform. Pirveli TV Founder Vato Tsereteli and Executive Director Nana Aburjanidze Assaulted at Embassy Reception. <https://fom.coe.int/en/alerte/detail/107637741>