

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

**JANUARY 1, 2024 – FEBRUARY 28, 2025**







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# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS IN 2024..</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2024 ATTACKS RADIOGRAPHY.</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>CATEGORY 1: Accusations Regarding "Foreign Influence" Through Funding</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>CATEGORY 2: Discrediting and Delegitimizing the Work of CSOs and HRDs.</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>CATEGORY 3: Likening CSOs to Political Parties and Implying "Covert Control" Over the State.</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>CATEGORY 4: Direct Attacks on Independent Media and Journalists</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>CATEGORY 5: Use of Parallel Structures (GONGOs) and Disinformation Campaign</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>CATEGORY 6: Attacks Based on Conservative Ideology and Stigmatization of Vulnerable Groups</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>LIST OF SIGNATORY ORGANIZATIONS.</b>	<b>39</b>

# INTRODUCTION

Radiography of Attacks on Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Journalists, and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in the Republic of Moldova is a joint effort to document incidents and events that undermine and deteriorate their operating environment. The publication is now in its eighth edition, covering the period from January 1, 2024, to February 28, 2025.<sup>1</sup> Similar analyses have been conducted for the periods 2016-2017<sup>2</sup>, 2018<sup>3</sup>, 2019<sup>4</sup>, 2020<sup>5</sup>, 2021<sup>6</sup>, 2022<sup>7</sup> and 2023.<sup>8</sup>

**For the purposes of this document, "attacks" specifically refer to statements and actions by public figures, including dignitaries, politicians, opinion leaders, and digital content creators, aimed at discrediting or undermining the work of CSOs, journalists, and HRDs. These attacks commonly involve portraying them in a negative light through insinuations, labeling, and associations with controversial issues that generate strong societal reactions. Tactics also include intimidation and/or harassment, public defamation, threats, and the initiation of abusive legal proceedings (SLAPPs).**

In most cases, such attacks can take the form of disinformation campaigns, such as articles or headlines in the media, posts on social networks, messages distributed through communication applications, especially anonymous ones, news channel broadcasts, statements at public events, press conferences or live-streamed videos, which are often amplified across multiple media platforms.

<sup>1</sup> Although the analysis of attacks was originally planned for 2024, the scope of the assessment was extended to include attacks triggered by the suspension of USAID on January 25, 2025, given the significant impact of this event on the operational environment of civil society.

<sup>2</sup> Radiography of Attacks on Non-Governmental Organizations in the Republic of Moldova, September 2016 – December 2017, available at: <https://crjm.org/en/radiography-of-attacks-against-nongovernmental-organizations-from-the-republic-of-moldova-september-2016-december-2017/12897/>.

<sup>3</sup> Radiography of Attacks on Non-Governmental Organizations in the Republic of Moldova, January – December 2018: <https://crjm.org/en/radiography-of-attacks-against-non-governmental-organizations-from-the-republic-of-moldova-1-january-31-december-2018/12939/>.

<sup>4</sup> Radiography of Attacks on Non-Governmental Organizations in the Republic of Moldova, January – December 2019: <https://crjm.org/en/radiography-of-attacks-against-civil-society-organisations-in-2019/20901/>.

<sup>5</sup> Radiography of Attacks on Civil Society Organizations in the Republic of Moldova, January – December 2020: <https://crjm.org/en/radiography-of-attacks-on-civil-society-organisations-in-the-republic-of-moldova-in-2020/20897/>.

<sup>6</sup> Radiography of Attacks on Civil Society Organizations in the Republic of Moldova, January – December 2021: <https://crjm.org/en/radiography-of-attacks-on-civil-society-organizations-and-human-rights-defenders-in-the-republic-of-moldova-in-2021/21018/>.

<sup>7</sup> Radiography of attacks on Civil Society Organizations and Human Rights Defenders in the Republic of Moldova, January – December 2022: <https://crjm.org/en/radiography-of-attacks-on-civil-society-organizations-and-human-rights-defenders-in-the-republic-of-moldova-in-2022/19211/>.

<sup>8</sup> Radiography of attacks on Civil Society Organizations and Human Rights Defenders in the Republic of Moldova, January – December 2023: <https://crjm.org/en/radiography-of-attacks-on-civil-society-organizations-and-human-rights-defenders-in-the-republic-of-moldova-in-2023/22581/>.

Monitoring and documenting the attacks was necessary in a context where a significant number of CSOs, journalists, and HRDs are the targets of numerous discrediting and defamation campaigns. These attacks have intensified, particularly against those who have supported reform processes, promoted European integration, advocated for human rights—especially the rights of minority or disadvantaged groups—and/or received external funding to implement these activities.

**The purpose** of the document is to expose false narratives and combat orchestrated attacks by calling on public authorities, politicians and other relevant actors to cease such actions and ensure a safe and enabling environment for CSOs, journalists, and HRDs. Additionally, the document provides these stakeholders with a framework for developing coherent and well-reasoned responses to such attacks, thereby strengthening solidarity and cooperation within civil society.

The **phenomenon of attacks on civil society** is not an isolated problem for the Republic of Moldova but reflects a broader trend in countries with fragile democratic systems. This concern has been recognized by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders during his official visit to Georgia in 2023.<sup>9</sup> The methods and tools used in such attacks are becoming more sophisticated and widespread.<sup>10</sup> **One of the many negative consequences of these measures is that CSOs and civil society activists are constrained and driven to self-censor or become less active.**<sup>11</sup> Based on the experience of other countries in the region, it can be asserted that the stigmatization of CSOs may serve as a precursor to state-led persecution.<sup>12</sup>

The initiative to document and monitor these attacks was inspired by Hungary,<sup>13</sup> a country whose associative environment has been facing similar challenges for several years. The document is prepared and presented by the signatory organizations, listed at the end of the radiography, which collaborated in the data collection.

Information included in the paper was obtained from media sources available online and from social media or other public communication platforms. Attacks were monitored and documented throughout 2024 and the first two months of 2025. The monitoring is not intended to be exhaustive.

**If you have information that can be categorized as an attack on CSOs, please send it to [contact@crjm.org](mailto:contact@crjm.org) for inclusion in the next monitoring report.**

***The list of signatories appears at the end of the document.***

<sup>9</sup> Report of the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders October 30 – November 7, 2023, Visit to Georgia: <https://srdefenders.org/country-visit-report-georgia/>.

<sup>10</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: <https://www.gmfus.org/news/supporting-civil-society-eastern-europe-and-western-balkans-old-and-new-challenges>.

<sup>11</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>12</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>.

<sup>13</sup> The Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Timelines of governmental attacks against NGOs, November 17, 2017, available online: <https://helsinki.hu/en/timeline-of-governmental-attacks-against-ngos/>.

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS IN 2024

Attacks against civil society organizations (CSOs), journalists, and human rights defenders (HRDs) in the Republic of Moldova in 2024 remained at levels comparable to those of 2023, continuing to be widely disseminated through various communication channels.

Social media platforms such as **Facebook, YouTube and TikTok<sup>14</sup>** remain the main **platforms for the dissemination of such attacks**, being used to spread false information and narratives aimed at discrediting the associative sector. **At the same time, Telegram channels** experienced significant growth over the past year, remaining among the most widely used and attractive sources of information for Moldovan citizens. **Due to its anonymity and lack of regulation, Telegram still allows for a rapid and mass distribution of false, manipulative, and stigmatizing content.** Due to its anonymity and lack of regulation, Telegram continues to facilitate the rapid and mass dissemination of false, manipulative, and stigmatizing content. The lack of traditional accountability mechanisms makes it difficult to combat disinformation and protect civil society organizations from orchestrated smear campaigns.

The attacks in 2024 were centered around important events, such as the **presidential elections and constitutional referendum** in autumn of 2024, the **competition for the position of Prosecutor General**, and Moldova's annual **LGBT+ community festival, "Moldova Pride."**<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of 2025, following the announcement of the suspension of external funding from U.S. federal funds, there was an increase in attacks targeting organizations receiving financial support, particularly from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Simultaneously, attacks were closely linked to topics such as justice sector reform, targeting CSOs and their representatives who actively promoted or participated in this process. Media organizations and investigative journalists who have conducted investigations into former or current officials and politicians involved in alleged corruption, particularly during the election period, have also been the target of many of such attacks.

CSOs were further "demonized" for allegedly promoting foreign interests and benefiting from substantial external funding and "privileged access" to the media, development partners, power structures and international political organizations. They are also often accused of being behind all the country's reforms, which certain groups perceive as "failures." Another recurring allegation is that CSOs allegedly monopolize key public positions in various state institutions, thus exerting more influence than political parties. In addition, some NGOs continue to be associated with the concept of 'GONGOs' (Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations), i.e. NGOs allegedly created or funded by the government to promote its own political interests, thus distorting the concept of genuine civil society.

<sup>14</sup>IRI Poll: Where Do Moldovans Get Their Information? <https://agora.md/2024/07/17/sondaj-iri-de-unde-se-informeaza-moldovenii-facebook-youtube-si-tiktok-principalele-aplicatii-media-utilizate>

<sup>15</sup>Report on the situation of LGBT+ rights in the Republic of Moldova, 2024 [https://gdm.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Raport-GENDER-DOC-M-2024\\_romana.pdf](https://gdm.md/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Raport-GENDER-DOC-M-2024_romana.pdf)

In 2024, a new method of discrediting and weakening the associative environment in Moldova was identified—the establishment of NGOs that, although presented as having social, educational, or entertainment purposes, are, in fact, tools of political groups (e.g., the NGO Evrazia<sup>16</sup>). These organizations act as satellites of political parties or individuals with hidden agendas, diverting civic activity and promoting political interests.

In 2024, several CSOs and independent media institutions in Moldova were the target of frequent attacks. Among the targeted CSOs were the Institute for European Policy and Reforms (IPRE), the Legal Resources Centre from Moldova (LRCM), the WatchDog Community, and the Soros Foundation Moldova (SFM) which were criticized for allegedly promoting foreign interests, accessing foreign funding, and influencing decision-making process, including judicial reform and external evaluation of judges and prosecutors. IPRE was attacked in the context of the scandal over the illegal access to personal data during the competition for the position of Chief Prosecutor of the Prosecutor's Office for Combating Organized Crime and Special Cases (PCCOCS). LRCM was labeled the "architect of the failed judicial reform" and accused of influencing the external evaluation process through its former members involved in the vetting commissions. SFM was accused of promoting oligarchic interests and destabilizing the country through corruption and disregard for the constitution. WatchDog was the target of allegations of foreign funding, and was labeled as an organization that "should be eliminated" from the Republic of Moldova.

At the same time, independent media organizations such as Ziarul de Gardă (ZdG), Nokta.md, Independent Journalism Center (IJC), Free Europe, TV8 and Jurnal TV were attacked for alleged bias and 'government' affiliation, accused of reflecting the political reality in a way favorable to the authorities and of being funded by external partners. Attacks were also launched against HRDs including documentary journalists Viorica Tătaru and Andrei Captarenco, Ziarul de Gardă (ZdG) director Alina Radu, investigative journalist Mariana Rață, Nokta.md editor Mihail Sirkeli, TV8 journalist Ștefan Bejan, and ZdG journalist Felicia Ganev. They were subjected to various reprehensible labels.

Among the politicians who spread biased and defamatory information about CSOs and their representatives were: Ion Ceban, Mayor of Chișinău, Vasile Bolea, MP from the Victoria/Pobeda parliamentary group, Bogdan Țirdea, MP from the Bloc of Socialists and Communists of Moldova (BSCM), Vlad Filat, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, Igor Dodon, former President of the Republic of Moldova.

Among the most targeted media institutions were TV8, Jurnal TV, Europa Liberă, and ZdG, whose journalists were vilified. These institutions were accused of, under the guise of combating foreign propaganda, actually promoting the interests of their development partners who fund them. In a public statement, the IJC emphasized that "the lack of effective and prompt countermeasures has generated a climate of impunity and encouraged the perpetuation of these destructive practices."

<sup>16</sup>Ziarul de Gardă, article entitled „Ambasadorii Eurasiei” pe „Teritoriul Copilăriei”. Cum zeci de copii din R. Moldova au ajuns să-și petreacă vacanța în tabăra de „reeducare” a copiilor ucraineni, în cadrul unui program finanțat de „Eurasia” lui Ilan Șor” (*“Eurasian Ambassadors” on the “Territory of Childhood”. How dozens of Moldovan children ended up spending holidays in “re-education” camp for Ukrainian children, within program funded by Ilan Șor’s “Eurasia”*), available online: <https://www.zdg.md/investigatii/ancheta/ambasadorii-eurasiei-pe-teritoriul-copilariei-cum-zeci-de-copii-din-r-moldova-au-ajuns-sa-si-petreaca-vacanta-in-tabara-de-reeducare-a-copii/>.



On October 20, 2024, the first round of the presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova took place at the same time as the republican constitutional referendum on EU accession. During that period, attacks on civil society organizations and independent media significantly intensified as part of an aggressive discrediting campaign. The main targets were media outlets and journalists who documented and investigated sensitive issues such as electoral fraud, corruption and suspicious financial flows linked to political interest groups. They were the target of a constant wave of defamation, disinformation campaigns and direct attacks by presidential candidates. In the midst of such pressures, journalists faced serious obstacles in accessing key information about the candidates, and sometimes even reluctance to grant interviews. Some of them were accused of bias and unprofessionalism.

On January 20, 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump issued an executive order halting funding for U.S. foreign assistance programs. Its implementation by the State Department on January 24, 2025, led to the cessation of all forms of financial support for international development projects. Among the affected institutions was the US Agency for International Development (USAID),<sup>17</sup> one of the world's largest global aid donors. On February 3, 2025, Elon Musk, appointed by President Trump to head the newly created Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), announced his intention to shut down USAID entirely. In a public statement, Musk called the organization 'criminal' and claimed that it's time for it to die', justifying the cutoff of funding.<sup>18</sup>

The decision had a significant global impact, as USAID is the world's largest international donor. In Moldova, where the U.S. is the main development partner, the suspension of funds has affected civil society organizations, media outlets, and many businesses that relied on financial support to implement social and development projects.

With the suspension of USAID activities, the number of attacks against organizations receiving U.S. funding increased, reinforcing conspiratorial narratives about 'foreign influence' in Moldova. The smear campaigns intensified, particularly targeting civil society organizations and independent media institutions, especially those receiving USAID support. These organizations were accused of serving foreign interests, and, through this association, their activities were portrayed as "criminal."

<sup>17</sup>Ziarul de Gardă, article entitled „SUA suspendă finanțarea programelor externe de asistență. Trump a ordonat revizuirea acestora” (*“US suspends funding for foreign aid programs. Trump has ordered a review”*), available online: <https://www.zdg.md/stiri/sua-suspenda-finantarea-programelor-externe-de-asistenta-trump-a-ordonat-revizuirea-acestora/>.

<sup>18</sup>Agora, article entitled „Elon Musk: „USAID este o organizație criminală. Trebuie să moară” (*“Elon Musk: 'USAID is a criminal organization. It must die”*), available online: <https://agora.md/2025/02/03/elon-musk-usaid-este-o-organizatie-criminala-trebuie-sa-moara> which includes a link to the Politico article here <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/02/musk-usaid-time-00201987>.

# 2024 ATTACKS' RADIOGRAPHY

## CATEGORY 1.

### Accusations Regarding "Foreign Influence" Through Funding

Some of the 2024 attacks focused on the idea of "outside influence." This narrative suggests that international funding is a way of undermining state sovereignty and that CSOs that benefit from such funding are serving foreign agendas. Some discourses even propagate the idea that financial support from development partners is a mechanism of "hidden political control." In reality, external funding follows transparent procedures that are subject to audit and legal regulation, and the involvement of CSOs in projects supported by external donors contributes to strengthening democracy and the rule of law. These accusations typically arise when CSOs expose irregularities in public institutions or advocate for necessary reforms. Instead of responding to substantive criticism, the strategy is to label them as "foreign agents" pursuing hidden interests.

**May 11, 2024**

Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Valeriu Ostalep, participating in the program "[7 zile](#)" (7 Days) on TV Cinema 1, commented on the events in Georgia related to the protests against the legislation restricting the activities of NGOs. His statements were reported by the online news portal [noi.md](#).

Ostalep asserted that the events in Georgia "*demonstrate the extent to which NGOs can influence politics in former Soviet countries,*" suggesting that these organizations may have a hidden agenda and represent foreign interests. He further implied that the protests in Georgia were organized and led by the country's civil society sector.

**July 24, 2024**

Columnist Vladislav Bordeianu [published](#) an article on the online portal [noi.md](#) attacking the Soros Foundation Moldova and other CSOs, using the term 'Sorosists' to refer to pro-Western politicians and NGOs that he said "*act to the detriment of their own country.*" The author describes them as '*unprincipled*', '*grant-hungry*', and pro-Western, and often anti-Moldovan, supporting LGBT rights and sex education in schools. In his opinion, they influenced national politics through access to the media, embassies, and power structures, thus controlling "*the media and external financial inflows.*"

The article cites statements from MP Bogdan Țîrdea, who claims that 'Sorosists' are associated with "*war, poverty, loss of territory and high treason*" and that they destabilize countries through corruption and disrespect for the constitution. According to him, in Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia and Romania, the '*Soros network*' has allegedly infiltrated state structures and is pursuing the interests of transnational oligarchs, including through the privatization of state resources, selling agricultural land to foreigners, and closing schools and hospitals.

The article also notes that Moldovan NGOs, which the author calls "*new Sorosists*," are actively involved in the country's political life, "*supporting favorites, organizing the political persecution of opponents*," and benefiting from privileged access to the media, embassies, power structures, and international political organizations. According to the author, these organizations have the capacity to destroy or elevate any politician or state institution, and the network of NGOs in Moldova allegedly forms a '*postmodern army*' of '*information warfare mercenaries*', thus maintaining the West's '*direct pressure mechanisms*' on national politics.

The author concluded by expressing his hope that "*nice guys with backpacks and sneakers*" would eventually "*work for their own country*" after the experience they have gained in "*Soros' institutions*."

**Note:** This article is a classic form of disinformation and propaganda based on conspiratorial rhetoric, manipulation and stigmatization of civil society. Demonizing NGOs and promoting the idea that they serve foreign interests undermines the legitimacy of their activities and has a direct impact on civic space and freedom of association in Moldova.

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**October 21, 2024**

The former mayor of Bălți and presidential candidate for the Republic of Moldova, Renato Usatîi, launched attacks against civil society and the media during a [press conference](#) in the context of the presidential elections on October 20, 2024.

He accused WatchDog and its executive director Valeriu Paşa of receiving "*more than 70,000 euros*" from outside sources to discredit him and promote the referendum on European integration. He also referred to NGOs as '*filth*' and argued that they should be expelled from the territory of the Republic of Moldova.

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**CATEGORY 2.****Discrediting and Delegitimizing the Work of CSOs and HRDs**

Another common type of attack is the accusations of "uselessness" and "lack of competence". Often directed at CSOs, HRDs and journalists, accompanied by pejorative labels. At the same time, disinformation networks actively disseminate defamatory messages, frequently through anonymous Telegram channels, obscure blogs, or fake social media accounts. These platforms are used to spread serious accusations, insult individuals or institutions, and ultimately undermine the credibility of the civil society sector. In the absence of effective regulatory mechanisms for digital platforms, such disinformation campaigns can have a powerful impact, fueling distrust and confusion in society towards the work of CSOs in particular.

This category also includes attempts to downplay the significant role of civil society in driving reforms, ranging from monitoring public spending and justice reform to advocating for human rights protection.

**February 29, 2024**

Politician Dinu Plîngău [wrote a post](#) on his Facebook page in connection with the [end of the competition](#) for the position of Prosecutor General. The [competition failed](#) due to the unjustified downgrading of a candidate by a Superior Council of Prosecutors (SCP) member who subsequently resigned.

In his post, the politician stated: *"The annulment of the competition (...) is a national disgrace and a confirmation of NGO-ists' failure to reform the Moldovan judiciary."*

**Note:** It is wrongly suggested that CSOs are responsible for justice reform. This misrepresents the role of CSOs which in fact monitor and support the implementation of reforms, provide independent expertise and promote transparency. Moreover, such statements undermine public confidence in CSOs which play an essential role in promoting democracy and safeguarding the public interest.

**March 4, 2024**

The mayor of Chişinău Ion Ceban wrote a post on his Facebook page [entitled](#): *"People expect a competent alternative, not irresponsible NGO-ists."*

The post was accompanied by a video excerpt from the same day's [UNinterview program](#) in which the mayor made several attacks and disparaging statements against civil society. He stated: *"(...) there is a need for a competent alternative, people who actually know what they are doing, not those coming from some NGOs, who have never been accountable for anything (...) who have never been responsible for anything in their lives (...) these are people from nowhere, people who have spent their entire lives at coffee breaks and have delivered nothing; they open their mouths, and you are already terrified by the nonsense they speak or the policies they propose."*

**March 11, 2024**

The member of the Association of Romanian Journalists without Borders (AJRB) and Director of the magazine "ACASĂ", Nicolae Josan, published a [critical post](#) on his Facebook account targeting civil society in Moldova. He accused the representatives of the local associative sector of being *"public fund launderers, swindlers, usually plagiarists who copy materials from the internet, thereby earning tens of thousands of euros for trivial and unimportant topics and issues, the authors of these projects being spineless and characterless vegetables."*

He further added that in Moldova, *"the concept of 'civil society' has been desecrated, being attributed to these public fund launderers."*

**Note:** We recognize the right to freedom of expression and critical opinion, but such generalizations are dangerous. Applying harsh and offensive labels to the majority of civil society actors not only distorts reality, but also undermines public confidence in the role of CSOs.

**March 13, 2024**

MP Alla Darovannaia published a post on her Facebook account regarding the [repeated hearing](#) of Judge Ion Chirtoacă by the Vetting Commission, as he is a candidate for the position of member of the Superior Council of Magistracy (CSM). During these hearings, at the judge's initiative, his parents were summoned to answer questions about the family's financial means.

In her post, the MP stated that the individuals in question were forced *"to refute the fabricated falsehoods spread by the PAS scum from LRCM, SCM, NAC, the Presidency, and so on."*

These criticisms lack substantiated arguments, and such attacks, especially coming from an elected official, are irresponsible.

**March 14, 2024**

The anonymous Telegram channel "Casa de Nebuni" with approximately 10,000 subscribers, [published a post](#) accompanied by a photograph of Vladislav Gribincea, former program director at LRCM. The post contained vulgar language, insinuating that Mr. Gribincea had extorted funds from development partners under the pretense of supporting justice reform, while allegedly pursuing the opposite objective.

This attack seeks to defame an individual as well as civil society organizations in general, to erode public trust in them, and to undermine their role in promoting reforms.

**March 25, 2024**

The anonymous Telegram channel "Casa de Nebuni" [published a post](#) featuring a screenshot of a Superior Council of Magistracy (CSM) announcement regarding the consultation by the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE) on its analytical note concerning the E-Justice system and the digitalization of justice. The post labeled IPRE as "NGO trash" along with LRCM, stating that they are *"European and American fund leeches who discredit everything they put their hands on."*

On March 26, 2024, an [identical post](#), featuring the same screenshot and text, was published on Facebook by lawyer Mihai Constantin Gafton.

**March 26, 2024**

The alleged administrator of several anonymous Telegram channels, an active participant in the online environment on the segment of judicial reform Anatol Chirilov, [published](#) a Facebook post making multiple accusations against former civil society representative Vladislav Gribincea. In his post, Chirilov insinuated that Gribincea exerts undue influence over justice reform and labeled LRCM as *"one of the most inefficient organizations in the field of justice."*

He made ironic references to renaming the Ministry of Justice as the *"Ministry of LRCM"* and justice reform as *"Nostra Famiglia Gribincea."* The post included criticism of LRCM's activities, suggesting that the organization is responsible for justice reform.

These statements, formulated in a defamatory and derisive tone without any evidentiary support, aim to discredit the civil society sector as a whole, insinuating undue influence and personal interests in the justice reform process, ultimately seeking to undermine the role of civil society in strengthening the rule of law.

**April 8, 2024**

The Telegram channel "[Casa de Nebuni](#)" shared a post from the "[Re-publica Unirii](#)" channel, in which former civil society representative Vladislav Gribincea was insulted, being referred to as the *"gravedigger of justice"* and a *"fool."*

On the same day, politician Victoria Furtună, a former anti-corruption prosecutor, [published a post](#) on her Facebook page accusing certain founders of LRCM and insinuating that they were responsible for both the deteriorating state of the judiciary and the 2014 bank fraud. The same post was duplicated on [her Telegram channel](#).

Furtună compared the ongoing justice reform to previous reforms, asserting that the same individuals and NGOs, including LRCM, had been involved. She specifically named Vladislav Gribincea, Nadejda Hriptievschi, and Ion Guzun, accusing them of being part of a justice reform process between 2012 and 2014 that allegedly led to the bank fraud. However, she provided no evidence or clear explanation to substantiate any connection between their actions and the fraud.

The post was written in a polemical, accusatory, and factually unsupported tone, with the aim of discrediting both the work of civil society and the justice reform process.

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#### May 14, 2024

The alleged administrator of several anonymous Telegram channels in the segment of justice reform Anatol Chirilov [published a post](#) in which he briefly described the essence of the letter of the Chief Anti-Corruption Prosecutor Veronica Dragalin, regarding former Pre-Vetting and Vetting Commission member, Tatiana Răducanu. Chirilov stated that "the Pre-Vetting Commission is part of the 'OPG' (*editor's note - Russian abbreviation for 'organized criminal group'*) LRCM."

This statement is part of a series of attacks intended to insinuate that LRCM influences the vetting of judges and prosecutors process, as well as the responsible commissions. The unfounded labeling of an association as an "*organized criminal group*" seriously damages the reputation of the entire civil society sector, undermining the role and mission of non-governmental organizations in a democratic society.

On the same day, the Telegram channel "Casa de Nebuni" published two posts within the same context, referring to LRCM as a '*criminal organization*'. ([post 1](#), [post 2](#)).

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#### May 14–15 2024

Between May 14 and 15, 2024, several posts appeared on Telegram channels and social media targeting LRCM in the context of Tatiana Răducanu's resignation, a former judge at the Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ) and member of the Pre-Vetting and Vetting Commissions. Răducanu announced her resignation on May 14, 2024, shortly after the head of the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office, Veronica Dragalin, published a letter stating that the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office had initiated a criminal case against her for alleged connections with Veaceslav Platon and Ilan Șor. The suspicions were solely based on correspondence between two controversial figures dating back ten years.

In her resignation request, Răducanu rejected the accusations, claiming they were unfounded. LRCM issued a [statement](#) emphasizing that publishing information from an ongoing criminal case is illegal.



The posts that appeared in the public space made reference to the fact that Tatiana Răducanu was previously the President of LRCM's Administration Board, and labeled it as a '[criminal organization](#)' allegedly engaged in "[making a sack of money to flee the country](#)."

Additionally, on May 15, 2024, the news portal Telegraph.md [published](#) an article referring to LRCM's statement, accusing the organization of having "*captured the judiciary both horizontally and vertically, particularly the Vetting Commissions*," allegedly at the command of the ruling PAS party and President Maia Sandu.

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#### May 16–19, 2024

During the [program "Cabinetul din umbră"](#) on Jurnal TV, former Minister of Justice, Fadei Nagacevschi, attacked the president of LRCM, Ilie Chirtoacă, claiming that "*LRCM is one of the architects of the failed justice reform*." This segment was later relayed by several sources.

PhD, Vice President of the "*Partidul Puterea Oamenilor*" (Power of the People Party), and a self-proclaimed digital creator), Mihai Stratulat was among those who [shared the material](#), referring to Tatiana Răducanu and other former members of the LRCM who currently hold positions in public institutions or Vetting Commissions. In his post, he accused the LRCM of being "*a well-organized structure infiltrated into state structures*" and blamed it for the failure of the justice reform.

In connection with the May 14, 2024 letter of Chief Anti-Corruption Prosecutor Veronica Drăgălin regarding the public insinuations addressed to former SCJ judge and member of the Pre-Vetting and Vetting Commissions Tatiana Răducanu, the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office announced the initiation of a criminal case, suspecting her of corruption, abuse of power and affiliation with Veaceslav Platon and Ilan Shor.

The LRCM [responded with a statement](#) saying that the allegations against Tatiana Răducanu were aimed at preventing anti-corruption prosecutors from assessing their own integrity, a reform that Veronica Drăgălin had publicly stated she did not support.

The leader of the DA platform Dinu Plîngău [posted a statement](#) on Facebook attacking LRCM, claiming that justice reform in Moldova represents "*a family business of LRCM members*," whom he considered "*a group that can no longer be called an NGO*" and who allegedly promote their members and relatives to key state positions. He also accused LRCM of having been "*alongside Plahotniuc and Candu*" in prosecutorial reforms, only to later declare it "*captured by the oligarchic regime*." The post was later [relayed](#) by one of the leaders of the Civic Platform Dignity and Truth Nicolae Josan.



Lawyer Adrian Tăbîrță also [shared a post](#), asserting that the "LRCM reformers infiltrated everywhere" should be subjected to an investigation.

The news portal Telegraph.md also [published a post](#) on Facebook, stating that "it is imperative for the current NGO-government to declassify everything related to Vetting," claiming that laws were altered specifically to camouflage the "list of LRCM-ists." The post also referred to the "NGO Government," interpreted as the "Governmental Drug Addicts' Organization," calling for justice to be "removed from LRCM's control."

Content creator Anatol Chirilov also [shared a reaction](#) on Facebook, asserting that Veronica Dragalin "wiped the floor with the pseudo-lawyers from LRCM," suggesting that the justice reform is being managed by incompetent individuals.

These attacks are part of a larger series of recurring accusations, built on a narrative designed to discredit LRCM.

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#### July 16, 2024

The Telegram channel "Casa de Nebuni" [published a post](#) that denigrated LRCM. The author of the post used offensive language to label the activities of LRCM. The language used not only harms the dignity of the individuals targeted but also contributes to the degradation of public discourse by promoting personal attacks at the expense of constructive debate.

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#### November 21, 2024

The Telegram channel "Casa de Nebuni" [published a post](#) containing attacks on civil society representatives who participated in [consultations](#) on combating political corruption, organized by the President of the Republic of Moldova.

According to the author of the post, Iulian Groza, executive director of IPRE, is labeled as "a zero and a half, like the entire IPRE" in the legal field, claiming that he is only capable of "washing some European millions on software used by prosecutors, while also accessing the personal data of hundreds of thousands of Moldovans," referring to the [scandal over illegal access to personal data](#) during the 2023 competition for the position of chief prosecutor of the PCCOCS.

He also referred to the president of the LRCM Ilie Chirtoacă "the idiot of the most criminal NGO in the country" and "the useful idiot who failed to take the bar exam for the 5th time."

The post also targets Valeriu Pașa, president of the WatchDog.MD community. The author criticizes Pașa's appearance and suggests that he lacks sufficient discernment.

**Note:** We acknowledge the right to freedom of expression and to make critical remarks, including those that may offend or disturb, but some of the statements and labels in this post clearly exceed these boundaries.

**November 20-21,  
2024**

The leader of the youth organization within the Coalition for Unity and Welfare (CUB) Ion Bulgac published [a post](#) in which he launched an attack on civil society. He claimed that "experts" in the public space are causing significant harm and *"bear no responsibility"* for it. According to him, these *"expert communities"* have transformed into GONGOs (Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations), which are deeply involved in the governance process. These experts, he argued, *"prepare society for the government's next moves"* by introducing narratives, launching opinion polls with errors of 10-20%, and generating "analyses" based on made-up figures. They also *"decide who can be appointed to leadership positions,"* act as sources for news, and claim to know everything and explain anything, all without being held accountable.

According to the author, GONGOs are *"a very useful tool for populist governments, but they are a great danger for the health of democracy in the medium and long term, because they mimic the existence of an independent civil society,"* referring to civil society in the Republic of Moldova. He mentioned that he would also decide on the elimination of GONGOs *"and what to do with all this expert bliss."*

On November 21, 2024, Ion Bulgac wrote [another post](#) containing a photo of the Moldovan President's consultations with civil society representatives on electoral corruption. Bulgac claimed that the president had also spoken with experts *"in all the necessary fields."* The post targets in particular Valeriu Paşa, president of the WatchDog. MD community, whom he calls a *'universal expert'* because he is a *"nachalnic"* (Russian for *'chief/boss'*) at the PATRIOT Center (Center for Strategic Communication and Combating Disinformation) and a member of the National Fiscal Monopoly Commission.

Ion Bulgac believes that people like *"Mr. Angryman"* (Valeriu Paşa) would negatively influence the general perception of what civil society is and should be. He warned that delaying the discussion on rethinking the activity of NGOs could lead to the eventual banning of them and the labeling of civil society representatives as foreign agents. He placed the blame for this situation on "mercenaries," rather than on "healthy" organizations.

Finally, Bulgac noted that the debate about political mercenaries, "pseudo-experts," and GONGOs would ultimately benefit civil society, rather than harm it.

**CATEGORY 3.****Likening CSOs to Political Parties and Implying "Covert Control" Over the State**

Another series of attacks alleges that CSOs actually form a "parallel state" or have their own agenda, which they implement through "covert control" of institutions. Such allegations overlook the fact that CSOs have no formal decision-making power; they provide expertise, analysis and recommendations that may or may not be taken up by the authorities. The process of public policy development includes a stage of consultation with civil society—an essential European principle of good governance. In reality, the final decision lies solely with state institutions (Parliament, Government, Specialized Councils), which bear full responsibility for the choices made.

**February 27, 2024**

[Former Judge Victoria Sanduța](#) published a post on her Facebook page claiming that most CSOs in Moldova are not independent, but rather serve the interests of public authorities.

In her post, she provided her own definition of an NGO, explained their role, and emphasized the negative consequences when an NGO becomes a defender of the government. Sanduța also wrote: *"Sincere congratulations to those truly independent, impartial, and critical members of civil society (**few remaining**) who stand against the actions of public officials."*

The post included a screenshot of another post from the European Union Delegation to Moldova's Facebook page, in the context of World NGO Day. In her comment on this post, Sanduța requested clarification regarding the role, essence, and definition of an NGO in the context of their funding.

**Note:** The message generalizes and questions the integrity of non-governmental organizations in Moldova without providing concrete evidence. Such statements may undermine public trust in civil society and discourage civic participation. Unfounded criticisms may also harm the collaboration between civil society and state institutions, which is essential for the development of a democratic society.

**May 9, 2024**

Former Moldovan Prime Minister Vlad Filat [posted on his Telegram channel](#) a message accompanied by a video segment from the program "Puterea a patra," with his participation, in which he addressed the issue of protests of citizens of Georgia against the adoption of laws that unduly restricted the work of civil society in that country.

In the text of the post, Filat indicated that *"the law on external funding of NGOs will not be implemented in Moldova now, because the current government and NGOs are one water and one land" (implying that they are closely aligned)*. He used the same rhetoric during the program.

On the same day, this [post was shared](#) by the Telegram channel "Casa de Nebuni," which further stated that NGOs in Moldova are not Non-Governmental Organizations, but rather *"Non-Legal Organizations, part of an organized criminal group."*

**Note:** This statement is an attack on NGOs, as it questions their independence and legitimacy, suggesting that they are politically controlled or operate solely in the interest of the government. It is a highly harmful rhetoric, as it undermines trust in civil society, spreads populist narratives, and distracts from real issues. Furthermore, the politician implies that such legislation, which would restrict civil society's activities, would be welcome in Moldova.

**May 22, 2024**

The general director of the sociological company IMAS, Doru Petruți, accused representatives of the NGO sector of carrying out political orders in favor of the current government during the ["Puterea a Patra"](#) television program. He claimed that "apart from studies and surveys controlled and designed by various NGOs" and forces affiliated with the government, independent studies on justice, education, or other relevant sociological topics are scarce.

These allegations were relayed by the [online portal noi.md](#), which noted that it is *"highly concerning when actors from the NGO environment engage in executing political orders."* His comments were made in the context of his earlier statement that his company was under pressure because IMAS polls allegedly reflected realities that did not suit the Moldovan government.

**May 22, 2024**

The Party for the Development and Consolidation of Moldova (PDCM), led by former Prime Minister Ion Chicu, [sent](#) a letter to the European Union's Court of Auditors asking for an audit of the use of European funds allocated for justice reform in Moldova. According to PDCM, this reform has been turned by the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) into nothing more than a *"money-laundering scheme"*.

The request focused on the vetting of judges and prosecutors, arguing that this process was managed by the same non-governmental organizations, in particular the LRCM and the IPRE. According to the authors of the letter, these organizations *"have delegated their members to the Vetting Commissions, including their secretariats,"* which allegedly led to serious conflicts of interest.

PDCM further asserted that, due to the involvement of these organizations, the work of the Vetting Commissions has been marked by *"corruption scandals and conflicts of interest,"* both among both the members appointed by the Republic of Moldova and those appointed by external partners.

**May 22, 2024**

The vice-president of the People's Power party, doctor and self-proclaimed digital creator Mihai Stratulat, [published a post](#) in which he referred to Vladislav Gribincea, then director of the LRCM's Justice Program, as well as the entire organization.

In his post, Stratulat claimed that *"the LRCM has been reforming justice since Plahotniuc's time"* and pointed out that Vladislav Gribincea has relatives in key positions. He further stated that Gribincea *"passed the vetting in 15 minutes"* and placed *"members of his organization and their spouses in the leadership of the Pre-Vetting Commission, as well as its secretariat, the Superior Council of Magistracy (CSM), the Superior Council of Prosecutors (CSP), and soon, the Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ)."*

Stratulat criticized LRCM's influence over the judicial evaluation process, accusing the organization of *"undermining young and honest, yet outspoken judges"* by either blocking their access to positions through pre-vetting or initiating journalistic investigations against them.

These statements were accompanied by a photograph of Judge Victoria Sanduța, known for her critical stance on the vetting process. She was denied appointment until reaching the retirement age threshold and was [dismissed](#) from her position as a judge by a decree signed by Moldova's President, Maia Sandu, on September 11, 2024.

**June 17, 2024**

Victor Pruteanu, a member of the MAN political party and advisor to General Mayor Ion Ceban, took aim at the LRCM in a [Facebook post](#), suggesting that the organization is affiliated with the ruling party. He stated that LRCM should have *"conducted an analysis of the illegalities committed by the ruling party, whichever it may be, and engaged in constructive criticism,"* adding that the organization *"does a much better job of criticizing those who criticize PAS."*

The politician made those statements in the context of the publication of the *Radiography of Attacks on Civil Society, 2023 Edition*, by the LRCM. He referenced Hungary as an example mentioned in the document, highlighting the challenges faced by its civil society in strengthening the rule of law and protecting human rights due to measures adopted by the ruling party following the 2010 elections.

**July 4, 2024**

During the [plenary session of the Parliament](#) on July 4, BCS MP Bogdan Țirdea launched an insinuating attack against the associative environment (min. 43), calling for the hearing of the Minister of Justice Veronica Mihailov-Moraru to provide explanations on the *"chaos in the justice system"* and the ongoing ministerial policies.

In his speech, Țirdea claimed that members of one NGO (without specifying which one) '*overnight*' ended up in positions in the SCM and the SCJ, *"even though they have not worked a day as judges,"* as well as leadership roles in the Evaluation Commission and the Security Council. He also criticized the evaluation of certain judges, mentioning Marina Rusu, whom he claimed was questioned about *"how she affords to support her children,"* and Victoria Sanduța, who *"has not been appointed for two years."* Additionally, he asserted that Alexei Paniș and Ion Chirtoacă became *"notorious names due to the scandals"* created by the vetting commission. The request for a hearing was rejected.

**Note:** The speech is critical and accusatory in nature, a reaction to recent appointments and evaluations in the judiciary. It takes aim at members of NGOs who, in his opinion, end up in important positions without the necessary experience, and questions the legitimacy of the selection process. Such allegations could contribute to undermining public confidence in the independence and transparency of judicial reforms. The impact could be significant, as such discourse could undermine public confidence in the institutions that are supposed to ensure impartiality and justice, thereby undermining the authority of such institutions and their legitimacy in the public eye.

## July 8, 2024

MPs Vasile Bolea and Vadim Fotescu, from the parliamentary group "Victorie," [presented](#) amendments to the Law on the Declaration of Assets and Personal Interests during a briefing. According to them, the initiative aims to ensure transparency in the activities of NGOs in Moldova by clarifying the financial flows they manage, as well as the incomes and assets of their leaders.

The authors argued that *"many civil society organizations dominate"* and actively propose reforms, including in the political sphere. They specifically pointed to organizations in the justice sector, which they claimed wield significant influence. MP Bolea stated that *"many from the associative sector are now in government, holding positions in various public institutions, including the judiciary."* Meanwhile, MP Fotescu added that *"these structures often have, or seek to have, a direct influence on our political life."*

The initiators justified the proposal by asserting that, since NGOs *"are connected to the political sphere, provide expertise, and draft various legislative proposals,"* it is crucial to know *"who commissions various draft laws and studies, and who carries out these orders."*

A segment of the press briefing was also shared on Vasile Bolea's [TikTok page](#), amplifying the message's reach among the online public.



**Note:** Although the proposal did not materialize, the initiative underscores a concerning trend of linking NGOs to political affairs, reflecting distrust in external funding provided by development partners and in the mechanisms managing these resources. Such a move could have a profoundly negative impact on the functioning of the civil society sector, potentially discouraging vital external funding and significantly hindering NGO activities. Furthermore, the proposal suggests an intention to intimidate NGOs and publicly discredit organizations actively contributing to education, societal development, human rights promotion, and key sector reforms. Essentially, the initiative introduces oversight and restrictive mechanisms on civil society, posing a serious threat to democracy in the Republic of Moldova.

**July 27, 2024**

Former Deputy Prime Minister and presidential candidate Andrei Năstase [posted](#) a video on social media criticizing civil society organizations and the media.

He objected to the simultaneous organization of the presidential elections and the referendum, claiming that the referendum *"has nothing to do with the EU"* and describing it as a *"fraudulent device"* to facilitate the president's re-election. Năstase said that this 'fraud' involved *"huge amounts of public and foreign money"* channeled to NGOs and the government-backed media, which he said should have been used to improve the living standards of citizens. His statements were made in the context of presenting a survey conducted by IMAS on the country's socio-political and economic situation.

**October 15, 2024**

Former Moldovan presidential candidate Andrei Năstase [posted](#) a letter on his Facebook page addressed to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Chief Prosecutor Laura Codruța Kövesi, requesting the launch of an investigation into the use of EU funds in the Republic of Moldova. According to Năstase, there are suspicions in society regarding *"how these funds intended for Moldovans are actually being diverted by those in power through various illegal schemes."*

Among other things, the politician suggested that several NGOs and media institutions, *"massively financed"* with European funds, *"are doing political partisanship for the current government."*

**Note:** This accusation targets the compromise of the objectivity and independence of these organizations and media, which could undermine public trust in their activities and legitimacy.

**CATEGORY 4.****Direct Attacks on Independent Media and Journalists**

A separate chapter is constituted by the systematic attacks on independent media: journalists are labeled as "*mercenaries of power*," "*manipulators*," or "*undercover agents*" of foreign interests. In some cases, this escalates to online harassment and even direct threats. When investigative journalism uncovers cases of corruption or conflicts of interest, politicians or other public figures attempt to discredit the journalist in order to minimize the impact of the revelations. This rhetoric creates a chilling effect on freedom of expression, as journalists may be more reluctant to investigate sensitive issues if they fear reprisals.

**January 12, 2024**

Mihail Vlah, advisor to Bashkan Evghenia Guțul, in charge of media relations, in a [video broadcast](#) live on the social network Facebook, called the reporters [Nokta.md](#) "corrupt pseudo-journalists" ("*продажные псевдо журналисты*"), and in the accompanying text threatened, "I think the time has come when we need to give them a good beating!" ("*Думаю, наступает время когда им нужно дать по зубам!*").

These statements were followed by another live broadcast on January 16, 2024, in which Vlah accused Mihail Sirkeli, the editor of Nokta.md, of defaming local deputies and the Bashkan, calling him "*a grant-eater, the disrespectful Mihail Sirkeli*."

On January 22, 2024, the editorial staff of Laf.md published a [public address](#) in which they pointed out that the journalists of this portal, as well as their colleagues from Nokta.md, were under pressure from the representatives of the power in ATU Gagauzia, referring to Vlah's statements.

On January 24, 2024, Mihail Vlah's behavior was [condemned by several non-governmental media organizations](#), which called for the immediate end to such intimidation practices and for the authorities to hold the author of the threats accountable.

**January 24, 2024**

Journalists from TV8, Viorica Tătaru and Andrei Captarenco, were [detained](#) by unrecognized security forces in Tiraspol while carrying out their journalistic activities. They were documenting alleged street protests organized by the so-called authorities in Tiraspol against the [new customs legislation](#) of the Republic of Moldova, which came into effect on January 1, 2024. The new law imposed customs duties on merchants in the Transnistrian region to be paid into the Moldovan state budget, in line with all economic agents in the country.



The [Bureau for Reintegration Policies](#) issued an urgent notice requesting the immediate release of the journalists (note: initially, only Tătaru's detention was confirmed, not Captarenco's) and the possibility of their safe return to the right bank of Dniester River. The case was brought to the attention of the OSCE Mission and external partners.

[Promo-LEX Association](#) also issued a public appeal, calling for immediate intervention to secure the journalist's release. The Association condemned the unacceptable actions of the unrecognized security forces in Tiraspol and reiterated the fundamental importance of press freedom and the protection of journalists.

Several [media associations](#) also condemned the self-proclaimed authorities' abuse of the press and called for the immediate release of the journalist. They flagged to the constitutional authorities the seriousness of the violation of human rights and freedoms, both by violating individual freedoms and by interfering with the private rights of journalists.

On the same day, the Prosecutor's Office for the Combating of Organized Crime and Special Causes (PCCOCS) [announced](#) the initiation of a criminal case regarding this matter. It noted that while the journalists were documenting the so-called protests, a group of unknown individuals, dressed in the uniforms of the so-called "law enforcement" structures of the self-proclaimed authorities from the left bank of the Dniester, approached the reporters and *"forcibly, against the will of the victims, abducted them and transported them in an unknown direction."* No additional information regarding the outcome of the criminal case was subsequently identified.

It was later announced that the [journalists had been released](#). They [stated](#) that they had been interrogated for three hours by representatives of the so-called "Ministry of Security" and that they had been released on the condition that the video footage taken during the documentation would be deleted.

On January 26, 2024, the [Ombudsman](#) issued a statement on the matter, condemning the illegal actions against journalists and proposing to convene the Sectoral Working Group on Human Rights in the Transnistrian Settlement Process to discuss the issue.

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## January 27, 2024

Activist Olga Parzany posted a [video clip](#) on her Facebook page from the January 19, 2024, meeting of the Supervisory Council of the regional public media provider "Gagauziya Radio Television" (GRT), which revealed elements of censorship at GRT.

During the meeting, journalist Oxana Kihayal, former editor of the GRT website, complained that GRT Executive Director Vasiliu Dermenji had asked her to retract a news item that exposed the false and manipulative nature of promises made by some politicians to provide gas at a price of 10 lei. She also mentioned that the Press Service of the Executive Committee of the Autonomous Region influences the editorial content of GRT.

This case was [described in detail](#) by Nokta.md, a media outlet of ATU Gagauzia, on February 8, 2024.

On February 12, 2024, several media associations [issued a public statement](#) condemning any attempt at censorship. They stressed that media censorship was unconstitutional and punishable by law. They called on the relevant authorities to investigate the case and urged journalists to report any attempt at censorship.

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#### February 21, 2024

During a press conference, the mayor of the capital [Ion Ceban verbally attacked TV8 journalist](#) Ștefan Bejan, accusing his media outlet of being the "mouthpiece and diaper" of the ruling party. He called the TV station "manipulative" and "as wearing yellow blinders."

The day before, the mayor [wrote on his Facebook page](#) that "the yellow press feeds the population with news about the diapers of the failed government." This reaction came because, according to him, the media did not respond to his invitation to attend the inauguration of a kindergarten building.

On February 22, 2024, several media associations issued a [public statement](#) condemning the inappropriate behavior of Mayor Ion Ceban, manifested by unjustified attacks and allegations against the media. The associations emphasized that this was not the first case of its kind. The hostile behavior was condemned and the mayor was asked to stop such reprehensible practices. He was also asked to behave appropriately and avoid any form of intolerance towards journalists.

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#### February 22, 2024

During the [public consultations](#) announced a day earlier, members of the People's Assembly of ATU Gagauzia, together with some members of the Executive Committee, debated a [legislative initiative](#) from January 4, 2024, which proposed changes to the operation of the public audiovisual media provider, Gagauziya Radio Televizionu (GRT) and introduced a mechanism for the authorization of online media in Gagauzia. According to the initiative, online media would be required to obtain a permit from the authorities of UTA Găgăuzia in order to operate, which is contrary to the Constitution.

Several [media organizations condemned](#) these attempts to undermine press freedom and called for the withdrawal of the initiative, stressing that the proposed amendments were inadmissible. The organizations recognized the need to adjust the regional broadcast legislation, but felt that reducing the quota for broadcast content in the Gagauz language or changing the management structure of GRT would not contribute to improving the local legislation. They also emphasized that that was not the first attempt by the Gagauz authorities to undermine the independence of the press: [in December 2022](#) they tried to establish a mechanism of "accreditation" of the press.

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**June 26, 2024**

*Ziarul de Gardă* (ZdG) reporter Felicia Ganev [was the victim](#) of inappropriate behavior by Chişinău Mayor Ion Ceban and his team, as well as the target of hate speech and an online harassment campaign. The incident took place in the context of a report on stormwater infrastructure projects implemented in Chişinău over the past five years.

The interview was preceded by an official request sent by the ZdG team to Chişinău City Hall on June 4, 2024, asking for information of public interest regarding those projects. Although the City Hall confirmed receipt of the request, ZdG received no response 22 days later. In the absence of an official response, the ZdG team went to the City Hall to obtain information directly from the Mayor.

During the filming, Mayor Ion Ceban asked the ZdG journalist if she was an engineer in order to "*know how to speak*," and City Hall spokeswoman Natalia Ixari denied that ZdG's request had been received. She also [covered the journalist's microphone](#), suggesting that she did not want to be filmed, a gesture perceived as intimidating.

Subsequently, Ion Ceban [accused](#) the ZdG team of asking him, "*as in other cases*," "*manipulative questions*" without "*any real interest in hearing the answers*." In addition, Natalia Ixari published several accusatory posts against the journalist, insinuating that the material was guided by bad faith. These statements were followed by hate messages and insults [online](#).

As a result of this case, ZdG [filed a complaint](#) with the police, requesting that the responsible persons be punished under Article 71 of the Contravention Code of the Republic of Moldova (*violation of the legislation on access to information and petitioning*). Also on June 26, 2024, non-governmental media organizations [signed a declaration](#) condemning the misconduct of Mayor Ion Ceban and his team, as well as online harassment campaigns and hate speech against journalists.

**October 21, 2024**

The former mayor of Bălți and candidate for president of the Republic of Moldova Renato Usatîi, launched attacks on civil society and the media during a [press conference](#) in connection with the presidential elections on October 20, 2024.

Usatîi stated that the current government "has impoverished the population but enriched NGOs," and made critical references to journalist Alina Radu, as well as to the publications *Ziarul de Gardă* (ZdG) and *Europa Liberă*, which he described as "propagandistic" and "miserable."

He also declared that TV8, Pro TV, Jurnal TV, *Europa Liberă* and ZdG were media outlets he refused to give interviews to, calling them "garbage dumps" and accusing them of being funded by development partners under the pretext of fighting Russian propaganda.

**October 29, 2024**

During the *Morari.live* show, journalists Gheorghe Gonța and Natalia Morari [criticized](#) the behavior of some of their colleagues, referring to the so-called "journalistic guild" as a "brothel." This statement was made in relation to the debate between Maia Sandu and Alexandr Stoianoglo, organized as part of the presidential election campaign. Gonța and Morari emphasized that some journalists exhibited unprofessional and biased behavior during the debate, claiming that "all the focus was placed on Stoianoglo's gaffes."

**November 4, 2024**

During the presidential elections and the constitutional referendum in autumn of 2024, the director of ZdG, Alina Radu, became the [victim](#) of a defamation campaign targeting her and her family. The attacks began after the publication, on October 10, 2024, of a journalistic investigation into the flow of money and the methods used to recruit and lure individuals working for Ilan Șor, with the aim of compromising the referendum and buying votes for the presidential candidate supported by Șor.

On October 29, 2024, following the announcement that ZdG would publish a second investigation on the "criminal supporters" of presidential candidate Alexandr Stoianoglo, the actual smear campaign against Alina Radu and her family began, which lasted up to and including November 3, 2024. According to Alina Radu, "there was continuous wave of slander from some obscure sites, amplified by convicted politicians, other fugitive criminals, mercenary journalists." She claimed that the defamatory posts were also disseminated by the Kremlin-controlled Russian media.

These posts were widely shared, generating comments inciting hatred based on identity traits, gender, age, physical appearance, and also spreading false accusations about acts that Alina Radu had not committed, such as the alleged claim that she had taken "illicit money" to pay for her daughter's tuition at Harvard University. Alina Radu emphasized that while ZdG's investigations had the best possible impact, they also caused significant moral harm to her, her family, and the editorial team.

In the same context, the founder of TV8, Mariana Rață, was also attacked. In a [public statement](#), she noted that "*oligarchs and their instruments have launched an unprecedented attack on honest journalists who have spoken and written, with evidence, about fraud, corruption, and illegalities*" in this electoral campaign. Mariana Rață stated that she intends to take legal action to "*seek the punishment of those who defame and slander us.*"

On the same day, the Independent Journalism Center (IJC) [issued](#) a statement expressing concern and strongly condemning the campaigns of vilification and harassment against media outlets and journalists in the Republic of Moldova, which it said had intensified in the context of the election campaign. The IJC urged journalists and media outlets targeted in such hostile campaigns to use all available legal means to obtain recognition and redress for the harm suffered, including by publishing refutations and issuing public apologies.

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#### November 22, 2024

The journalist of AGORA news portal Irina Soltan became the target of offensive labels, insults and unfounded and defamatory accusations from the author of the Telegram channel "Ungureanu 112."

The intimidation actions began after the journalist published two news articles. [One of them](#) reported on the death of a woman following a fall from a scooter, an incident confirmed by official sources, while [the other](#) covered the topic of moderating electoral debates in the context of the presidential elections on October 20, 2024. The author of the "Ungureanu 112" channel allegedly shared screenshots of these news articles, accompanied by text messages that did not address the substance of the topics but instead accused the journalist of "stealing news without citing the source." These messages also contained insults directed at Irina Soltan and the AGORA editorial team.

On November 23, 2024, several media organizations signed a Declaration condemning the actions of the administrator of the channel "Ungureanu 112," which had been launched "*with the aim of damaging the image and reputation of the media outlet and journalist Irina Soltan.*"

Media NGOs called on the Moldovan authorities of the Republic of Moldova to take the necessary legal measures to hold accountable those responsible for the insults, offensive labeling, and unfounded and defamatory accusations against the press.

### December 9, 2024

During the [operational meeting](#) of the municipal services of Chişinău City Hall, the capital's general mayor, Ion Ceban, insulted several journalists and vloggers from Tribuna Primăriei. While describing his visits to the country's districts, where he stated the situation was a "disaster," the mayor invited journalists and vloggers he described as "disconnected from reality" to travel to the villages and districts, referring to them as "trolls of the Action and Solidarity Party," "sycophantic clowns." The invitation was directed at Anatol Durbală ("the clown Durbală"), Cătălin Lungu ("sycophant Cătălin Lungu – Zero Doi"), as well as "comrades" Nata Albot and Andrei Bolocan, "comrades" (Alexandru) Cozer and Mariana Raţă, and "alcoholics" Vitalie Călugăreanu and Valeriu Paşa ("a self-proclaimed expert in all fields"), along with other so-called "puppies of PAS."

Media NGOs [condemned](#) the actions of Mayor Ion Ceban, calling on him to abandon such deviant behavior and to adopt a dignified and appropriate language, avoiding any form of intolerance towards journalists, media institutions, and vloggers. The associations reiterated that this was not the first such incident.

### February 2025

Following the announcement of the suspension of U.S. foreign aid, several attacks and insinuations were made against journalists who received foreign funding. In a Facebook post, lawyer Vitali Catana used inappropriate language, calling for "lists of journalists" funded by foreign partners and insinuating the illegality of the grants. The attacks targeted in particular Cornelia Cozonac, president of the Center for Investigative Journalism, and Alina Radu, director of Ziarul de Gardă.

On February 1, 2025, during a public presentation, LRCM was labeled as a "criminal organization" by journalists from TV5, a television channel affiliated with Ilan Şor. Similarly, on February 10, 2025, during a trial concerning the alleged illegal financing of the former "Şor" party, Ziarul de Gardă reporter Măriuţa Nistor was intimidated by Bashkan Evghenia Guţul and her supporters, who accused her of receiving money from a "criminal group," referring to USAID. A similar situation was reported by the newsroom of CU SENS.

Media NGOs have [strongly condemned](#) these defamation campaigns against journalists and media institutions, emphasizing that such actions undermine freedom of expression and the public's right to accurate information. They also urged the targeted journalists to use all legal tools to defend their rights, stressing that intimidation and defamation are serious offenses that must be promptly sanctioned.



**February 25, 2025**

In the context of a news report on the Ombudsman's reaction to [cases](#) of intimidation of journalists in Gagauzia, former Prime Minister Ion Chicu [generated](#) a new pattern of irresponsible and subliminal discourse directed against the press. He resorted to insults, derogatory labeling, and unfounded and defamatory accusations against the editorial teams of Laf, Nokta, and Ziarul de Gardă. This occurred one week after a similar statement in which Ion Chicu employed the [same rhetoric](#) against representatives of TV8.

In a [public statement](#), the Independent Journalism Center (CJI) and other media organizations condemned the disgraceful behavior of politician Ion Chicu towards the media and called on the former prime minister to refrain from inappropriate public discourse targeting the press.

**CATEGORY 5.****Use of Parallel Structures (GONGOs) and Disinformation Campaigns**

A new method used to discredit the associative environment in Moldova is the creation and use of NGOs that, although claiming to have social, educational, or entertainment purposes, are in fact tools of controversial political groups. These organizations operate as satellites of political parties or individuals with hidden agendas, diverting the true meaning of civic activity and being used to promote political interests.

**February 2024**

On February 13, 2024, Ilan Șor, sentenced to 15 years in prison in Moldova, announced the [initiative](#) to create a so-called NGO called "Evrazia." This organization was presented as aiming to strengthen the ties between the Republic of Moldova, Russia, and the Eurasian Economic Union. However, in reality, it sought to promote foreign interests and derail democratic processes in the country.

According to an [investigative report](#) by the anticoruptie.md portal, through this project, trips for several young people and teachers from Moldova, particularly from the Gagauzia region, were organized to Moscow under the guise of a cultural program intended to strengthen the relationships between the inhabitants of post-Soviet regions. Essentially, these activities were aimed at influencing citizens' perceptions of the country's geopolitical orientation, undermining the European course and, in particular, compromising the constitutional referendum in autumn of 2024.

Even worse, according to the testimonies of some of the participants in such visits, they were asked to transport sums of money back to Moldova of about \$1,000 per person, money that was most likely used to finance political activities, and for this service people were paid an additional \$100-150. This practice clearly illustrates the illegal nature of this so-called NGO and how associative structures are hijacked for obscure purposes, compromising the integrity of civil society and undermining democracy.

This organization was also used to organize political rallies and protests across the country aimed at creating instability and undermining confidence in democratic institutions. At the same time, this platform was used to build a network of influence to promote the interests of Moldova's fugitive oligarchs. To note that the persons involved in such activities did not participate pro bono, but were paid, which once again demonstrates the illegal nature of this initiative.

This information was confirmed by the [report of the Security and Intelligence Service](#) on the assessment of the Russian Federation's involvement in Moldova's electoral processes in 2024-2025.

**Note:** Such practices are extremely dangerous because they deeply damage the integrity of civil society and undermine democracy. The creation and use of NGOs as tools to promote obscure political agendas discredits the work of genuine organizations working for human rights, transparency and democratic reform. This undermines public trust in civil society organizations and places them all under suspicion. At the same time, such initiatives undermine democratic processes and are used for disinformation and destabilization.



**CATEGORY 6.****Attacks Based on Conservative Ideology and Stigmatization of Vulnerable Groups**

A series of attacks on civil society and human rights defenders are based on conservative ideas, portraying NGOs as "anti-traditional" and responsible for "spreading LGBT+ propaganda" or undermining Christian values. Through such rhetoric, political leaders and some opinion makers seek to associate the nongovernmental sector with issues that still evoke negative reactions among parts of society, creating a strong sense of rejection and mistrust.

By describing events and actions in support of minority rights as an "attack on faith" or a "threat to the traditional family," extremist voices seek to divide the population and turn these sensitive issues into a tool of political warfare. In reality, protecting the rights of any minority is an international and constitutional obligation, and civil society initiatives in this regard aim to prevent discrimination, not to "destroy traditional values".

**January 22, 2024**

The so-called leader of the Transnistrian region Vadim Krasnoselski [declared](#) 2024 as the "Year of Family Values," following the example of the Russian Federation which adopted a similar decision. This was [motivated](#) by a desire to protect the younger generation from "non-traditional values" that could emerge with the development of modern society, spreading through the media, public events, online film screenings, and influencing young people to adopt non-traditional sexual relations. In his annual address, outlining the agenda for the coming year, Krasnoselski said, *"Family means parents, husband and wife, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. It is the whole family, it is the foundation of everything"* („Семья – это и родители, это муж и жена, это и дети, это внуки и правнуки. Это все семья, это все фундамент”). He emphasized that the main priority for 2024 was the protection of traditional family values, strengthening the institution of marriage and family foundations in accordance with the *Concept of the State Family Policy of the Transnistrian region for 2021-2026*.

In this context, the [Promo-LEX](#) organization found that, in early 2024, amendments to six laws were proposed to prohibit the distribution among children of materials promoting "nontraditional sexual relationships" or those that "deny traditional family values." The proposals also included the addition of websites promoting "non-traditional sexual relations" to the region's list of banned sites, as well as a ban on media and advertising content that promoted such values.

According to the new amendments to the Contravention Code, "*propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations*" attracts sanctions in the form of fines starting from 260 Euros, as well as additional measures such as administrative detention. For foreign citizens or stateless persons, the sanctions include, in addition to fines, expulsion from the Transnistrian region or administrative detention for up to 15 days, followed by expulsion.

Such measures reflect a growing trend of restricting freedom of expression and access to information in the Transnistrian region. By sanctioning propaganda and content against traditional family values, the Transnistrian authorities appear to be seeking not only to protect a particular family model, but also to control discourse and access to information, raising important questions about the balance between freedom of expression and the protection of social values in the context of the region.

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#### June 11, 2024

In the context of the Moldova Pride Festival on June 16, 2024, the Socialist Party of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM) [published](#) an article on its official page, launching attacks against the LGBT community in Moldova. Party officials described the event as an insult to "*our country, our people, our Orthodox faith and the centuries-old traditions of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents*" and accused the LGBT community of imposing "*anti-family*" ideologies and undermining the national identity of citizens.

The PSRM labeled the Moldova Pride March an "*anti-Christian festival*," a "*parade of pride*," and a "*shameful show*." The party also called on Moldovan citizens, other political parties, public organizations, and the clergy of the Moldovan Orthodox Church of Moldova to participate in a march "*in defense of our people, our faith, and our family*," arguing that it was necessary to protect the concept of the "*traditional family*" and the spiritual education of children.

These statements reflect populist rhetoric aimed at exploiting sensitive social issues to mobilize conservative voters. The PSRM's attacks on the LGBT community ignore the principles of democracy and human rights and promote an exclusivist view of social values.

**June 16, 2024**

During the Moldova Pride Festival on June 16, 2024, several aggressive [counter-demonstrations](#) took place against representatives of the LGBT community in Moldova. Among the organizers of these actions were members of the political group "Victory," created by Ilan Șor. The counter-protesters gathered on București Street, wearing protective suits and equipped with disinfectant containers. When asked about the purpose of their action, they responded that they were "*cleaning the city of any impurity*" ("мы очищаем город от всякой нечисти"), a discriminatory and offensive message directed at the LGBT community.

Another group of protesters gathered near the Ștefan cel Mare and Sfânt monument in the capital, chanting slogans such as "When the Orthodox remain silent, the stones shout" and "Shame." They carried icons and crosses, with some dressed in priestly attire, thereby emphasizing their opposition to the Moldova Pride event from a religious perspective.

These counter-demonstrations reflect the deep divisions in Moldovan society regarding LGBT rights and highlight the instrumentalization of populism and religious discourse to justify intolerance. While freedom of expression and the right to protest are fundamental democratic principles, actions that incite hatred and discrimination should not be accepted in a state that has international obligations to protect human rights.

**June 18, 2024**

The MPs Denis Ulanov, Marina Tauber, Petru Jardan, Reghina Apostolova, Vadim Fotescu and Irina Lozovan, members of the "ȘOR" Party, registered a [draft law](#) regarding the approval of the Concept of the National Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Spiritual and Moral Values in the Republic of Moldova. The draft law includes measures to regulate social and cultural aspects, including defining marriage as exclusively between a man and a woman, limiting adoptions to heterosexual families, banning medical interventions for gender reassignment, and prohibiting any mention of genders other than male and female in official documents. It also proposes a ban on meetings and events that promote values considered non-traditional, the propaganda of same sex relations, as well as the blocking of any state initiative that could support such values. In addition, the draft law imposes measures to strengthen the role of traditional values in education and to prohibit the public dissemination of information that might contradict this vision.

Public consultations for this draft were initially scheduled for July 10, 2024, but were postponed to an unspecified later date. As of the end of 2024, the draft has not been subject to parliamentary debates.

**July 28, 2024**

The former president of the Republic of Moldova Igor Dodon [published](#) a message on his Facebook page in the context of the 2024 Summer Olympics, containing anti-European and homophobic statements. He claimed that *"Europe is conquered by LGBT and Satanist propaganda,"* adding that such a *"perverse and anti-Christian Europe does not belong to us,"* saying that it would be better for Moldova to remain *"sovereign, with Christian values and a traditional family."* Additionally, Dodon stated that joining the European Union would impose obligations such as integrating into NATO, selling land and national heritage to foreigners, and the *"mandatory introduction of homosexual propaganda in schools."* This type of rhetoric had previously been promoted in his appearance on the show *"По Фактам"* and other [related posts](#) on his TikTok page.

The former president's statements are factually unfounded and represent a populist message aimed at exploiting the fears of a part of the population about socio-political changes and European integration. This type of discourse, based on disinformation and stereotypes, is often used to mobilize conservative and Eurosceptic voters without offering real arguments or concrete solutions for the country's future.

**July 28, 2024**

Former mayor of Bălți and presidential candidate of the Republic of Moldova, Renato Usatîi, launched several attacks against the LGBT community in Moldova during the show *"Puterea e în adevăr"* (*Power is in Truth*). He used offensive and discriminatory expressions, referring to the community with derogatory terms such as *"golubiatie"* (a pejorative term in Russian for homosexuals), making reference to artists who participated in Eurovision and, in his view, have now reached the Olympics. He also referred to community members as *"those pigs,"* adding ironically that he expected *"three NGOs"* to sue him.

Moreover, Usatîi continued with insulting remarks, saying that if he had been there, he would have given them *"to Viskas or to Pedigree Pal for immediate (srazu – in Russian) production,* although he did not believe that *"dogs and cats eat pee, no, they know what is good,"* using a vulgar insinuation against the community.

Following those statements, the GENDERDOC-M Information Center filed a complaint with the Equality Council, but it was considered inadmissible and forwarded to the police, leading to the opening of an administrative case against Usatîi.

Such statements by public figures not only legitimize discrimination and intolerance, but also contribute to a climate of hostility and violence against vulnerable communities. The use of hate speech in the public sphere is extremely dangerous, especially when it comes from political figures, as it can encourage aggressive attitudes and undermine the democratic values of society. In a state that aspires to respect human rights and European standards, such violations should be firmly sanctioned in order to prevent the escalation of intolerance and discrimination.

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**August 6, 2024**

Former Moldovan President Igor Dodon [told](#) Exclusiv TV's Moldova Live program that control mechanisms were needed for the work of NGOs in the country. He said that "*foreign-funded NGOs are becoming a separate power in Moldova*," having more influence than the media or politicians and benefiting from "huge budgets, of hundreds of millions."

As an example, Dodon cited the case of Georgia which on June 3 adopted a [law on "foreign agents"](#) inspired by Russian legislation. It gives the authorities sweeping powers to control NGOs and media outlets that receive more than 20% of their funding from foreign sources, forcing them to publish detailed financial reports, disclose personal and sensitive information, and even private communications. The law has sparked significant protests in Georgia and has been criticized by the European Union and the United States for its potential impact on freedom of association and civil society.

These allegations represent an attempt to limit the financial sustainability of organizations by imposing regulations similar to those in Russia and Georgia, which require strict control over external funding, including the publication of financial reports and the disclosure of personal and sensitive information. Such regulations are often criticized because they can become instruments of intimidation and restrict the work of civil society organizations and journalists. Given his position as a politician with parliamentary representation, Dodon's speech carries significant weight and has the potential to influence legislation and restrict freedom of association and expression for organizations that receive external funding. Given his position as a politician with parliamentary representation, Dodon's discourse carries significant weight and has the potential to influence legislation and restrict freedom of association and expression for organizations that receive external funding.

**September 18, 2024** The former President of the Republic of Moldova Igor Dodon [released](#) a video in the context of the presidential elections in which he reiterated a discriminatory and defamatory discourse against the LGBT community in Moldova, while contributing to the spread of disinformation. In his statements, he claimed that, at the insistence of European partners, quotas for LGBT people in state institutions would be introduced immediately after the elections and that there would be "*massive promotion*" of this community in schools and kindergartens. Using stigmatizing language, Igor Dodon referred to LGBT people as "*of this kind*," perpetuating stereotypes and prejudice. He also emphasized that "*we are for the traditional family*" and that the majority of "*normal people in Moldova*" supported this view, implying that LGBT people did not belong to this category.

The former president's statements not only promote discrimination and intolerance, but also contribute to the creation of a climate of hostility towards a specific target group. The claims regarding the alleged imposition of LGBT quotas and the forced promotion of this community in education are unfounded and constitute a form of disinformation aimed at manipulating public opinion during the election period. Such statements are problematic not only from the perspective of respect for fundamental human rights, but also in the context of Moldova's international commitments to combat hate speech and protect equality and diversity.

**September 21, 2024** A [rally](#) organized by Mihail Vlah, advisor to Gagauzia's Bashkan Evghenia Guțul, took place in Comrat. The event brought together his supporters and dozens of Comrat residents, and was presented as an action against Orthodox "*persecutions*." In reality, the rally was marked by political agitation in favor of fugitive oligarch Ilan Șor, messages against President Maia Sandu and European integration, and attacks against the LGBT community.

During the demonstration, Ilia Uzun, the deputy Bashkan, referred to the authorities in Chișinău as "*infidels*," accusing them of "*propagating LGBT, homosexuality, and sodomy*." The protests took place in the context of efforts by deputies from the Bloc of Communists and Socialists, Bogdan Țîrdea and Vladimir Odnostalco, to convince the Russian public that the authorities in Chișinău intend to ban the Orthodox Church, following Ukraine's example.

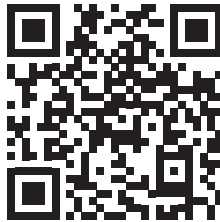
Such actions, where religion is used as a pretext to promote political messages and hate speech, are extremely dangerous in a democratic society. Politicians who resort to manipulation and incitement to hate contribute to deepening social divisions and spreading intolerance, jeopardizing social cohesion and Moldova's European path.

## **LIST OF SIGNATORY ORGANIZATIONS**

*(Displayed in alphabetical order)*

- **ADEPT Association**
- **Center for Policy and Reforms**
- **Independent Journalism Center**
- **Information Center GENDERDOC-M**
- **Institute for European Policies and Reforms**
- **Jurnal TV**
- **Legal Resources Centre from Moldova (LRCM)**
- **Media Alternativa Association (TV8)**
- **Pilgrim Demo Association (Nokta)**
- **Primăria Mea Association**
- **Promo-LEX Association**
- **Soros Foundation Moldova**

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