

## **DOMINATION OF ROMANIAN AND RUSIAN MEDIA: AN ADVANTAGE THAT BRINGS DISADVANTAGES**

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Moldovans could say they are lucky. Almost 90 percent of the population of the small country of Moldova may call themselves polyglots. They have spoken two languages – Romanian and Russian – since early youth. In addition, most Moldovans can read and write using two absolutely different alphabets – Latin and Cyrillic.

This happened due to specific historic circumstances. The Moldovans' native language is Romanian (according to the Constitution – Moldovan. How to call the language is still a matter of dispute in Moldova). During the last two centuries, as Moldova used to be a part of the Russian Empire, and then of the USSR, everybody in the country was forced to learn Russian. At the same time, the Latin alphabet for the Moldovan language was changed to Cyrillic (maybe to help Moldovans learn Russian).

After 1990, when Moldova separated from the USSR, the Latin alphabet was returned and the role of the Russian language was limited to what officials like to call an “interethnic communication language”. It means that different minorities in Moldova (Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Gagauzians – a kind of a Turkish minority, etc.) understand each other using the Russian language, instead of the official Romanian/Moldovan.

No one would argue against the fact that speaking two languages is an advantage. For example, Moldovans are among the few nations who can read newspapers printed in foreign countries, listen to foreign radio stations and watch TV from other countries without any effort. But this is on one hand.

On the other, this advantage brings many disadvantages.

Right after Moldova declared independence, it practically had no media market. The only Moldovan television was state TV (inherited from the USSR), the only radio stations – two national channels, and several newspapers.

Ex-Soviet central television, with headquarters in Moscow, continued, however, to cover Moldova. At the same time, Romanian state TV started to broadcast in Moldova from Bucharest.

Thus, there were three state TV channels - one of them exclusively in Russian (from Moscow - ORT), another one exclusively in Romanian (from Bucharest – TVR 1), and the most important one in two languages, Romanian/Moldovan and Russian, (from Chisinau - TVM). All of them were free and covered the same territory in Moldova.

Problems began as the media market started to develop. The Romanian and Russian TV stations turned out to be unequal competitors for the Moldovan poor television. More rapid economic growth in these two countries determined TV stations to develop much more quickly. In just several years, the stations in Bucharest and Moscow boosted their ratings with high quality programs, shows and movies, becoming much more interesting than the television in Chisinau.

This seemed to bother no one. But only until national TV management realized that it could get extra funding from advertising, instead of asking for money from the Government.

To their disappointment, right away it became clear that no important advertiser was going to buy airtime on Chisinau's TV. An enormous (for Moldova) amount of advertising was instead broadcast by the TV stations in Bucharest and Moscow. The advertisers' logic was simple – why should I pay for advertising on the Moldovan TV channel if Moldovans can easily watch it on TVR 1 or ORT?

Because of that, huge amounts of money bypassed Moldova. Of course, the Government receives money from Romania and Russia for granting permission to broadcast in Moldova, but these amounts are ten times smaller than funds spent on advertising by private companies.

Apparently not very important, this fact hindered the development of the media market. Given the fact that TVR 1 and ORT were easily received and understood by Moldovans, there was practically no need for new Moldovan media.

Nowadays, Moldovans can receive and watch for free nine TV stations – Moldova 1 (former TVM, Moldovan), ORT (Russian, with a Moldovan branch), RTR (Russian), Muz TV (Russian), TVR 1 (Romanian), PRO TV (Romanian, with a Moldovan branch), NIT (Moldovan station, re-broadcasting Russian TVC), EURO TV (Moldovan) and TV5 (French). Three of them – PRO TV, NIT and Euro TV cover only the central part of the country. TV5

has the smallest audience among all TV stations broadcasting in Moldova, as very few people speak French.

Hence, in 14 years of independence, no new TV station appeared in Moldova that would cover the whole country. Instead, Russian RTR (state television in Moscow) started to broadcast throughout the country along with ORT (public television in Moscow).

The creation of new Moldovan TV stations was replaced by local branches of foreign TVs. The first one was PRO TV Chisinau. The Romanian television company PRO TV opened an office in Chisinau, which was supposed to re-broadcast its programs in Moldova. In addition to this, the Moldovan branch prepares two news programs a day, filled with local news. The rest of its airtime is Romanian PRO TV.

The same thing was done by ORT. A local company agreed with the television in Moscow to open a local branch to produce local news. The rest is Russian ORT.

This Russian TV station, created on the basis of the Soviet Central TV, has been the most popular station in Moldova during the last 14 years.

#### WHAT TV CHANNELS DO YOU PREFER?

	First choice	Second choice	Third choice	Total
ORT (rus)	43.2	23.4	9.6	76.1
TV Moldova	16.4	13.3	7.2	36.9
RTR (rus)	6.8	12.9	11.3	31.0
PRO TV (rom)	10.4	9.5	7.5	27.4
NIT	4.0	10.1	6.9	21.0
NTV*(rus)	3.3	5.4	5.9	14.6
TVR 1 (rom)	2.4	4.2	5.0	11.5
Acasă*(rom)	2.7	2.3	1.7	6.7
TVC 21*	1.8	2.2	2.0	6.0
TV 26*	1.5	1.3	1.4	4.2
Muz TV(rus)	1.5	1.3	1.3	4.1
TV6*(rus)	0.5	1.4	1.5	3.4
Euro sport*	1.1	0.9	0.4	2.4
Discovery*	0.6	1.1	0.5	2.3
REN TV*(rus)	0.6	0.6	0.5	1.8
Euro TV	0.2	0.4	0.6	1.3
Euro News*	0.4	0.2	0.5	1.2
Atomic*(rom)	0.3	0.3	0.3	1.0
Other (below 1% each)	1.9	3.0	3.6	8.5
No answer	0.2			0.2

- \* available on cable only
- \* European TV channels (Eurosport, Euronews, Discovery, etc, are provided with Russian translation)
- \* TVR 1 did not broadcast for several months towards the end of the year 2002

Note: The survey was carried out in June 2003, by IMAS Inc. (source – <http://ijc.iatp.md>)

The table above reflects the situation established in Moldova over the last years. As seen from the survey, the most popular TV stations in Moldova are Russian ones. There are a few reasons for this – the older audience was accustomed to watching Moscow TV; almost everybody (including all minorities) speaks Russian, and it has more interesting programs than other TV stations.

The latter two facts (excluding the minorities) explain why Romanian TV stations are popular in Moldova.

This situation given, it is obvious that no one would risk investing in opening a new Moldovan TV station. Unfortunately, it seems that the Moldovans' advantage of speaking two languages is going further to be a big disadvantage for the Moldovan media.

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