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### Who Protects Our Information Space?

Any individual is a source and, at the same time, a receiver of information. And since nobody can be self-sufficient, each individual is looking for new sources, recording and storing the information obtained willingly or unintentionally during communication with other sources, which create a public space. If we are to start from the fact that each sentence—whether identified as an advertisement or not—broadcast on the radio, TV, published in a newspaper or stuck illegally to a light post, is a piece of information, this makes us understand how important is the message which becomes public. To be sure, these are truisms, beyond which we could add just the following: just as a person controls his/her own life and freedom, so communities control the spaces, including the information one, they own (if they own them). By violating a country's air space one can provoke an international conflict, by systematically intruding into "the air"—which is a virtual but nevertheless public good—one can be admonished everywhere in the world but not in Moldova.

The notion of information space is relatively new. It became more known here in 2000-2001, when the Broadcasting Coordinating Council (BCC) tried to introduce a license for accessing the country's information space as well as a rebroadcast license (which cable operators never had and thus rebroadcast illegally foreign radio and TV stations). The parliament passed unanimously this amendment to the Broadcasting Law, and it had to be signed by the president, but all of a sudden a group of license holders (including an obscure association of journalists) started a hysterical campaign. Things went all the way and the Russian Embassy had to become involved, which threatened to unleash interethnic conflicts. This was a hypocritical and useless gesture, since in October (during the Chisinau meeting of the presidents of the 12 CIS countries) the Chisinau authorities declared their support for Russia's initiative to create a supposed "common CIS information space." On this occasion, Radio Free Europe reported: "Almost all CIS member countries want to become part of the world information space, to have direct access to the world media and research and technical literature, and not to find themselves penned in some CIS information space."

Why such a moderate body, euphemistically speaking, as BCC had to initiate measures to protect Moldova's information space by introducing an access license? Because the numbers oblige any public official, who is loyal to this state, to ring the bell. The more so since the evidence is there, one just has to switch on a radio receiver or a TV set, or go to a news- or book-stand.

#### **In BCC's practice no fine has ever been enforced**

Thus, what is the current situation in broadcasting? BCC officials told us that at present in Moldova there are 41 over-the-air TV stations, including 3 public/state ones—Moldova 1, Euro TV (Chisinau municipal station) and the State Gagauzia TV. There are also 62 cable stations (all of them private). Of all these, in Chisinau there are 12 over-the-air TV stations and 12 cable ones. Concerning radio, in Moldova there are 23 over-the-air radio stations and 3 wire stations (the wire networks in three communities have been repaired). Of these, 18 over-the-air radio stations broadcast from Chisinau, only four of them having original programs in Romanian—Radio Moldova, Antena C, Radio Nova, and Radio Contact (the only local office of a Bucharest station). Radio stations have no press reviews; but the audience in Moldova is informed about the content of Moscow publications. Unfortunately, the data provided by BCC are incomplete, at least in the case of the ProFM radio station, about which BCC knows nothing although the station is well and alive and broadcasts in Romanian 24/24, with only one program hour rebroadcast from Bucharest. The rest of the stations don't have broadcasts in the state language of the country, save the newscasts, weather forecasts or exchange rates, lasting several seconds and being edited with bias in lame Romanian. The same is true of advertising. In the case of television, the situation seems to be a little different: of 103 TV stations only 3 or 4 have local broadcasts in Romanian, and four others are rebroadcast from Romania: Acasa, Prima, TVR1, and ProTV (which has a local studio in Chisinau)

All license applicants have to submit a concept and a format based on original programming, and observe strictly the linguistic ratio of 65/35 (Romanian/Russian speakers). But the political reality, the anemic reaction of the wronged Romanian-speakers and, above all, the confusing and easily construable law allow them to completely disregard the obligations undertaken when receiving the license. This is because article 13 (the same shaky article 13 as in the

Constitution!), paragraph 3, from the Broadcasting Law provides: “Public or private stations shall broadcast at least 65% of the entire programming in the state language. This provision does not refer to the satellite and cable-delivered TV programs, as well as foreign stations and those broadcasting within territories with a compact minority population. Provision 13.3 refers only to programs produced locally and does not refer to the air time during which programs of foreign stations are rebroadcast by stations operating on the territory of Moldova.” As soon as they are issued the broadcast license, cable and frequency operators forget about their obligations and take to rebroadcasting, which is easier and cheaper. They broadcast ads, and almost all the films put on air are pirated. A natural question arises: how can such behavior be sanctioned? According to art. 43 of the Broadcasting Law, BCC has the authority to apply administrative sanctions. One of them can be a public warning. During BCC meetings (open to the public) such sanctions are applied, but they are strikingly ineffective—the most well-known case has been that of Radio Shanson, which goes on broadcasting vulgarities and shanty-town songs. Theoretically, the following sanction could be a fine, but—Attention!—there has been no case in BCC’s practice when a fine would be applied. This is because, in this case too, legal formulations are void as they lack a mechanism of enforcing the sanctions. And then, what’s the point of making a row that foreign “airs”—no longer breathable—dominate us?

### **The individual is creating his/her own inner info-cultural space, searching outside for what resonates in him/her**

We will insert several symptomatic opinions of some opinion leaders from different domains—literature, history, physics, geography, computer science. Academician Mihai Cimpoi considers that our information space is null. It actually does not belong to us, as it is flooded 99.9% by Russian information. He presented a concluding example: “I am listening in the morning to news from Bucharest, which is then covered over by a Russian station. I can’t hear the station Radio Romania Cultural, not speaking about the fact that right in front of the Union of Writers, next to Eminescu’s statue, there is a tobacco stand from which one can constantly hear Russian music. I am subscribed to several Romanian magazines, which cost a lot. In their delivery there is a huge organizational obstacle. However, the interest for Romanian books is great, as we can see during meetings with readers.”

Poet Arcadie Suceveanu identifies himself exclusively with the Romanian space, but he is also not a stranger to the Slav space: “By virtue of the fact that I know Russian, I can learn things through the prism of the Russian language and the Slav sensibility, but without getting contaminated by my participation in this space. In general, the people are divided and confused. The Romanian space is not well known to many intellectuals because they have had no contact with Romanian books. The majority of them have been modeled by the long presence of the Russian element. Therefore, their antennae are directed, willy-nilly, more towards the Slav space than to the Romanian one. For some—and I am speaking about the lower, uncultivated people—it is easier to express themselves in Russian, even though their Russian is not perfect, or in a rudimentary ‘Moldovan’.”

Here I have to remind you that the pressure of a different culture continues to be so strong in Moldova that even the language in which Moldovan dog owners (especially those living in cities) give orders to their dogs is Russian, not to speak about the names given to the dogs. In the current use of language, some simple and old words have been replaced by their Russian equivalents even in the case of so-called elevated speakers. A significant indicator of cultural belonging are the classifieds one can see stuck all over the city of Chisinau, which are typed on a computer in Cyrillic, 14 years after the Roman alphabet has been introduced!

Here is the opinion of poet Emilian Galaicu-Paun: “From the point of view of the information space, we are definitely in the Russian one (nostalgically Soviet, a shade brushed up). But from the cultural perspective, we can speak about an emergence of the Romanian culture—the top values from Romania are present in our libraries, while the East supplies consumer exemplars. The intellectuals here, i.e. the people who set the mood, are expressing a clear orientation towards an integration with the Romanian space.”

Sergiu Musteata, president of the Association of Young Historians of Moldova: “The discussion concerning the claim against the info-cultural space is provoked by the ambiguity of identity which has been promoted since the creation of the independent state R. of Moldova. I prefer the Internet as a source of professional information, because it is faster and cheaper. Concerning the impact of the media on young people from the same area as myself, unfortunately most frequently I hear about Radio Dinamit which broadcasts mainly Russian music. The national radio and TV stations are not attractive at all, have no programs in history (even if there are some, they are either occasional or directed to political ends).”

Arcadie Barbarosie, director of the Institute for Public Policies, was extremely succinct: “We are in the Balkan space. We don’t know who we are, what we want, and where to go.”

Academician Tatiana Constantinov, director of the Geography Institute of the Academy of Sciences, believes that for now our broadcasting is not competitive. There is little culturalization—few are the programs for educating a taste for classical music, painting, radio and TV drama, and there is no vista to good quality world art. And with thrillers replete with violence and sex you can’t form a normal generation. Along a different line of thought, academician T. Constantinov says that the researchers from a number of the Academy’s institutes have no access to the Internet because of the costs; for about 15 years the Academy’s library has not bought any literature, and thus professional and technological information is reduced to personal contacts with fellow researchers from the great scientific centers of the post-Soviet space.

Academician Valeriu Cantar answered to the question in the headline as a true physicist: “It is the individual who forms his/her inner info-cultural space, searching outside for what resonates in him/her. But the resonance is not static either. Situations cannot be typified; only their tips can be compared. Among our press, there is no impartial publication, all newspapers are alike. I read both poles—Contrafort and Literatura si arta. Personally, on TV I search for pure information, and I find it on Euronews, CNN, NTV, sometimes on ProTV. Concerning research sources, I find 95% of them in Western magazines, as well as in Russian ones published in English. I started an Internet quarterly magazine—the first one fully in English—called Moldovan Journal of Physical Science (contributions from foreign colleagues represent 35% of the total content). Last year I created an international advisory council.”

Finally, the opinion of Viorel Frunza, a young programmer: “There are no nationalities in the Internet. People visit good sites. If there is a good one in Russian, you go there and find there resources you need. If you don’t, you can search even for resources in Chinese. I had a situation when, being unable to understand a single hieroglyph, I was looking for a little program, and after poring over the Net for some time I found it on a Chinese site.”

The lack of cultural homogeneity in a society hides the possible emergence of ungovernable masses.

The look we have cast around us, trying to outline the vectors through which we define our own info-cultural space, is a kaleidoscopic one. Variation would be interesting, had large cultural incongruities not made it confusing. Therefore, the fact that we, the Romanians from Moldova, live in a public space of permanent alienation, is by no means favorable to our Russian-speaking co-citizens either. For all citizens of Moldova it is vital to have a mutual cultural bond, some values that would unite all ethnicities without hurting the multicultural nature of the space. Since the big differences, which were cultivated on purpose and maintained artificially, lead to the cultural non-homogeneity of society, it fosters the appearance of ungovernable masses, of latent discord that can break out at any moment. One such hotbed, which may be called “tram nationalism,” is when in Chisinau’s public minivans one can hear Russian radio stations, and this situation permanently generates squabbles that sometimes degenerate into fights. The crux of the problem is the dilemma of identity, which is being speculated by the media subservient to the government.