

SYNTHESIS

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# Radiography of attacks on civil society organizations and human rights defenders in the Republic of Moldova

1 January – 31 December 2021

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# **RADIOGRAPHY OF ATTACKS ON CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

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## Abbreviations

NIA	National Integrity Authority
EBCS	Electoral Bloc of Communists and Socialists
POB	Public Opinion Barometer
CIJ	Centre for Investigative Journalism
CPEDEE	Council on the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination and Ensuring Equality
LRCM	Legal Resources Centre from Moldova
IPP	Institute of Public Policy
IEPR	Institute for European Policies and Reforms
NCO	Non-commercial organizations
NGO	Non-governmental organisations
CSO	Civil society organisations
ASP	Action and Solidarity Party
DTPPP	Dignity and Truth Platform Political Party
PSRM	Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova
EU	European Union

## Introduction

The Radiography of Attacks on Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and Human Rights Defenders (HRD) in the Republic of Moldova is a joint effort to document information and events that deteriorate the environment of CSOs in Moldova. The Radiography is at its 5th edition and covers the period of January 1 – December 31, 2021. Similar analyses were presented for the period 2016-2017<sup>1</sup>, 2018<sup>2</sup>, 2019<sup>3</sup> and 2020<sup>4</sup>.

For the purposes of this document, attacks are considered in particular the statements and actions of politicians, especially those in government, and the publication of articles in the media or public interventions that present the non-profit sector as organizations that promote the interests of foreign countries or that serve the interests of political parties. Sometimes these attacks take the form of legislative initiatives aimed at damaging the working environment of CSOs.

The activity of monitoring and documenting the attacks was necessary in the context in which an increasing number of independent CSOs are becoming the target of numerous discrediting and denigration actions, after they criticized or expressed disagreement with the government's actions.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of the document is to draw attention to orchestrated attacks against CSOs and to prompt public authorities, companies and individuals who support them to cease attacks and allow CSOs to operate freely. It also aims to enable CSOs to formulate a reaction to attacks against them.

Compared to previous documents, the current edition also includes attacks on HRDs, which are an important part of civil society. HRDs are individuals or groups who act peacefully to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, at the local, national, regional and international levels. Their work is protected by the 1998 UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Society's Entities

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<sup>1</sup> Radiography of attacks on non-governmental organizations in the Republic of Moldova, September 2016 - December 2017, available at: [https://crim.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2018-02-21\\_radiografia-atac-ONGs\\_fin.pdf](https://crim.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2018-02-21_radiografia-atac-ONGs_fin.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Radiography of attacks on non-governmental organizations in the Republic of Moldova, January - December 2018, available at: [http://crim.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2019-03-19-timeline-atac-OSC\\_2018\\_final.pdf](http://crim.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2019-03-19-timeline-atac-OSC_2018_final.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Radiography of attacks on non-governmental organizations in the Republic of Moldova, January - December 2019, available at: <https://crim.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2020-05-13-Timeline-attacks-CSOs-RO.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Radiography of attacks on civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova, January 1 – December 31, 2020, available at: <https://crim.org/radiografia-atacurilor-asupra-organizatiilor-societatii-civile-din-republica-moldova-in-2020/19034/>.

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Council, Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Visit to the Republic of Moldova, 2019, A/HRC/40/60/Add.3, paras. 36-37, available at: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/60/ADD.3>.

to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms<sup>6</sup>.

HRDs are often sanctioned, harassed and intimidated for their work to protect and promote human rights. In this document, we will describe the cases of HRD harassment in the Republic of Moldova in 2021. These cases are not exhaustive, but representative of the way in which the HRDs are being silenced in the Republic of Moldova. The most frequent cases of intimidation of the HRDs were carried out through complaints to law enforcement bodies and other state institutions, including by taking legal action for slander.

The information included in the document was obtained from the media resources available online and social networks, court decisions published online and from individual discussions with some HRDs. The monitoring and documentation of the attacks took place throughout 2021. Monitoring may not be exhaustive. Attacks **against CSOs** are included in chronological order, starting with January 2021. Some attacks were indicated in a single block, depending on the object (e.g. attacks in the context of early parliamentary elections) or the subject of the attack (denigrating articles against a particular CSO). Attacks against HRDs are listed in alphabetical order. References are made in the document to the webpage where the relevant materials were published. Some links are no longer active, but the authors of the Radiography have evidence of the publication of the materials in question. In the Radiography for 2021, we included both attacks on civil society and the reactions of national CSOs.

The phenomenon of attacks on civil society is not an isolated problem for the Republic of Moldova. It is already a trend in the countries of the south-eastern region of Europe with a fragile level of democracy. The methods and tools by which this is done are becoming more sophisticated and widespread.<sup>7</sup> One of the many negative consequences of these actions is that CSOs and civic activists are forced to self-censor or be less active.<sup>8</sup> Based on the experience of other states in the region, we can say that the stigmatization of CSOs can be a precursor to persecution actions by the state.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> UN, Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Resolution 53/144, 9 December 1998, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-right-and-responsibility-individuals-groups-and>.

<sup>7</sup> Balfour R., Bouchet N., Policy Paper "Supporting Civil society in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans: Old and New Challenges", 2018, GMF Europe Program, available at: <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/supporting-civil-society-eastern-europe-and-western-balkans-old-and-new-challenges>.

<sup>8</sup> Amnesty International, "Laws designed to silence: the global crackdown on civil society organizations", 2019, ACT 30/9647/2019, p. 2, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ACT3096472019ENGLISH.PDF>.

<sup>9</sup> Buyse A., "Squeezing civic space: restrictions on civil society organizations and the linkages with human rights", 2018, The International Journal of Human Rights, 22:8, p. 966-988, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13642987.2018.1492916>.

initiative to document and monitor attacks [is inspired by Hungary](#), a country whose associative environment has been facing similar challenges for several years. The document is prepared and presented by the signatory organisations indicated at the end of the publication, which collaborated on data collection.

If you have information that can be categorized as an attack on CSOs, it can be sent to [contact@crjm.org](mailto:contact@crjm.org) email address to be included in the next monitoring report.



## Summary

Attacks against civil society organizations (CSOs) in 2021 decreased in number and complexity compared to previous years. The document also analyzes several attacks against human rights defenders (HROs).

Mainly, the attacks against CSOs were centered around a major political event, namely the early parliamentary elections of July 11, 2021. The attacks were diverse and referred to the creation of the narrative of danger coming from abroad, including through CSOs, attacks on two CSOs that conducted opinion polls before the elections, accusations against CSOs regarding the financing of opposition parties. Also, in 2021, cyberattacks on a CSO and an attack by the Prosecutor General in office at the time were recorded.

In the document, we analyzed five cases of attacks against ADOs that either took place in 2021 or started earlier and took place in 2021. These attacks target four ODAs – three in the media sector and a member of the Council for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination and Ensuring Equality (CPPEAE). Three ODAs are represented by the organizations Center for Investigative Journalism (CIJ), RISE Moldova and Ziarul de Garda. They have been harassed with lawsuits and complaints to various state institutions after publishing articles targeting corruption by high-ranking officials – chief prosecutors and a former state president. The last case concerns the harassment of Yevgeny GOLOSHCHEAPOV through law enforcement bodies for his human rights work within the CPPEAE.

The early parliamentary elections of July 2021 generated the most attacks on CSOs. Representatives of the PSRM, including former President Igor Dodon, promoted the narrative of danger from abroad, of the governance of Moldova by foreigners, including through CSOs. Such a narrative is often used as a scarecrow in elections to gain political capital. The launch of pre-election opinion polls by two CSOs (the Institute for Public Policy and the Watchdog.md Community) has caused attacks on these organizations and their directors both from some politicians and in the pro-socialist press. An obscure foreign publication published an article a week before the parliamentary elections according to which foreign governments had financed opposition parties through many NGOs. The article was widely distributed by the press favorable to the socialists. Subsequently, the publication ceased its activity.

Another attack was aimed at the launch, a few days before the elections, of the Russian translation of the so-called "research" by Socialist MP Bogdan Țîrdea on CSOs in Moldova in 2020. The attack and Țîrdea's statements were taken over by the Socialists and the press affiliated with them. In 2020, CSOs mentioned that MP Țîrdea discredited non-governmental organizations based on forgeries, defamatory accusations, insinuations, manipulation of financial data and erroneous and malicious comparisons.

The same conclusions apply to the 2021 attack, with Socialist MP Țîrdea using the same tool a second time, the same in an electoral campaign.

The year 2021 saw a diversification of attacks against CSOs. In August 2021, the ICJ website was subjected to several cyberattacks. There have been attacks on CSOs and from the highest representatives of law enforcement bodies. On October 4, 2021, the Prosecutor General at the time Alexandr STOIANOGLO stated in a press conference that some CSOs, independent media and some development partners are involved in discrediting and blaming him, including referring to two studies launched in September 2021 by the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE) and the Center for Legal Resources of Moldova (LRCM). Several CSOs condemned the Prosecutor General's slanderous and unacceptable statements to non-governmental organizations, independent media, and development partners.

These events generated, as in previous years, a large content of attacks directed against CSOs, using "classic" tricks of denigration of their activity: labeling the activity of CSOs as an activity in the interest of the parliamentary opposition or Western countries, interference in the internal affairs of Moldova, limiting the country's sovereignty through external funding of CSOs, etc. As in previous years, attacks on CSOs were widely replicated by part of the Moldovan press, increasing their defamatory effect.

Most of the attacks against CSOs in 2020 came from members of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM), such as Igor DODON, ex-president of the Republic of Moldova, Bogdan ȚÎRDEA, PSRM MP, Grigore NOVAC, PSRM MP. There were attacks from the politician Renato USATÎL, president of the political party Our Party, Dorin CHIRTOACA, ex-mayor of mun. Chisinau, of the political analyst Vitali CATANĂ and of the Prosecutor General at that time, Alexandr STOIANOGLO.

Most of the attacks were recorded against the following CSOs: Institute for Public Policy, Watchdog.md Community, Institute for European Policies and Reforms, Center for Legal Resources of Moldova, Center for Investigative Journalism, Promo-LEX, Expert Group, Center for Independent Journalism, Institute for Strategic Initiatives, Transparency International Moldova, etc.

The media portals "active" in attacks against CSOs in 2021 were similar to those of previous years: [www.telegraph.md](http://www.telegraph.md), [www.sinteza.org](http://www.sinteza.org), [www.paranteze.md](http://www.paranteze.md), [www.actualități.md](http://www.actualități.md), [www.abcnews.md](http://www.abcnews.md), [www.primul.md](http://www.primul.md), [www.stiridinmoldova.md](http://www.stiridinmoldova.md), [www.politics.md](http://www.politics.md), [www.a-tv.md](http://www.a-tv.md), [www.ntv.md](http://www.ntv.md), [PSRM website](#), etc.

## Attacks against civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Republic of Moldova in 2021

**May 2021: promoting the narrative "Moldova is in danger. We do not give the country to foreigners"**

On July 11, 2021, early parliamentary elections were held in the Republic of Moldova. Even before the electoral campaign, which usually takes place a month before the elections, the ruling Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM) started a campaign to promote the narrative of danger coming from abroad, including through CSOs.

Starting with May 6, 2021, the PSRM has installed billboards in the country, in Romanian and Russian, with the message "*Moldova is in danger. We do not give the country to foreigners.*" The message was an electoral one, although the electoral campaign had not yet begun. The registration of electoral contestants began on May 12, 2021, and the next day, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) registered the Electoral Bloc of Communists and Socialists (BECS). The chairman of the parliamentary faction of the PSRM, Corneliu FURCULITA, [said](#) that these panels did not refer to the electoral campaign, but to the party's activity and were paid by the PSRM.

On May 7, 2021, **Igor Dodon, the former President of the Republic of Moldova**, in his video-blog "[President Igor Dodon responds](#)" reinforced this message, which was actually an electoral message. He warned that the accession of the right-wing force to power meant the surrender of Moldova to foreigners: "*If the right comes to power, then they will increase the retirement age, the state will come under external control – NGOs, Soros, Americans and Europeans will direct here, but not Moldovans,*" ... "*If they come with Harvard, who walk around with their bags on their backs, and take power, there will be total chaos. We will manage in this situation as well, we have seen different ones - who considered themselves big and strong, but the country is in danger*", launching the urge to consolidate the center-left parties, in order to protect the national interest.

	<p><b>Publications favorable to the Telegraph.md and Sinteza.md</b> Socialists published articles informing about those billboards and quoting Dodon's position, without presenting a competing opinion.</p> <p>On May 14, 2021, <a href="#">NewsMaker</a> asked Igor DODON what these billboards installed in the country mean. Dodon reproached journalists that the NewsMaker publication is financed from abroad. He said: <i>"I'm repeating for NewsMaker, although they know it well. Who pays them, the Americans... As they say, who pays, he orders the music. In no case do I want to make any accusations. We have good relations with NM journalists, I give them interviews. In some state structures, decisions are now taken not by Moldovan citizens, but by various advisers, who receive salaries from funds abroad. Let's leave aside the question of who finances you. Do you think it's normal? What kind of state is it if the "boys" from outside the country decide for us? We are not in this case a state, but a banana republic."</i></p> <p><b>NOTE.</b> The narrative of danger coming from abroad, including through CSOs, is often used by some political forces as an electoral scarecrow to win elections. They use conspiracy theories and various stereotypes to manipulate the electorate.</p>
<p><b>June-July 2021: attacks against IPPs and Watchdog.md in connection with the launch of opinion polls</b></p>	<p>On July 11, 2021, early parliamentary elections were held in the Republic of Moldova. In June 2021, the Institute for Public Policy (IPP) and the Watchdog.md Community launched two pre-election opinion polls (<a href="#">poll 1</a>, <a href="#">poll 2</a>). On July 5, 2021, IPP launched <a href="#">the Public Opinion Barometer (BOP)</a>. All polls included several questions, including about trust in Moldovan political figures and the option of voting for political parties and blocs in parliamentary elections.</p> <p>After each event to launch the polls and the BOP, there were attacks on these organizations and their directors both from politicians and in the pro-socialist press.</p> <p>On June 9, 2021, <b>the Sinteza.org publication</b> wrote an <a href="#">article</a> entitled <i>"BOP poll: Moldovans do not trust BOP polls"</i>, in which it accused Arcadie BARBĂROȘIE, director of IPP, and Valeriu PASA, director of Watchdog.md, of political partisanship as a result of the launch of the survey. The publication did not cite the opinion of the above-mentioned people. Also on June 9, 2021, <b>the</b></p>

**publication Telegraph.md** wrote an [article](#) entitled "*A Romanian sociologist makes dust out of the WatchDog survey*" in which it quotes the opinion of a sociologist who criticizes the first opinion poll launched on the same day by IPP and Watchdog.md, without asking the opinion of the authors of the survey.

On June 29, 2021, **Telegraph.md** wrote an [article](#) titled "*Who and for what publishes fake 'polls'? The WatchDog case of Valeriu Pasha*". It reproduced a press release of the "**Renato Usatyî**" **Electoral Bloc** accusing Watchdog.md of falsifying and manipulating sociological data in favor of right-wing parties. The article did not seek Watchdog.md's opinion. On the same day, the same publication wrote another [article](#) entitled "*Renato Usatyî says that the WatchDog Association is sponsored to favor the PAS in these elections*", without presenting Watchdog.md's opinion.

On July 2, 2021, **Renato USATÎL, president of the political party Our Party**, announced the results of the BOP that was to be released in a few days, and [accused](#) Arcadie BARBĂROȘIE, director of IPP, of political partisanship in favor of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) and of manipulating data. On the same day, **Sinteza.org** wrote an [article](#) entitled "*Renato Usatyî: BOP and WatchDog polls are propaganda for PAS. This is what only Plahotniuc did*", in which he reproduced Usatyî's statements, but did not ask for the opinion of the IPP or Watchdog.md. Also on July 2, 2021, **the Telegraph.md publication** wrote an [article](#) entitled "*Usatyî, about the BOP and WatchDog: If you don't qualify, at the next election the CEC should no longer allow you to do polls and go to watch harbuji*", with similar content in which Usatyî's speech was reproduced, without asking for the opinion of the IPP or Watchdog.md.

Following the release of the results of this poll, **Renato USATII, president of the political party Our Party**, [said](#) in a program that "*By law, next time I will forbid them, democracy is over for these people with polls. If you assumed the margin of 2-3% and you were wrong with 10%, don't be upset, in the next elections you won't do any polls. The CEC will reject the registration. Because this is propaganda and manipulation.*" On July 7, 2021, **Sinteza.org** published an [article](#) entitled "*Renato Usatyî on the BOP: Democracy will end at these polling houses*", in which it reproduced Usatyî's statements, but did not ask for the opinion of the IPP.

	<p><b>NOTE:</b> Renato USATÎl made these statements probably being dissatisfied with the results of the polls and the BOP, according to which the trust in the politician Usatyî constituted only 0.8% (poll 1), 2% (poll 2) and 3.3% (BOP), respectively. Of the decided respondents, 5% (poll 1), 6.3% (poll 2) and 4.6% (BOP) respectively said they will vote for the "Renato Usatyî" Electoral Bloc. Following the early parliamentary elections of July 11, 2021, Our Party <u>accumulated</u> 4.10% (i.e. less than indicated in the opinion polls and BOP) and did not pass the electoral threshold to enter Parliament.</p>
<p><b>July 2021: Attacks accusing CSOs of funding opposition parties</b></p>	<p>On July 11, 2021, early parliamentary elections were held in the Republic of Moldova. During the election campaign, there were several attacks suggesting that CSOs had financed the electoral campaign of opposition parties.</p> <p>On July 4, 2021, a week before the snap parliamentary elections, <b>the online publication <u>New Europe</u></b>, based in Brussels, Belgium, published an <u>article</u> titled "<i>A secret €56 million operation to remove Russia from a post-Soviet state.</i>" New Europe wrote that it had come into possession of secret documents from the special services of a European Union (EU) member state, which would have shown that the West is investing about EUR 56 million in ensuring the victory of the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) in the early parliamentary elections of July 11, 2021.</p> <p>According to the alleged secret documents, most of the money would have come from two states: Germany and the United States of America. According to New Europe, Romania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Great Britain and Italy were also involved in this financing. The funding would have been made through several instruments: non-governmental foundations (Open Society Foundations, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, European Endowment Democracy, Soros Foundation, etc.), European parties from the same political family, government projects and private companies. According to this article, a network of 253 national CSOs (citing in particular: Promo-LEX, WatchDog, IPP, Expert Grup, Independent Journalism Center, Institute for Strategic Initiatives, Institute for European Policies and Reforms, Legal Resources Center of Moldova, Transparency International Moldova, etc.) were allegedly involved in this illegal financing scheme.</p>

Subsequently, this article was translated and taken over by pro-socialist portals - [paranteze.md](http://paranteze.md), [actualități.md](http://actualități.md), [abcnews.md](http://abcnews.md), [primul.md](http://primul.md), [stiridinmoldova.md](http://stiridinmoldova.md), [sinteza.org](http://sinteza.org) - without presenting the position of the mentioned CSOs.

**NOTE 1.** The article in New Europe can be seen as a reply to the one published by the renowned German newspaper [Bild](#) which wrote on June 22, 2021 that [Russia invested](#) over 11 billion euros to make the socialist Dodon president of Moldova (in the presidential elections in Moldova in autumn 2020), and which included excerpts from confirmatory documents.

The New Europe publication [is not credible](#). She was in the midst of [media scandals](#) in Romania in 2013 related to corruption. The article published by New Europe does not present evidence and contains a number of erroneous data. For example, the amount of 56 million euros is exorbitant, given that about 1.4 million euros were spent in the entire campaign in Chisinau, according to [the weekly financial reports](#) that the parties are obliged by law to submit to the CEC. The purpose of the publication seems to be to influence public opinion by negatively portraying the work of CSOs and opposition parties. The article reflected exclusively the opinion of the author (indicated under a pseudonym), without presenting the position of the organizations concerned. In the meantime, the publication's website has become unavailable.

On July 5, 2021, **political analyst Vitali CATANĂ** told the media portal [politics.md](http://politics.md) (later taken over by [a-tv.md](http://a-tv.md), [primul.md](http://primul.md)), referring to the rumors about the secret financing of the country's President Maia SANDU and PAS by certain European countries and organizations, that: *"we see in the Moldovan public space all kinds of NGOs and activists who mimic intense and useless activities in order to get hold of the most expensive cars and houses they own."*

On July 5, 2021, **Dorin CHIRTOACĂ**, the **ex-mayor of mun. Chisinau**, [accused the](#) European Union of direct involvement in the elections in the Republic of Moldova. Chirtoaca said that *"this structure of civic organizations, non-governmental organizations, including the press, and websites, and televisions, which receive funding of millions of euros, already many people say "PAS press" simply, as well as the "PAS NGOs", in fact this campaign is carried out with them"*. This statement was later taken over by other media



portals favorable to the socialists: [telegraph.md](https://www.telegraph.md), [ntv.md](https://www.ntv.md), without presenting other opinions.

On July 6, 2021, at a [press conference](#), **Socialist MP Grigore NOVAC** asked the Prosecutor General's Office to take notice of this alleged case of illegal financing. The next day, prosecutors submitted this request to the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) for examination.

**NOTE 2.** On September 16, 2021, the CEC [replied](#) to the Prosecutor's Office that it had examined the complaint and had not detected any deviations or other illegalities admitted by PAS in the electoral campaign process within the early parliamentary elections, as indicated in the notification of MP Novac based on the investigation from New Europe.

On July 7, 2021, **Socialist MP Bogdan ȚÎRDEA** presented at a [press briefing](#) the Russian version of the book "Civil Society of the Republic of Moldova: Sponsors. NGO-crazy. Culture Wars", launched in October 2020 in the electoral campaign for the presidential elections (see details in [the X-ray of attacks on CSOs in 2020](#)). Țîrdea said that in the presidential campaigns of 2016 and 2020, Maia Sandu used "dirty money, laundered through NGOs". According to Țîrdea, during the 2016 campaign, "the British Embassy and the European Endowment for Democracy pumped 2 million lei into the Center for Analysis and Evaluation of Reforms (CAER), which in turn transferred this money to the electoral fund of candidate Maia Sandu, which amounts to over 1.45 million lei. In the 2020 campaign, more than 30 NGOs were involved, and the representatives of these institutions made hundreds of donations in favor of candidate Maia Sandu. From the NGOs financed from abroad, 266480 lei were transferred to Maia Sandu's account. But that's the official part, in reality the amount is ten times higher." Țîrdea's statements were taken over by the Socialists and their affiliated media (e.g. [socialistii.md](https://www.socialistii.md), [telegraph.md](https://www.telegraph.md), [ntv.md](https://www.ntv.md)).

**NOTE 3.** In 2020, when Socialist MP Țîrdea launched the so-called research on CSOs in Moldova, CSOs [condemned](#) the unprecedented attack launched by MP Țîrdea, defining it as the harshest, most complex and assumed frontal attack launched by a Moldovan politician against the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, against the fundamental rights and freedoms of the



country's citizens and against the modernization of the Republic of Moldova according to the European model. They mentioned that MP Țîrdea discredited non-governmental organizations on the basis of forgeries, defamatory accusations, insinuations, manipulation of financial data and erroneous and malicious comparisons. The same conclusions apply to the 2021 attack, with Socialist MP Țîrdea using the same tool a second time, the same in an electoral campaign.

**NOTE 4.** These attacks were also aimed at diverting attention from a recently published [press article](#), according to which Russian consultants coordinated by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) came to the Republic of Moldova to consult the PSRM, the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) and the "Shor" Party in the electoral campaign for the early parliamentary elections of July 2021.

**NOTE 5.** The legislation of the Republic of Moldova strictly prohibits NGOs from providing financial support to political parties (Article 6 of the Law on Non-Commercial Organizations, Article 41 of the Electoral Code, Article 26 paragraph 6 letter h) of the Law on Political Parties and Article 52 paragraph 2 letter d) of the Fiscal Code) and also from carrying out electoral agitation in favor of any candidate in elections (Article 6 paragraphs 3-5 of the Law on Non-Commercial Organizations). Therefore, CSOs cannot transfer financial resources to political parties.

### August 2021: cyberattacks against the ICJ website

During August 2021, the website of the Center for Investigative Journalism (CIJ) [www.anticoruptie.md](http://www.anticoruptie.md) was subjected to several **cyberattacks**. The site's activity was especially jeopardized on August 11 and 12, 2021, when the portal was permanently blocked during certain periods of these days.

The identity of the attacks is not known, but the company Inovare-Prim SRL, which provides hosting for the CIJ portal, [confirmed](#) that the attacks were committed from outside, and their strategy diversified as they were unveiled and annihilated. Similar attacks were recorded during the electoral campaign for the February 2019 parliamentary elections and on the eve of the 2020 presidential elections.

	<p>The reason for the attacks is not known, but Cornelia COZONAC, president of the ICJ, <a href="#">considered</a> that these attacks were directly related to the professional activity of the reporters of the ICJ and that they were attempts to intimidate and silence.</p> <p>Anticorupție.md is a portal specialized in anti-corruption and journalistic investigations on the topics of corruption, fraud, integrity issues of dignitaries, fraudulent management of public money and organized crime. Reporters from the CIJ have been monitoring people who aspire to public office for several years, publishing their profiles, with all the details, based on documents. Cozonac assumed that anticorupție.md activity was the reason behind these attacks.</p>
<p><b>October 2021: attack on civil society by Prosecutor General Alexandr STOIANOGLO</b></p>	<p>On October 4, 2021, <b>the Prosecutor General at the time Alexandr STOIANOGLO</b> stated in a <a href="#">press conference</a> that some CSOs, independent media and some development partners are involved in his "<i>discrediting and blaming</i>". In a <a href="#">document</a> published on the same day on the website of the Prosecutor General's Office, images from the phone of a former prosecutor were presented, showing the correspondence between him and several representatives of civil society and the diplomatic corps. This correspondence dated from December 2019 and contained information about the prosecutor's office. It seems that the prosecutors obtained access to this correspondence following the decryption of the information on the former prosecutor's phone in a criminal case.</p> <p>Several civil society organizations (CSOs) <a href="#">condemned</a> the Prosecutor General's slanderous and unacceptable statements to non-governmental organizations, independent media, and development partners. CSOs indicated that these statements denote a lack of understanding of the role of civil society and the prosecutor's office in a society based on the rule of law.</p> <p>CSOs expressed regret that the resources of the Prosecutor General's Office were used for monitoring CSOs, their representatives and activities, instead of things of primary importance for the Republic of Moldova, such as: investigating the robbery of the banking system, the Laundromat or the illegal financing of political parties. CSOs expressed concern that the Prosecutor General knowingly and personally admitted the</p>

publication of information from criminal investigations, which is confidential. The disclosure of private correspondence and criminal prosecution materials constitute crimes according to the Criminal Code.

In his statements, the Prosecutor General referred to two studies launched in September 2021 by the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE) and the Center for Legal Resources of Moldova (LRCM). The CSOs indicated that by presenting the analyses and formulating recommendations for the justice sector, IPRE and LRCM acted guided by the public interest and used official data published by the prosecutor's office in this regard. The launch of these documents took place during this period, being postponed due to the electoral campaign. The conclusions of the documents were not challenged by prosecutors. Moreover, similar analyses were carried out by the LRCM until the appointment of Mr. Stoianoglo as Prosecutor General. The signatory organizations mentioned that IPRE and LRCM remain committed to promoting the necessary reforms in the justice sector and to promoting democracy in the Republic of Moldova.

CSOs considered that the accusations launched by the Prosecutor General were aimed at distracting public attention from the problems in the prosecutor's office, such as the lack of progress in investigating the robbery of the banking system and the Laundromat, for which the Prosecutor General was criticized by the entire society. Also, the attack of the Prosecutor General occurred exactly on the day when several investigations were published based on #PandoraPapers documents, which bring to the fore cases of high-level corruption and money laundering through tax havens, diverting attention from them.

Subsequently, prosecutor Stoianoglo was accused of violating the inviolability of personal life as a result of the disclosure of confidential data from the criminal investigation at the press conference of October 4, 2021.

## Attacks against human rights defenders in the Republic of Moldova in 2021

Human Rights Defenders (HROs) are individuals or groups who act peacefully to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, at the local, national, regional and international levels. Their work is protected by [the 1998 UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#).

According to [the European Union Guidelines on ADO, ADO's](#) activities include:

- documenting infringement cases;
- seeking remedies for victims of such violations by providing legal, psychological, medical or other support; and
- combating customs of impunity that serve to cover up systematic and repeated violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

ADOs are often sanctioned, harassed and intimidated for their work to protect and promote human rights. Next, we will describe the cases of ADO harassment in the Republic of Moldova in 2021. These cases are not exhaustive, but representative of the way in which the DA is being silenced in the Republic of Moldova. The most frequent cases of intimidation of the ADO were carried out through complaints to law enforcement bodies and other state institutions, including by taking legal action for slander.

### Center for Investigative Journalism harassed for the investigation into the wealth of the head of the Ciocana Office of the Chisinau Prosecutor's Office Igor POPA

*[The Center for Investigative Journalism \(CIJ\)](#) was created in 2003 for the development of investigative journalism in the Republic of Moldova. The ICJ has conducted more than 500 journalistic investigations on corruption and organized crime, human rights violations, child protection, etc. The ICJ manages the [www.anticoruptie.md](http://www.anticoruptie.md) online platform created for reporting and reporting cases of corruption and related crimes.*

In 2020, the ICJ published an investigation into the fictitious divorce of prosecutor Igor POPA and his family's undeclared assets. According to the investigation, prosecutor Popa resorted to a fictitious divorce to avoid declaring properties that did not correspond to the official income. Still during the documentation period, the CIJ and the authors of the investigation were harassed by prosecutor Popa's wife in order to intimidate them and stop them from documenting the case. At the end of 2011, the Anticorruption

Prosecutor's Office started a criminal case against Igor POPA for illicit enrichment and forgery in the declaration of assets.

On July 22, 2020, the ICJ [published](#) a journalistic investigation of public interest on the wealth of Igor POPA, head of the Ciocana office of the Chisinau Prosecutor's Office, former deputy prosecutor general during the Democratic Party of Moldova government. The journalistic investigation was prepared by the CIJ reporter, Julieta SAVIȚCHI and the civic activist Anatol MĂTĂSARU. The ICJ began work on the journalistic investigation at the end of 2018. Prosecutor Popa [divorced](#) his wife Ala POPA on October 20, 2016. However, more public information gave the ICJ reporters to suspect that it was a fictitious divorce and they began to document the case, including through personal observation. Even before the publication of the investigation, lawyer Ala POPA [began harassing the](#) CIJ and the civic activist Mătăsaru, in order to discourage them from continuing to document and publish the investigation.

During the investigations, CIJ reporters found that Igor Popa lived in a luxury apartment in the center of Chisinau, which was not found in his declaration of assets and interests, as well as other assets he used, but which belonged to his ex-wife Ala POPA. The CIJ reporters found that prosecutor Popa was divorced in documents and thus did not declare the real estate and cars registered in the name of his ex-wife. In reality, the investigation revealed that, despite the divorce, Igor and Ala Popa lived together. The CIJ reporters also investigated the income of lawyer Ala POPA, which was quite modest and could not have explained her wealth. Immediately after the divorce was pronounced, Ala POPA bought two apartments in a residential neighborhood in the center of Chisinau, where prices were among the highest in Chisinau, and several real estate.

The prosecutor's wife, Ala Popa, a lawyer, was the author of numerous harassments against the CIJ and the civic activist Mătăsaru right from the documentation phase of the investigation. She wrote complaints to several state institutions, to the National Center for Personal Data Protection (NCPDCP), to the Press Council, to the police and prosecutor's office, and took legal action. Some institutions followed up on the complaints of the prosecutor's wife at the stage when the case was barely documented. Others have started criminal trials and criminal cases.

The journalists began to document the case by verifying the assets of prosecutor Popa and his wife in the Register of Real Estate at the Cadastre, with which the CIJ had a contract. Shortly after, lawyer Ala POPA [asked for explanations](#) from the CIJ what was the reason for accessing her data from the Cadastre. Subsequently, at the complaint of lawyer Popa, the CNPDCP also asked for the same explanations from the CIJ and requested the presentation of the investigation they were working on. In both situations, the ICJ came up with the explanation that the investigations carried out were in order to verify the assumption that a person holding a public office would not have declared the properties he uses, this being part of the documentation process for a journalistic investigation and is part of the journalist's work, and that, According to the legislation,

journalists are not obliged to explain the reason for accessing databases with public information.

These arguments were not enough, however, so on January 30, 2020, the NCPDP repeatedly asked the ICJ to prove that the access to the data from the Cadastre was used for journalistic purposes and to present the journalistic material. On March 24, 2020, the NCPDP issued a [decision](#) no. 91 in which it found that ICJ journalists violated the Law on the Protection of Personal Data and the Code of Ethics of the Journalist when they carried out checks at the Cadastre. The CNPDCP found that the journalists did not prove that the verification of the data on the properties of Alley Popa was done for journalistic purposes, because no investigation or other journalistic material was published. In the same decision, the institution asked the Press Council to take a stand, investigate the case and inform all the media about the problem identified in the case. The ICJ described the CNPDCP's decision as a dangerous precedent for press freedom, and the actions of lawyer Ala Popa – an attempt to harass journalists and silence them.

The Press Council examined the NCPDP's request on April 7, 2020. The Press Council found that in the actions of the ICJ reporters, referred to in the CNPDCP decision, there were no violations of deontological norms or good journalistic practices. Also, the Press Council [informed the](#) NCPDP that accessing different types of personal data is part of the journalists' current activity of documenting press materials and verifying information.

After the publication of the journalistic investigation on July 22, 2020, Ala POPA [filed](#) a new series of complaints against the ICJ to various institutions. On July 24, 2020, lawyer Popa submitted a [request](#) asking the ICJ to answer several questions. The ICJ answered each question in detail. Subsequently, Ala Popa filed a [complaint](#) with the Press Council. Her complaint abounded in accusations, personal attacks and ugly labeling of the authors of the material. The press council asked for explanations from both the author of the investigation, Julieta SAVIȚCHI, and the CIJ. The ICJ [sent the](#) Press Council answers signed by the author Julieta SAVIȚCHI, and by the CIJ management, exposing again in detail the purpose of the investigation, the documentation process, the methods used, the way of verifying the information about the Popa family's properties. In August 2020, the Press Council decided not to examine Alley POPA's complaint, as applications were also submitted to the court.

Ala POPA again filed a complaint with the CNPDCP, in order to establish the legality of the journalistic investigation published on July 22, 2020. This time, Ala POPA asked to sanction the author of the Savițchi investigation, the activist Mătăsaru, who filmed for the investigation, the president of the CIJ, Cornelia COZONAC, as well as the CIJ. On October 9, 2020, the CNPCDP found "*the absence of violation of the provisions of Law no. 133/2011 on the protection of personal data by the Center for Investigative Journalism, Cornelia Cozonac, Julieta Savițchi and Anatol Mătăsaru*". The CNPCDP indicated that this complaint did not fall within its competence, but within the competence of the law enforcement bodies.

Lawyer Ala POPA also addressed the law enforcement bodies. She filed complaints in court, with the prosecutor's office and with the police against the activist Anatol MĂTĂSARU, who filmed for Anticoruptie.md in the investigation about the undeclared properties of prosecutor Popa. The Chisinau Court [rejected](#) as unfounded the request of lawyer Popa. The police filed a criminal case against the activist on the basis of Article 177 of the Criminal Code for violating the inviolability of personal life. At the end of 2021, the case was under the management of the Chisinau Court.

In November 2020, Ala POPA also filed a complaint against the CIJ with the Center Police Inspectorate, complaining about "*the illegal collection and unauthorized dissemination by the Center for Investigative Journalism of information about personal life (of Alley POPA) that constitutes a personal secret*". The police started a criminal trial in which they heard Ala POPA as a victim. At the same time, the police officers who dealt with the case requested the decisions of the CNPDCP. The criminal trial with no. 20200101462 of November 4, 2020 lasted almost a year, being examined in the light of the provisions of art. 177 of the Criminal Code, according to which the legislator establishes criminal liability for "violation of the inviolability of personal life", i.e. "the illegal collection or knowingly dissemination of information, protected by law, about the personal life, which constitutes a personal or family secret of another person, without his consent". Throughout the criminal trial, the police did not ask for explanations from the ICJ. On September 20, 2021, the Center Prosecutor's Office adopted the ordinance not to start the criminal investigation in the CIJ case, the reason being that "*the act does not meet the elements of the crime*".

The ICJ challenged in court the decision no. 91 of March 24, 2020 issued by the CNPDCP, qualifying it as abusive and illegal and aimed at intimidating journalists. After a year in which the trial did not advance at all, in July 2021, the case was removed from the docket, due to non-compliance with the procedure. According to the law, it was necessary to submit a prior application to the CNPDCP with the CIJ's claims, after which the appeal to the court. In the CNPDCP decision of March 24, 2020, the institution directly indicated that if the ICJ does not agree with the decision, it can be appealed within 30 days to the Riscani Court, which the ICJ did. However, the court found that it was not only the CIJ case that failed on the grounds that the procedure was not followed. Analyzing the judicial practice in relation to the NCPDP, it was found that most cases on NCPDP decisions that reach the court have the same fate. The ICJ [described the](#) NCPDP's decision as a dangerous precedent for press freedom, and the actions of lawyer Ala Popa as an attempt to harass journalists and silence them.

In November 2021, as a result of the CIJ investigation, the Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office filed a criminal case for illicit enrichment on behalf of prosecutor Igor POPA. Subsequently, the Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office filed another case on Popa's behalf for forgery in the declarations of assets. [According to the ICJ](#), lawyer Ala POPA was also accused in the case on illicit enrichment.



**NOTE:** The CIJ investigation concerned a case of concealment of a prosecutor's wealth, which could not be explained by his family's income. In the Republic of Moldova, corruption is endemic and affects human rights. As a result of the ICJ investigation, prosecutor Popa was accused of illicit enrichment and false public statements, meaning the investigation had an important impact on the fight against corruption. For this reason, in this case, the ICJ and the authors of the journalistic investigation into the unjustified wealth of a high-ranking dignitary represent human rights defenders.

### Center for Investigative Journalism harassed for the investigation into the assets of Deputy Prosecutor General Ruslan POPOV

Another case of harassment of *the Center for Investigative Journalism (CIJ)* (see above the description of the ICJ's activity) for its anti-corruption investigations is the one initiated by the Deputy Prosecutor General at the time, Ruslan POPOV. In 2020, the ICJ published a public interest investigation into the wealth **of the Deputy Prosecutor General, Ruslan POPOV**, which did not coincide with the official income of the Popov family. Subsequently, Popov began harassing the CIJ through a lawsuit. Until the end of 2021, there was still no finality of this process, the court hearings being postponed countless times.

On January 22, 2020, the ICJ published on Anticorupție.md portal the journalistic investigation "[The landowner at the head of the Prosecutor General's Office](#)" regarding the wealth of the Deputy Prosecutor General, Ruslan POPOV. According to the investigation, Popov had a business in the field of agriculture, which included an orchard of 100 ha in the village of Mileștii Mici, Ialoveni district. The business was registered in the name of Popov's father, who was retired and did not have the resources for such a business. The investigation mentioned that a refrigerator was also being built on that territory for storing the fruits. Apart from this, the investigation also provided details about the Popov family's real estate and luxury cars.

The next day, the Prosecutor General's Office published a [press release](#) according to which the information from the journalistic investigation was sent to the National Integrity Authority (ANI) for control. Most of the press release referred to Popov's explanations regarding the origin of the fortunes, with the mention that the denigrating information "*is intentionally directed by certain persons and groups of political, economic and criminal interests ... and could lead to their being held accountable, according to the law*", which sounded rather like a threat to the ICJ. On the same day, ANI [announced that it](#) had initiated the control over the legal regime of Popov's assets.

Following this journalistic investigation, on March 10, 2020, Ruslan POPOV sued the ICJ for harm to his honor, dignity and professional reputation. CIJ journalists [found out](#) about



the fact that Popov sued them and about the date of the first hearing on the website of the Chisinau Court, the CIJ not receiving any official summons. [The preliminary hearing](#) was scheduled for June 9, 2020, and since this date, during the years 2020-2021, the court hearings have been postponed numerous times. The Chisinau Court did not issue a court decision on this case until the end of 2021.

The control carried out by ANI was concluded over a year and a half from the initiation. On September 30, 2021, ANI [ceased](#) control of Popov's wealth and personal interests, [indicating](#) that there was no substantial difference between the Popov family's income and expenses. ANI notified the State Tax Service to carry out an inspection of Popov's father's peasant household, on the grounds that the control of his wealth is not within the competence of ANI. However, ANI did not fulfill its obligation to control the assets of the prosecutor's father. According to art. 33 of Law no. 132/2016 on ANI, if there is the appearance that the assets of the person subject to control have been registered in the name of other persons, the control will also extend to these assets and persons.

In October 2021, Ruslan POPOV [was detained](#) by the Anticorruption Prosecutor's Office, being later accused of [illicit enrichment](#).

**NOTE:** In this case, as in the case above, the ICJ investigation referred to the unjustified wealth of a prosecutor with a leading position. In the Republic of Moldova, corruption is endemic and affects human rights. For this reason, in this case, the ICJ represents a defender of human rights.

## **RISE Moldova harassed for investigation into illegal financing of PSRM**

[RISE Moldova](#) is a community of investigative journalists, programmers and activists from the Republic of Moldova and Romania founded in 2014. RISE Moldova investigates organized crime and makes connections from offshore areas, reveals money laundering schemes in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, corruption schemes, smuggling, tax fraud, arms trafficking and brings to light the hidden businesses of politicians. In 2015 and 2016, RISE was the partner for the Republic of Moldova of the global investigation projects #PanamaPapers and #SwissLeaks.

In 2016, RISE Moldova published a journalistic investigation of public interest on the illegal financing of the electoral campaign of **Igor DODON, chairman of the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM)**, through an offshore company. Dodon won the elections and became the president of the Republic of Moldova. RISE Moldova was sued by the PSRM and lost the lawsuit at the national level. In 2021, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled in favour of RISE Moldova and found the violation of freedom of expression.

In September 2016, a month before the presidential elections, RISE Moldova published a [journalistic investigation](#) in which it wrote that the PSRM would have benefited from sponsorships of 30 million lei (about USD 1.5 million) from an offshore company in the Bahamas connected to the Russian Federation, and this money benefited Igor DODON for the electoral campaign for the presidential elections. According to the investigation, a few months before the 2016 presidential elections, the offshore company transferred the money to Exclusiv Media SRL, based on a loan agreement concluded three days before the transfer. The contract stipulated that in the event of disputes, the law of the Russian Federation would apply and that a Russian arbitral tribunal would examine the disputes that arose. The company Exclusiv Media SRL was owned by PSRM deputy Corneliu FURCULITA, who, according to the investigation, has close relations with Dodon. According to RISE Moldova, Exclusiv Media SRL concluded loan agreements with several people close to the PSRM, who later made donations to the PSRM. Among these persons were Corneliu FURCULIȚĂ, MP and head of the PSRM faction in Parliament, Vasile BOLEA, PSRM MP, Maxim LEBEDINSCHI, member of the Central Electoral Commission at that time, Petru CORDUNEANU, PSRM municipal councillor, etc. The legislation of the Republic of Moldova prohibits the external financing of political parties and candidates in elections.

The company Exclusiv Media SRL [was already targeted in a criminal prosecution](#) for money laundering in the context of the transfer of the amount of USD 1.5 million from the offshore company in the Bahamas. The criminal investigation was opened by the National Anticorruption Center (NAC) on July 1, 2016, before the presidential election and before the publication of the RISE investigation. More details about this criminal investigation are not known.

After the publication of this journalistic investigation, the harassment of RISE Moldova through the courts began. On November 4, 2016, a few days before the second round of the presidential elections, both the PSRM and the company Exclusiv Media SRL [sued](#) RISE Moldova. Subsequently, Dodon became the president of the country, and in the PSRM action filed against RISE Moldova, all national courts ruled in favor of the PSRM. In the PSRM case **against RISE Moldova**, on December 21, 2017, the Chisinau Court partially admitted the request to summon the PSRM and forced RISE to publish a denial and pay the moral damage of MDL 10 thousand. The court considered that the statements and/or information spread about the PSRM regarding its financing from external funds, as well as regarding the financing by the PSRM from external funds of Igor DODON's electoral campaign were devoid of factual basis and did not correspond to reality. Mr. Dodon anticipated this court decision by about half a year, mentioning during [a TV show](#) [1:00:26 — 1:00:48] the court's solution. The decision of the Chisinau Court of Appeal was upheld by the Chisinau Court of Appeal on April 18, 2018 and by [the Supreme Court of Justice](#) on July 11, 2018. The courts forced RISE Moldova to publish a denial and express a public apology.

Some judges who examined the case at the national level were promoted by decrees of President Igor Dodon. For example, Judge Ala MALÎ was appointed to the Chisinau Court of Appeal (CA Chisinau) by the decree of March 12, 2018, i.e. exactly in the period when the appeal filed by RISE Moldova against the PSRM was being examined. A month later, she was part of the panel of judges that rejected this appeal.

In the second case, **Exclusiv Media SRL to RISE Moldova**, on February 22, 2017, the District Commercial Court partially admitted Exclusiv Media SRL's request. On May 31, 2018, the Chisinau Court of Appeal admitted the appeal of RISE Moldova, quashed the decision of the first instance and decided to send the case back for retrial. After more than 3 years, in March 2020, following the retrial, the Chisinau Court of the Center rejected the action of Exclusiv Media SRL as unfounded.

RISE Moldova appealed to the ECtHR and invoked the violation of the freedom to communicate information guaranteed by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, due to the obligation of them to deny the information included in a journalistic investigation, which allegedly defamed the PSRM. After the ECtHR communicated the case to the Government in March 2019, the Government Agent (AG) asked the national courts to expressly recognize the violation of the applicants' freedom of expression and to award compensation. On December 3, 2020, the Chisinau Board of Directors admitted the request for review submitted by the GA and rejected as unfounded the defamation action filed by the PSRM, but did not grant RISE Moldova compensation. The decision of the Chisinau CA became final, as no one appealed. On October 12, 2021, the ECtHR found a violation of the rights of RISE Moldova because, although the authorities found the violation of their freedom of expression, they did not provide compensation in this regard.

**NOTE:** The RISE Moldova investigation referred to one of the most harmful forms of corruption – the illegal financing of a political party and an electoral candidate. Corruption in the Republic of Moldova is systemic and affects human rights. One of the forms of harassment is legal action, which involves costs, time, qualified personnel and other resources. For this reason, in this case, RISE Moldova represents a defender of human rights.

## **Yevgeny GOLOSHCHAPOV harassed for his work as a member of the Council for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination and Ensuring Equality**

**Evghenii GOLOSHCHAPOV** was at the time of the events one of the five members of the Council for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination and Ensuring Equality (CPPEDAE). CPPEDAE is a national public institution for the protection of human rights specializing in the field of equality and non-discrimination. The Council was founded by the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova on the basis of Law no. 121 of 25 May 2012

on ensuring equality. On June 15, 2018, the Parliament adopted Decision no. 112 by which he appointed Goloșceapov as a member of the CPPEDAE following a [public competition](#). One of the main tasks of the CPPEDAE is to examine complaints of discrimination.

In 2020, Evghenii GOLOȘCEAPOV was sanctioned for defamation as a result of the adoption of decisions as a member of the CPPEDAE. In 2021, the Chisinau Court terminated the contravention trial against Goloșceapov.

In 2020, Yevgeny GOLOSHCHEAPOV examined, as a member of the CPPEDAE, two complaints filed by a petitioner against lawyer Igor (Igor) HLOPETȘCHI. The first complaint was filed by the petitioner against lawyer Igor (Igor) HLOPETȘCHI and his client regarding alleged harassment on the basis of ethnic origin. On 17 July 2020, all five members of the Council adopted a [decision finding](#) that lawyer Igor HLOPETȘCHI had committed discriminatory actions against the petitioner in the form of harassment on the basis of ethnic origin. Taking into account the fact that Igor (Igor) HLOPETȘCHI was a lawyer, the Council submitted a copy of the decision for examination to the Ethics and Discipline Commission of the Union of Lawyers of the Republic of Moldova.

The second complaint was filed by the same petitioner in August 2020, against lawyer Igor (Igor) HLOPETȘCHI and his father, Igor (Pavel) HLOPETȘCHI, regarding alleged harassment based on ethnic origin. Goloșchapov was appointed rapporteur on the second case. On 13 November 2020, all five members of the Council adopted a [decision finding](#) that the father, Igor (Pavel) HLOPETȘCHI, had committed discriminatory actions against the petitioner in the form of harassment on the basis of ethnic origin. At the same time, the CPPEDAE declared inadmissible the complaint against lawyer Igor (Igor) Hlopetșchi, noting that it had already been exposed on it by the previous decision of July 17, 2020. Both decisions of the CPPEDAE were published on the institution's website and anonymized.

Following these decisions, lawyer Igor (Igor) HLOPETȘCHI filed a complaint against Goloșceapov for slander (art. 70 of the Contravention Code). The complaint was examined by the Center Police Inspectorate in which his father, Igor (Pavel) HLOPETȘCHI, [had a leading position](#), although Goloșceapov invoked the conflict of interest. On November 25, 2020, Goloșchapov was heard by agent Mikhail CURIANOV. On December 29, 2020, the policeman drew up the report finding that Goloșceapov committed the libel against lawyer Igor (Igor) HLOPETȘCHI. Goloșchapov received the copy of the minutes only on February 19, 2021, after repeated written requests.

Goloșchapov challenged the report in court, considering that Igor (Igor) HLOPETȘCHI's complaint regarding the slander was a revenge in connection with the exercise of his professional duties as a member of the CPPEDAE. Goloșchapov indicated that the report did not contain evidence that would have proven the slander and that the sanction was imposed on him unfoundedly.

On August 23, 2020, the Chisinau Court (Ciocana headquarters) [admitted](#) Goloșceapov's appeal and terminated the contravention trial against him. The court found that the content of the decisions adopted by the collegiate body CPPEAE did not result in acts of slander on the part of Goloșceapov against Igor (Igor) Hlopețchi and, respectively, that there is no act of contravention. The court noted that the ascertaining agent did not attach evidence regarding the alleged slander. Until the end of 2021, there was no information on the challenge of the decision of the Chisinau Court (Ciocana headquarters) of August 23, 2020 by the Center Police Inspectorate.

**NOTE:** Evghenii GOLOȘCEAPOV was sanctioned for his human rights activity within the Council for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination and Ensuring Equality. As established by the court, the policeman who sanctioned him for contravention had no evidence regarding the commission of slander by Goloshceapov. In addition, this policeman was hierarchically subordinated to the father of the lawyer who filed the libel complaint and was in a conflict of interest. Goloshchapov had to endure financial resources and time to defend himself against this arbitrary sanction, which resulted as a result of his human rights work. For this reason, in this case, Goloschapov represents a defender of human rights.

## Ziarul de Garda harassed for the investigation into the luxury vacations of the President of the country Igor DODON

[Ziarul de Garda \(ZdG\)](#) is a Moldovan newspaper founded in 2004. ZdG has published numerous journalistic investigations into corruption and human rights violations and has been sued for many of those investigations. Next, we will analyze how ZdG was harassed in court for an investigation into Igor DODON, the President of the Republic of Moldova at the time.

On January 16, 2020, ZdG published an article titled "[The President's Luxury Vacations](#)," which described the vacations of the last ten years of Igor DODON, President of the Republic of Moldova at the time of the investigation's publication. According to ZdG, Dodon and his family had benefited from at least 20 vacations between 2011-2020, some of them in luxury hotels and destinations, such as the Maldives, Seychelles, Dubai. The costs of these vacations did not correspond to the official income of the Dodon family. ZdG published several photos from those vacations, some of which were taken from social networks. ZdG also requested and published President Dodon's opinion sent through his press office.

After the publication of the investigation, President Dodon started harassing ZdG by taking him to court. On March 3, 2020, Igor DODON [filed a request for a summons against](#) ZdG regarding the defense of his honor, dignity and professional reputation

following the publication of the investigation into his vacations. Dodon asked the court to consider the following statements false and defamatory and harmful to his honor, dignity and professional reputation: *"At least, in 2018, the president's family was accommodated in one of the most luxurious hotels on the Greek peninsula Halkidiki: "Pomegranate Wellness Spa Hotel". In fact, the president would have been accommodated in a luxury villa located on the territory of the hotel, where just one night's accommodation can cost even 20 thousand euros."* Dodon asked the court that ZdG publish and spread the denial, including on the [www.zdg.md](http://www.zdg.md) website, in the same section, page, duration of time, and the text of the denial to be written with the same characters as the denied information.

In the summons request, President Dodon complained about the violation of his privacy. He indicated that the images published by ZdG were from the period before he became president, were private, were published without his consent and that they do not *"fall into the field of acceptable criticism or fair comments, the limits and purpose of the right to information being exceeded. The ECtHR, as a matter of principle, established that the public does not have a legitimate interest in knowing where a personality is to be found and how he behaves, even if he appears in public places, despite his notoriety. Everyone must have a 'legitimate expectation' of protection and respect for their privacy."*

President Dodon continued the harassment of ZdG by publicly encouraging politicians to sue ZdG. On May 15, 2020, during his periodic show on the YouTube platform "[President responds](#)" (min 31.20), President Dodon answered the question of the ZdG editorial office why he sued them for the article about his luxury vacations and which part is not true. ZdG mentioned that Dodon was the first head of state to sue the ZdG editorial office in the 16 years of activity until that moment. President Dodon said: *"You have to say thank you for advertising you and not asking for a share of sales. I'm kidding, you're going to give it to me and you're going to do shows out of it. I have a special esteem for all my colleagues in the press, but when they promote falsehoods, including about family life, obviously I will do my best to penalize you, according to the law. I'll check one day, and in the next episodes I'll give you all the legal addresses, not just against you. but to all those who distributed fakes. There are dozens of lawsuits in the last year and a half alone. There are already five, six, seven final decisions of the courts that agree with me, that they were erroneous information. Yes, how else can we work with you? If you publish all kinds of nonsense, about me, about my family members. I encourage all politicians who see that the press promotes fake news to go to court. Otherwise, how are we going to make a rule? If you don't answer and don't go to court, it means that you confirm. Otherwise, I am open to the press, any questions you have."*

Although ZdG sued for defamation and invasion of privacy, neither Dodon nor his lawyer appeared at the court hearings, except for the first hearing on May 19, 2020, at which Dodon's lawyer appeared. Under these circumstances, about a year and seven months after the filing of the summons request, on October 6, 2021, the Chisinau Court [ordered](#) the removal from the docket of Dodon's summons against ZdG. The court explained its decision by the fact that Dodon's lawyer received the summons on June 29, 2021, but

he did not present to the court any evidence confirming the impossibility of his presentation at the hearing (art. 267 letter g of the [Code of Civil Procedure](#)).

Igor DODON continued to intimidate ZdG. On November 10, 2021, four days after the summons against ZdG was removed from the docket, another lawyer representing Dodon filed a request with the Chisinau Court requesting the annulment of the Chisinau Court of November 6, 2021 to remove the request from the docket. Dodon's lawyer justified his request by the fact that Dodon's former lawyer unilaterally terminated the contract for legal services with Dodon on October 5, 2021, i.e. one day before the request against ZdG was removed from the docket. The lawyer allegedly tried to communicate this to Dodon by phone, but mentioned that he would not have succeeded due to a working visit by Dodon.

On December 16, 2021, the Chisinau Court [rejected the](#) request for the annulment of the conclusion of November 6, 2021. The court mentioned that no conclusive evidence was submitted to confirm the impossibility of presenting Dodon's lawyer at the hearing and notifying the court about his absence. The court noted that the lawyer had almost three months to inform the court about any impediments to the examination of the dispute between the parties, and the 15-day deadline for submitting the request for annulment of the conclusion was not respected.

**NOTE:** The ZdG investigation referred to luxury vacations of the highest-ranking politician in a state – the President of the Republic of Moldova. The official income of the president's family could not justify such vacations. In this case, it is obvious that President Dodon created a climate of intimidation against ZdG both by taking legal action and by publicly encouraging other politicians to sue ZdG, and subsequently by unjustifiably delaying court hearings. For this reason, in this case, ZdG is a defender of human rights.






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The Legal Resources Centre from Moldova (LRCM) is a nonprofit organization that contributes to strengthening democracy and the rule of law in the Republic of Moldova with emphasis on justice and human rights. Our work includes research and advocacy. We are independent and politically non-affiliated.

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