

**WatchDog vs. propaganda in local press coverage of foreign news**  
*JurnalTV, Moldova1, PrimeTV, TV8, ProTV, Primul în Moldova, NTV, RTR*

Topic of the month: **December 2022**

### **IS ROMANIA JOINING SCHENGEN?**

When will [Romania join the Schengen area?](#) It is a question that, in December 2022, seemed to find a positive solution in the shortest possible time. Events have kept the entire European community in suspense, and will bring essential changes first and foremost in the lives of Romanian citizens. Therefore, in the December report, we decided to turn our attention to this external issue, which is also closely related to the realities in the Republic of Moldova, where [more than one million](#) citizens also hold Romanian passports.

We therefore set out to find out how the Moldovan public, which watches local TV news, was informed about what happened. Namely, of the most watched, according to the Socio-Political Barometer, [TV channels in Chişinău](#).

I followed in particular how events were reflected on the subject in the second week of December, when, meeting in Brussels, the EU Justice and Home Affairs ministers officially announced: Romania failed to gather the unanimity of votes needed to join the Schengen area.

### **THE SUBJECT IN THE FOREIGN NEWSPAPERS**

#### **"NO" FOR ROMANIA**

Romania has been involved in the preparation process for joining the Schengen free movement area for two decades. Information about [the advantages](#) and [disadvantages](#) of the country's accession to Schengen was regularly reported in the Romanian press. But just [three weeks before](#) the day the long-awaited decision was expected to be taken by the EU's Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council, Austria decided against Romania's accession.

Until the very last moment, Bucharest [has counted on the involvement of the European Commission](#), but also on the success of the direct negotiations with Austria and the negotiations at the level of the European Parliamentary groups. However, meeting in Brussels on 8 December, the JHA Council failed to reach a consensus. [Austria's](#) position remained unchanged. Croatia was the only country admitted. Romania [voted against](#), along with Bulgaria. Austria's argument was that the wave of migrants, coming via the Western Balkans route, would suffocate the existing system. This is despite the fact that [Bucharest has officially refuted these accusations](#), citing Frontex (the European border protection agency) data, which showed that illegal immigrants arriving in Austria prefer other routes than through Romania. The events sparked a [diplomatic outcry](#) at the highest [level](#) and a wave of protests on Romania's [political arena](#).

### **THE SUBJECT ON TV CHANNELS FROM CHISINAU**

At the time of the events analysed, the stations that remained unlicensed under the [CSE provision](#) were still broadcasting and the sanction was already applied after 16 December. As expected, the subject was not equally covered by the eight monitored channels - JurnalTV, Moldova1, PrimeTV, TV8, ProTV Chisinau, RTR Moldova, First in Moldova (Primul în Moldova), NTV. And the last two simply ignored it.

- **Level of coverage of events in the local press overall ranking**

|      |   |  |
|------|---|--|
| I.   | They did not cover the event in any way.  | First in Moldova (Primul în Moldova)<br>NTV Moldova  |
| II.  | It was the furthest from the real facts, ignored important details or distorted the material.   | RTR Moldova (1 news item)<br>Jurnal TV (1 news item) |
| III. | They paid sufficient attention to the events, but admitted inaccuracies capable of influencing the correct perception of information. | TV 8 (3 news)<br>Moldova 1 (4 news)                  |
| IV.  | They covered the subject relatively neutrally and fairly.   | PrimeTV (2 news)<br>ProTV Chişinău (3 news)          |

## SHORT ANALYSIS (details in the Annex)

### CATEGORY I

#### **First in Moldova, NTV Moldova**

*They have no material.*

In general, rather stingy in reporting international news, the channels First in Moldova and NTV Moldova resorted to the same tactic this time too. Manipulation through silence - the total omission or partial ignoring of certain subjects, in fact, is one of the most accessible forms of manipulation of public opinion to which the local media frequently resorts.

#### **NTV Moldova**

NTV Moldova did not devote any subject to the date in the reference period, 6-9 [December](#).

#### **First in Moldova**

Neither did *First in Moldova* broadcast any material on the events under review. In searching for news dedicated to the topic under analysis, we identified instead pro-Kremlin narratives in the general news flow. For example, some of the foreign news that the station carried during this period was dedicated to the so-called "suffering" of Europeans caused by various [energy](#) crises. In counterpoint to this kind of material was news about the [new China-Rusia gas pipeline](#) and Beijing's 'optimistic outlook'. So, although the news was apparently harmless, the station's political affiliation was also apparent in the way the topics were chosen and arranged in the news. No wonder, then, that along with several other stations, First in Moldova has attracted sanctions from the Commission for Exceptional Situations.

## CATEGORY II

### *RTR Moldova, JurnalTV*

ignored important details or distorted the content of the material

Obviously, we cannot put the two channels on the same level: *RTR Moldova* being clearly influenced by Russian propaganda, and *Jurnal TV* being rather the opposite. However, we found that both stations ignored both important details, which influenced the content of the news and contributed to the biased reporting of the material.

### **RTR Moldova**

1 news item (8 december)

*RTR Moldova* devotes a short and rather superficial [news](#) to the subject. Indirectly and veiledly, it nevertheless inoculates certain pro-Russian propaganda narratives, which are hidden in the way certain accents are placed, but also in the language of the news, which abounds in aggravated formulations, some of which betray the fact that they have been translated word-for-word from Russian (See Annex). In this way or otherwise, the viewer is subtly inoculated with ideas such as 'the EU is a problem area', where European politicians are incapable of making decisions and European values are far from being true 'values'.

So, the manipulative methods used this time are hidden in details that seem insignificant at first glance. But put together, they create a reality that is out of place but coveted by pro-Kremlin propaganda.

### **JURNAL TV**

1 news item (8 December)

*JurnalTV* did not reserve a single [news item](#) for the subject, but it can be accused of bias, as it mainly reports Romania's position and completely omits the arguments of those who did not support its accession to Schengen. At the same time, we did not find in the news an important clarification: what is the reason why Austria and the Netherlands refused to vote for Romania's accession to the Schengen area? Also missing are contextual explanations that would help the viewer to orient himself in a flow of information.

Thus, the incomplete presentation of the information makes the news biased, as it only presents the position of Romania, which appears to us as an actor unjustly wronged by the other members of the community.

## CATEGORY III

### **Moldova 1, TV8**

*They admitted inaccuracies that may influence the correct perception of the information.*

### **Moldova 1**

4 știri ( 6, 8, 9 December)

M1 paid quite a lot of attention to the events, making just three news items. The first is more of a short [TC 22.32](#) announcement, but with more information than the next day's material. Dedicated to the JHA decision itself, it is [TC 13.04](#) which does not answer a number of essential questions (on the cause of the Austrian veto, Bucharest's reaction, etc., see Annex). All these shortcomings were probably going to be covered by the next item in the diary [TC 15.25](#) - a live interview with

the former Foreign Minister of Romania. However, this was very difficult to follow due to sound problems, which made it difficult to hear the information. The following day's programme [TC 12.40](#) did not give a clear picture of what happened either, this time again marked by generalisations and information taken out of context.

So, put together, all these shortcomings negatively influenced the proper perception of information for the viewer who intended to be informed on those M1 days.

## TV8

3 newsi (7, 8, 9 December)

TV8 has also been following the subject since the early days of its development. However, TV8 [news](#) presents a fragmented picture of events, focusing more on the dramatic side of the issue, ignoring a number of natural questions that arise [along the way](#) (see Annex). Thus, the [news item](#) devoted to the diplomatic scandal between Austria and Romania and the tensions on the political scene in the neighbouring country occupies a much more important place in the news than the [central](#) item, devoted to the JHA decision.

In conclusion, viewers who hoped to learn about the reasons for Romania's rejection, the progress of the negotiations, the arguments of the parties or the advantages of Schengen membership for citizens - would not have been able to find answers to these questions.

## CATEGORY IV

### ProTV Chişinău, Prime TV

*They covered the subject relatively neutrally and fairly.*

#### ProTV Chişinău

3 news (6, 7, 8 December)

During the monitored week, ProTV Chisinau made a news with the first [statements](#) of Austria and continued to inform its viewer the [next](#) day. [The material](#) dedicated directly to the JHA Council decision, although emphasizing the dramatic side for Romania, nevertheless presents a fairly balanced picture of the developments. The news could be complete if it contained (at least in the text) the reaction of Bulgaria, rejected "as a package with Romania".

Most of the news made by *ProTV Chisinau* on the given subject, however, present, in principle, the main statements and arguments, without forgetting the context and background. Thus, the viewer who chose this channel for information found here clear and succinct answers to most of the questions related to this topic.

#### Prime TV

2 news (7, 8 December)

*PrimeTV* dedicated two news items to the event, [the first one](#) being aired directly on the eve of the decision pronounced in Brussels, based on the Romanian President's statement that "Romania will negotiate until the last minute". The material, quite complex and lengthy in length, generally covers the main official statements made at the time, anticipating but also explaining the reasons for the Austrian veto and the Dutch position. On the day of the final JHA Council vote, *PrimeTV* airs another [news item](#) item, shorter than the previous one, but sufficiently balanced and explicit. Thus, without getting caught up in the scandalous side of the story, *PrimeTV* informs its viewers about what happened in a relatively balanced and fair way.

## CONCLUSION

We found no serious cases of propaganda on the eight TV stations monitored when presenting the subject analysed in December 2022. Most of the shortcomings reported in the analysis do not represent direct cases of propaganda. Apart from some cases of indirect manipulation by ignoring the subject (First in Moldova, NTV), the most serious cases generally concerned indirect propaganda messages, hidden in details and accents (RTR Moldova).

In most cases, however, it is a violation of the principles of correct information, of varying seriousness. In particular, through the omission of important data or lack of context (JurnalTV, Moldova1, TV8) - problems that can influence the correct perception of information, contributing to the distortion of the picture of reality presented to the viewer watching the news on Moldovan TV channels.

However, we have also observed cases of selective presentation of information, dictated by the taste for scandal, drama and controversy (TV8, JurnalTV), a tactic that counts on the interest of the public to increase the percentage of views. But it is important to understand that, as with domestic news, to ensure a healthy and credible media environment it is important for journalists to consider ethical standards including when choosing the external topics, they report and to ensure that the information they provide is accurate, impartial, useful and clear to the general public and that their stories are chosen with the viewer's interest in mind and not just to attract their attention.

In conclusion, we can summarize that the channels in categories III and IV were the closest in their coverage of the current international situation, with *ProTV* and *PrimeTV* being the channels that covered the subject in the most balanced, clear and undistorted way.

It should be noted that the analysis given is valid for this specific case study and does not necessarily imply extrapolation of the conclusions to editorial policies in a broad sense.

\* See also annex with detailed analysis