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# **MEDIA INFLUENCE MATRIX: ROMANIA**

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# About CMDS

The Center for Media, Data and Society (CMDS) is a research center for the study of media, communication, and information policy and its impact on society and practice. Founded in 2004 as the Center for Media and Communication Studies, CMDS is part of Central European University's School of Public Policy and serves as a focal point for an international network of acclaimed scholars, research institutions and activists.

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*The Media Influence Matrix Project is run collaboratively by the Media & Power Research Consortium, which consists of local as well as regional and international organizations. The consortium members are academic institutions (universities and research centers), NGOs, journalism networks and private foundations.*

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# **Executive Summary**

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## KEY FINDINGS

With dozens of nationwide and local television and radio channels, over 3,000 printed publications and a fragmented media ownership structure, Romania's media market looks vibrant and diverse. Romanian media legislation is compatible with European Union (EU) legislation and local regulators monitor broadcasters' compliance with legal provisions. Romania also boasts surprisingly competitive and accessible technology: its internet is one of the fastest in the world, and data and mobile packages are affordable for many. If access were measured strictly on technical terms, Romanians would look like a highly privileged people.

However, Romanian media operate in an adverse environment, hardly enabling independent journalism. Two companies dominate the television market. Local media pinch pennies. The only space where journalism can thrive is the internet where news portals are mushrooming. However, many of them are small and struggling financially, grappling with a public whose trust in media and journalists is at low levels and who is generally unwilling to spend money on media content. All that dims prospects for the future of Romania's independent journalism.

Media consumption in Romania shows similarities with European trends, but differs in a few important aspects. First, in Romania, television is by far the most used medium for media content consumption, with 92% of Romanians using it on an almost daily basis. That contrasts with a more balanced use of media in Europe. The second most popular medium in Romania is the internet with 42% of people using it almost daily; that is, however, one of the lowest internet penetration rates in the EU. Radio and the written press are the least used media in Romania: less than a quarter of Romanians listen to radio daily and only 6% of them read a newspaper. Both levels are much below the European averages.

The sharp decline experienced by local media, most notably print and radio, is of particular concern. Content produced and broadcast from the capital city of Bucharest dominates the news market. Moreover, the most powerful media are in the hands of a few players, also based in Bucharest and with the power to cover the whole country.

The television market, for example, is divided up by two companies: Central European Media Enterprises (CME), which runs Pro TV, the most successful television channel in Romania, and Intact Media Group, which runs another highly popular channel, Antena 1, among other media outlets. The recent takeover of CME from its American owners by the Czech financial group PPF run by Petr Kellner, an oligarch, doesn't augur well for independent journalism. Intact, a domestically grown media business controlled by the politically connected Voiculescu family, isn't a bastion of good reporting either. The two groups combined control almost half of the Romanian viewership.

Online media is a much more dynamic space in spite of the popularity enjoyed by the news portals belonging to the leading television players (ProTV and Antena, again) and newspapers (the tabloids Libertatea and Click). As people are increasingly becoming accustomed to the internet, the emergence of a slew of small online news media such as G4 Media, PressOne, DoR, Inclusiv, Recorder and others can reinvigorate the field. These alternative, sometimes exclusive, projects, have a small audience, but bring innovation to content creation and presentation. Their problem is their limited focus, mainly on the elites, a result of the digital divide, still wide in Romania. Usually younger, better educated people living in urban areas benefit the most from the newest technologies. In contrast, older, poorer people living in rural areas still lack affordable

and easy access to the internet. The concentration in the telecommunications and internet technology sectors doesn't help. Five large players, namely Orange, Telekom, DIGI Communications, UPC and Vodafone control the telecom services market. The internet market, including social media, browser and search engine use, is dominated by the U.S.-owned Facebook and Google.

In terms of legislation, Romania boasts a media law framework that is compatible with EU legislation and that, in theory, should help create an enabling environment for independent journalism. However, implementation of the law is lacking and policies that regulate practice do not always function. Journalists routinely complain about problems related to access to public information and job conditions, the former a result of a general lack of transparency in decision-making, the latter related to bad labor legislation.

Media regulation is almost exclusively shaped by state bodies such as parliamentary committees, state-administered regulators and, occasionally, MPs who usually have little to no expertise in the field. Associations of journalists and civil society groups react to laws and policies, but only after they are adopted, and only seldom intervening actively in media regulation and policy. As a result, there is no serious debate or long-term strategy to create a safe and productive environment for journalism.

## FUTURE OUTLOOK

Romania is seeing an explosion of innovative and bold journalistic projects and ideas involving investigative and long-form narrative journalism, and community media. They are all though small-scale projects available to a privileged public, which significantly limits their impact. On a longer term, the limited scale of these initiatives is likely to pose serious problems to their financial sustainability. Some are likely to collapse or get bought by larger groups.

Announced in October 2019, the sale of CME to Petr Kellner, a Czech oligarch who owns a business empire stretching across Eastern Europe and a myriad of industries including banking, mining, telecoms, automotive manufacturing and real estate, is expected to have major consequences for the television news production and entertainment sector as CME-owned ProTV is the dominant television player in Romania, significantly influencing media production and consumption. The consequences of the deal are likely to go beyond the media market.

As both 2019 and 2020 are electoral years in Romania, to select the president and parliament, respectively, news consumption is likely to increase and, with it, pressures and investments. The political positions of the major television stations in the next year are going to reflect the key political alliances emerging in the country.

Technology can bring change. 5G networks are expected to be introduced in the second half of 2020, due to delays in organizing bids for frequency licenses. This is going to have an immediate effect, hopefully positive, on people's access to technology, particularly vulnerable groups, such as people living in villages who currently have poor connections. Some risks remain. The biggest is the consolidation of power in the telecom market. After UPC was purchased by Vodafone and Telekom sold part of its operations to Orange, three companies dominate this industry, concentration that is likely to intensify with the award of the 5G licenses.

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# **Government, Politics and Regulation**

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## LEGAL OVERVIEW

Romania's media and communication content is regulated through several laws. The Audiovisual Law no 502 of 2002 defines the main types of content, actors and activities in the broadcast industry. It has since been amended several times.

Romania does not have a press law per se. The written press and online content are an unregulated field, but they are subject to a series of regulations enshrined in the penal and civil codes. Censorship is forbidden in Romania, but content can be regulated through the interventions of several institutions that promote and guarantee respect for human rights and punish hate speech and discriminatory practices.

In addition, codes of conduct adopted by professional organizations are in place. Hate speech is not protected under Romanian law and the right to rectify and react is guaranteed for individuals who have been subjected by broadcasters to "inexact portrayals or information"[1] Source protection is also guaranteed by law[2], but it comes with the responsibility to provide accurate information. Courts can ask for sources to be revealed if matters of national security and public order demand it or if the resolution of a legal case demands it when all other options have been exhausted. Defamation, libel and slander were decriminalized in Romania through an amendment to the Penal Code that was adopted in 2009, but entered into force in 2014.

Today, they are not considered criminal offenses. However, defamation, libel and

slander are regulated through the Civil Code, which acknowledges the right to personal dignity and public image, allowing people who feel libeled to ask for financial compensation.

In a nutshell, Romania has a media law framework that is compatible with European Union (EU) legislation and that, in theory, creates an enabling environment for independent journalism. However, there are major policy issues that shape the everyday practice of journalism as well as a few unrelated laws that have an impact on the labor conditions for journalists.

Media regulation is almost exclusively shaped by state bodies such as parliamentary committees, state-administered regulators and, occasionally, initiatives launched by MPs who usually have little to no expertise in the field. Associations of journalists and civil society groups usually react to already adopted laws and policies, but they only seldom have managed to push through media regulations and policies. On the other hand, they have played a major role in the country's media policy by preventing on numerous occasions legislation deemed to be harmful for journalists from being adopted. Civil society groups have been also actively involved in monitoring the legislative and regulatory developments.

Nevertheless, faced with a dearth of human and financial resources, civil society groups have not managed to push for a serious debate or long-term strategy to create a safe and productive environment for journalism.[3]

[1] Audiovisual Law no 504/2002, further amended, available online (in Romanian) at [http://www.cna.ro/IMG/pdf/LEGEA\\_AUDIOVIZUALULUI\\_nr.\\_504\\_din\\_2002\\_CU\\_MODIFICARILE\\_LA\\_ZI\\_IUNIE\\_2019.pdf](http://www.cna.ro/IMG/pdf/LEGEA_AUDIOVIZUALULUI_nr._504_din_2002_CU_MODIFICARILE_LA_ZI_IUNIE_2019.pdf) (accessed on 23 June 2019).

[2] Source protection is guaranteed by the Audiovisual Law, by the law regulating the Agerpres news agency (Law no 19/2003) and the law regulating the public television and radio broadcasters (Law no 41/1994). Romania is also a signatory of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which guarantees source protection for journalists. Although there is no "press law" as such that would guarantee the same source protection for the print and online media, the international conventions Romania is a signatory of should (in theory) protect all forms of journalism.

[3] Ioana Avadani, Propunere de politici pentru o presă liberă și independentă în România (Proposal for policies for a free and independent press in Romania), 2012, Hertie School of Governance, available online at: <https://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Romania.pdf> (accessed on 6 June 2019); see also (in Romanian), Monica Cercelescu, Libertatea presei vs. libertatea de exprimare a avocatului. Limite comune și specifice (Freedom of the Press vs the lawyer's freedom of expression. Common and specific limits), 2015, available online at: <https://www.juridice.ro/412841/libertatea-presei-vs-libertatea-de-exprimare-a-avocatului-limite-comune-si-specifice.html> (accessed on 6 June 2019).

A landmark event for the professionalization in journalism in Romania was the adoption of the Deontological Code by the Convention of Media Organizations (COM) in 2004. Established in 2002, COM was at the time an alliance of 40 or so professional media organizations and individuals including owners, media outlets and professional associations. The Code consists of principles, rights and obligations that journalists are supposed to follow in doing their work. It recognizes journalism as a public interest profession, stating that journalists have the right to refuse to carry out tasks that conflict with their values. Although such internal codes of conduct are important in shaping the professional identity of journalists and a vital instrument to build trust, lack of influential professional associations in the area hinder their implementation. It is believed that some journalists follow the Code's rules, but the community of journalists needs to enforce the Code as a professional practice to see some impact.

In addition to media legislation and self-regulation, journalists who live and work in Romania have been seriously affected by changes in the labor legislation that were passed in 2011. The changes effectively abolished the journalists' right to negotiate a collective labor contract as media was no longer recognized as a standalone industry. The sector was merged with culture

into a new legal category that became known as the "media and culture industry" covering a wide range of professions from singers to actors to dancers to journalists and printing house employees. The 2011 legal provisions that led to these changes were criticized by many of these groups because they have very different priorities and interests.

Finally, regulation of data protection and access to information policies has a significant impact on journalists' everyday work. Access to public information is guaranteed by the Romanian legislation, but, in practice, state institutions are slow to adopt good practices such as regularly publishing data and reports on their websites. Obtaining public information is hindered by bureaucracy and, often, the authorities' reluctance to share public data. In fact, some of the legal provisions that would normally help journalists get access to information to properly do their job have been used against them. Romanian data protection legislation, which transposes new EU legal provisions collected in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) [4] has been used in one high-profile corruption case to ask journalists to reveal their sources.[5]

Overall, despite a fairly permissive and adequate legal framework, institutional practices and implementation of the law have serious negative consequences for Romanian journalism.

[4] Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council, the European Union's ('EU') new General Data Protection Regulation ('GDPR'), regulates the processing by an individual, a company or an organization of personal data relating to individuals in the EU. Additional information is available online at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection/reform/what-does-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr-govern\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection/reform/what-does-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr-govern_en) (accessed on 15 June 2019).

[5] The author refers here to a raid conducted by the National Data Protection Agency against an investigative journalism initiative (RISE Project) whose journalists published a series of reports about the businesses of the (then) Social Democrat leader, Liviu Dragnea, the de facto most influential person in Romania's political power until recently. A discussion about the relation with the GDPR is available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/06/europes-gdpr-elevated-privacy-over-press-freedom/590845/> (accessed on 15 June 2019).

# REGULATORY AUTHORITIES

## Operational aspects

### Broadcast Media and Frequency Spectrum

#### The National Audiovisual Council (*Consiliul Național al Audiovizualului, CNA*)

##### *Remit and Tasks*

The National Audiovisual Council (Consiliul Național al Audiovizualului, CNA) is the main regulatory body for television and radio in Romania. CNA's main responsibilities, as stated in a publicly available list of tasks,[6] are to monitor how broadcasters comply with existing legal provisions, to promote media literacy and education and to ensure market competitiveness and fairness.



The CNA also regulates the radio frequency spectrum and is tasked with licensing television and radio broadcasters.

Licenses for audiovisual operators are given for a nine-year period. In the license application process, the Council verifies whether the applicants comply with a series of licensing requirements, both technical and organizational, put forward in the law. Among other things, the CNA has to ensure the applicants for broadcast licenses do not have any debts to the state and do not hold a monopoly.[7]

##### *Board Composition*

The Council is accountable to Parliament. Its eleven members are appointed by the two chambers of Parliament (three appointments by the Senate and three by the Chamber of Deputies), the President (2), and the Government (3). Each member serves a six-year term.

Members of the Council should, in theory, have expertise in the field, as they must understand legislation, implement regulations and decide on complex issues such as freedom of expression and privacy rights. Since its creation in 1994, the CNA has been staffed with people coming mostly from the fields of arts and culture, and less with journalists and media or legal experts.[8] Political appointments are customary and a battle for political representation takes place when new members are appointed.

[6] More information available on CNA's website at <http://www.cna.ro/-Consiliul-.html> (accessed on 15 June 2019).

[7] Exceptions include cases when the state allows delayed payment (in installments) or debt relief.

[8] Raluca Petre, *Media Regulatory Bodies in Romania; the limits of institutional change, Models for Journalism and Communication*, 2010, Are Docendi, Bucharest, pp 290-298.

The current Council does have a few members who identify themselves as journalists and writers and is led by a newly appointed president (Maria Monica Gubernat)[9] who has a post-graduate degree in media and communication studies. Members of the Council are obliged by law to be politically independent (meaning that they should not be affiliated with a party or serve political functions). However, most of them have long political careers behind them, which they pause once they are appointed in the CNA.

Out of the 11 members of the Council (including its president), one is a media expert, two are former journalists, two are practicing writers and journalists, two have technical experience in media or regulation, three had mostly political careers, and one is a psychologist.

#### List of CNA members, June 2019[10]

- Maria Monica Gubernat (PhD in media and communication studies, elected CNA president in April 2019)
- Radu Călin Cristea (literary critic)
- Răsvan Popescu (writer, film critic, journalist)
- Radu Herjeu (journalist and writer)
- Gabriel Tufeanu (technical experience in television)
- Nicolaie Bălașa (writer, former CNA inspector for 20 years)
- Ramona Sorescu (executive director, Realitatea TV, new member)
- Orsolya Borsos (worked for the Ministry of European Funds, new mandate since December 2018)
- Alexandru Kocsis (child protection, psychology)
- Cristina Pocora (political career with the National Liberal Party (PNL), proposed by the Presidency)
- Dorina Rusu (political career with the PNL, journalist)

#### *Funding*

The Council, which is funded with public money, has seen a steady increase in its budget since 2013.

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[9] Maria Monica Gubernat's position had to be formally validated by the Parliament at the time of writing.

[10] Iulia Bunea, "CNA, raport de activitate 2018. Kanal D, cel mai amendat post generalist. Realitatea TV, cea mai sancționată televiziune de știri" (CNA activity report 2018. Kanal D the most fined generalist TV channel. Realitatea TV the most fined news channel), *Paginademedi.ro*, 5 April 2019, available online at <https://www.paginademedi.ro/2019/04/cna-raport-de-activitate-2018> (accessed on 6 June 2019); see also the CNA's website, available online at <http://www.cna.ro/-Consiliul-.html> (accessed on 15 June 2019).

## The regulator's accounts

### The CNA budget

		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Income	'000 RON	8,299	8,491	8,347	9,765	9,486	11,001
	'000 €	1,881	1,912	1,879	2,174	2,080	2,365
Expenditure	'000 RON	8,268	8,426	8,283	9,765	9,432	10,889
	'000 €	1,874	1,897	1,865	2,174	2,068	2,341

\*The yearly average exchange rate of the Romanian National Bank (BNR) was used to calculate Euro figures in this report.  
Source: CNA annual reports

## The National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications of Romania (*Autoritatea Națională pentru Administrare și Reglementare în Comunicații, ANCOM*)

### Remit and Tasks

ANCOM is an autonomous authority under the control of Parliament. The institution monitors electronic communication in Romania, overseeing all communication markets (including internet, radio frequency spectrum, telephone and postal services) and the infrastructure that supports these services. In addition to these tasks, ANCOM also has regulatory and consultative responsibilities.

### Board Composition

The president and the two vice-presidents of ANCOM are appointed by Parliament. The authority has over 600 employees.

The current leadership of ANCOM consists of President Sorin Grindeanu (an IT engineer, former Prime Minister) and Vice Presidents Eduard Lovin (an ANCOM expert with 10+ years in the institution) and Bogdan Iana (an ANCOM expert with 20+ years in the institution).

Mr Grindeanu, the current ANCOM president, is a former Prime Minister from the Social Democratic Party (PSD). He was removed from that position through a no-confidence motion in June 2017 after a series of conflicts with the party's then president, Liviu Dragnea.

### Funding

ANCOM is not funded by public money, but from fees that it collects for use and management of frequencies as well as taxes for telephone number allocation. ANCOM had a budget excess in 2017, which it proposed to use to develop internet infrastructure for the "digitally excluded".[11]

[11] Adrian Vasilache, "Proiect de OUG: Arbitrul telecom va putea aloca până la 500 milioane de lei din excedentul din 2017 pentru proiecte care să dezvolte comunicațiile electronice din România" (NGO project: the telecom watchdog will be able to allocate up to RON 500m from its 2017 excess budget for projects aimed at developing electronic communication in Romania), HotNews.ro, 2 July 2018, available online at <https://economie.hotnews.ro/stiri-telecom-22542492-proiect-oug-arbitrul-telecom-putea-aloca-500-milioane-lei-din-excedentul-din-2017-pentru-proiecte-care-dezvolte-comunica-iile-electronice-din-romnia.htm> (accessed on 6 June 2019)

## The regulator's accounts

### ANCOM budget and expenditures

		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Income	'000 RON	369,256	421,464	388,405	452,541	464,865	n/a
	'000 €	83,731	94,924	86,504	99,241	99,970	n/a
Expenditure	'000 RON	207,112	157,333	160,036	161,782	172,743	n/a
	'000 €	46,964	35,435	36,044	36,031	37,882	n/a

n/a: not available

Source: ANCOM annual reports

## Print Media Regulators

Print and online media are unregulated in Romania, but their content can be subject to various unrelated laws such as legislation that protects minorities from hate speech, laws on discrimination and incitement to violence as well as legislation that protects the right to privacy, dignity and public image.

## Internet Regulators



Online content is not regulated in Romania. ANCOM, the country's telecom regulator, is in charge of regulating the internet, but its responsibilities are mostly limited to technical issues.

Debates in the public sphere about the need to regulate online content, especially fake news and its impact on the electoral process, have been heating up recently. There is resistance to such initiatives from a few civil society organizations that see any attempt to regulate speech as a potential tool that political and business elites can use to persecute journalists. Most recently an action by Facebook against fake accounts present on its platform sparked a debate about how much space a privately held, commercially funded company like Facebook can have to regulate free speech.

The broadcast watchdog, CNA has a mandate to sanction television and radio stations in cases when they deliberately spread fake information, but it has no mandate over the print and online media.

## Data Protection Regulators

### The National Supervisory Authority for Personal Data Processing (*Autoritatea Națională de Supraveghere a Prelucrării Datelor cu Caracter Personal, ANSPDCP*)

#### *Remit and Tasks*

As a national authority, ANSPDCP is under the control of the Senate (the upper house of Romania's Parliament). The ANSPDCP's president has a status similar to a state secretary.

The authority monitors the implementation of national and international legislation, approves and proposes legislation, and monitors the activity of data-carrying operators. It manages and oversees the implementation of the GDPR, which in 2018 was its most challenging task.

#### *Board Composition*

As in the case of other regulators in Romania, the leadership of the data authority lacks expertise and experience in the field that it manages. Although regulations require the president and the vice-president of the data authority to have at least ten years of experience in a relevant field, in reality, its high-ranking managers were appointed mainly on political grounds, specifically thanks to their political loyalty to the PSD.

Both ANSPDCP leaders worked as councilors for various prominent party members and have not previously worked in any position that would qualify them to lead the country's data protection watchdog. Moreover, the ANSPDCP's president Ancuța Gianina Opre is enmeshed in an ongoing corruption investigation that was launched in 2017, targeting activities related to her position in the National Authority for Restitution of Properties (*Autoritatea Națională pentru Restituirea Proprietăților, ANRP*), the institution in charge of returning properties confiscated by the communist regime before 1989 and compensating people for losing those properties to the communists.

#### **Leadership of the ANSPDCP, June 2019**

- Ancuța Gianina Opre – President (political career in PSD, former councilor of PSD Prime Minister Mircea Geoană)
- Mirela Nistoroiu – Vice-president

#### *Funding*

The budget of the ANSPDCP has increased between 2013 and 2017 to some €1m. In 2017, it was more or less the same as in the previous year.

## The regulator's accounts

### *ANSPDCP budget and expenditure, 2013-2017*

		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total income	'000 RON	2.894	2.945	2.949	4.851	4.585
	'000 EUR	656	663	656	1.092	1.005
Expenditure	'000 RON	2.853	2.885	2.868	4.767	4.287
	'000 EUR	646	649	645	1.061	921

Source: ANSPDCP annual reports

## Other Institutions with Regulatory Powers

### Ministry of Communications and Information Society (*Ministerul Comunicațiilor și Societății Informaționale*)

The ministry at the time of writing was headed by Alexandru Petrescu, a former member of the PSD, who used to be the head of the Romanian Post. Also a former minister for economy who was proposed to become director for ANCOM, he has a background in business administration and heads an institution largely focused on internet and communication technology and infrastructure that guarantees a well-functioning electronic communication in Romania. A quick look at the ministry's strategy and recent projects shows activities in the fields of cyber security, work aimed at bridging the digital divide in Romania, and introduction of better communication technology in the country.

The ministry has been absent from debates on freedom of the press, access to information or free speech. Its mandate is mostly focused on technology and infrastructure and in such a capacity it can influence people's access to information. Especially by addressing issues of access to new media and technology among marginalized groups, the ministry is in the position to shape media practices. However, its overemphasis on infrastructure development leaves a question mark on its capacity to address the social and economic causes of the digital divide in Romania.

### Parliamentary Committees

Committees are parliamentary bodies formed in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of Parliament. They do not have decision-making power but are entitled to propose and review legislation, having a consultative role and the right to monitor the activity of Parliament in their area of expertise. Nonetheless, members of these committees are not appointed based on their expertise. These committees rather reflect the political composition of Parliament.

Two parliamentary committees have influence in the media.



**The Committee for Culture, Arts and Mass Media** is responsible for media affairs and also culture and the arts, as the name suggests. The committee has 15 members, with its current leadership consisting of a former priest, an economist, a lawyer and a politician.

#### Leadership of culture, arts and mass media committee

President:

- Gigel-Sorinel Știrbu (former priest, studies in theology and history, representative of the National Liberal Party, PNL)

Vice Presidents:

- Dragoș-Petruț Bârlădeanu (economist, former councilor of Vrancea, PSD)
- Damian Florea (politician, PSD)
- Adriana Diana Tușa (lawyer, politician, PSD)

At a quick glance, the activity of the committee mainly consists of incendiary public statements, usually in the form of political attacks, orchestrated by its president, against the governing party and some of its members. The committee meets once a week and debates themes ranging from the establishment of museums to organization of cultural events and the structure of the Romanian Academy to access to information policy to abusive practices inside the public service broadcasters and the use of mobile applications by state authorities.

**The Committee for Technology and Communication** has a much more focused technical area of expertise. It also has 15 members and meets on a weekly basis. It is less vocal publicly, focusing on topics primarily related to communication infrastructure. The committee does have a software engineer as president, however, the rest of its leadership lack expertise in the field covered by the committee. The vice-presidents of the committee are a former professional boxer, a civil engineer and a representative of national minorities hardly known by the public.

#### Leadership of the Committee for Technology and Communication

President:

- Cătălin Drulă (software engineer, Union Save Romania, USR)

Vice Presidents:

- Vasile Cîtea (former boxer, PSD)
- Ionela Viorela Dobrică (construction engineer, PSD)
- Mariana-Venera Popescu (representative of minorities)

**The National Council for Combating Discrimination** (*Consiliul Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării*, CNCD) is not a media regulator. However, it does have the power to influence media content. Its mandate is to protect groups vulnerable to discrimination and to impose sanctions, usually fines, on discrimination perpetrators. As it covers media, it complements in some ways the work of the CNA<sup>[12]</sup> on radio and television programs. Unlike CNA, however, the CNCD also oversees the print and online media.

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[12] The two institutions cooperate in cases of discrimination and hate speech. For example, CNA regularly sends cases to CNCD for review.

In 2018, CNCD reviewed 74 cases of speech that qualified as attacks on “human dignity,” out of which 48 were carried out in the media (both traditional and online media). The CNCD’s decisions are accompanied by warnings or fines. All the journalists investigated by CNCD received fines (17 in total), according to ActiveWatch, a Bucharest-based media freedom watchdog.[13] Given the speed with which CNCD solved cases involving the governing party (PSD) and the outcomes that are usually favorable to PSD, ActiveWatch suspected CNCD of political bias.

## Decision-Making Process

### Key Decision-Makers in Regulation & Policymaking

Although the media system is dominated by private enterprises, the legislation is almost solely dictated by the state.[14] The institutions that have the mandate to propose policy and legislation in the field are the National Audiovisual Council (CNA), the National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications of Romania (ANCOM), the parliamentary committees responsible for mass media and technology, and individual MPs who can propose legislation. The civil society organizations have on occasion a consultative role and the labor and employers’ organizations have some leverage too, but in recent years they have had a rather reactive than an active role.

Two characteristics of the Romanian media policy and regulatory field are notable. One is that the legal framework is in theory enabling journalists to perform their job efficiently. However at the policy and practice level, principles guaranteed in legislation are not respected. The second is that there is a serious lack of expertise in the regulatory bodies that results in a lack of strategy in managing the field. These two problems allow for a rather ad hoc decision-making process. The fact that there are no serious battles to be fought over legislation means that traditional bodies that would engage in policymaking are not engaged systematically in the process. The fight over institutional practices is a trench warfare that engages actors in smaller, but constant battles.

Thus, it is difficult to identify individuals with long-term planning and strategy in their media policy approach. Some do shape media policy by not performing their tasks and allowing their institutions to be used as instruments in political battles.

#### CNA

**Maria Monica Gubernat**, the president of the CNA, has a PhD in media and communication studies. She has been a member of the Council since 2012, appointed by the PSD. She has a long history of membership in the party, working for the PSD electoral campaign as early as 2000.



Source: CNA

[13] For more details, see Raportul anual cu privire la discursul intolerant și instigator la ură (Annual report on intolerance and hate speech), ActiveWatch, June 2019, available online at <https://activewatch.ro/ro/antidiscriminare/publicatii/raportul-anual-cu-privire-la-discursul-intolerant-si-instigator-la-ura> (accessed on 23 June 2019).

[14] Ioana Avadani, Propunere de politici, cit.



Source: CNA

**Nicolaie Bălașa-Sorescu** is the vice-president of the Council. He has a PhD in philosophy. Mr Bălașa-Sorescu has been working for the Council since 1995. Although it might seem unfair to hold two recently appointed council members accountable for their institution's failures, both Ms Gubernat and Mr Bălașa-Sorescu have been in the Council for long enough to share some of this responsibility. The CNA has been in the spotlight repeatedly for failing to perform either by postponing or not making difficult decisions, by not actively intervening in stopping harmful legislation and by not taking the lead in the regulatory process.

### The Committee for Culture, Arts and Mass Media

A priest-turned-politician, member of the National Liberal Party (PNL), **Gigel Sorinel Știrbu** is the president of the committee. He has a PhD in history and also attended courses at the National Defense University and in diplomacy. He had a one-year mandate (2013-2014) as culture minister. He is known for his vituperative attacks on PSD, the governing party. He has more expertise and experience in the arts and culture fields than in the media. In the past couple of years, he has proposed legislation that, among other things, would make Romanian language programs more accessible to hearing impaired<sup>[15]</sup> and shed transparency on copyrighted material.<sup>[16]</sup> He called on the CNA to be more active in monitoring abuses during the May 2019 European election campaign. Mr Știrbu's role is important as all legislative initiatives in the media are first assessed by his committee.



Source: Romanian Parliament

### The National Supervisory Authority for Personal Data Processing



Source: actual24.ro

Both **Ancuța Gianina Opre** (president, on the left) and **Mirela Nistoroiu** (vice-president, on the right) of the data protection authority have been political appointments with connections to the PSD. Their lack of expertise in the field of data protection at a time when their institution is supposed to manage the implementation of the GDPR, a major piece of EU law, raises serious concerns. The two allowed their institution to be used by the former PSD leader Liviu Dragnea in a case of intimidation of journalists investigating alleged acts of corruption. Mr Dragnea, one day after the EU

elections, was put behind bars following a lengthy corruption-related lawsuit. The use of EU legislation against independent journalists, which outraged the journalism community in Romania and abroad, was aimed to send a message to other valiant journalists. An institution whose mission is to monitor how privacy-related issues are respected can't get itself involved in political vendettas. On the long run, the lack of expertise and competence in the data authority is a serious threat to press freedom.



Source: dpo-net.ro

[15] See the text of the amendment (in Romanian) at [http://www.cdep.ro/pls/proiecte/docs/2018/cd089\\_18.pdf](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/proiecte/docs/2018/cd089_18.pdf) (accessed on 15 June 2019).

[16] See the text of the amendment (in Romanian) at <http://www.cdep.ro/proiecte/2019/000/60/8/se71.pdf> (accessed on 15 June 2019).

## Transparency of Decision-Making in Media Regulation

Transparency in decision-making is ensured through several mechanisms that allow journalists and their professional organizations to reach out to legislators. The sessions of the parliamentary committees responsible for media-related matters are open and their agendas and reports are published online. Occasionally, these committees invite professional organizations and representatives of civil society groups to meetings and consultations.

The National Audiovisual Council (CNA) also holds public meetings. Like all state bodies in Romania, CNA has to make public its yearly activity and financial reports.

But in spite of all these efforts to make information available to journalists and the general public, although information about emerging laws is available, legislation that impacts media practice is adopted without much foresight. The problem seems to be lack of access (by experts and civil society) to the legislative process rather than transparency.

Transparency alone does not solve accountability-related problems and unequal power relations in the field, especially if transparency is ensured post-factum, after media legislation is proposed, debated and approved. Access to meetings of parliamentary committees is vital for journalists to hold MPs accountable, but it's not sufficient to influence the legislative process. Nominations for these committees are public, but intervention in the lawmaking process is again out of reach for journalism associations or civil society organizations. (*See Impact of Regulators on News Media and Journalism in this report*)

## Impact of Regulators on News Media and Journalism

Access to information legislation is vital for journalists as it allows them to hold state actors accountable. Romania adopted in 2001 legislation<sup>[17]</sup> that allows citizens to ask public institutions to release information about their financial situation, institutional decisions and activities, among other things. The requests are sent to a designated department within the state institutions and must be answered within ten working days (for what is considered a standard request) and within up to 30 days for more complex requests (for example, when the request implies data aggregation). However, in practice, the lack of proper access to information is prevalent and was signaled by news organizations<sup>[18]</sup> and NGOs,<sup>[19]</sup> being on the priority list of the government led by Dacian Julien Cioloș between November 2015 and January 2017.<sup>[20]</sup> It has since been abandoned by the current government.

[17] Law no 544/2011 on the Free Access to Information for the General Public, published on 12 October 2001, available online <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/31413> (accessed on 15 June 2019).

[18] Simina Codruta, "Statul opac. Cum refuză autoritățile din România accesul la informații publice" (The Opaque State. How Romanian authorities refuse access to public information), Pressone, 31 January 2016, available online at <https://pressone.ro/statul-opac-cum-refuza-autoritatile-din-romania-accesul-la-informatii-publice/> (accessed on 6 June 2019).

[19] Ioana Pelehatăi, "7 pentru 544: La ce e bună legea accesului la informații de interes public?" (7 for 544: What is the access to information law good for?), Scena9, 4 July 2017, available online here: <https://www.scena9.ro/article/544-legea-accesului-la-informatii-de-interes-public> (accessed on 6 June 2019).

[20] See the press release (in Romanian) about the establishment of the Ministry for Public Consultation and Civic Dialogue dated 2015, which lists better access to public information as one of its priorities, available online at <http://gov.ro/ro/guvernul/sedinte-guvern/guvernul-a-decis-infintarea-ministerului-pentru-consultare-publica-i-dialog-civic> (accessed on 15 June 2019).

The major problem in the implementation of the access to information law is the slow processing of requests either because of the lack of resources in most state institutions (lack of personnel is often cited by those who complain) or for political reasons (when various state bodies purposely withhold information that would damage the image of certain political actors or institutions).[21]

New developments after 2015, in particular Romania's decision to join the Open Government Partnership[22], a global platform of governments and NGOs that promotes open government, are likely to lead to improvements. By joining the partnership, Romania committed to regularly publishing datasets of public information, promoting open access to data at local level (municipalities and city councils), and allowing for access to information in minority languages.[23] However, efforts to achieve these goals have not been consistent in the years after 2015. The poor state of various online platforms developed for these purposes (that are shabbily designed, unresponsive or not working at all) including the finance ministry website[24] (that collects data about public spending) or the government's data centralization portal[25] bear testimony to that.

Moreover, recent attempts to change the legislation to make it more restrictive when it comes to the type of data available for requests is concerning.[26] Claiming that requests for datasets are too complex for public clerks to process, the Ministry of Public Consultation and Social Dialog announced in 2017 that the Government was seeking to modify the access to information laws.[27]

Freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Constitution in Romania and is protected and regulated internally through a number of laws (including the Audiovisual Law and the Penal and Civil Codes) and through various international treaties like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) that Romania signed. Such legal provisions are important as issues such as defamation, libel and slander have recently surfaced back to the public debate after some high-level politicians such as Liviu Dragnea, the former leader of the governing Social Democratic Party (PSD), brought back to life legal proposals that would increase fines for "discriminatory speech" and "intolerance." [28] Mr Dragnea also revived ideas to adopt legislation that would punish insults brought to the Romanian people and country. In the end, the legal proposal on "discriminatory speech" was sent back for review to committees in the lower chamber of the Parliament whereas the ideas to introduce legal provisions to punish those who insult Romanians fizzled out.

The political turmoil triggered by the loss that the governing PSD suffered in the European Parliament elections in May 2019 could, however, affect all these legal developments. Although the vote didn't affect directly the power balance in the Romanian politics, following PSD's steep decline

[21] ActiveWatch, "Raportul FreeEx (2016-2017)-Libertatea Presei în România" (FreeEx Report 2016-2017-Freedom of the Press in Romania), available online at: <https://activewatch.ro/ro/freeex/publicatii/lansarea-raportului-freeex-2016-2017-libertatea-presei-in-romania> (accessed on 15 April 2019).

[22] See more details at the Open Government Partnership website, at <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/countries/romania> (accessed on 15 June 2019).

[23] ActiveWatch, "Raportul FreeEx (2016-2017)-Libertatea Presei în România," cit.

[24] See more at Transparenta Bugetara (Budget Transparency) website available online at <http://www.transparenta-bugetara.gov.ro/transparenta-bugetara/index.htm> (accessed on 15 June 2019).

[25] See more at: [www.data.gov.ro](http://www.data.gov.ro)

[26] Codruța Simina, Bianca Felseghi, "Guvernul se pregătește să modifice Legea accesului la informațiile publice" (The government prepares to amend the Access to Public Information Law), Pressone, 9 June 2017, available online at <https://pressone.ro/guvernul-se-pregateste-sa-modifice-legea-accesului-la-informatiile-publice/> (accessed on 6 June 2019).

[27] "Petrea: Legea 544 privind accesul la informațiile de interes public va fi modificată într-o dezbatere cu societatea civilă" (Petrea: Law no 544 regarding the free access to public information will be modified after a debate with civil society), Agerpres, 3 April 2017, available online at <https://www.agerpres.ro/politica/2017/04/03/petrea-legea-544-privind-accesul-la-informatiile-de-interes-public-va-fi-modificata-intr-o-dezbatere-cu-societatea-civila-14-28-28> (accessed on 6 June 2019)

[28] See the full text of the proposal (in Romanian) at <http://www.cdep.ro/proiecte/2015/600/40/9/se837.pdf> (accessed on 15 June 2019).

in EU elections to under 25% of the votes from some 46% won in the latest elections in 2016, PSD's very position in the Romanian political life is likely to be shaken. The morning after the conclusion of EU elections, Mr Dragnea was sentenced to three years and six months in prison in one of the many corruption lawsuits he is embroiled in. Within hours, he was already locked up. Until then, the PSD-led Government had pushed hard against the attempts of the Romanian justice to sentence corrupt politicians in PSD in spite of EU's warnings not to interfere with the courts. These political shifts could have an impact, hopefully positive, on media policies.

A law that restricts freedom of the press by encroaching upon the rights of journalists as workers is the Labour Code from 2011, which severely reduced the power of unions to operate and the right of workers to organize and to negotiate collective contracts. A set of newly introduced legal provisions regarding the right of specific professions to negotiate collective contracts affected the media sector, which was merged by the 2011 law with the arts and culture fields.

When the law was passed, media unions formed trade confederations that not only negotiated labor rights and benefits, but also successfully added legal provisions that protected the right of journalists to refuse to sign work that contravenes to their values (what is known as the "conscience clause"). Unions had played an active role in proposing self-regulation mechanisms for journalists such as the Deontological Code adopted in 2004. They also offered to monitor the implementation of the code. However, all these efforts were to no avail as the Labour Law passed in 2011 changed the status of the media sector, practically annulling all collective contracts for journalists.

Therefore, after 2011, media unions had to reorganize and find new institutional frameworks in which to function effectively and have a representative base. Efforts to reorganize and merge with the arts and culture sector took years and mobilized a considerable amount of resources from unions, who, as a result, during this time, were less effective in promoting and defending the rights of their members.[29]

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[29] Interview with Cristinel Godinac, leader of MediaSind, the largest media union in Romania, conducted in person on 25 April 2019.

# INFLUENCERS

## Local Influencers

### Industry Players

Industry players used to have considerable leverage on policymakers (but less on the actual policy) mostly through the Romanian Press Club (Clubul Român de Presă, CRP), a local NGO lobbying for the interests of media owners, and through the political connections of several powerful media moguls such as Adrian Sârbu (founder of Pro TV, a leading commercial channel), Dan Voiculescu (founder of Antena Grup), the late Dinu Patriciu (owner of the publisher Adevărul) and others.

However, the CRP is now mostly absent from the media and many of the media head honchos are either in jail, died or considerably lost their influence. Industry players now operate a lobby group, the Romanian Association for Audiovisual Communication (Asociația Română de Comunicații Audiovizuale, ARCA) that has been mostly focused on advocating against policies and laws on advertising (most recently, they tried to stop regulations of gambling ads).

In conclusion, industry players have not been very vocal about policy and institutional change. However, they have repeatedly tried to use their influence in convincing regulators to allow them to operate in spite of their poor financial health. A notable case is that of Realitatea TV that, although bankrupt, has been in operation for the past seven years. The channel has accumulated debts to the state budget of over €25m. Cozmin Gușă, the owner of the channel, has worked as a political consultant for leaders on both sides of the political spectrum (ranging from Traian Băsescu, a former President representing the Democratic Party (PD) to Dan Mircea Geoană, a former Prime Minister representing PSD), but also a journalist.

Debt forgiveness has been common in Romania for years. Back in the 2000s, Pro TV was allowed to operate in spite of its mountains of debt to the state in exchange for tempering (and, in the end, neutering) its criticism of the authorities on the channel's news reporting. Such fiscal privileges allowed media companies, for nearly two decades now, to grow and dominate the market. The price these media outlets paid, hardly quantifiable, was a high level of politicization.

### Civil Society

Civil society organizations working on media-related issues have been active since 2002 through an informal network known as the Convention of Media Organizations (COM). With the number of members fluctuating between 20 and 30, depending on who joins or leaves the network, COM meets from time to time to discuss media-related issues. The Convention has been fairly inactive in recent years. The secretariat of the network is staffed by the Center for Independent Journalism (*Centrul pentru Journalism Independent, CJI*) and ActiveWatch, two Bucharest-based NGOs.

The influence of civil society in the legislative process varies depending on the legislature. Civil society organizations, for example, were successful through petitions, media coverage and pressures on MPs in stopping regulations such as legal provisions on defamation proposed in 2016 by Mr Dragnea, or “media vulnerability” (defined by the Supreme Council of National Defense in its

Strategic Plan of 2010 as a threat to national security along with drug traffickers, organized crime and terrorism, which would have allowed authorities to treat journalists as threats). To stop the regulation of “media vulnerability”, pressure from abroad helped. At the invitation of MediaSind, the largest trade union of journalists in Romania, missions of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) visited Romania, slamming the planned regulations and bringing the matter to the attention of the European Parliament. Under such pressures, the planned provisions were eventually dropped.

Other organizations such as labor unions have been seriously weakened by the new Labour Code passed in 2011. However, MediaSind has been successful in bringing to international attention issues related to media workers’ rights and the increased political pressure on the public service media in Romania. MediaSind, for example, managed to stop a planned merger of the public radio and television with the state-controlled national news agency into one organization, a model imported from the neighboring Hungary of the autocratic government led by Viktor Orban.

Such interventions of civil society successfully preventing legislation that would have badly affected journalists are hopeful. However, looking back at the last ten years of media regulation, the adoption of major laws that dramatically affect the media system and journalistic profession (such as the new Labour Law adopted in 2011, changes in the funding of the public broadcasting company (from a tax-based model to a government-funding one) that makes it more dependent on the state and more vulnerable to political influence, or the failure to adopt laws that would make access to information easier) show that the actors fighting for media freedom and independence are not yet strong enough to successfully battle the state. A major concern is the lack of mechanisms that would allow proper public consultations where the public, including journalists, can contribute proposals for better regulation and policy.

There are many influential journalists and bloggers in Romania, but none with real power and leverage in media policymaking.

## External Influencers

The European Union (EU) is the most powerful influencer in the Romanian media-related policies and regulations. An EU law that has recently had a massive impact on data protection practices in the country is the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which forces all data-collecting entities to inform their clients how their personal data will be collected and obtain their consent to collect and store such information. Data collection legislation has an impact on media organizations as employers (that use personal data of employees) and as companies (that collect data to improve their audience reach). The GDPR does exempt journalists from various legal provisions, allowing them, for example, to protect the identity of their sources and to publish personal data in cases when their articles serve the public interest (for example, financial information about people in a public office).

Ironically, though, the GDPR has so far been used to bring journalists to heel. The data authority in Romania sent a request to RISE Project, an investigative journalism initiative, to disclose their sources following the publication of a series of reports about the illegal business deals of the former Social Democrat leader, Liviu Dragnea. The authority also threatened RISE with a fine of €20,000,



which can hurt an organization mostly funded by philanthropies.[30] In spite of pressures from the EU, which severely condemned the move and warned Romania to abstain from using the regulation in such a manner, the cases hasn't been concluded to date.

A greater influence in Romania's media is likely to come from the European Union Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market (known as the Copyright Law) that forces social media and content-sharing platforms to pay for copyrighted material shared on their platforms. The Copyright Law was adopted at EU level in March 2019 and will have to be transposed into national legislation by each EU member state within two years. In theory, provisions in this law would help news organizations be properly compensated by global technology colossuses such as Google and Facebook for content shared on their platforms. But in practice, Google might simply de-index news sites from its searches to avoid paying for copyrighted material, which could cripple many news media whose content would not be found online. Big players such as large news media in Romania might be able to negotiate the level of fees for content with the tech giants; however, smaller news portals fear that they would become (even more) invisible online.

But while the EU is a significant actor in the media-related policy field in Romania, the opposite is not true: Romania has not managed so far to push any media legislation to the EU agenda.[31]

Other pan-European or global organizations, including the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) or United Nations (UN) bodies, hardly have any influence in the Romanian media.

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[30] A discussion about the relation with the GDPR is available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/06/europes-gdpr-elevated-privacy-over-press-freedom/590845> (accessed on 15 June 2019).

[31] Ioana Avadani, Propunere de politici, cit.

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# **Funding Journalism**

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# SOURCES OF FUNDING

## Shifts in Journalism Funding

With dozens of both nationwide and local television and radio channels, over 3,000 printed publications and a fairly fragmented media ownership structure, Romania's media market looks vibrant and diverse. In reality, however, power and influence in the media are concentrated in the hands of a sprinkling of players.

A few large holdings including Central European Media Enterprises (CME), Intact Media Group and RCS&RDS have amassed both economic and symbolic power to influence media content at a very deep level. The content they produce set the norm for other smaller production houses. They shape public taste and opinion.

Sources of funding in journalism are somewhat diverse, but advertising and government financing dominate. Overall, media funding in Romania can be split in three major categories:

- Commercial funding (advertising, sales and subscription fees, carrier fees)
- State funding (direct funding for national broadcasters, state advertising, tax exemptions, state grants)
- Donations and grants (individual support through crowdfunding, donors and grant-making organizations, project-based services)

Commercial funding is by far the most common source of financing media in Romania, if we exclude the public service broadcasters. People in Romania still do not have enough resources (or are not mentally

prepared yet) to financially support media projects, so advertising funds most of the media content. This inevitably favors bigger players who command a large proportion of the audience. In addition, advertising-based funding affects content production as media content producers are pressured to produce high ratings instead of high-quality content.

Print media and independent outlets are the most vulnerable in a media market with low audience involvement like the Romanian one. An example of such vulnerability is the case of local media outlets that are particularly exposed to pressures from local authorities as they rely heavily on advertising from local companies that are often linked with local politicians. Media outlets that generate sufficient cash on their own such as major television stations and tabloid newspapers can afford to be apolitical as much as they can. But small newspapers and broadcasters are hardly in that position.

The state funds the public service radio and television broadcasters directly from the state budget. Before 2017, the two broadcasters were funded through a tax that the public had to pay with their electricity bill, since then, the two institutions have their budget approved by Parliament. This puts the public broadcasters in a situation of vulnerability as they are directly dependent on the governing parties and politicians in power. Other ways in which the state indirectly funds the media include tax collection<sup>[1]</sup> (or the lack thereof), state advertising<sup>[2]</sup>, and state grants allocated to media outlets, particularly to minority media.

[1] Notorious cases include Realitatea TV, a news channel that is still allowed to operate although it has high debts (from unpaid taxes) to the state; and Media Pro Group that had in the early 2000s millions of euros in unpaid taxes before it was purchased by a foreign company.

[2] Currently this is a negligible amount of money (Interview Ioana Avadani, Center for Independent Journalism (CJI), Bucharest, Romania)

Donations seem to be a safer way of funding media, but even in this case media outlets have to be vigilant and not fall in the trap of having big donors set the reporting agenda. Foundations belonging to multinational giants have a small presence in funding Romanian media; however, a few small independent and niche outlets (narrative and community journalism initiatives, in particular) have been relying on grants to support their work. Small donations through crowdfunding and monthly subscriptions are not yet common in Romania.

What characterized the Romanian media system in the past decade is the transition from a media system shaped to a large extent by powerful media moguls to a system dominated by large media companies. The system still sports a high concentration of power, especially in the television field, but the dominance has more an institutional than personal character typical for mogul-dominated media systems. It is left to see whether this transition will allow for a plurality of voices to appear and challenge the fairly concentrated media sector.

## Who's who in Romanian media

### The key influencers in the largest media in Romania

Service operator	Ownership	Key influential actor	Prominent news media assets				Income (RON m), 2017
			TV	Radio	Print	Online	
Pro TV	CME	Aleksandras Cesnavicius	Pro TV, Pro2, Pro Cinema	n/a	n/a	Stirileprotv.ro	768.6
Antena Grup	Intact Media Group	Dan Voiculescu	Antena 1, Antena 3, Antena Stars	Radio ZU	Jurnalul National	A1.ro, Antena3.ro, Observatorul.tv	318.4
RCS&RDS	Digi Communications N.V.	Zoltan Teszari	Digi 24, Digi Sport	Digi FM, Pro FM	n/a	Digi24.ro	3,339.40
Government	n/a	Government	TVR 1, TVR2	Radio Romania Actualitati, Radio Cultural	n/a	n/a	1,290.80
Ringier Romania	Ringier AG	-	n/a	n/a	Libertatea, Gazeta Sporturilor	Libertatea.ro, Gsp.ro	48.8
Adevarul Holding	Adevarul Holding	Cristian Burci	n/a	n/a	Click, Adevarul, Dilema Veche	n/a	112.5

n/a: not available

Source: CMDS

*Note: the table describes the main sources of influence in the media based on the perceived level of influence. Pro TV's influence is fueled by its audience, the highest in the country, followed by Antena Grup. RCS&RDS, because it controls much of the distribution market for television, deserves the third place. Although the public media do not have a large audience, the state, which finances them, exerts significant influence because of the amount of funding it spends in the media. Finally, Ringier and Adevarul are shaping the print media sector both through their popular tabloids and their online platforms.*

## Popular News Media

### Consumption Trends

Media consumption trends in Romania follow patterns similar to most European Union (EU) countries. One notable difference is the popularity of the written press, which plumbed new depths in Romania in recent years. Television is by far the most popular medium in Romania, followed by internet, print media and radio. What sets Romania apart from the EU average is the hegemony of television as a popular medium, on the one hand, and the free fall of the written press, on the other.

### Media diet in Romania

*Daily/almost daily use of media, Romania vs EU comparison, 2016-2017*

	Television		Internet		Radio		Print media	
	Romania	EU	Romania	EU	Romania	EU	Romania	EU
<b>2016</b>	86%	80%	42%	61%	24%	47%	9%	29%
<b>2017</b>	92%	81%	42%	65%	24%	50%	6%	28%

Source Eurobarometer 88[3]/89[4]

Television is by far the most used medium for media content consumption in Romania, according to data from the European Commission. Some 92% of Romanians watch television on a daily or almost daily basis, and most of them on a traditional television set. The second most used medium is the internet with 42% of Romanians using it on an almost daily basis, while radio and the written press are the least used media. Less than a quarter of Romanians listen to radio daily and a paltry 6% read a newspaper, according to the latest data available from the Commission in 2017. Television use is above the European average. In contrast, consumption of print media is way below the EU average of 28% (in 2017).

Television also leads when it comes to public trust. Some 61% of Romanians believe what they see on television. Radio comes next with 53% of the population, followed by print media (46%), internet (37%) and social networks (28%). Overall, however, only 24% of Romanians have high trust in the media, which is more or less the EU average.[5]

Nonetheless, the level of trust is not necessarily consistent with the consumption patterns, which raises several questions. Why do Romanians consume so little radio and written press if they trust those media almost like television? Or why do Romanians use the internet much more than they trust it? Answers could be linked to accessibility[6] (in the case of the written press) and shifting consumption patterns (in the case of the internet). Internet penetration has been steadily increasing in the past few years. In 2017, some 74% of Romania's households had access to the internet.[7] In contrast, print media are harder to find, especially in small towns and villages.

[3] "Standard Eurobarometer 88: Media use in the European Union," European Commission, Autumn 2017, available online <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/82786> (accessed on 12 April 2019).

[4] "Standard Eurobarometer 89: Media use in the European Union," European Commission, Spring 2018, available online at [ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/83548](https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/83548) (accessed on 12 April 2019).

[5] Standard Eurobarometer 89, cit.

[6] Accessibility is related both to cost (as more and more information is available online and perceived by users as being free-of-charge) and to distribution of newspapers (a problem especially in rural areas where distribution networks have collapsed and papers are not delivered any longer (Cristina Lupu, Center for Independent Journalism, written communication, 25 April 2019).

[7] See the Country Factsheet in Media Influence Matrix, available online at <https://cmds.ceu.edu/country-factsheet-7> (accessed on 12 April 2019).

The implications of these shifts in media consumption for rural communities and small towns are immense. Local media are normally much more aware of issues that have impact on the communities they serve and local journalists have strategically a better position to identify locally relevant issues and report on them in a more informed manner than those reporters who work remotely, usually in large cities. Centralization of content production in large urban centers thus leads to poor coverage of local issues. Locally, media (print and radio) are mostly consumed by rural and elderly audiences while most people rely heavily on nationwide television (in the absence of other media). That leads to a situation where the public knows more about Bucharest than about their own home town.

## *Key Players*

### **Television**

The preferred medium for news consumption in Romania is television, with 84% of the public using television as a primary source of news.[8] The television market is dominated by Pro TV and Antena 1, two of the first commercial channels established in Romania in the 1990s.[9] Pro TV group, with all its channels, commands nearly a quarter of the Romanian audience. Antena Group (including all of its channels) follows closely with some 18% of the audience. The three biggest broadcast groups, Pro TV, Antena and Dogan (owner of Kanal D) control jointly more than half of the Romanian audience.



Pro TV is the crown jewel of Central European Media Enterprises (CME), a U.S.-owned broadcast group. Founded in 1995 by Adrian Sarbu, a former film director, who recorded with his own videocamera the street protests during the 1989 anti-communist revolution that led to the collapse of Nicolae Ceausescu dictatorship in Romania, Pro TV dismantled the monopoly of the former state broadcaster soon after its launch. Thanks to its sensationalist news output, American blockbusters and mass-catering television shows (a novelty in a country that had for decades only a dull state broadcaster), Pro TV has since defended its leading position on the Romanian television market.

But it was Antena 1 that was the first commercial television to launch operations in Romania, back in 1993. Started as a regional channel broadcasting in and around Bucharest, Antena 1 soon expanded to become a nationwide channel. Antena 1 was founded by Dan Voiculescu, a Romanian businessman and politician who was serving a ten-year prison term for money laundering and was released on probation after three years (in 2017). The media holding controlling the Antena stations, Intact Media Group was formally handed over to Voiculescu's two daughters in 2005. Antena 1 is Pro TV's main competitor on the Romanian television market.

The third largest television channel in Romania, Kanal D was launched in 2007 by Dogan Media International, a Turkish-owned company belonging to the Dogan family, which has a complicated relation with the Turkish government as it operates businesses in many sectors including energy, banking and insurance. In spring 2018, Dogan Media Company in Turkey was bought by Demiroren Holding, a conglomerate close to the government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the authoritarian president of Turkey.[10]

[8] Radu, R., "Romania" in Digital News Report 2017, 2018, Oxford: Reuters Institute, pp. 88-90, available online at <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/risj-review/2017-digital-news-report-now-available> (accessed on 12 April 2019).

[9] A third channel, Tele7Abc, launched at the time, is now defunct.

[10] "Turkish Media Group Bought by Pro-Government Conglomerate," New York Times, 21 March 2018, available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/21/world/europe/turkey-media-erdogan-dogan.html> (accessed on 22 March 2019).

All three major stations, Pro TV, Antena 1 and Kanal D are generalist television channels, offering mostly a low-brow, commercial television diet that includes movies, reality shows, newscasts and sports.

The only television channels that pose some competition to the leading trio Pro TV-Antena-Dogan are Romania TV, a controversial channel founded in 2011 by Sebastian Ghiță, a runaway investor enmeshed in a thicket of corruption-related investigations; and National TV, a channel founded in 2003 by the Micula brothers, businessmen from the city of Oradea, in northwestern Romania, who own the soft drinks bottler European Drinks. Romania TV is a news and talkshow channel whereas National TV is a generalist television channel drawing much of its audience through telenovelas and movies. (*See more in Influential News Media in this report*)

Other than that, RCS&RDS, a large telco founded in 1994 by the Oradea-born businessman Zoltán Tészari, has been investing in news media in recent years. However, its Digi TV television chain (including sports, documentary and news channels) is nowhere near the audience rates enjoyed by market leaders like Pro TV and Antena. RCS&RDS's most popular television channel is a sports channel with an audience share of under 2%.

It is also worth noting the poor performance of the public service broadcaster whose flagship channel TVR1 has an audience share hovering around 2%. It sank to under 2% in 2019, its worst audience figure ever.

#### Largest television channels by audience share in Romania, 2017-2019

TV Channel	Year			Operating company	Majority owner
	2017	2018	2019		
Pro TV	18.01	18.96	19.12	Pro TV	CME
Antena 1	12.69	11.85	12.01	Antena Group	Intact Media Group
Kanal D	10.18	11.43	10.74	Dogan Media International	Dogan Group
Romania TV	6.88	5.77	5.99	Ridzone Computers	Gheorghe Catrinel Maria
Antena 3	6.4	5.14	4.55	Antena Group	Intact Media Group
National TV	2.27	2.79	2.57	ABC Plus Media	Ioan and Viorel Micula
Prima TV	2.96	2.9	2.43	Prima Broadcasting Group	Clever Media Network
Pro 2	1.42	1.37	2.39	Pro TV	CME
Antena Stars	1.87	1.72	2.13	Antena Group	Intact Media Group
DigiSport 1	1.06	1.97	1.87	RCS&RDS	Digi Communications N.V.
TVR 1	2.18	2.39	1.74	SRTV	Government
Realitatea TV	1.96	1.48	1.63	Realitatea Media	Cosmin Gusa
Pro Cinema	1.82	1.64	1.63	Pro TV	CME
Happy Channel	0.99	1.03	1.5	Antena Group	Intact Media Group
B1TV	1.88	1.38	1.47	B1 TV Channel	Sorin Oancea
Etno	1.44	0.89	1.43	Etno Folclor Media	Silviu Prigoana
TVR 2	1.23	1.67	1.38	SRTV	Government

Note: Data for February of each year

Source: Romanian Association for Audience Measurement (ARMA)

## Radio

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The popularity of radio as a medium has declined in recent years at nearly the same pace as print media. Only 6% of Romanians listened to the radio on a daily basis in 2017. Since 2015, the listenership of most stations has dropped. The most radical decline in audience was experienced by the public service broadcaster Radio Romania Actualitati and its subsidiaries. Once an uncontested market leader, it now comes

8th in terms of popularity. Although thanks to its networks of local radio channels, the public service broadcaster is still a significant player in the radio segment, its influence has decreased significantly, especially in urban areas.

The biggest companies on the radio market are AG Radio Holding, Czech Media Invest (CMI), the public service broadcaster and RCS&RDS. The Media Camina Group is part of a larger media trust, Intact Media Group, owned by the Voiculescu family.

AG Radio Holding is owned by ANTI Group, the largest media group by assets in Greece, with operations across the Balkans and Eastern Europe. In Romania the company owns Kiss FM, Magic FM and Rock FM, and operates the online music and news site Unsitedemuzica.ro (meaning “a music site” in Romanian). AG Radio Holding is the market leader with a 27% share of the radio market in 2017. Czech Media Invest (CMI) started operations in Romania in 2018 when it purchased the assets of the French-owned media group Lagardere in Romania (Europa FM, Virgin Radio and Radio 21).[11] CMI was founded by Daniel Kretinsky, a Czech businessman formerly associated with the financial group J&T in the Czech Republic, who is heavily invested in a plethora of industries including energy. The Media Camina Group owns Radio ZU, the most popular radio station in Bucharest and the second most listened in Romania. The group is part of the Intact Media Group, which has investments in other media as well.

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[11] “Europa FM, preluat de un controversat grup de business apropiat de Ungaria și Rusia” (Europa FM taken over by a controversial business group close to Hungary and Russia), BI, 18 April 2018, available online at <https://www.b1.ro/stiri/eveniment/europa-fm-vandut-daniel-kretinsky-220036.html> (accessed on 22 March 2019).



## Radio listenership in Romania (number of listeners), 2015-2018

Station	2015	2016	2017	2018	Operator
Kiss FM	2,105,300	2,155,100	1,682,800	1,769,800	AG Radio Holding
Radio ZU	1,752,200	1,960,600	1,241,900	1,278,900	Grupul Media Camina GMC (Intact Group)
Europa FM	1,509,900	1,381,700	837,700	829,700	Czech Media Invest (CMI)
Digi FM	n/a	485,300	441,900	517,300	RCS&RDS
Magic FM	772,100	700,600	472,700	511,300	AG Radio Holding
Virgin Radio	n/a	n/a	392,400	503,100	Czech Media Invest (CMI)
Pro FM	1,454,300	965,600	474,900	484,800	RCS&RDS
Radio Romania Actualitati	1,990,000	2,025,600	46,200	443,000	Government
Rock FM	264,100	290,700	214,400	224,000	AG Radio Holding
Antena Satelor	701,200	699,400	242,200	186,500	Government
Radio Oltenia Craiova	418,400	403,400	134,700	133,100	Government
Radio Romania Iasi	401,800	395,900	130,200	101,800	Government
Radio Guerilla	n/a	n/a	n/a	99,400	Mihai Dobrovolschi & Adrian Edmondo Popescu
National FM	253,200	251,800	106,700	99,100	Ioan and Viorel Micula
Radio Romania Cultural	176,000	208,000	78,300	75,700	Government
Radio Romania Resita	163,000	190,500	76,800	66,800	Government
Radio Romania Timisoara	203,200	191,400	48,300	52,400	Government
Radio Romania Targu Mures	134,300	116,000	39,300	34,000	Government
Radio Romania Constanta	49,000	36,500	37,600	23,100	Government
Radio Romania Cluj	99,500	134,300	24,400	20,200	Government
Radio Romania Bucuresti FM	80,600	91,800	30,600	12,200	Government

Note: data for fall each year; n/a: not available

Source: Asociația pentru Audio Audiența (The Association for Audio Audience)

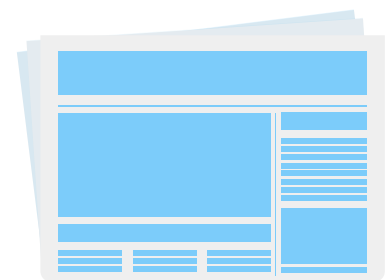
## Print Media

The print press in Romania follows international trends of decline in influence and financial sustainability. Tabloids dominate the market; however, their circulations have tumbled in recent years as well. Surprisingly, some local publications perform better than nationally distributed dailies. *Evenimentul*

*Zilei*, which was the first tabloid newspaper launched in Romania in the mid-1990s, has a lower circulation than the most popular dailies from mid-size cities like Oradea and Arad (with populations of 205,000 and 162,000 people, respectively).

Overall, however, print media is a moribund sector, with only two nationwide newspapers, both tabloids, selling more than 10,000 copies. Major newspapers such as *Adevarul* and *Romania Libera* barely sell 5,000 copies. In a country of 19 million, these are remarkably low figures.

*Adevarul* Holding owns the most popular printed tabloid in Romania, *Click* as well as *Adevarul*, a daily with an impressively long history. The company was founded in 2006 by Dinu Patriciu (founding member of the Liberal Party and an oil and real estate magnate), a controversial



businessman who died in 2014 after selling<sup>[12]</sup> his media business to a less notorious, but still controversial businessman, Cristian Burci (who was accused among other things of money laundering). Last year, industry insiders said that Burci was planning to sell all his media except for Click<sup>[13]</sup>, a tabloid featuring mostly gossip. Adevarul's history harks back to the 19th century. After 1989, the newspaper reappeared (under the name Adevarul) as a successor to Scanteia, the official newspaper of the communist regime in Romania before 1990. Adevarul was one of the most read dailies in the 1990s and the early 2000s.

Swiss-owned Ringier Group is the sole prominent western publisher in the Romanian print media. The company is not investing in serious journalism in Romania, focusing instead on glossy magazines, tabloids and sports publications. Ringier purchased Gazeta Sporturilor (GSP) in 2018. GSP is locally known as an institution in sports reporting thanks also to Catalin Tolontan, GSP's editor-in-chief for 21 years. A critical voice in the media, Tolontan left this position in 2018 to lead editorial efforts at Libertatea, but said that he would stay at GSP to "coordinate" the group's journalistic work.<sup>[14]</sup> If this will mean that one of Romania's leading tabloids will change course and start publishing different (more quality) content is left to be seen.

With circulation figures that would make nationwide newspaper slaver at the chops, Inform Media Press is ranked among the largest publishers in Romania in spite of the fact that it operates on local market. Its newspapers, Bihari Napló (in Hungarian), Jurnalul Aradean and Jurnalul Bihorean make it in the top ten most circulated newspapers in Romania. Inform Media Press, formerly known as Russmedia, is a company founded in 2016 by a Hungarian-incorporated company associated with Lőrinc Mészáros, an oligarch close to Hungary's Prime-Minister Viktor Orbán.<sup>[15]</sup> The Hungarian peer company, Inform Media Press Kft has also bought a raft of local papers in eastern Hungary in the last couple of years.

Editura Evenimentul si Capital, owner of the daily Evenimentul Zilei (EvZ), meaning "the event of the day" in Romanian, is majority-owned by Dan Andronic, a journalist with many political connections and influence. EvZ exerted significant influence in the Romanian press during the 1990s pioneering the yellow journalism in the country. Aside from the two most popular tabloids, EvZ remains the best-selling daily newspaper with nationwide coverage in Romania.

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[12] "Patriciu a vândut Adevărul Holding lui Cristian Burci. Oficial" (Patriciu sold Adevarul Holding to Cristian Burci. It's official), *Economica*, 5 October 2012, available online at [https://www.economica.net/patriciu-a-vandut-adevarul-holding-lui-cristian-burci-oficial\\_35403.html](https://www.economica.net/patriciu-a-vandut-adevarul-holding-lui-cristian-burci-oficial_35403.html) (accessed on 22 March 2019).

[13] Lucian Negrea, "Se pregătește tranzația anului pe piața media: Cristian Burci vinde Adevărul și Prima TV/ SURSE" (The transaction of the year on the media market is being planned: Cristian Burci sells Adevarul and Prima TV/Sources), *Stiripesurse.ro*, 15 August 2018, available online at [https://www.stiripesurse.ro/se-pregate-te-tranza-ia-anului-pe-pia-a-media-cristian-burci-vinde-adevarul-i-prima-tv\\_1283591.html](https://www.stiripesurse.ro/se-pregate-te-tranza-ia-anului-pe-pia-a-media-cristian-burci-vinde-adevarul-i-prima-tv_1283591.html) (accessed on 22 March 2019).

[14] "După 21 de ani ca redactor-șef, e timpul să predau responsabilitatea lui Cătălin Țepelin, un ziarist din noua generație, mai bun ca mine!" (After 21 years as editor-in-chief, it is time to hand over the responsibility to Cătălin Țepelin, a journalist of the new generation, better than me!), *Tolo.ro*, 11 July 2018, available online at <https://www.tolo.ro/2018/07/11/dupa-21-de-ani-ca-redactor-sef-e-timpul-sa-predau-responsabilitatea-lui-catalin-tepelin-un-ziarist-din-noua-generatie-mai-bun-ca-mine/> (accessed on 21 March 2019).

[15] Szalay Dániel, "Bejegyezték a Népszabadság hōherja által megvett kelet-magyarországi médiavállalat névváltását" (Announced name change of media company belonging to Népszabadság hangman), *24.hu*, 21 September 2017, available online at: <https://24.hu/media/2017/09/21/bejegyeztek-a-nepszabadsag-hoherja-atal-megvett-kelet-magyarorszag-i-mediavallalat-nevvaltasat/> (accessed on 15 March 2019).

## Most popular daily newspapers in Romania, 2018

Publication	Coverage	Publisher	Director	Circulation
<b>Tabloid</b>				
Click	nationwide	Adevarul Holding	Dan Belcea	59,989
Libertatea	nationwide	Ringier Romania	Mihnea Vasiliu	34,020
<b>General news</b>				
Jurnalul Aradean	local	Inform Media Press	Fodor Istvan Mihaly	10,522
Bihari Naplo	local	Inform Media Press	Fodor Istvan Mihaly	9,597
Evenimentul Zilei	nationwide	Editura Evenimentul si Capital	Virgil Munteanu	7,855
Adevarul	nationwide	Adevarul Holding	Dan Belcea	5,594
Jurnal Bihorean	local	Inform Media Press	Fodor Istvan Mihaly	4,798
Romania Libera	nationwide	Theta Proficiency	Bogdan Antonescu	4,613
Crisana	local	Anotimp Casa de Presa si Editura	Daniel Man	4,513
Agenda	local	Inform Media Press	Fodor Istvan Mihaly	3,429
Viata Libera	local	Trustul de presa Dunarea de Jos	Cristina Cocu	3,227
Jurnalul	nationwide	Antena 3	Sabina Petre	2,564
<b>Financial magazines</b>				
Forbes	nationwide	BP Publishing Media	Raluca Badea	6,333
Ziarul Financiar	nationwide	Mediafax Publisher	Adrian Sarbu	3,746
Capital	nationwide	Editura Evenimentul si Capital	Virgil Munteanu	3,742

Note: data for Q4 2018; n/a: not available

Source: Romanian Joint Industry Committee for Print and Internet (BRAT)

## Online News

The internet is the second most used medium for news consumption in Romania. As a result, the online media market has been growing fast in the country in recent years. The number of unique visitors for the top visited news sites in Romania shows a staggering jump in followers of online editions of newspapers such as Adevarul and Libertatea, but it also confirms the

popularity of television stations. Pro TV, Antena 1 and Digi all feature among the 20 most visited news sites in Romania.

The major media companies, namely Adevarul Holding, Intact Media (via Antena), CME (via Pro TV), Ringier and RCS&RDS dominate the online news market. The most popular newly launched news portals are Hotnews.ro (the first online-born news site in Romania), and Ziare.com, both highly competitive in a market where they share the space with bigger media companies that have either a print or TV asset to back their online operation.



The newswires Agerpres (state-run) and Mediafax (private-owned) feature among the most visited news websites in Romania. The two agencies used to be extremely influential in the news media sector, but in recent years they have lost their power as they failed to adapt to the online space. Their websites are non-responsive and poorly designed, hardly able to bring in more readers. Moreover, as news aggregators have mushroomed in recent years, news agencies have lost their central position as a news output resource.

### Most popular news internet portals in Romania, 2019

Website	Company	Number of unique visitors (monthly)
Adevarul.ro	Adevarul Holding	8,421,772
Stirileprotv.ro	Pro TV	7,219,543
Libertatea.ro	Ringier Romania	6,857,373
Digi24.ro	RCS&RDS	5,585,335
Realitatea.net	Realitatea Media	4,456,731
Observator.ro	Antena TV Group	4,425,750
Antena3.ro	Antena TV Group	4,329,189
Ziare.com	Alert News	3,911,062
Stiripesurse.ro	European Business Environment	3,379,217
Hotnews.ro	Media Bit Software	3,239,876
Evz.ro	Editura Evenimentul si Capital	3,147,231
Click.ro	Adevarul Holding	2,917,035
Mediafax.ro	Mediafax Group	2,887,160
Huff.ro	Smart Activity	2,866,340
Romaniatv.net	ThinkDigital	2,858,455
B1.ro	Ancore Media	2,665,706
Gandul.info	Mediafax Group	1,375,543
Cotidianul.ro	ThinkDigital	625,182
Agerpres.ro	Agentia Nationala de Presa Agerpres	550,227

Note: data for February  
Source: BRAT

### *Funding Trends*

As elsewhere in the world, the Romanian news media has been battered by the economic crisis after 2008 as advertising revenues dramatically shrank. Moreover, the rapid advances in technology shook the business models and financing formats across the market. The high level of political control in the media, both nationally and locally, added to the woes. Crippled by the

financial decline, many of these outlets have become easy targets for wealthy entrepreneurs and politicians who see media outlets as tools to pursue their interests (political or economic) than to promote public interest journalism.

While the large players, chiefly television broadcasters or media conglomerates that have assets in several media segments, are still generating most of their revenue from advertising, digital news and journalism portals have been increasingly trying to diversify their funding mix. However, only few such outlets have tested subscription and paywalls. Most of the others, especially platforms run by small groups of journalists, increasingly resort to public donations or seek donor funding.

It is local media, on the other hand, that is experiencing a profound financing crisis. Although on paper dozens of local media are profitable businesses, in reality, they survive solely thanks to local municipalities or oligarchs who fund media to prevent critical coverage about their and their allies' businesses.

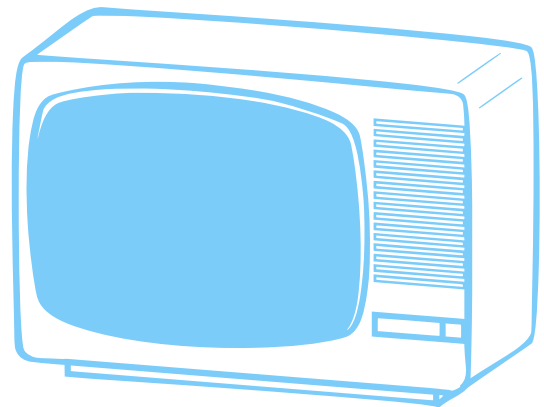
The government plays a big role in funding media by contributing significant state subsidies, worth over €200m a year, to the public broadcaster. The irony is that the audience ratings of the public broadcaster TVR has been a meager 2% for years. However, as some of the public television shows or the public radio programs reach out to rural households underserved by media, the government is still pumping money into the country's public service media.

## Television Funding

The television production market in Romania is dominated by two large operators, CME and Intact Media Group, whose combined turnover nears RON 1bn (nearly €210m). Television companies finance themselves primarily from advertising revenues. Few big players can afford to go off the must-carry lists<sup>[16]</sup> and negotiate carriage fees directly with large cable companies. As a recent clash between Pro TV and RCS&RDS (a major cable operator in Romania) showed, it is possible to push cable

providers to offer better prices for carrying television stations, but only if the television station is a powerful market player (such as Pro TV). *(For more about the relations between media companies and distributors, see Technology, Journalism and Public Sphere: Romania chapter in Media Influence Matrix)*

Almost from the early days, Pro TV established itself as a market and audience leader, a position it still comfortably holds. In 2017, Pro TV's annual turnover was RON 768.7m (roughly €160m), more than double the amount of its next competitor. The channel is drawing most of its income from advertising, controlling some 47% of Romania's total television market, according to data



[16] This is a list of television stations that the country's broadcast regulator, CNA, deems as important, obliging cable operators to include them in their offering.

for 2017.[17] However, a significant amount of Pro TV's total turnover, some 30%, comes from carriage fees and subscriptions, according to CME's financial reports.[18]

Pro TV's main competitor is Antena TV Group, which, with Antena 3 station, has an annual revenue worth half of Pro TV's total turnover. The third largest television operator by revenue is Dogan Media International, operator of Kanal D. Its turnover is a seventh of Pro TV's yearly turnover. It employs roughly 270 people, which is a third of the staff employed by Pro TV. Kanal D is a smaller operation with revenue coming almost exclusively from advertising (Kanal D is on the must-carry list of stations and does not receive revenue from cable companies).

The next large television company, at a distance, is Ridzone Computers, the company that runs the station Romania TV. The channel is the fourth most viewed television station, but it operates on a budget and with a staff significantly lower than the three market leaders. Romania TV banks on low production costs and highly inflammatory content that attracts a relatively high audience. Another prominent player (yet much smaller than the top three players) is National TV, operated by ABC Plus Media. A generalist channel, National TV is mostly financed from advertising revenue.

After a slow recovery from the post-2008 crisis, television revenue, which is heavily dependent on advertising, has been growing. In the past five years or so, most of the leading television companies have turned a profit. The only exception was Romania TV, which has been losing money. Fluctuations in the economy heavily influence television revenue. Any dramatic shift in the market hits heavily all television stations in Romania, with the exception of the national broadcaster, which is funded directly by the state.

### Largest television channels by revenue, 2017

Channel	Company	Turnover, 2017		Number of employees, 2017
		RON	€	
Pro TV	Pro TV	768,677,901	168,569,715	909
Antena 1	Antena TV Group	318,427,310	69,830,550	655
Kanal D	Dogan Media International	119,840,563	26,280,825	270
Antena 3	Antena 3	63,426,505	15,313,717	392
National TV	ABC Plus Media	27,054,350	5,932,971	155
Romania TV	Ridzone Computers	26,057,321	5,714,324	93

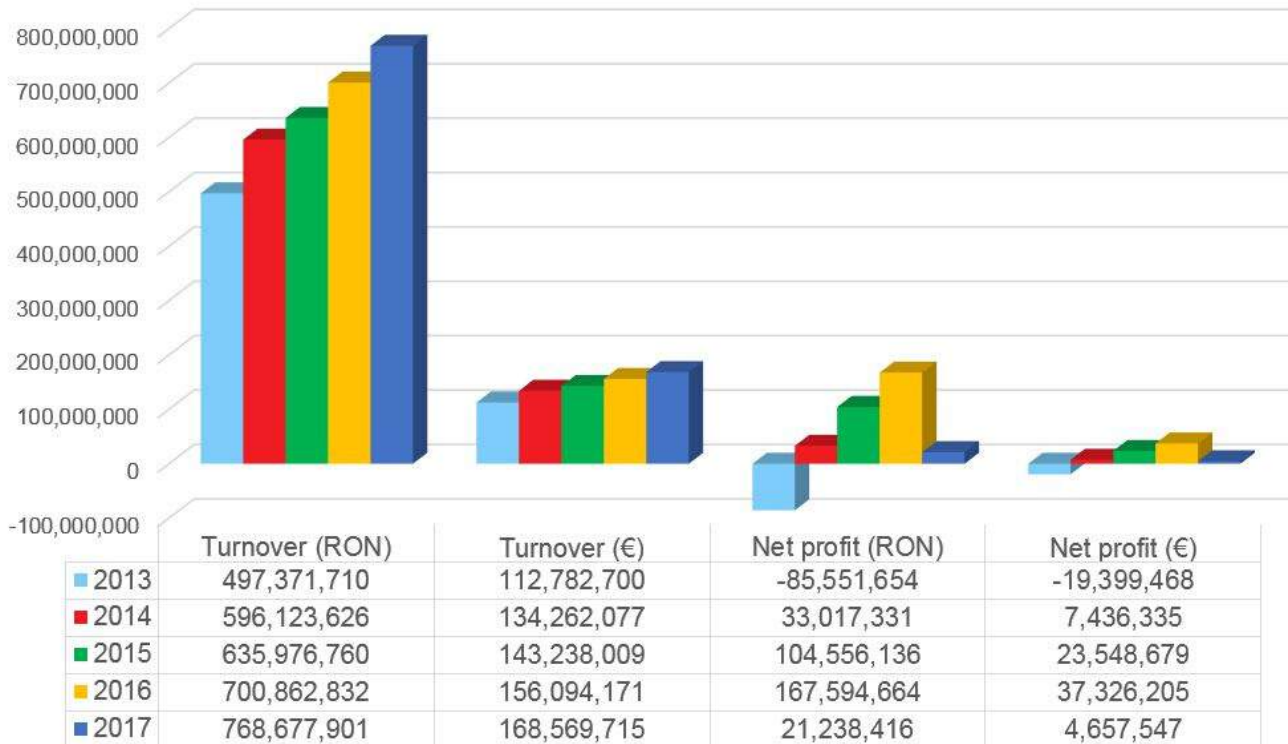
Note: euro figures calculated at the average exchange rate set by the National Bank of Romania (BNR); number of employees data refer to the whole company  
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

[17] Media Fact Book, 2018.

[18] CME, "Q4 2018 Earnings Call Presentation," available online at <https://www.cetv-net.com/investors/presentations-and-factsheets/presentation-details/2019/Q4-2018-Earnings-Call-Presentation/default.aspx> (accessed on 22 March 2019).

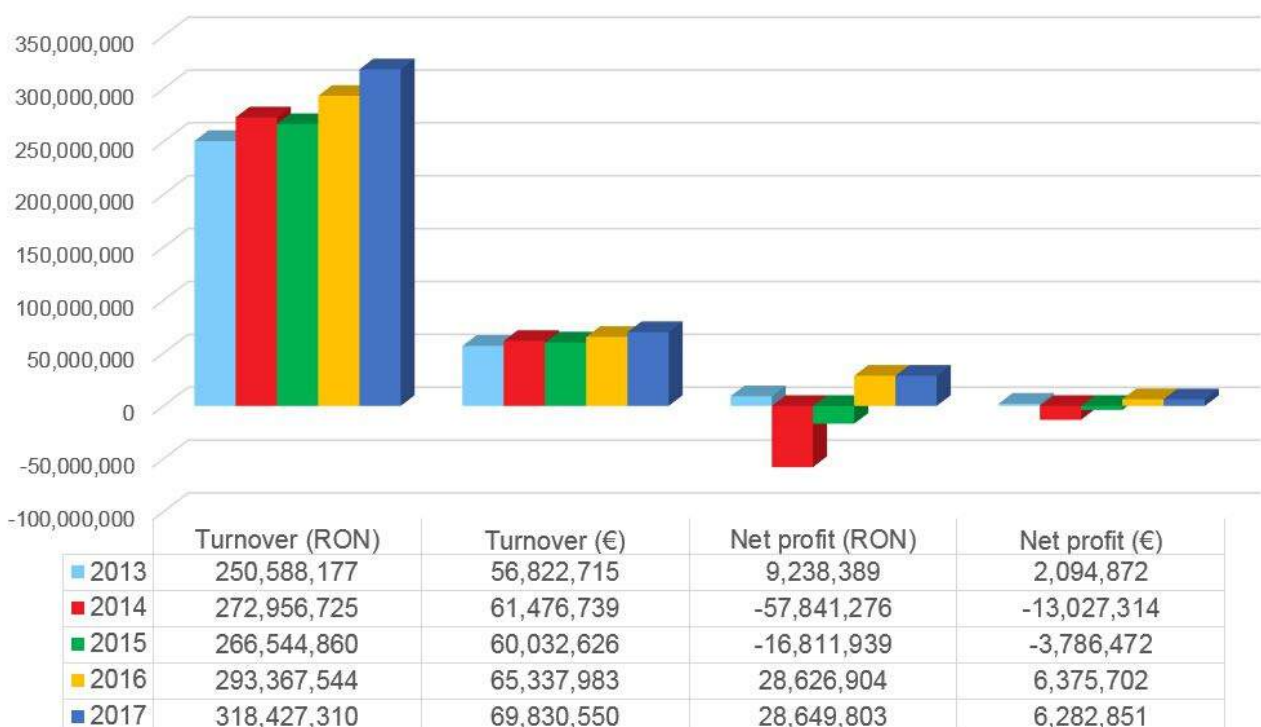
## Financial performance of prominent television operators

## Pro TV, key financial data, 2013-2017



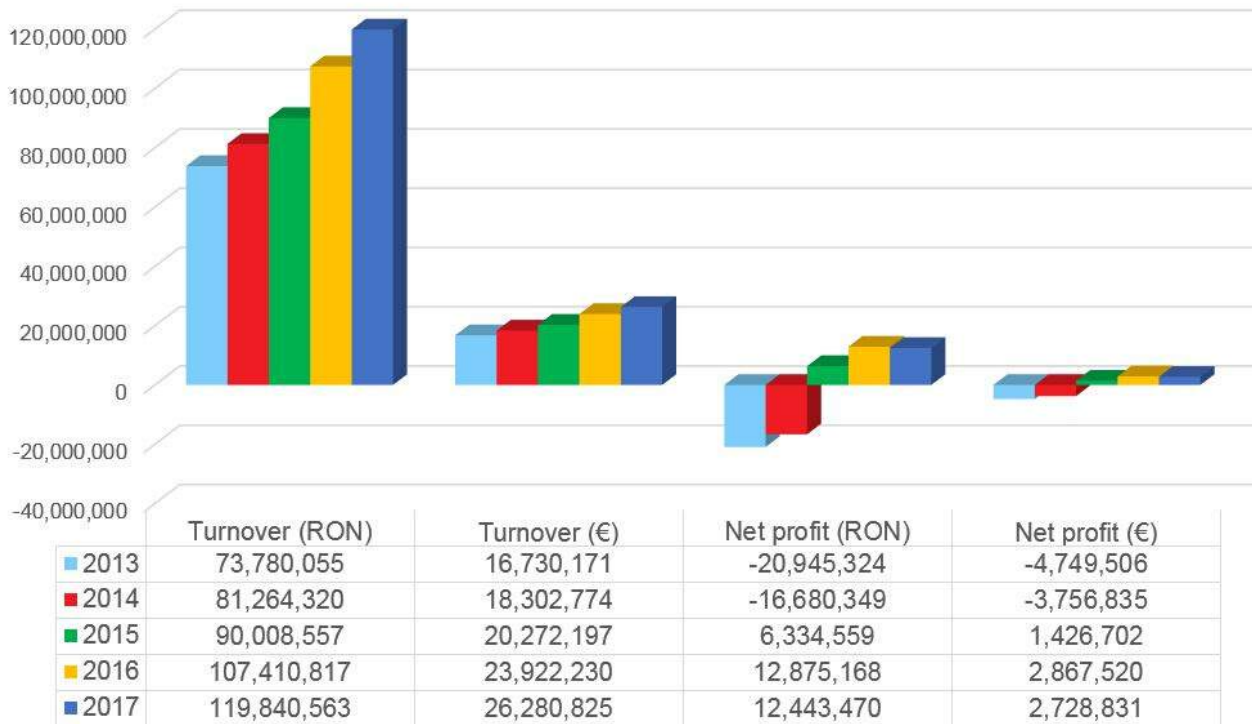
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

## Antena TV Group, key financial data, 2013-2017



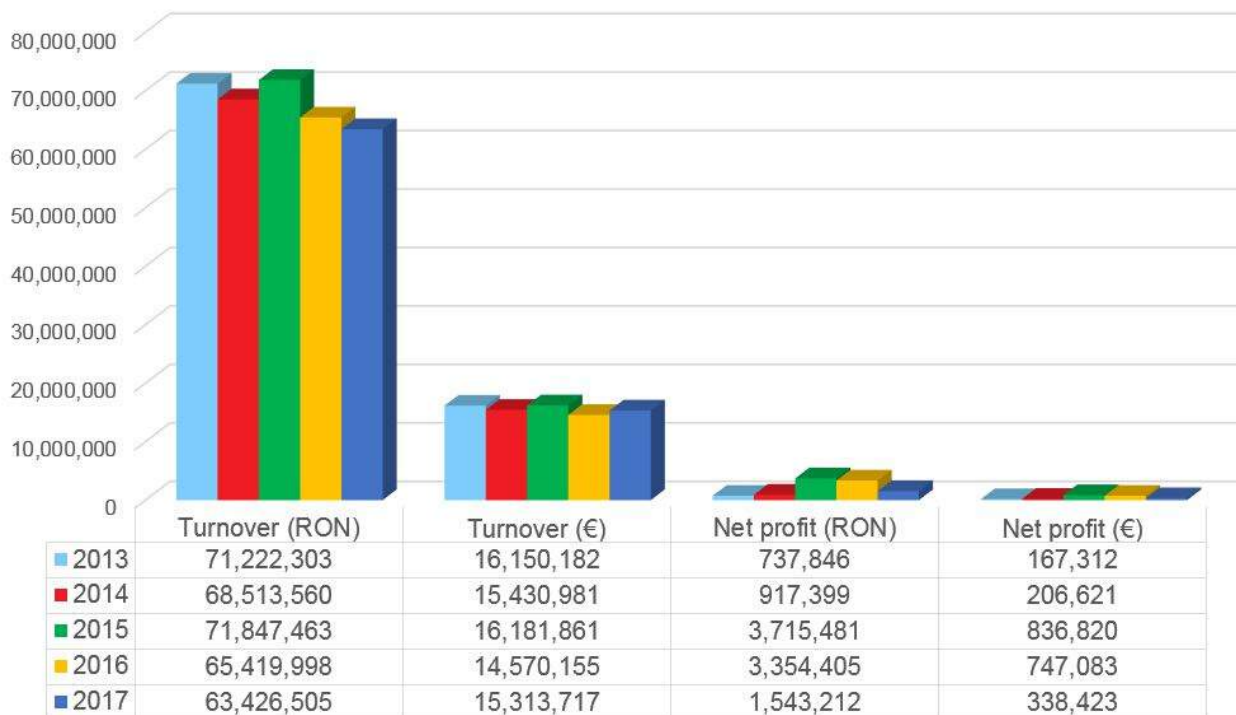
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

### Dogan Media International, key financial data, 2013-2017



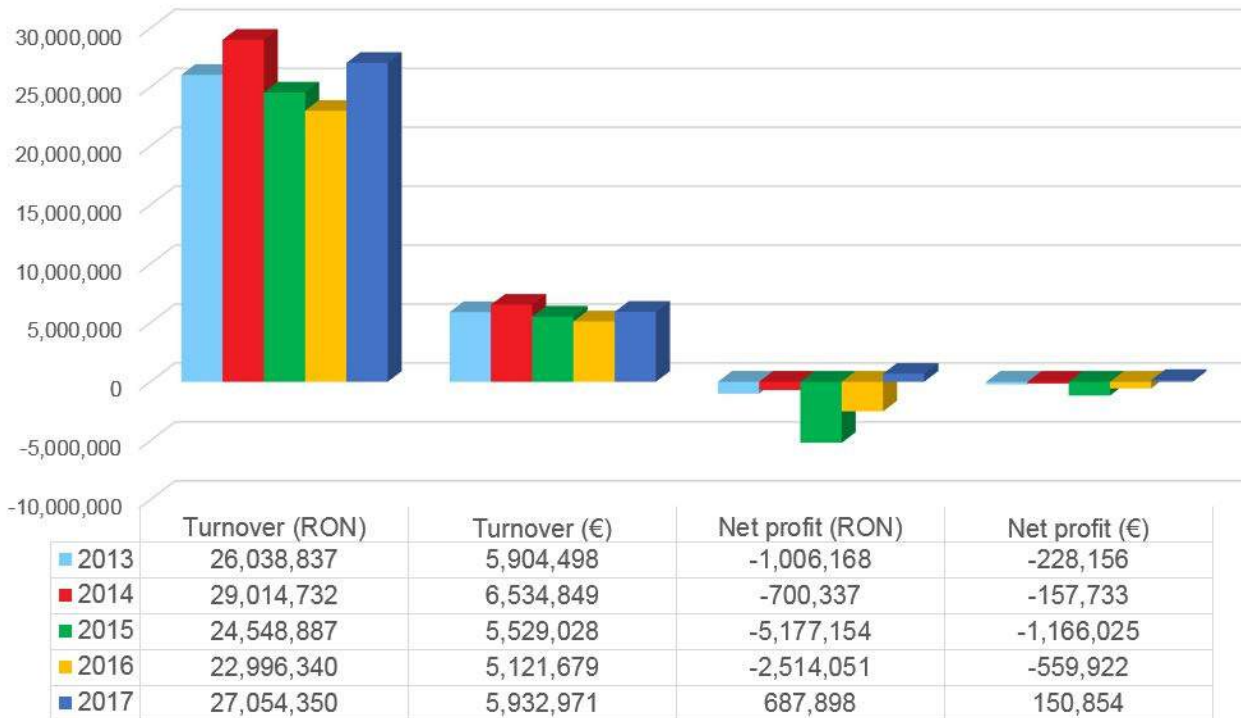
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

### Antena 3, key financial data, 2013-2017

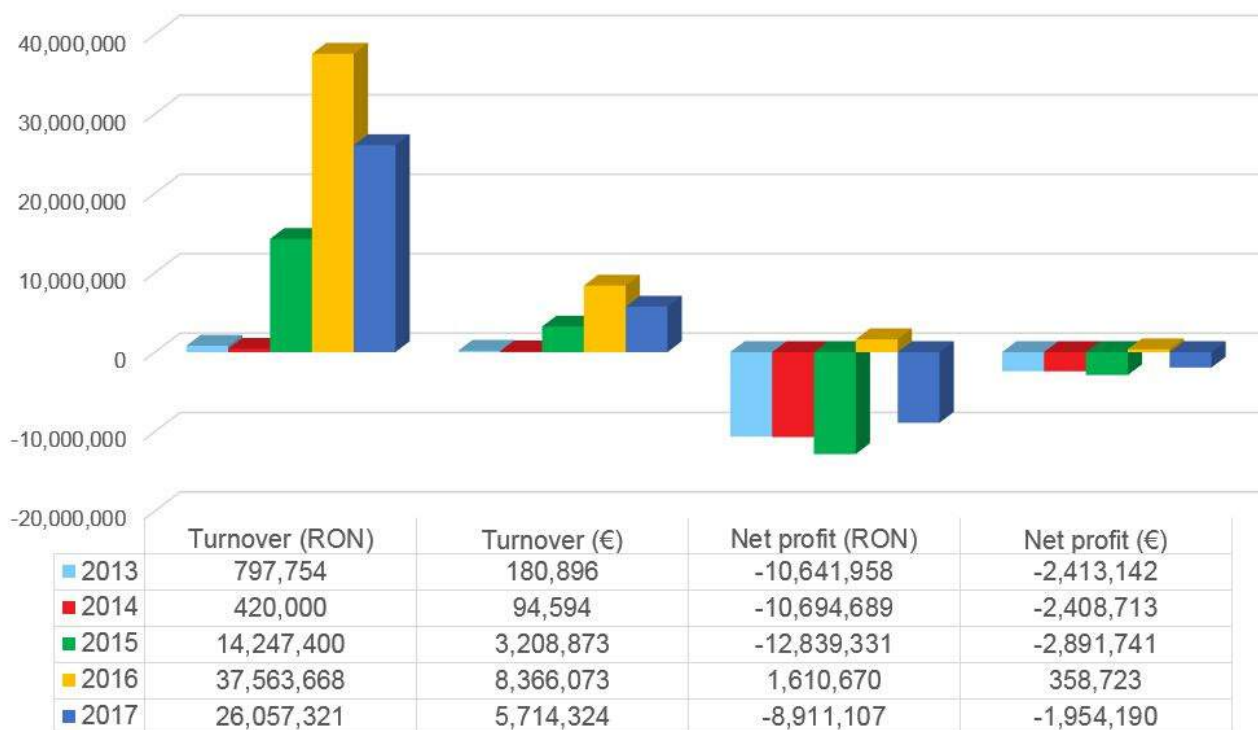


Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania



**ABC Plus Media, key financial data, 2013-2017**

Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

**Ridzone Computers, key financial data, 2013-2017**

Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

## Radio Funding

Radio funding is even less diverse than television funding as it relies almost exclusively on advertising revenue. In the television market, there is only one large foreign company, CME. The radio business, however, is a more diverse sector. Two of the largest radio station owners on the Romanian market are Greek and Czech, both with investments in a slew of other industries and with media operations across borders. Their investment history indicates that they will likely try to buy more radio stations in Romania in the near future.

Radio is a small, but relatively profitable business. Most of the radio operators in recent years have been profitable. Grupul Media Camina (GMC), part of the Intact holding, is the largest radio operator with some RON 28.4m (€6.2m) in revenue in 2017. The company had in 2017 a 23% share of the total radio ad spend in Romania.[19] Radio ZU is the most popular radio station in Bucharest, a highly attractive market for advertisers. The radio also profited from a drop in the audience of some of its competitors (Radio XXI, rebranded as Virgin Radio), and from licensing issues faced by others (Radio Guerilla). All major radio stations in Romania, with the exception of Radio XXI, finished 2017 in the black. With a new owner and under its new brand, Virgin Radio is expected to turn a profit in 2018. Although it is not a popular medium, radio is a resilient business with fairly low costs and stable, yet modest, revenue.

### Largest radio stations by revenue, 2017

Station	Company	Turnover, 2017		Number of employees, 2017
		RON	€	
Radio ZU	Grupul Media Camina (GMC) (Intact Group)	28,365,808	6,220,571	47
Kiss FM, Magic FM	AG Radio Holding	25,973,947	5,696,041	89
Europa FM	Europe Development International-R*	23,518,424	5,157,549	56
Virgin Radio	Radio XXI*	4,993,451	1,095,055	25
DIGI FM**	RCS&RDS	3,339,403,562	732,325,342	11,703

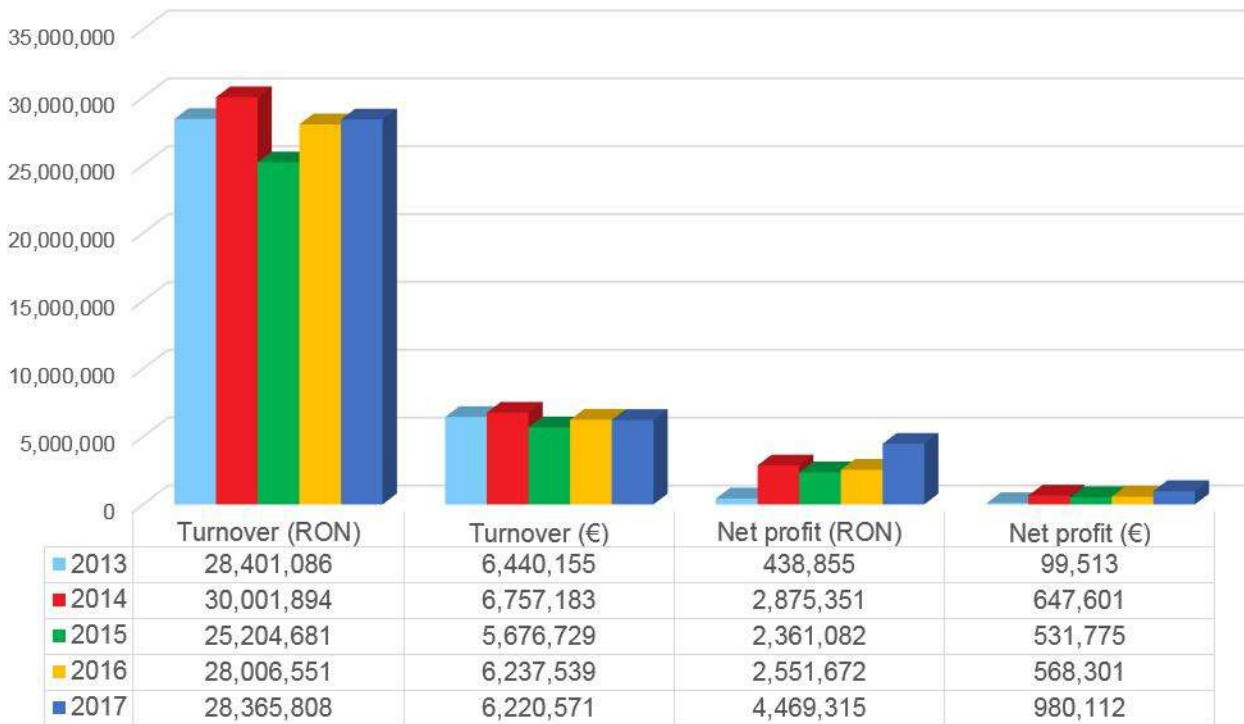
\*owned by Czech Media Invest (CMI)

\*\*the figure refers to the overall revenue of the RCS&RDS group, which operates also in the telecommunications sector; data specifically for its radio operation are not available

Note: number of employees data refer to the whole company  
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

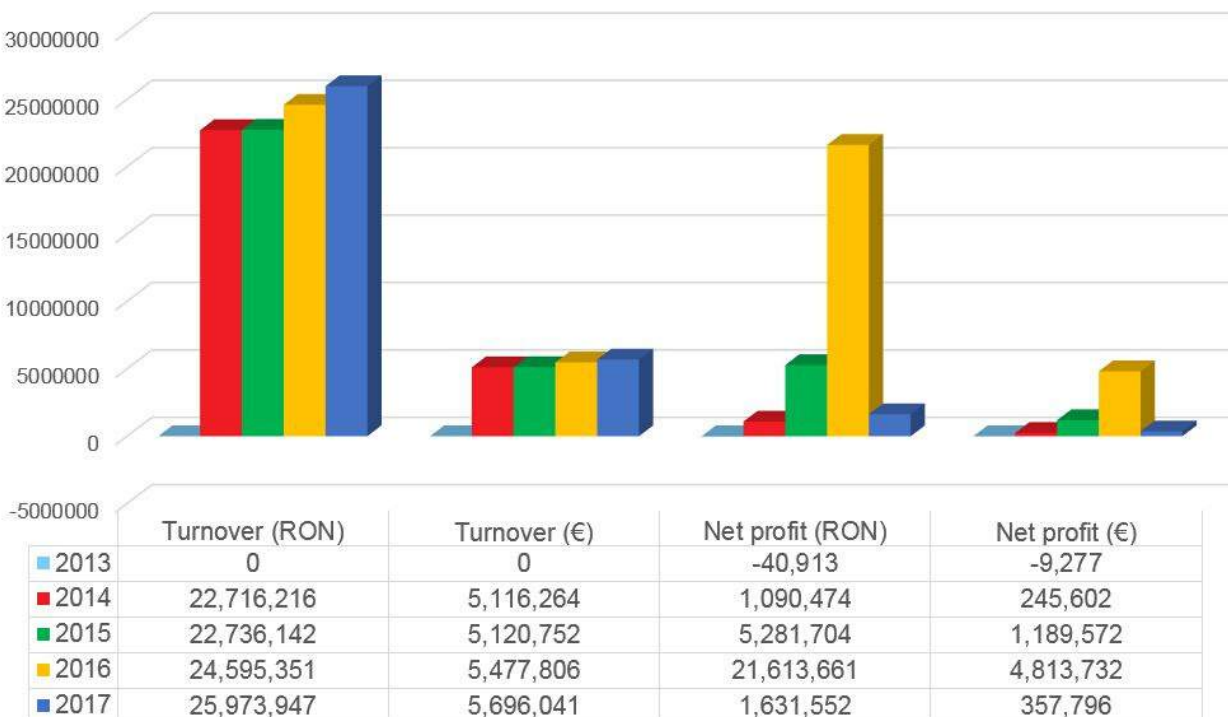
## Financial performance of prominent radio operators

## Grupul Media Camina (GMC), key financial data, 2013-2017



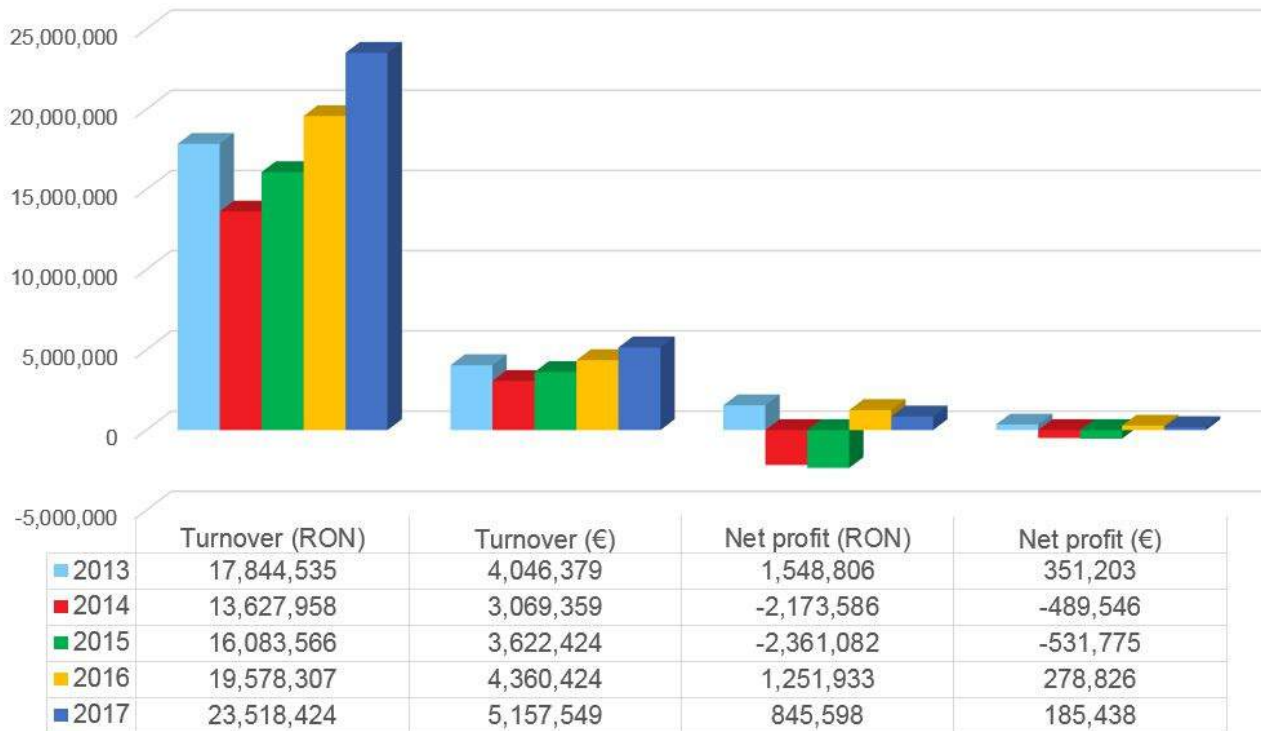
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

## AG Radio Holding, key financial data, 2013-2017



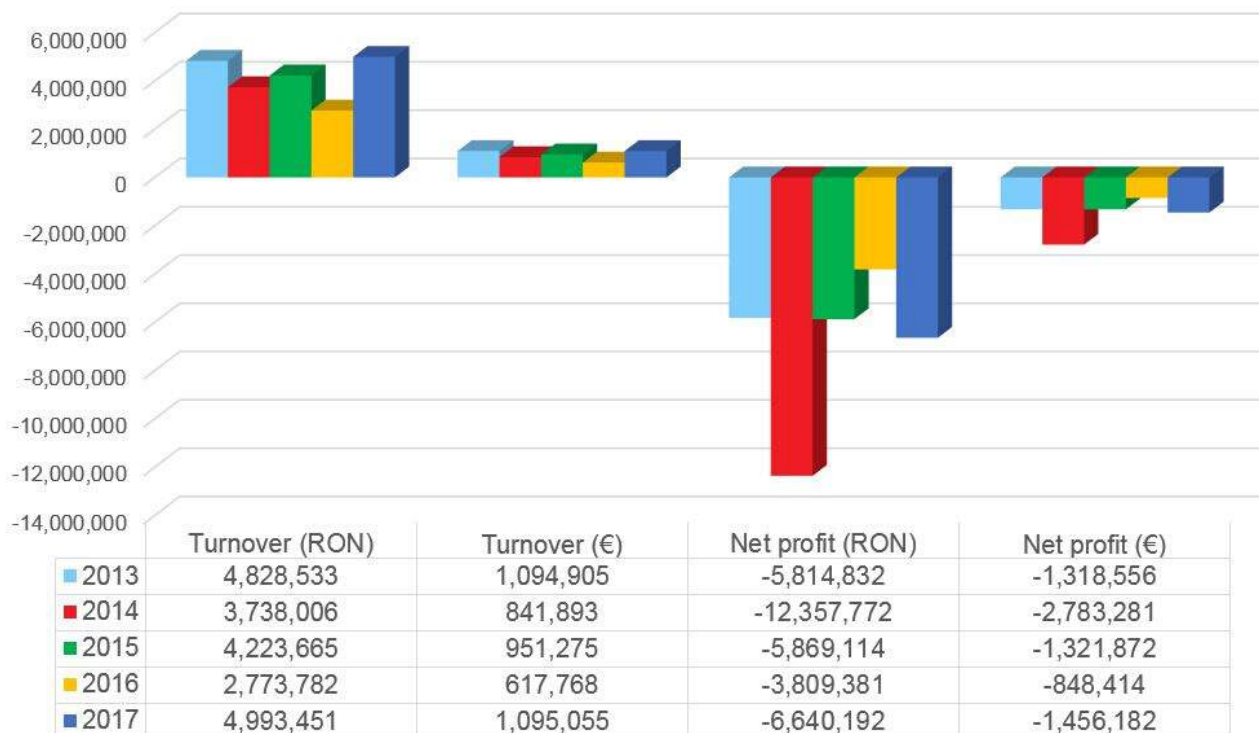
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

### Europe Development International-R, key financial data, 2013-2017



Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

### Radio XXI, key financial data, 2013-2017



Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

## Print Media Funding

As opposed to radio and television, the print media always had a more direct financial relation with its audience. Traditionally, the press in Romania has been funded through a combination of contributions from readers (purchase of newspaper copies or subscriptions), advertising, and, sometimes, financial support from “benefactors” (rich people interested in supporting certain media outlets). Such benefactors are rare today, but the practice survived.

Print media is becoming less attractive for both advertisers and the general public (which has been increasingly turning to internet for news). Hence, the sector is in a very precarious economic state today. This economic vulnerability makes printed publications an easy target for capture, either by local authorities or by wealthy businessmen. At the same time, the dwindling influence of print media makes it less attractive for political and business interest groups. It might be that precisely this lack of appeal will set it free and allow it to grow into an independent media sector.

The print market in Romania is dominated by two publishers. Swiss-owned publisher Ringier leads with a turnover of nearly €25m in 2017. With less than half of Ringier’s revenues, Adevarul Holding comes second. Each of them controlled in 2017 some 20% of the print ad market in Romania.[20] The third largest print media company by revenue is Inform Media Press, a publisher of local newspapers. Its turnover is, however, a fraction of the revenues generated by the two largest publishers. In 2017, Inform Media Press’ turnover was worth some €2.7m.

Ten years after the 2008 financial crisis, the written press in Romania seems not to have recovered in the same way television and radio did. The camp of profit makers in 2017 is thin and even big publishers like Ringier are losing money. Moreover, none of the print publications have a steady growth rate. Increased volatility and a lack of predictable revenue is the key funding trend in Romania’s print media sector.

Subscription models are not popular in the Romanian online news market. Only recently has Newsweek launched a subscription-based magazine in Romania: part of its online platform is accessible free-of-charge and part behind a paywall. Its success is yet to be measured.

### Top print media by revenue, 2017

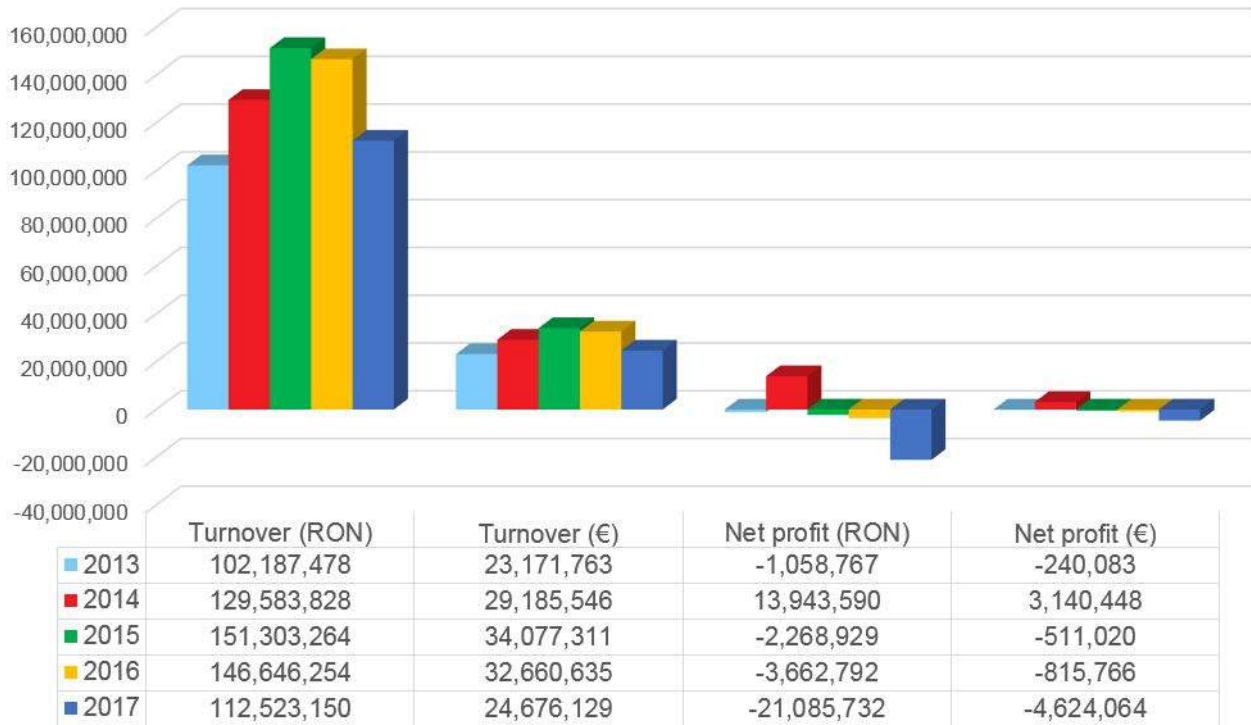
Publication	Company	Turnover, 2017		Number of employees, 2017
		RON	€	
Libertatea	Ringier Romania	112,523,150	24,676,129	305
Adevarul, Click	Adevarul Holding	48,808,516	10,703,621	241
Local newspapers (Bihari Naplo, Jurnal Bihorean, Jurnalul Aradean, Agenda)	Inform Media Press	12,385,831	2,716,191	183
Evenimentul Zilei	Editura Evenimentul si Capital	9,719,541	2,131,478	22
Forbes	BP Publishing Media	6,099,177	1,337,538	16
Romania Libera	Theta Proficiency	417,344	91,522	0

Note: number of employees data refer to the whole company  
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

[20] Media Fact Book, 2018

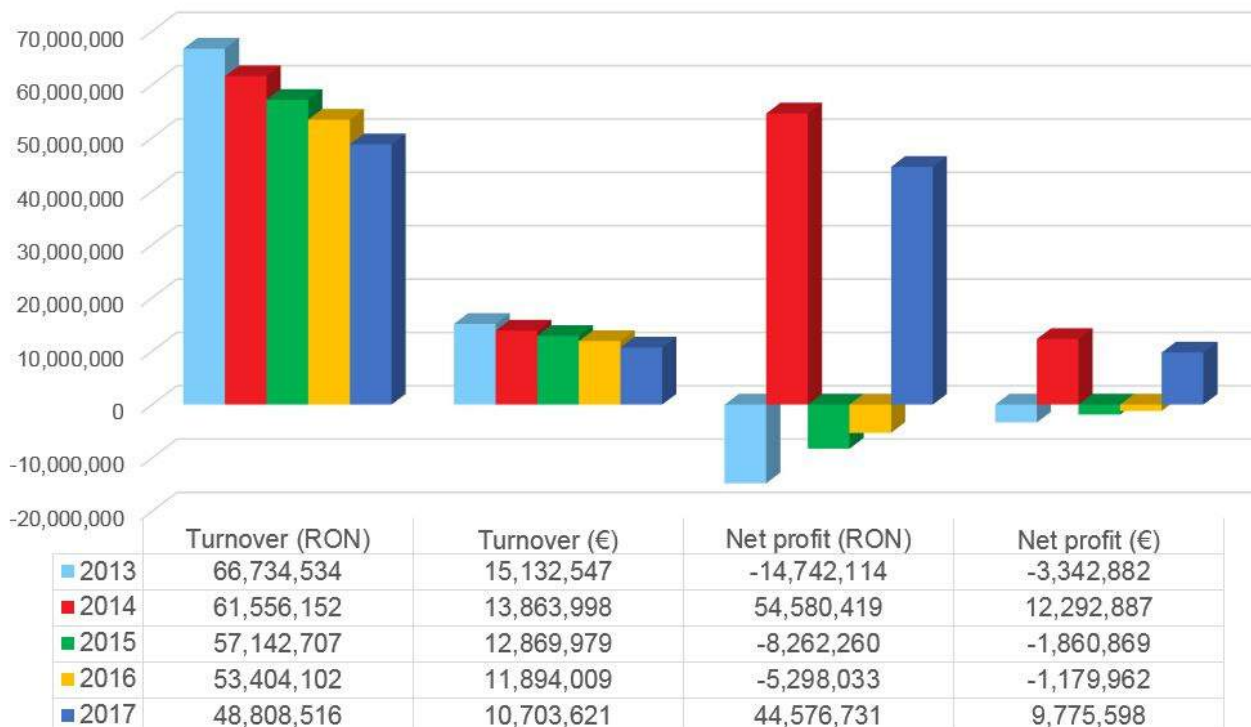
## Print media budgets

## Ringier Romania, key financial data, 2013-2017



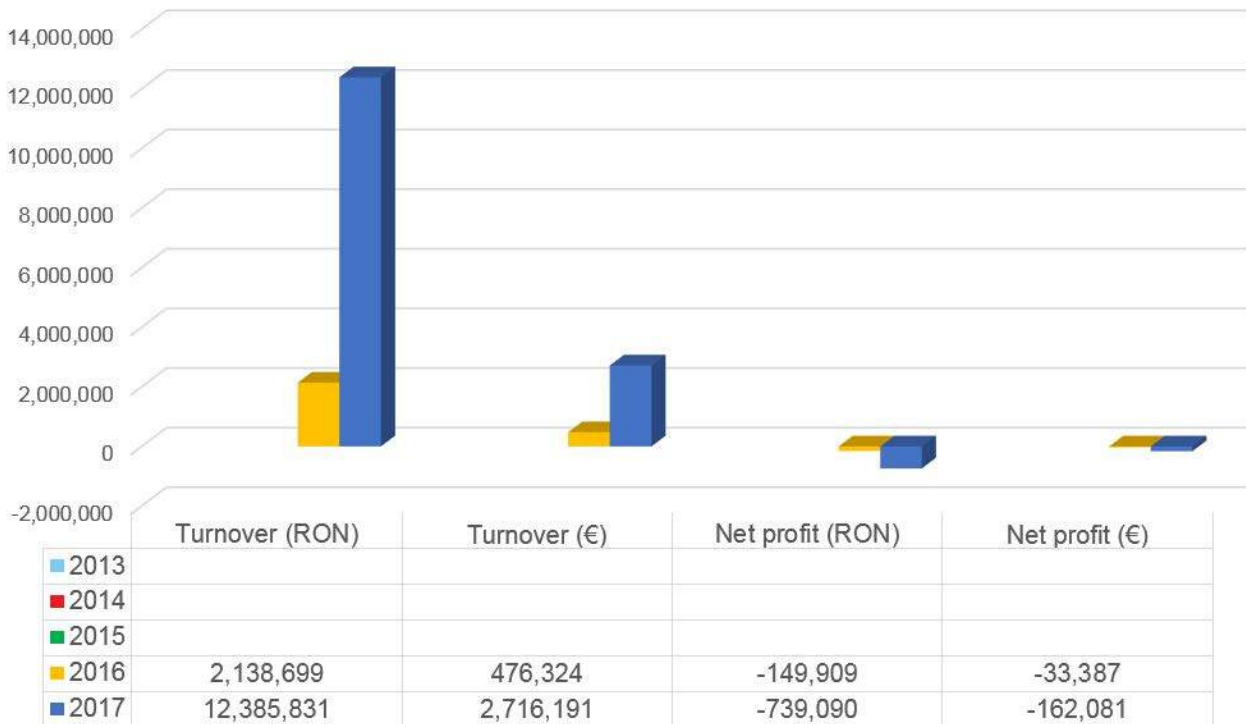
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

## Adevarul Holding, key financial data, 2013-2017



Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

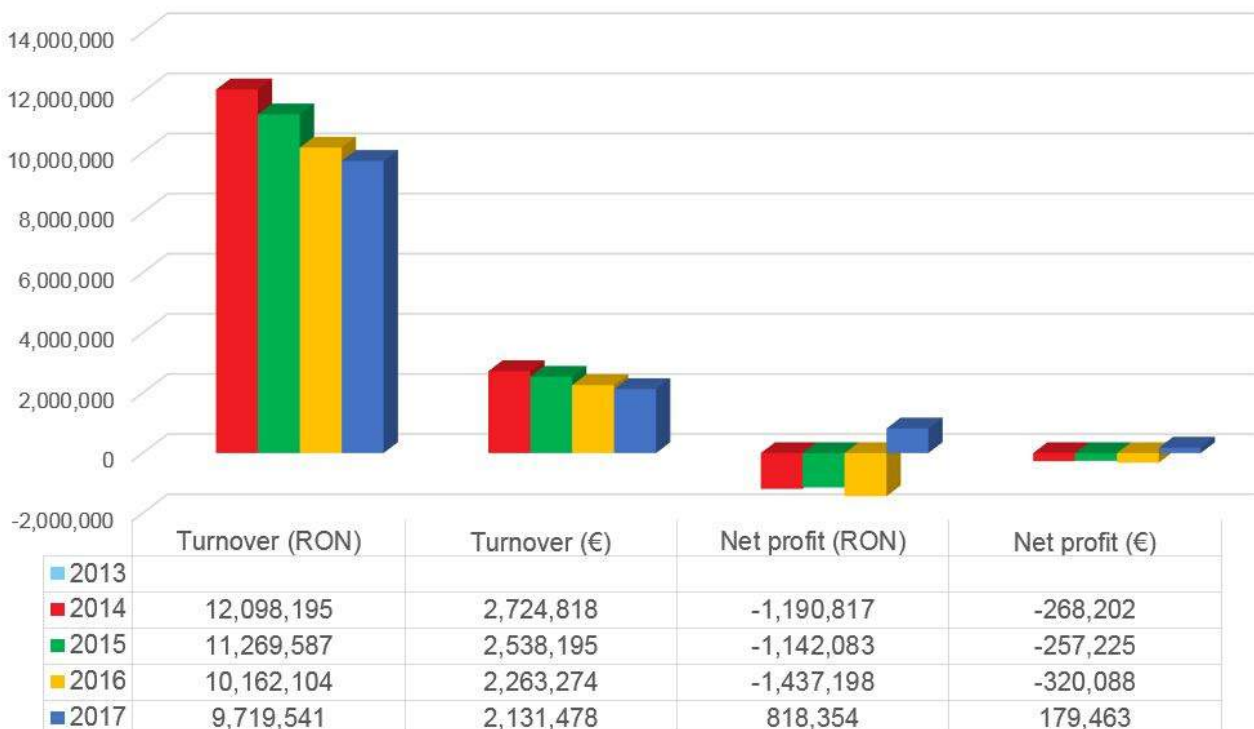
### Inform Media Press, key financial data, 2013-2017



Note: No data available for Russmedia Newspaper, the company that operated before Inform Media Press

Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

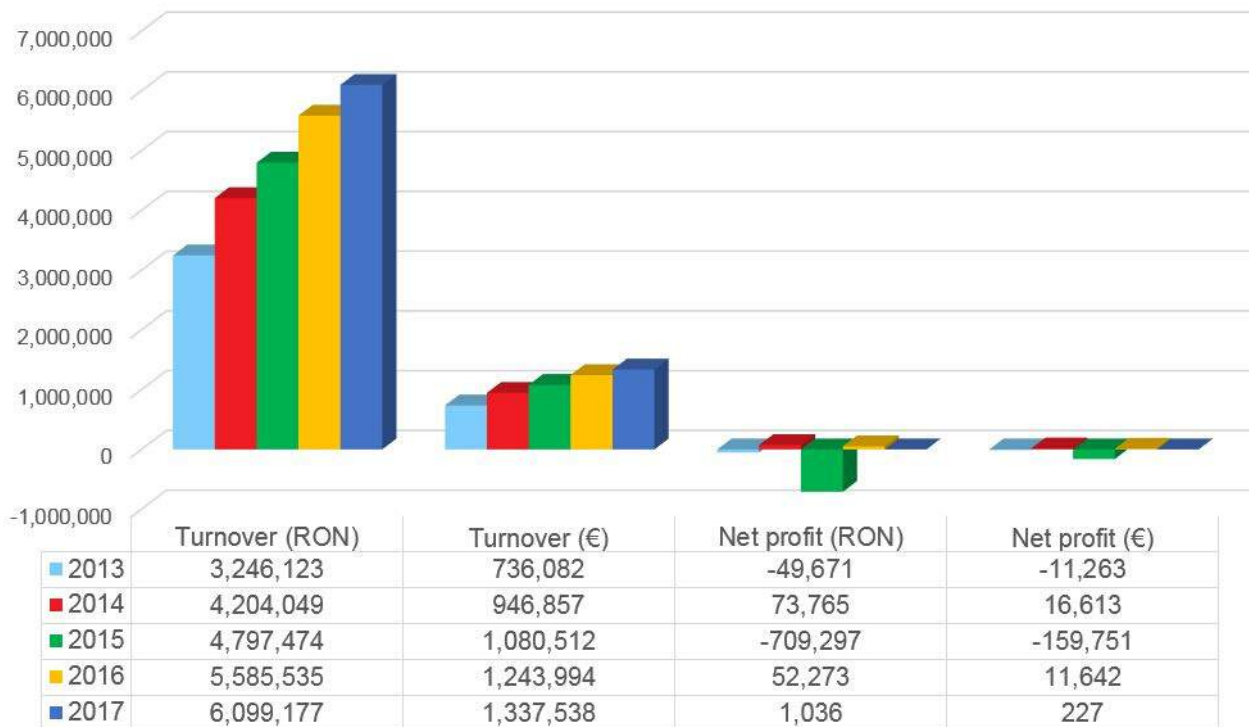
### Editura Evenimentul si Capital, key financial data, 2013-2017



2013: not available

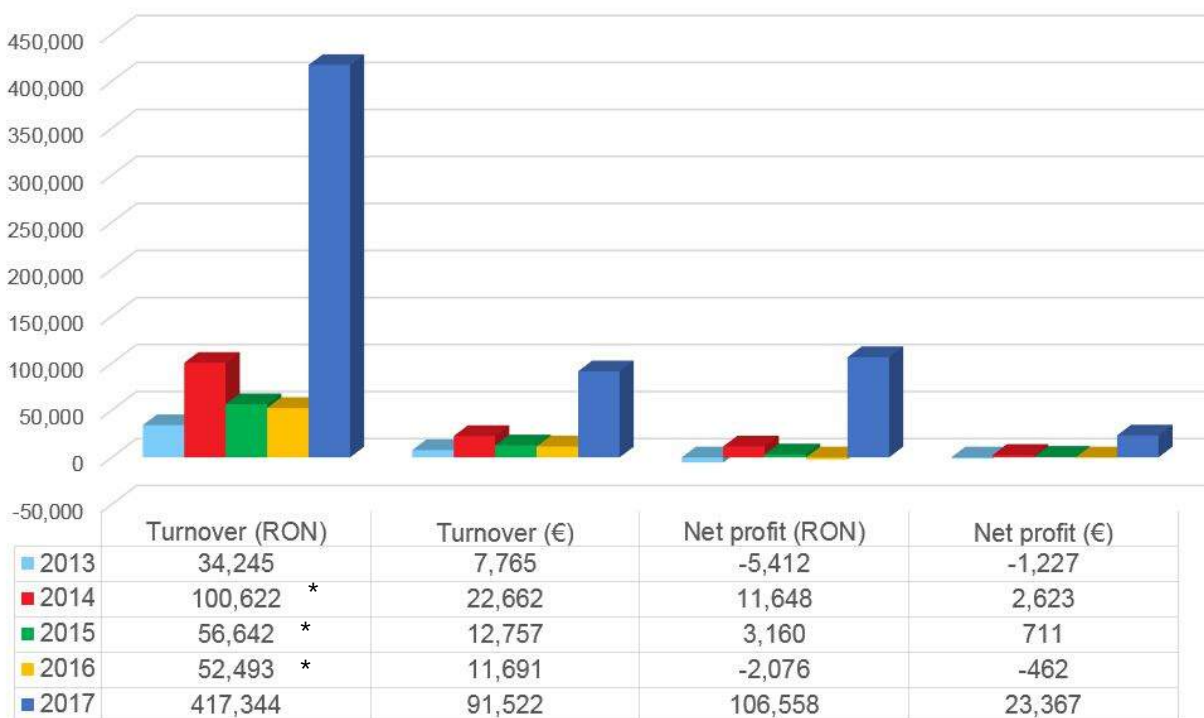
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

### BP Publishing Media, key financial data, 2013-2017



Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

### Theta Proficiency, key financial data, 2013-2017



\*revenue figure

Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania



## New Players and Projects

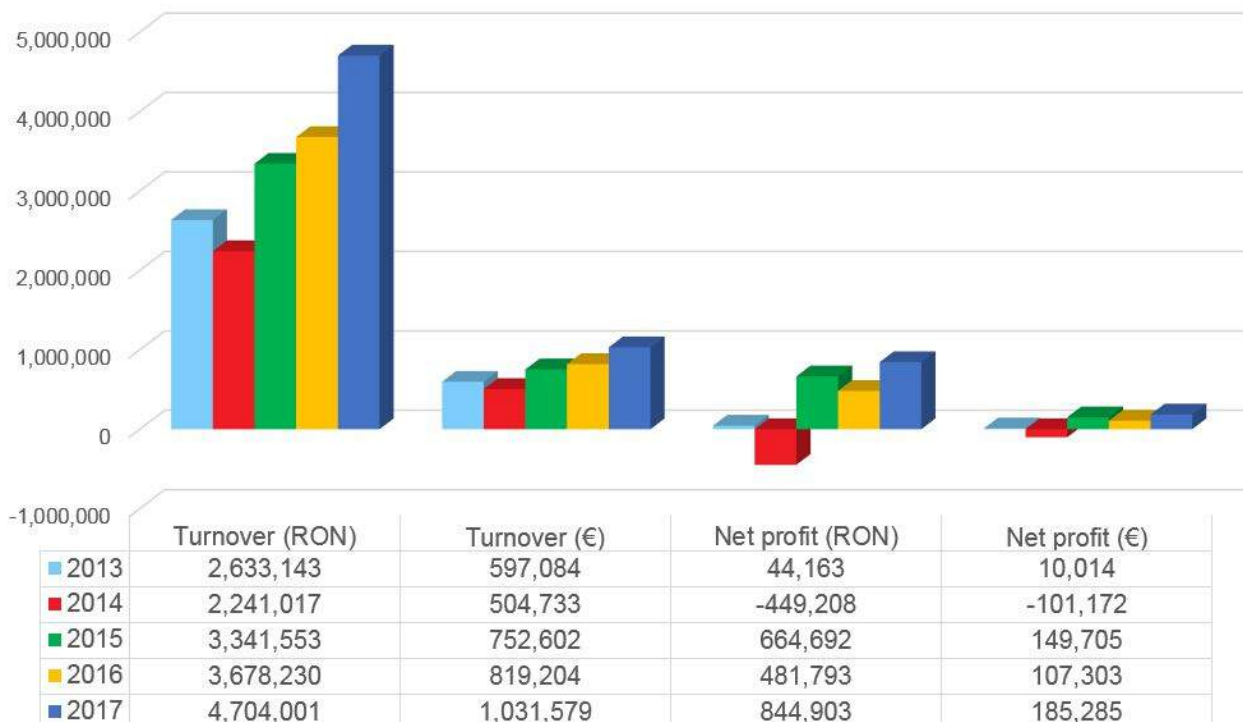
If commercial media and state-funded media represent the standard funding models in the Romanian media, a series of journalistic projects established in the past five years or more represent experimentation: they use funding models that mix a variety of financing sources, including individual and institutional donations, project-based funding, crowdsourcing and non-monetary support such as voluntary labor.

The three most popular digital-born websites, HotNews.ro, Stiripesurse.ro and Ziare.com are small operations with annual revenues of under €1m and generally profitable. They all registered a profit in 2017. None of them uses a paywall, hence most of their income comes from advertising. Of the three, HotNews.ro is the largest with revenues upwards of €1m in 2017, double compared to only three years before. HotNews is one of the oldest sites in Romania, its history going back to 1999 when Ioan Margarit, a financial journalist, started in his flat in Bucharest, using help of his peers, RevistaPresei.ro, an aggregator of headlines from all of the Romanian news media. The site chugged along during the early 2000s when the internet was only popular among the young and nerdy. But after 2005, when RevistaPresei.ro was renamed HotNews.ro, the site has steadily grown as it started offering original content.

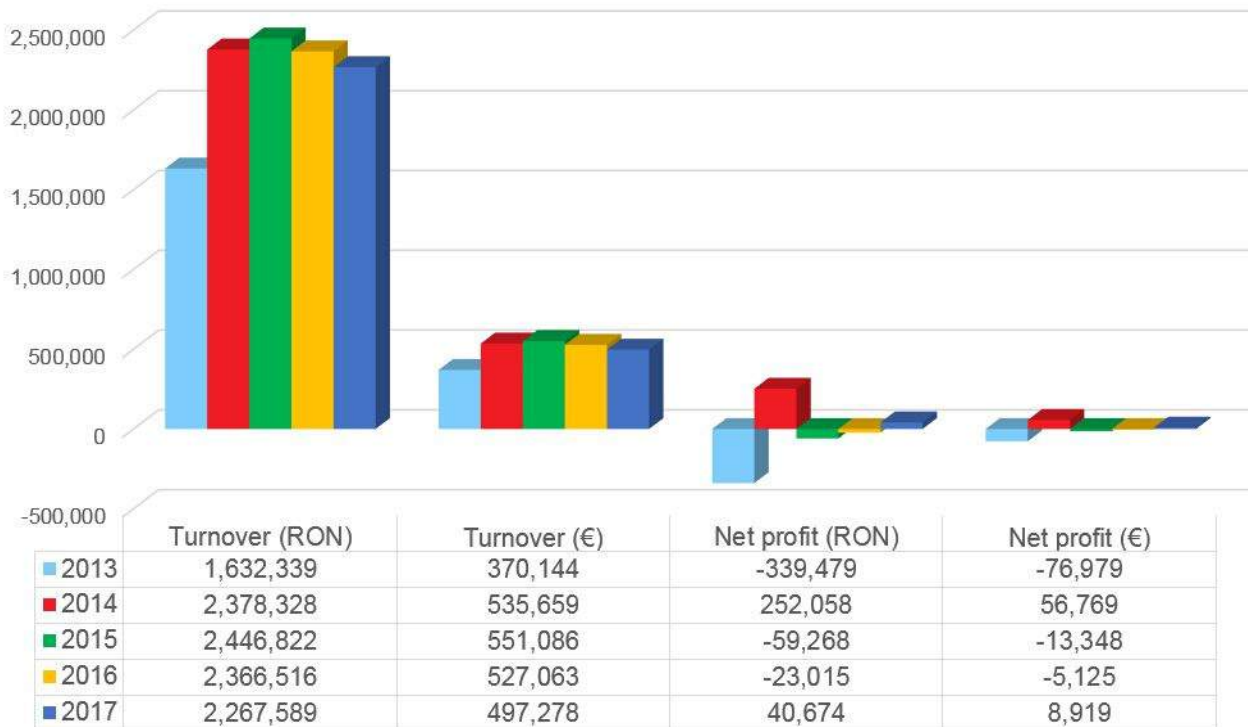
One of the newest players in the Romanian news market is Newsweek Romania, a publication licensed by Newsweek of U.S., which launched operations in spring 2018. Newsweek Romania appears weekly and has also a news portal. Its financing comes from advertising and subscriptions. The magazine has attracted most of its writers from the daily newspaper Romania Libera.

### New players: financial performance

Media Bit Software\*, key financial data, 2013-2017

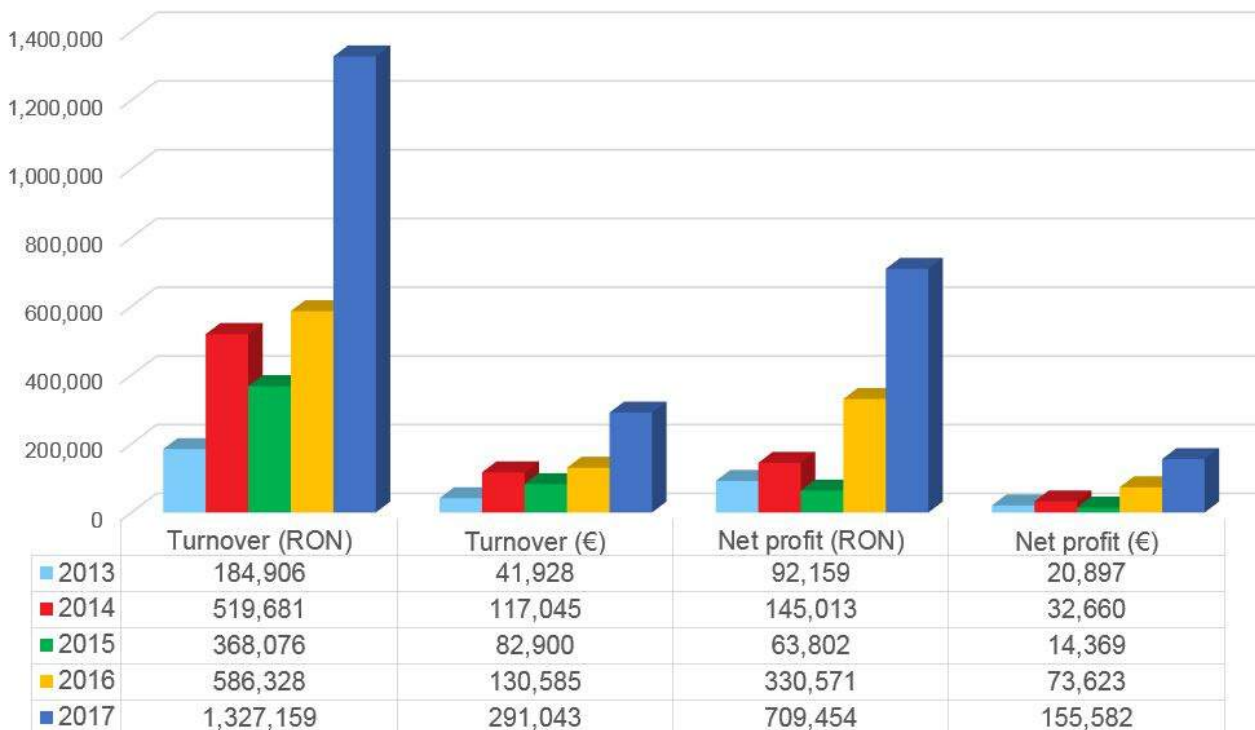


\*Publisher of Hotnews.ro  
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

**Alert News\*, key financial data, 2013-2017**

\*Publisher of Ziare.com

Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

**European Business Environment\*, key financial data, 2013-2017**

\*Publisher of Stiripesurse.ro

Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

On top of these digital portals, Romanian journalism has also seen a flurry of independent projects that have been experimenting, more or less successfully, with new narratives and business models. Although their influence pale in comparison with the big media players, their contribution to improving the quality of information is considerable.

### Niche Journalism: Rise Project and Recorder

Rise Project is an investigative journalism project founded in 2012 by a group of local investigative journalists, activists and coders. It is fully embedded in international networks with a similar profile such as the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), two global journalism networks mostly funded by donor organizations. Rise Project's director, Paul Radu, is also co-founder of OCCRP. Rise Project is funded mostly by donors including the Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Programme and Open Society Foundations (OSF), technology companies (Google), foreign embassies in Romania, and individual donations.[21]

Recorder is a video journalism project founded in 2017 by four local journalists. They focus on using video for reporting and have been growing their staff and income since their 2017 launch. Some 40% of their budget (roughly €56,000) comes from individual donations and from advertising.[22]

### Journalistic Communities: Casa Jurnalistului

Casa Jurnalistului (The House of the Journalist) is a community of freelance journalists who offer working space for their members. The project is simply a house whose expenses are covered with cash raised through crowdsourcing via Patreon (a global crowdfunding membership platform) and direct donations. Casa Jurnalistului raises some €1,300 a month from its supporters.[23] They do not have a legal entity through which Casa Jurnalistului is run, all donations go straight to the personal bank account of Vlad Ursuleanu, one of the Casa's founders, according to Casa Jurnalistului's site. Members of the community publish mostly stories on social and political topics on the Casa Jurnalistului's website. Some of their writers have their own portals or blogs and work on a freelance basis for other publications.

### Narrative journalism: Decat o Revista (DOR)

DOR is a magazine that focuses on narrative journalism. DOR (acronym for "Decat O Revista," which means "just a magazine" in Romanian) is heavy on storytelling and long-form reporting. It covers cultural, social and environment-related topics, but oftentimes discusses economic and political themes as well. DOR is a neatly designed magazine that appeals to a readership of middle to upper class, mostly living in cities. The magazine is published quarterly and costs RON 110-140[24] (€23-€30) for a yearly subscription or €5 per magazine. The magazine largely supports itself from selling subscriptions and merchandise, but also from advertising and grants. In spite of its well-off audience, DOR has been losing money in recent years. In October 2018, the magazine could not pay salaries[25] and started a campaign asking their public to support them by buying the magazine.

[21] "De unde sunt platiti jurnalistii de la Rise Project?" (From where are the journalists of Rise Project paid?), 22 August 2017, available online at <https://www.riseproject.ro/de-unde-sunt-platiti-jurnalistii-de-la-rise-project/> (accessed on 16 March 2019)

[22] "Raport in fata cititorilor" (Report for our readers), 15 January 2019, available online at: <https://recorder.ro/recorder-raport-in-fata-cititorilor/> (accessed 16 March 2019)

[23] Their crowdfunding page is available at <https://www.patreon.com/casajurnalistului> (accessed on 10 April 2019).

[24] Readers can choose between a Supporter and a Friend subscription, which include a range of products such as the magazine in print and .pdf format, subscription to their newsletter, and a series of gifts, depending on the subscription type (usually a book or DoR merchandise).

[25] Cristian Lupsa, "Cum am reușit să evităm un dezastru financiar" (How we managed to avoid a financial disaster), 22 December 2018, available online at <https://www.decatorevista.ro/cum-am-reusit-sa-evitam-un-dezastru-financiar/> (accessed on 21 March 2019).

### Safielumina.ro

Meaning “let there be light” in Romanian, Safielumina.ro is an investigative portal specializing in coverage of church affairs, particularly the Orthodox Church of Romania (BOR), a powerful and corrupt institution, with a large following, that receives considerable funding from the government and the EU. Church life Romania is rife with corruption scandals involving priests. Safielumina.ro is produced by a team of journalists from various publications and funds itself mostly through donations from the general public.

### Inclusiv.ro

One recent initiative aimed at pioneering solutions journalism in Romania, Inclusiv.ro plans to fund its work through donations and memberships. At the time of writing, it was running a crowdfunding campaign whose goal was to collect some €100,000 as starting capital.

## Influential News Media

The most influential news media in Romania is television. Pro TV as an uncontested market leader, both in terms of revenue and audience, exerts massive influence in the country. The station has completely shaped the Romanian television market during the past two decades. The vision of its founder, Adrian Sarbu, to bring light entertainment that generates profits to Romania, proved to be a successful recipe. Timing helped: it was rolled out in the 1990s when the market was monopolized by the former state broadcaster, known for its propagandistic and dull programming.

When it comes to news production, Pro TV has conclusively changed practices and tastes in Romania, promoting news as infotainment rather than a public service meant to inform people. News production is part of Pro TV’s business, not journalistic, strategy. News should be fun and relatable, shocking and sensational; should capture viewers’ attention and be sellable to advertisers: this has been the station’s news philosophy for decades, embraced by its managers and leaders, including Aleksandras Cesnavicius, Pro TV’s current CEO.

Another influential media player in Romania is Intact Media Group, owned by the Voiculescu family. Its stations, Antena 1 (a generalist station with the second largest viewership after Pro TV) and Antena 3, exert significant influence in shaping political views. With an older audience than Pro TV’s and taking an aggressive pro-government stance, Antena Group acts literally as a political player to be reckoned with. Dan Voiculescu, its imprisoned, and then freed founder, built his political career by using the Antena channels not only to promote his image, but to make and break other political leaders. In addition to its television business, the group also owns a popular radio station, Radio ZU, which is the most listened radio channel in Bucharest, as well as print media and online portals.

The audience figures of the media operated by the telco RCS&RDS do not qualify them as a big player on the news market: both Digi TV and Digi FM have a small audience share. But what makes RCS&RDS relevant is the communications infrastructure they control in Romania. The largest player on the Romanian cable market and one of the biggest mobile and broadband providers in the country, RCS&RDS integrates media production, services and infrastructure. Their revenue dwarfs the income of any other media company in Romania. The company owns all the infrastructure that its competitors use. Zoltán Teszari, the founder and majority owner, is also involved in the energy market, which usually implies a good relationship with the government. When and if RCS&RDS will fully show its muscle in the Romanian media industry is yet to be seen.

Being in a position where it can fund or de-fund news media companies, the Romanian government has significant power in the country's media. It exerts influence by directly funding the public broadcasters, TVR and Radio Romania, purchasing advertising space in the media and using tax amnesty for certain companies late in paying their back taxes. Although TVR and Radio Romania have very low audience figures, they still have an impact in rural areas and small towns. They are a key source of information for small farmers and are accessible in households that can't afford a cable subscription, which are not in large numbers. Their radio stations are still popular in small and mid-size towns. All that audience is valuable political capital. Moreover, the government is in the position to control local print media via municipalities. It also has a program of grants for minority media, which further extends its influence. Add to that its regulatory power, through control of regulatory bodies like the National Audiovisual Council (Consiliul Național al Audiovizualului, CNA), and you have a powerful state player exerting massive influence in the media. *(For more on media regulation in Romania, see Government, Politics and regulation in Media Influence Matrix: Romania)*

The two largest publishers Ringier and Adevarul Holding, although large in their segment (they are the most powerful print media houses in Romania and publish the two most popular tabloids in the country), are small actors compared to the country's key influential media.

Digital-born publications like HotNews.ro, Stiripesurse.ro and Ziare.com are small operations, vulnerable to major market fluctuations as they rely heavily on advertising money. However, they have influence mostly among young, affluent people.

When it comes to news consumption, the two market leaders in television, Pro TV and Antena 1, are the most used source of information. Pro TV's evening newscast is by far the most watched news program, followed by Antena 1's Observator. The popularity of Pro TV's newscasts could be attributed to the sensationalist nature of its programs. To a certain extent, the popularity of Pro TV's main news anchor, Andrea Esca (who is a brand in herself), drives the news programs' ratings. Pro TV's 5 p.m. newscast is particularly notorious for featuring mostly violent crimes and dramatic life events (such as death, conflict or cases of patients with terminal diseases). In contrast with Pro TV, which tries hard to remain apolitical, the news coverage of the Antena Group stations, particularly Antena 3, is heavily skewed towards the current Romanian government led by the Social Democratic Party (PSD).[26]

Pro TV has a relatively young viewership, with 65.5% of its primetime audience aged between 25 and 54 years of age.[27] The public watching Observator is slightly older with 50% of the primetime viewership aged between 25 and 54.[28] In contrast, Romania TV has a considerably older audience with only 14% of the viewership aged between 25 and 54 and almost two thirds of primetime viewership over 65 years old.[29]

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[26] Octavia Constantinescu, "FOTO Mesaje cu propaganda Antena 3, la procesul lui Dragnea: 'Stop dosarelor politice!'" (PHOTO Messages with Antena 3 propaganda at Dragnea's trial: 'Stop political lawsuits!'), Newsweek Romania, 15 April 2019, available online at <https://newsweek.ro/actualitate/foto-mesaje-cu-propaganda-antena-3-la-procesul-lui-dragnea-stop-dosarelor-politice> (accessed on 6 May 2019).

[27] Petre Barbu, "Cine se uită la Pro TV? (profilul telespectatorilor în prime-time)" (Who watches Pro TV? Profile of viewers in primetime), Forbes, 26 February 2019, available online at <https://www.forbes.ro/cine-se-uita-la-pro-tv-profilul-telespectatorilor-prime-time-133898> (accessed on 25 March 2019).

[28] Petre Barbu "Cine se uită la Antena 1? (profilul telespectatorilor în prime-time)" (Who watches Antena 1? Profile of viewers in primetime), Forbes, 27 February 2019, available online <https://www.forbes.ro/cine-se-uita-la-antena-1-profilul-telespectatorilor-prime-time-133941> (accessed on 25 March 2019).

[29] Petre Barbu "Cine se uită la România TV? (profilul telespectatorilor în prime-time)" (Who watches Romania TV? Profile of viewers in primetime), Forbes, 27 February 2019, available online <https://www.forbes.ro/cine-se-uita-la-romania-tv-profilul-telespectatorilor-prime-time-134116> (accessed on 25 March 2019).

## The ratings battle

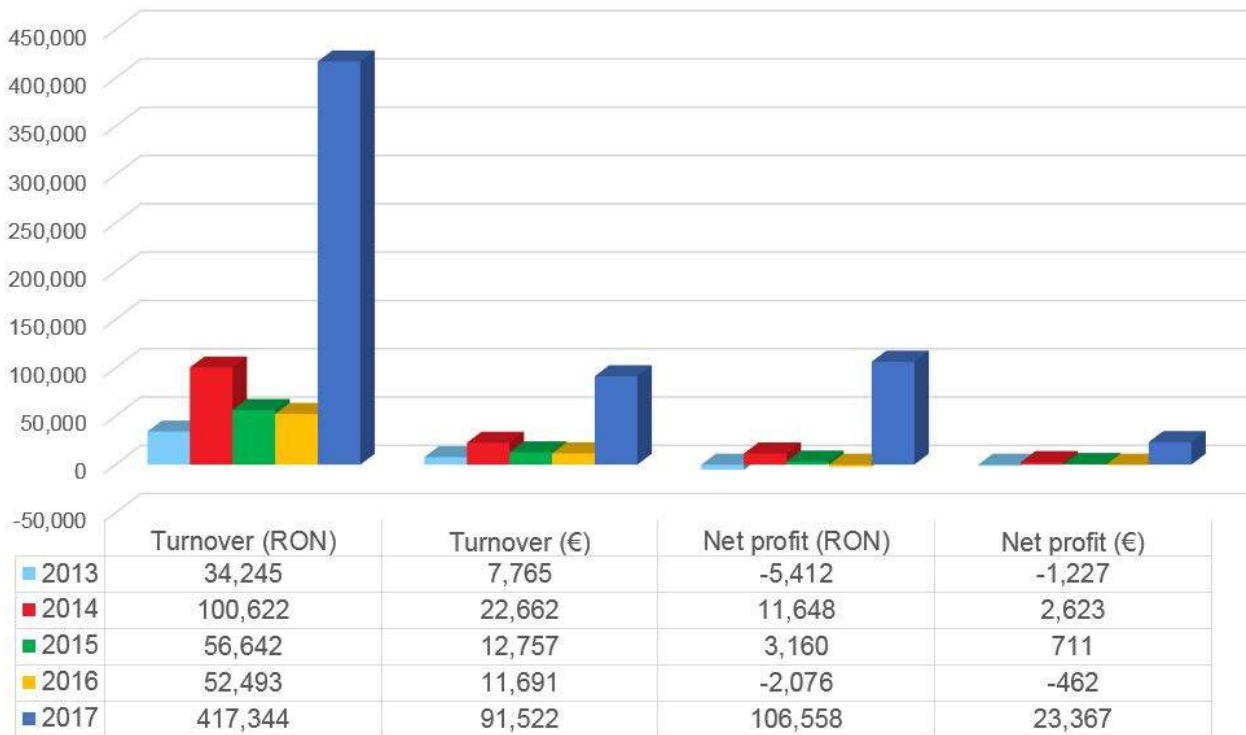
### *Most popular television news programs in Romania, 2018*

News Program	Channel	Ratings 2018
Stirile Pro TV 19	Pro TV	8.5
Observator 19	Antena 1	5.8
Stirile Pro TV 17	Pro TV	5.5
Stirile Pro TV 7	Pro TV	5
Stirile Pro TV 06	Pro TV	4.7
Stirile Pro TV 13	Pro TV	3.4
Observator 16	Antena 1	3.2
Stirile Pro TV 22.30	Pro TV	3
Stiri 22.00 Romania TV	Romania TV	2.6
Stirile Kanal D	Kanal D	2.4
Stiri 20.00 Antena 3	Antena 3	2.4
Stiri 21.00 Romania TV	Romania TV	2.4
Observator 13	Antena 1	2.4
Observator 06	Antena 1	2.4
Stiri 19.00 Romania TV	Romania TV	2.3
Observatorul diminetii	Antena 1	2.2
Stiri 17.00 - Romania TV	Romania TV	2.2
Stiri 15.00 Romania TV	Romania TV	2.1
Telejurnal 15	TVR 1	2
Stiri 20.00 - Romania TV	Romania TV	1.9

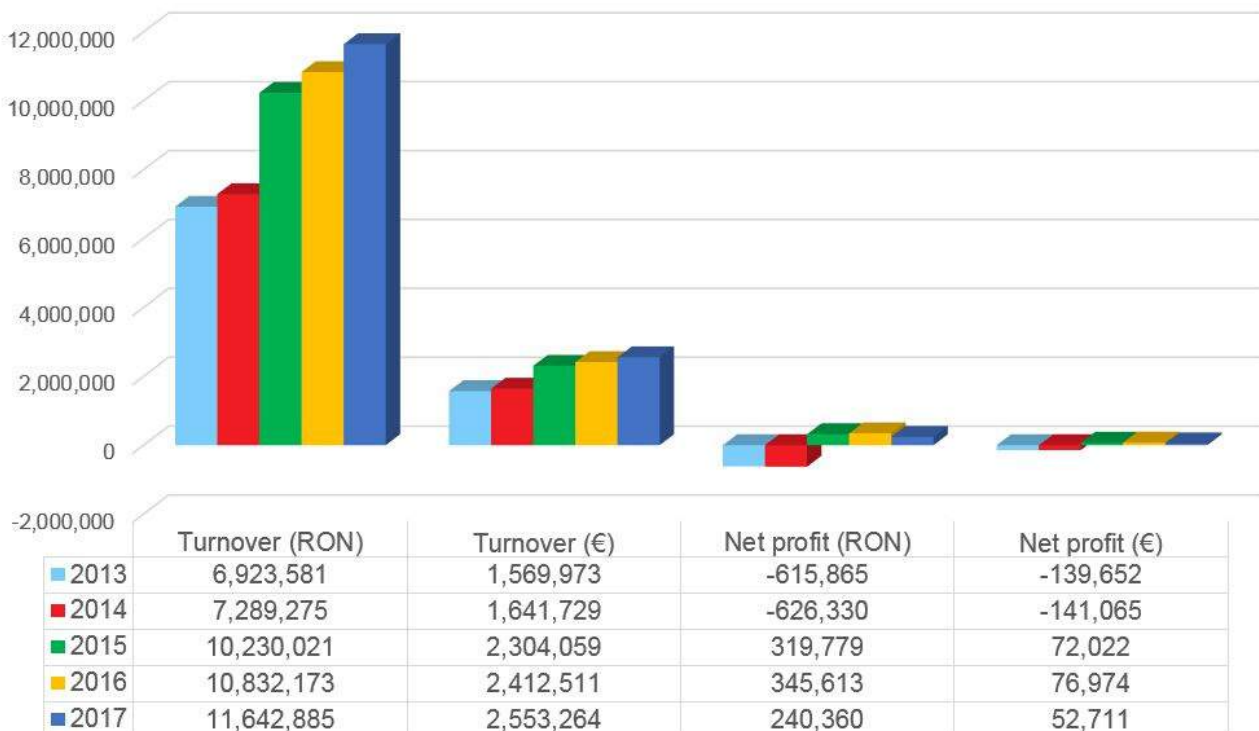
Source: Paginademedia.ro, Kantar copyright ARMA

In spite of the collapse of several publications throughout the past decade, the business media in Romania remains a vibrant sector with several key publications fighting for audiences in the business community. One of the oldest business media is Ziarul Financiar, a newspaper run by Mediafax, a group created by Pro TV's founder Adrian Sarbu. Another important player on this market is Capital, which is part of the Evenimentul is Capital publishing house. In 2009, the business media market was joined by Forbes of the U.S. One of the youngest players is Wall-street.ro, a business news site run by Internet Corp, company founded by Mihai Seceleanu, a young Romanian entrepreneur who developed the firm into an internet powerhouse with revenues in excess of €2.5m in 2017.

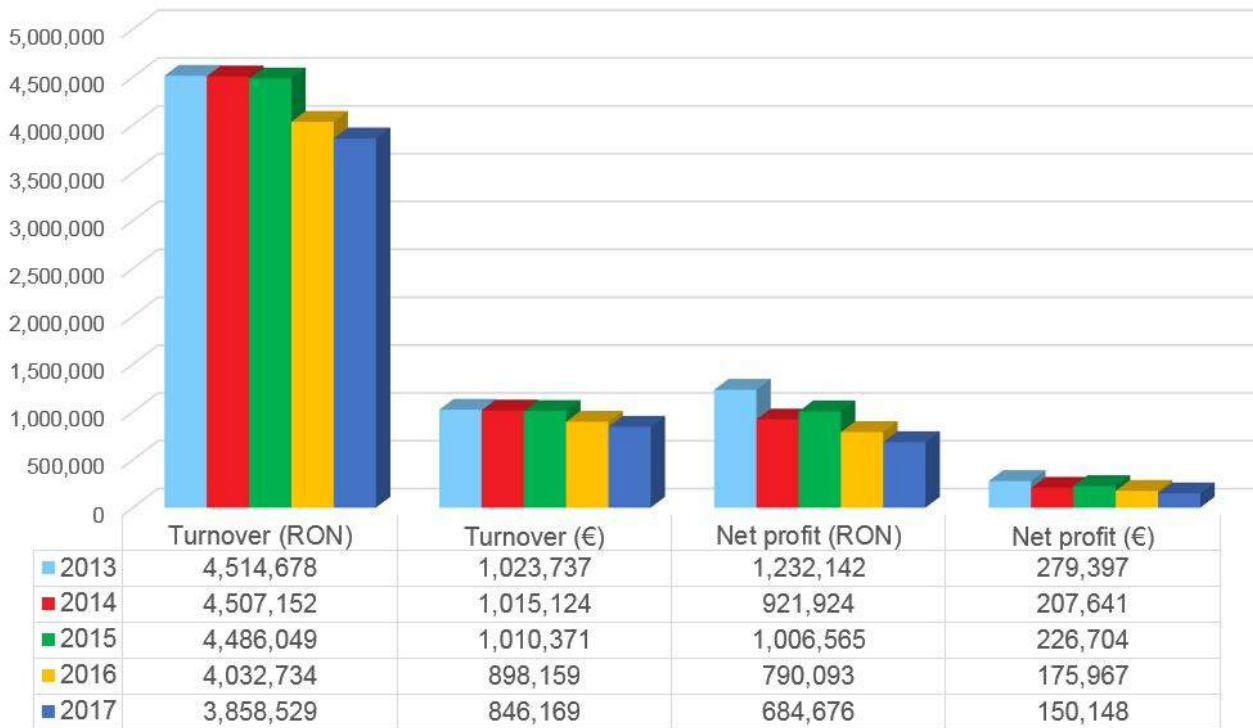
Most of the business publications have been profitable, relying on a staunch readership that needs such information on a daily basis.

**BP Publishing Media\*, key financial data, 2013-2017**

Publisher of Forbes.ro  
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

**Internet Corp\*, key financial data, 2013-2017**

\*Publisher of Wall-street.ro (the company runs seven other websites, focused on lifestyle and women)  
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

**Meta Ring\*, key financial data, 2013-2017**

\*Publisher of Bursa.ro (the company runs seven other websites, not focused on news)  
Source: Ministry of Finance, Romania

The high-brow media market in Romania is very poor. The taste for in-depth, intellectual journalism has been ebbing away, the result of more profound, long-term trends that have to do with the quality (or the lack of it) of education in the country. The few publications catering to this intellectual public include Dilema Veche (owned by the Adevarul Holding) and Revista 22, published by Grupul pentru Dialog Social (meaning “the group for social dialogue” in Romanian), an NGO set up during the tumultuous days of the anti-communist revolution in December 1989.

One website with increasing influence in policymaking circles, but also in the business community is Cursdeguvernare.ro (meaning “governance course” in Romanian), a website founded in 2010 by journalist Cristian Grosu and his brother Antonio.

## **Local Media**

At first glance, the Romanian local media seems to be a diverse and competitive sector with hundreds of media outlets covering the country’s 41 counties. However, in reality, the state of local media is far from rosy. Many of these outlets are dormant websites that haven’t been updated in a long time. Most of the local media companies in Romania operate on small budgets, pinching pennies everywhere they can. Only eight out of 75 prominent local media operators mapped in this report have a yearly turnover of more than €1m. Nearly half of all 75 companies operate with yearly budgets of less than €100,000.

Without access to advertising money disbursed centrally by the large advertising agencies, most of the local media outlets are surviving thanks primarily to the munificence of the local governments and oligarchs (sometimes the same) who dole out funding to media outlets as a way to buy their coverage. In some counties, they own these media outlets directly. The newspaper Desteptarea in Bacau, a city in Moldova, the eastern part of Romania, boasts a yearly turnover of over €3m, a large amount for a local publication. Desteptarea’s publisher is bankrolled by the



family of Dumitru Sechelariu, the former mayor of Bacau who died in 2013. His press operation has since been led by his wife Laudietta.[30]

The financial sustainability of local media is hard to assess as these media outlets, particularly newspapers, do not publish data about their circulation and distribution. Some local media such as Gazeta de Sud, a regional paper run by a larger media holding that covers the region of Oltenia in southern Romania, or Info Sud-Est, a local paper covering the city of Constanta, Romania's largest port, have been struggling in recent years to diversify their funding sources by offering subscriptions or financing their operations from other lucrative activities.

For nationwide media groups, local media are not an attractive business at all. With the exception of the public service broadcaster that inherited from communist times a network of local studios, nationwide television stations do not operate stations in the regions. Those who did have been rapidly closing them. Digi TV shut down in spring 2019 all its eight regional offices.[31] Antena 1 handed over all its local stations to Antena 3,[32] a highly controversial pro-government news station. Small local television stations are often arbitrarily removed from the packages of the county's large cable companies. Often, they do not have the resources to fight cable companies who own the distribution infrastructure that carries their programs.[33]

#### Most prominent local media in Romania, by turnover, 2017

Media outlet/company	Turnover (€)	County	Media outlet/company	Turnover (€)	County
Editura Prahova	3,467,596	Prahova	City News	589,629	Cluj
Desteptarea	3,292,089	Bacau	Tribuna	578,457	Sibiu
Mesagerul de Covasna	1,956,484	Covasna	Buna ziua Iasi	517,345	Iasi
Sibiu 100%	1,912,569	Sibiu	Viata Libera	415,482	Galati
Media Sud	1,690,696	Dolj	Monitorul de Botosani	396,046	Botosani
Cuget Liber	1,511,030	Constanta	Obiectiv Vocea Brailei	354,663	Braila
TV Neptun	1,052,416	Constanta	Vremea Noua	329,916	Vaslui
Monitorul de Vrancea	1,021,430	Vrancea	Gazeta de Nord-Vest	268,202	Satu Mare
Informatia Zilei	951,443	Satu Mare	Graiul Maramuresului	251,514	Maramures
Evenimentul Regional al Moldovei	885,429	Iasi	Monitorul de Cluj	249,235	Cluj
Observatorul de Covasna	619,232	Covasna	Ziarul Ceahlaul*	236,786	Neamt
Monitorul de Suceava	618,646	Suceava	Mesagerul Hunedorean	235,586	Hunedoara
Ziarul de Iasi**	618,444	Iasi	Cuvantul Liber	232,402	Mures

[30] "Familia Sechelariu renunță la operațiunile în televiziune și radio, dar păstrează ziarul Desteptarea," (Sechelariu family gives up its television and radio operations, but keeps the newspaper Desteptarea), Mediafax, 2 September 2014, available online at <https://www.mediafax.ro/cultura-media/familia-sechelariu-renunta-la-operatiunile-in-televiziune-si-radio-dar-pastreaza-ziarul-desteptarea-13189970> (accessed on 10 April 2019).

[31] Iulia Bunea, "Cele opt televiziuni regionale ale Digi24 se închid oficial, după ce CNA a retras, la cerere, licențele" (Digi24's eight stations close officially, after CNA withdraws licenses at request), Paginademedia.ro, 26 March 2019, available online at: <https://www.paginademedia.ro/2019/03/statiile-regionale-digi24-se-inchid-oficial> (accessed on 4 April 2019).

[32] Iulia Bunea, "Stațiile locale Antena 1, transformate în posturi regionale Antena 3" (Antena 1 local stations, turned into regional stations for Antena 3), Paginademedia.ro, 2 April 2019, available online at <https://www.paginademedia.ro/2019/04/antena-3-are-retea-de-televiziuni-regionale> (accessed on 6 April 2019).

[33] Madalina Cerban, "RCS&RDS, sancționat de CNA pentru că nu își retransmite propria televiziune" (RCS&RDS penalized by CNA because it does not distribute its own television), Mediafax, 13 December 2013, available online at <https://www.mediafax.ro/cultura-media/rcs-rds-sanctionat-de-cna-pentru-ca-nu-isi-retransmite-propria-televiziune-11765720> (accessed on 6 April 2019).

Media outlet/company	Turnover (€)	County	Media outlet/company	Turnover (€)	County
Telegraf	189,325	Constanta	Observatorul Prahovean	46,592	Prahova
Giurgiuveanul*	186,497	Giurgiu	Jurnalul de Arges	44,586	Arges
Delta	182,377	Tulcea	Transilvania Expres	43,381	Brasov
Obiectiv de Suceava	174,972	Suceava	Eveniment de Olt	42,255	Olt
Redesteparea	174,716	Timis	News-AR	41,456	Arad
Crai Nou	152,611	Suceava	Ziarul Actualitatea	41,355	Timis
Gazeta Oltului	135,917	Olt	Salajeanel	32,080	Salaj
Gorjeanul	123,734	Gorj	Ziarul de Bacau	31,457	Bacau
Radio Sky	121,090	Constanta	NewsBucovina	26,466	Suceava
Ziarul de Vrancea	113,209	Vrancea	JurnalMM	19,803	Maramures
Monitorul Expres*	111,507	Brasov	Arena	17,803	Calarasi
Monitorul de Neamt/Monitorul de Roman	103,579	Neamt	Antidotul	15,863	Galati
Punctul	99,905	Mures	Gazeta Noua	14,452	Olt
Opinia Timisoarei	98,823	Timis	Arges Plus	13,955	Arges
Drobeta Press	91,864	Mehedinti	Liber in Teleorman	13,250	Teleorman
Rasunetul	90,992	Bistrita-Nasaud	Giurgiupeurse	12,831	Giurgiu
Gazeta de Cluj	90,797	Cluj	Olt Alert	12,355	Olt
BizBrasov	78,419	Brasov	Gorj News	11,842	Gorj
Mesagerul de Neamt	75,804	Neamt	Portal Satu Mare	10,903	Satu Mare
Obiectiv	71,327	Tulcea	ZiarMM	10,697	Maramures
Mesagerul de Sibiu	67,884	Sibiu	Jurnal de Vrancea	10,261	Vrancea
Arges Expres Press	61,907	Arges	Vranceamedia	8,564	Vrancea
Magazin Salajeana	59,907	Salaj	Dezvaluiri.ro	8,459	Constanta
Stiri Botosani	56,795	Botosani	Gazeta de Prahova*	7,160	Prahova
Monitorul de Galati	46,663	Galati			

\*Data for 2016; \*\*Data for 2015

Source: CMDS based on data from the Ministry of Finance

*Detailed financial data about local media companies available on CMDS website:  
<https://cmds.ceu.edu/local-media-financial-data>*

In spite of their modest size, local media appear to be profitable businesses. In 2017, only two local media operators netted more than €100,000; however, the same year, most of the 75 local media mapped in this report managed to earn profits, which is an exceptional performance in a country where journalism is struggling to survive. Nevertheless, these figures are misleading as most of the local media outlets are artificially funded by local businesses associated with local governments. Editors-in-chief and publishers chasing local authorities to secure annual marketing contracts from municipalities as a way to survive have become a common practice. Recorder, a news portal, published in 2018 a list of local media outlets funded through advertising contracts by local councils and town halls.[34] The awards are small, ranging from a few hundreds to a few thousands of euros monthly; however, for papers that employ a couple of journalists any cash is important as it helps them cover their salaries.

[34] Iulia Marin, "Presa locală, cumpărată cu bani publici: milioane de euro pe ode, emisiuni aranjate și felicitări" (The local press bought with public money: millions of euros for praises, commissioned shows and greetings), Recorder, 14 May 2018, available online at: <https://recorder.ro/presa-locala-cumparata-cu-bani-publici-milioane-de-euro-pe-ode-emisiuni-aranjate-si-felicitari/>, accessed on 6 April 2019.

On top of all these financial problems, local media are facing other forms of pressure. They include lawsuits (that small media outlets can't afford), financial and tax inspections, and outright threats and intimidation. Notable examples of local media outlets persecuted for doing investigative work include Liber in Teleorman[35], Vrancea 24 and Timpul de Valcea.[36]

In many cases, local media are used by their owners as tools to promote their business or personal interests. In Iasi, Romania's fourth largest city by population, located in the eastern part of the country, Ghiocel Asimionesei, owner of the newspaper Buna Ziua Iasi, has been reportedly using his position to gain favors from the city hall.[37] In Baia Mare, the capital city of the Maramures county in northwestern Romania, the director of Axa News MM, Corin Chereches, has been using his media to boost his political career. He was member of the local council and held top positions in the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL). The deals between Axa News MM and the Baia Mare city council were eventually investigated by the local anti-corruption watchdog.[38]

In such an environment where local politicians and oligarchs collude with publishers and media owners, local media are immediately affected by their owners' problems. In Brasov, a city in central Romania, the media group Mix is facing extinction following mounting financial problems and accusations of corruption surrounding its owner, Aristotel Căncescu, a former MP and head of the local council in Brasov. In late 2018, the building that shelters the group's headquarters in Brasov was auctioned off by the tax authorities as Căncescu incurred debts worth RON 1m to the state budget.[39] A year earlier, Căncescu was indicted for tax evasion in a case involving his media companies.[40] Eventually, one of the media assets owned by Mix, Radio Brasov, was taken over by the public radio.[41] Căncescu, one of Romania's most corrupt politicians, has been arrested several times and is being investigated in several corruption-related cases that are likely to put him behind bars for years.

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[35] Teleorman is the residence of the current leader of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), Liviu Dragnea, a county place from where he runs most of his businesses, and hence a rich area for investigations.

[36] Inițiativa pentru o Justiție Curată (ICJ), "Abuzuri ale Puterii împotriva presei locale" (Abuse of Power against the local press), November 2018, available online at: <https://justitiecurata.ro/abuzuri-ale-puterii-impotriva-presei-locale/> (accessed on 6 April 2019).

[37] Cezar Moraru, "Tupeul lui Asimionesei în fața lui Chirica: vrea bloc cu 6 etaje pe o palmă de teren" (Asimionesei's gumption in Chirica's face: he wants a block of flats with six floors on a plot of land), ReporterIS, 16 August 2018, available online at <http://reporteris.ro/iasi/item/86419-tupeul-lui-asimionesei-in-fata-lui-chirica-vrea-bloc-cu-6-etaje-pe-o-palma-de-teren.html?start=3050> (accessed on 15 April 2019).

[38] "Corin Chereches, audiat la DNA Cluj pentru legaturile cu Primaria Baia Mare" (Corin Chereches, interrogated by DNA Cluj for links with the Baia Mare City Hall), Ziar MM, 20 June 2018, available online at <https://ziarimm.ro/corin-chereches-audiat-la-dna-cluj-pentru-legaturile-cu-primaria-baia-mare/> (accessed on 12 April 2019).

[39] Ionuț Dincă, "Sediul trustului de presă Mix, scos la vânzare de Fisc, după ce firma lui Aristotel Căncescu a acumulat datorii de peste 1 milion de lei la bugetul de stat" (The headquarters of the press group Mix, put up for sale by the Tax Office, after the company of Aristotel Căncescu accumulated debts of over RON 1m to the state budget), BizBrasov, 30 December 2018, available online at <https://www.bizbrasov.ro/2018/12/30/sediul-trustului-de-presa-mix-scos-la-vanzare-de-fisc-dupa-ce-firma-lui-aristotel-cancescu-acumulat-datorii-de-peste-1-milion-de-lei-la-bugetul-de-stat/> (accessed on 12 April 2019).

[40] Ovidiu Vranceanu, "Aristotel Căncescu și fratele său, trimiși în judecată în dosarul licențelor Mix. Prejudiciul a fost fixat la 18,027 milioane de lei, peste două treimi din această sumă fiind doar dobânzi și accesorii pentru neplata taxelor în momentul tranzacției" (Aristotel Căncescu and his brother, indicted in the Mix licenses case. The damage was estimated at RON 18.027m, more than two-thirds of the sum being just interest and additional charges for not paying taxes during the transaction), BizBrasov, 5 April 2017, available online at <https://www.bizbrasov.ro/2017/04/05/aristotel-cancescu-si-fratele-sau-trimisi-in-judecata-in-dosarul-licentelor-mix-prejudiciul-a-fost-fixat-la-18027-milioane-de-lei-peste-doua-treimi-din-aceasta-suma-fiind-doar-dobanzi-si-accesorii/> (accessed on 12 April 2019).

[41] "Radio România Brașov, construit pe scheletul „fugarilor” din Radio Brașov și Mix TV. De data asta, angajații sunt plătiți pe bune din bani publici" (Radio Romania Brasov, built on the scaffolding of the "fugitives" from Radio Brasov and Mix TV. This time, the employees are truly paid from public money), BizBrasov, 1 March 2019, available online at <https://www.bizbrasov.ro/2019/03/01/radio-romania-brasov-construit-pe-scheletul-fugarilor-din-radio-brasov-si-mix-tv-de-data-asta-angajatii-sunt-platiti-pe-bune-din-bani-publici/> (accessed on 12 April 2019).

In a separate case, the media group controlled by a group of businessmen, former journalists, close to Radu Mazare, the former mayor of Constanta, is also crumbling. They include Telegraf, one of the oldest local dailies in Romania, set up back in 1992, and the television station TV Neptun. The companies running the two outlets are controlled by Sorin Gabriel Strutinsky, one of Mazare's close friends. Telegraf became insolvent in 2017,[42] and SOTI Cable Neptun, the operator of TV Neptun, a year earlier.[43] In December 2017, Strutinsky was sentenced to seven years in prison in a corruption case. After several years as editor-in-chief at Telegraf, Mazare devoted his career to politics, serving for many years as MP and mayor of Constanta. Faced with corruption-related suits, Mazare fled Romania in the end of 2018, settling in Madagascar.

### Most prominent local media in Romania, by net profit, 2017

Media outlet/company	Net profit (€)	County
Telegraf	107,869	Constanta
Evenimentul Regional al Moldovei	101,272	Iasi
Sibiu 100%	97,657	Sibiu
Monitorul de Botosani	96,569	Botosani
Monitorul de Vrancea	54,126	Vrancea
Desteptarea	51,672	Bacau
Informatia Zilei	44,370	Satu Mare
Gazeta de Cluj	26,352	Cluj
Mesagerul de Covasna	24,886	Covasna
Arges Expres Press	24,709	Arges
Opinia Timisoarei	24,578	Timis
Delta	22,515	Tulcea
Redesteptarea	21,783	Timis
Observatorul Prahovean	21,734	Prahova
Ziarul de Bacau	21,450	Bacau
Monitorul de Suceava	20,473	Suceava
City News	19,117	Cluj
Gazeta Oltului	19,010	Olt
BizBrasov	18,311	Brasov
Ziarul Actualitatea	17,874	Timis
Eveniment de Olt	16,821	Olt
JurnalMM	15,473	Maramures
Graiul Maramuresului	13,009	Maramures
Ziarul de Vrancea	12,791	Vrancea
Drobeta Press	11,583	Mehedinti
Mesagerul de Sibiu	11,313	Sibiu
Giurgiupeurse	11,191	Giurgiu
Monitorul de Cluj	9,677	Cluj
Olt Alert	9,291	Olt
Punctul	9,063	Mures

Media outlet/company	Net profit (€)	County
Arena	8,980	Calarasi
Gazeta Noua	8,843	Olt
Obiectiv de Suceava	7,167	Suceava
News-AR	6,050	Arad
Ziarul Ceahlau*	5,963	Neamt
Arges Plus	5,542	Arges
Jurnal de Vrancea	5,527	Vrancea
Vranceamedia	4,492	Vrancea
Cuvantul Liber	4,418	Mures
Gorj News	4,351	Gorj
Liber in Teleorman	4,300	Teleorman
Antidotul	2,958	Galati
Stiri Botosani	2,139	Botosani
Buna ziua Iasi	2,105	Iasi
Rasunetul	1,337	Bistrita-Nasaud
Gazeta de Prahova*	1,312	Prahova
Giurgiuveanul*	1,071	Giurgiu
Mesagerul de Neamt	796	Neamt
Viata Libera	565	Galati
Obiectiv Vocea Brailei	335	Braila
Gorjeanul	234	Gorj
Crai Nou	70	Suceava
Transilvania Expres	-22	Brasov
NewsBucovina	-943	Suceava
Dezvaluiri.ro	-1,159	Constanta
Mesagerul Hunedorean	-2,146	Hunedoara
Magazin Salajeana	-2,173	Salaj
Portal Satu Mare	-3,677	Satu Mare
Monitorul de Galati	-4,331	Galati
ZiarMM	-10,809	Maramures

[42] Iulia Bunea, "Ziarul Telegraf, din Constanta, a intrat în insolvență" (The newspaper Telegraf, from Constanta, entered insolvency), Paginademedia.ro, 14 July 2017, available online at <https://www.paginademedia.ro/2017/07/ziarul-telegraf-din-constantina-a-intrat-in-insolventa> (accessed on 12 April 2019).

[43] Petrișor Obae, "Neptun TV, postul lui Strutinsky, prietenul lui Mazare, în insolvență" (Neptun TV, Strutinsky's station, Mazare's friend, insolvent), Paginademedia.ro, 19 April 2016, available online at <https://www.paginademedia.ro/2016/04/neptun-tv-postul-lui-strutinsky-prietenul-lui-mazare-in-insolventa> (accessed on 12 April 2019).

Media outlet/company	Net profit (€)	County
Ziarul de Iasi**	-12,789	Iasi
Monitorul de Neamt/ Monitorul de Roman	-13,899	Neamt
Radio Sky	-14,764	Constanta
Obiectiv	-21,510	Tulcea
Vremea Noua	-28,117	Vaslui
Tribuna	-36,280	Sibiu
Jurnalul de Arges	-37,147	Arges
Monitorul Expres*	-40,572	Brasov

Media outlet/company	Net profit (€)	County
Editura Prahova	-78,755	Prahova
Gazeta de Nord-Vest	-102,775	Satu Mare
Salajeanul	-124,916	Salaj
Observatorul de Covasna	-132,594	Covasna
Cuget Liber	-178,069	Constanta
TV Neptun	-213,984	Constanta
Media Sud	-226,062	Dolj

\*Data for 2016; \*\*Data for 2015  
Source: CMDS based on data from the Ministry of Finance

*Detailed financial data about local media companies available on CMDS website:  
<https://cmds.ceu.edu/local-media-financial-data>*

## Hungarian-Language Media

The Hungarian-language media in Romania serves around 1.2 million ethnic Hungarians, most of them living in Transylvania, a region in central and western Romania bordering Hungary. Hungarian-language media is a vibrant sector targeting all major cities in Transylvania, including Cluj-Napoca, Oradea, Targu Mures and Miercurea Ciuc. Cluj-Napoca is the region's media center for Hungarian-language media hosting the most read daily and weekly (Erdélyi Napló, Krónika, Szabadság) and the most prominent online portals (Transindex, Maszol, Főter).

As none of these publications are members of the Romanian Bureau for Transmedia Audit (BRAT), a circulation audit body, data about their audience are lacking. Only the publications belonging to the publisher Inform Media Press are being audited. Their Hungarian-language daily Bihári Naplo is faring very well, having the second largest circulation in Romania on the non-tabloid print media segment.

The Hungarian media in Romania is mainly operating on state funding coming from both the Romanian and Hungarian governments, either funds earmarked by the Romanian state to support its national minorities or, more recently, cash from the Hungarian state to support Hungarian media in neighboring countries. The financial support of Hungarian-language media abroad was initially a project supported by Lajos Simicska, a media mogul who was a friend of the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán until they bitterly argued in 2015. Following the spat with Orbán, Simicska lost access to power and resources, which had dramatic consequences for the Hungarian-language media in Transylvania as funding from Budapest was halted. One of the biggest companies on the Hungarian-language media segment in Romania, Udvarhelyi Híradó, which was heavily funded through the Simicska scheme, went bankrupt in 2017 after finances from Hungary stopped coming. Media outlets such as Krónika, Erdélyi Riport and Főter were part of Udvarhelyi Híradó. After Udvarhelyi Híradó went bankrupt its publications continued to appear under different ownership. They now receive money from the Hungarian state.[44]

[44] Zoltan Sipos, "Az égből pottyant 1,45 milliárd: itt az Erdélyi Médiatér Egyesület támogatói okirata" (The 1.45bnthat dropped from the sky: here are the Erdélyi Médiatér Association's supported organizations), Atlatzo.hu, 9 February 2019, available online at <https://atlatzo.ro/2018/02/09/az-egbol-pottyant-145-milliard-itt-az-erdelyi-mediater-egyesulet-tamogatoi-okirata/> (accessed on 15 March 2019).

## From Budapest, with love

*Prominent publishers of Hungarian-language media in Romania, 2017*

Publication	Type	Location	Publisher	Turnover, RON, 2017	Number of employees, 2017
Szabadsag	daily	Cluj-Napoca	Szabadsag	981,757	24
Transindex.ro	online	Cluj-Napoca	Média Index Egyesület	452,132	4
Erdely Naplo, Erdelyriport.ro, Kronika	weekly, online, daily	Cluj-Napoca	Prima Press	417,818	5
Foter.ro	online	Cluj-Napoca	Varjúvár Kiadó	n/a	n/a
Maszol.ro	online	Cluj-Napoca	Progress Alapitvány	n/a	n/a

n/a: not available

Source: Romanian Ministry of Finance

Hungarian media companies are small operations. One of the biggest is the regional daily Szabadság, which has 24 employees and a turnover of RON 981,757 (€215,297), according to data from 2017, the latest available. It netted less than €10,000 in 2017. However, the average Hungarian-language news media in Romania operate with an annual budget of around RON 400,000, which is roughly €90,000. Hence, the support from the Hungarian government is crucial for these outlets to survive. The government of Fidesz-MPP, the populist, national-conservative party of Prime Minister Orbán, allocated in 2017 a total of €4.5m to a foundation whose mission is to support Hungarian-language media outside Hungary.[45] The support from the Hungarian government to a media outlet in Transylvania thus ranges in most cases between €30,000 and €60,000 yearly,[46] which for a publication living on €100,000 a year is essentially a lifeboat.

The most obvious danger of this funding model is the exposure to censorship that it creates. The current Hungarian government is notorious for muzzling critical press in its own country by closing or buying media outlets. Its expansion in Romania can only raise concerns that the government's actual purpose is to control the Hungarian minority and use their votes in elections (as most of the ethnic Hungarians in Romania hold Hungarian passports).

Moreover, funding from the Hungarian government is not a sustainable model as it is linked with and influenced by changes in the political regime in Hungary. As in the case of Udvarhelyi Híradó, even personal conflicts between people in power in Hungary are enough to shut down a business.

Similar concerns are related to the financial support coming from the Romanian state, which provides an equally unsteady source of financing. Reliability on one or two of these major sources of funding makes the Hungarian-language media in Transylvania extremely vulnerable to any changes in the long run.

[45] Zoltan Sipos, "Magához édesgette a Fidesz az erdélyi magyar online sajtót" (Fidesz sweetened the Transylvanian online media), *Atlatso.hu*, 5 June 2017, available online at <https://atlatso.ro/2018/02/09/az-egbol-pottyant-145-milliard-itt-az-erdelyi-mediater-egyesulet-tamogatoi-okirata/> (accessed on 15 March 2019)

[46] Zoltan Sipos, *Fidesz sweetened the Transylvanian online media*, cit.

## Key Funders

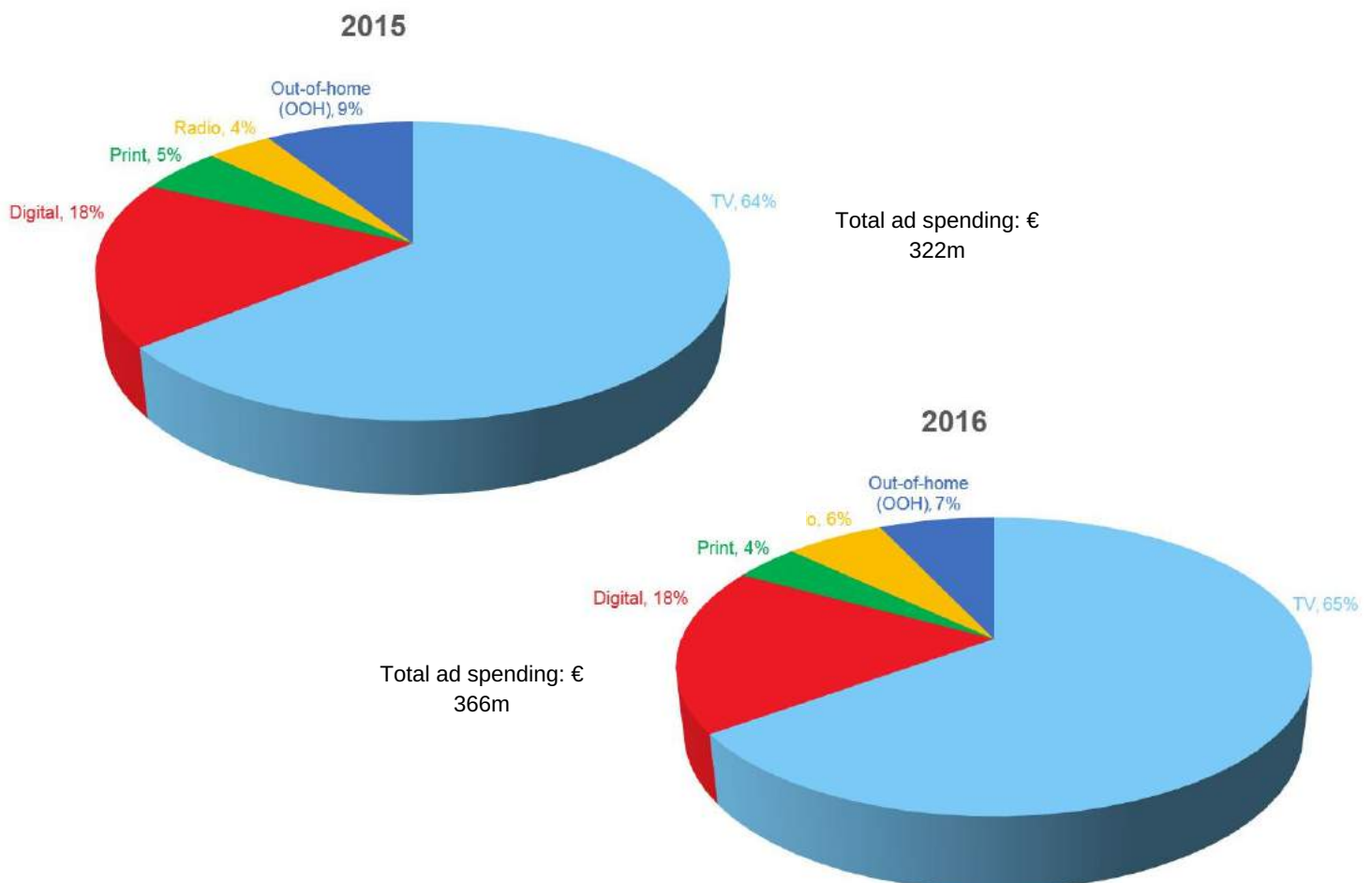
### *Non-Governmental Funders*

#### Advertising

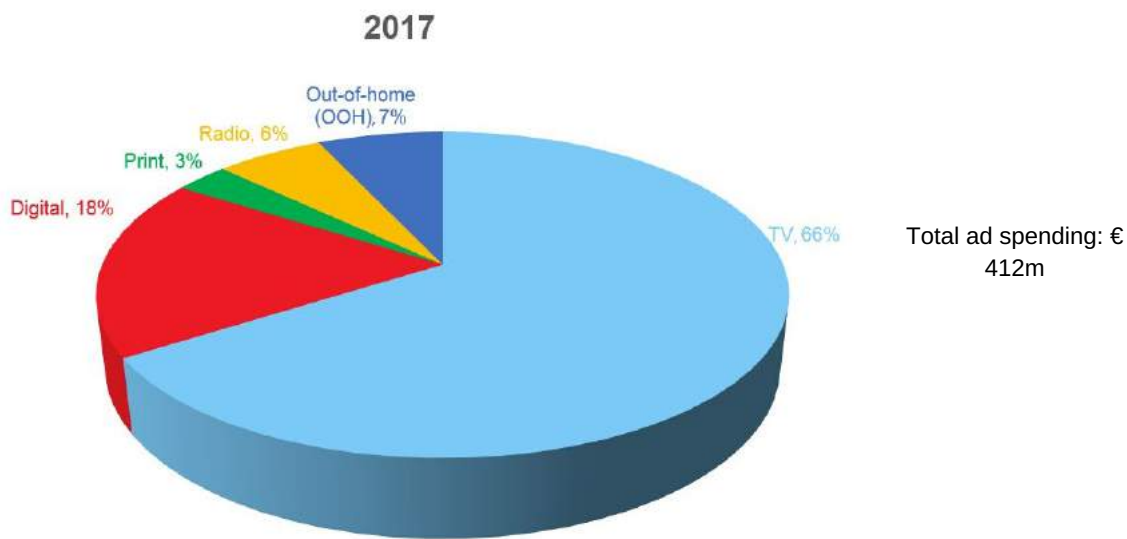
The Romanian advertising market has experienced steady growth in the past few years, exceeding €412m in 2017. This trend was expected to continue in 2018.[47] Other sources of revenue for the media include state support in the form of direct subsidies for the public service broadcaster or state advertising (see more in State Funding in this chapter); revenues from cable companies in the form of fees for including television channels in their cable packages; direct support from readers (in the form of purchase of newspapers and subscriptions); and, to a lesser extent, grants and private donations.

Advertising continues to be the largest non-government source of funding for the news media in Romania. Television dominates the advertising market in Romania, accounting for more than two-thirds of the total ad spend. Second comes digital, at a distance though, with some 18% of the ad market. The biggest decline in ad revenue during the past decade has been experienced by print media, its share in the total ad spend going down to a paltry 3% in 2017.

#### Advertising market, breakdown by sector, % of total ad spend, 2015-2017



[47] Reports for 2018 have not been published at the time of writing (March 2019).

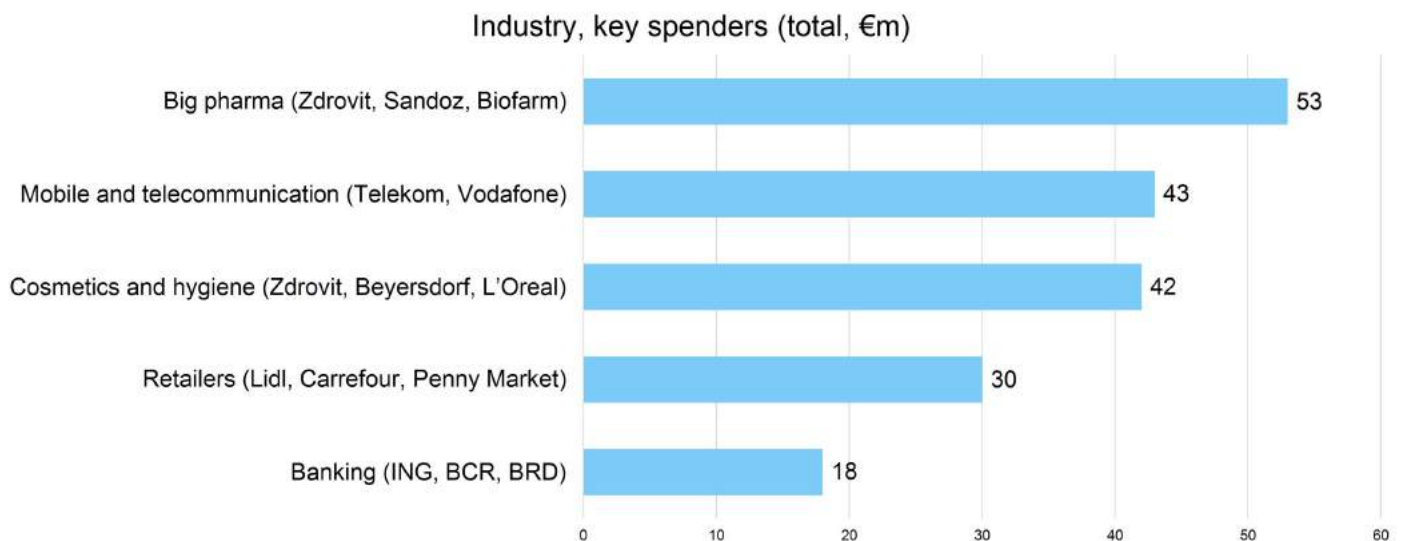


Source: Media Fact Book (2016-2018)[48]

The biggest advertisers in Romania are large pharmaceutical companies, mobile and telecommunication companies, cosmetics and hygiene product manufacturers, retailers and banks.[49]

### Ad spenders

*The largest advertisers in Romania, 2017*



Source: Media Fact Book, 2018

[48] Reports available online at <http://www.mediafactbook.ro/> (accessed on 25 March 2019).

[49] See similar trends in the Media Fact Book 2017 and 2016.



It is unusual for advertisers or their clients to directly intervene to influence content in the news media. There have been instances where advertisers have reacted to extreme politicization of various television stations. Such was the case of Antena 3 and Romania TV, two channels founded and controlled by people close to the government, that were boycotted by a spate of large advertisers as a response to the politically skewed coverage of the 2017 anti-government protests. [50] In January 2017, both channels saw their major advertisers withdraw their commercials from primetime following increased pressure from the public who regarded these two channels as a source of government propaganda. Although the measure was short-lived, it did impact the stations significantly. The number of ads per day on Antena 3 dropped from an average of 500 in January 2017 to 160 on 7 February 2017. Romania TV saw a less radical, but still significant fall from 500 ads per day to 290.[51] Although it was meant to be a PR move rather than a political statement, the advertisers' boycott inadvertently politicized the role of big advertising spenders, revealing the power that they hold over the media, even if they rarely exercise it in this fashion.

A much more insidious way in which advertisers shape content production is by imposing their expectations about the audience, both in size and profile. Media always seek to reach a group defined as “the commercial public” (the public with ages between 18 and 49) as they hold the biggest purchasing power in most countries, Romania included. But due to a series of factors such as aging of the Romanian population combined with increased financial insecurity among people younger than 30, the “adult” media-targeted public is being reconfigured to include older people with higher purchasing power. Aleksandras Cesnavicius, Pro TV's CEO, said in 2018 that changes in programming and content to adapt to a different public in order to satisfy the demands of advertisers were being observed.[52]

The Romanian online advertising market has been growing fast, but it remains heavily dominated by Google and Facebook. In 2017, the two companies controlled some 66% of the €73m online advertising market in Romania.[53] That has major implications for the Romanian journalism as 88% of Romanians use the internet as a source of news, and 66% of these users are known to consume news on social media. The dominance of the American technology companies strips local online media of a significant amount of resources.

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[50] Costin Ionescu, “Cum resimt Antena 3 si Romania TV presiunea revoltei anticoruptie. Ce functioneaza si ce nu impotriva abuzurilor TV” (How Antena 3 and Romania TV feel the pressure of the anti-corruption revolt. What works and what doesn't against abuses of television stations), HotNews.ro, 12 February 2017, available online at [https://economie.hotnews.ro/stiri-media\\_publicitate-21605668-analiza-cum-resimt-antena-3-romania-presiunea-revoltei-anticoruptie-functioneaza-nu-impotriva-abuzurilor.htm](https://economie.hotnews.ro/stiri-media_publicitate-21605668-analiza-cum-resimt-antena-3-romania-presiunea-revoltei-anticoruptie-functioneaza-nu-impotriva-abuzurilor.htm) (accessed on 25 March 2019).

[51] Petrișor Obae, “Numărul de reclame pe Antena 3 și România TV a scăzut dramatic. Câte spoturi au avut ieri” (The number of ads on Antena 3 and Romania TV declined dramatically. How many commercials they had yesterday), Paginademedi.ro, 8 February 2017, available online at <https://www.paginademedi.ro/2017/02/numarul-de-reclame-pe-antena-3-si-romania-tv-a-scazut-dramatic-cate-spoturi-au-avut-ieri> (accessed on 24 March 2019).

[52] Iulia Bunea, “INTERVIU. Aleksandras Cesnavicius, șeful Pro TV, despre decizia postului de a renunța la Europa League și Champions League: Am ales „jucăriile” pe care le-am considerat mai puternice și cu potențial mai mare de audiență” (Interview. Aleksandras Cesnavicius, the Pro TV boss, about the decision of the station to give up Europa League and Champions League: We chose the “toys” that we considered powerful and with a greater audience potential), Paginademedi.ro, 28 August 2018, available online at <https://www.paginademedi.ro/2018/08/aleksandras-cesnavicius-ceo-pro-tv-grila-toamna-2018> (accessed on 25 March 2019).

[53] (2018). *Media Fact Book*. Bucharest: Initiative.

## Philanthropies

Philanthropy funding in Romanian journalism is very small and has not had any tangible impact on journalism or media freedom.

Since 2009, Media Impact Funders, a donor association, counted only some US\$ 2.1m in foreign donor money invested in media in Romania. Of that, US\$ 1.3m was spent on news production and the rest on media policy and access-related projects. Bucharest dominates with most of the donor funding (US\$ 1.9m) concentrated in organizations based there. The largest funder by far is EEA and Norway Grants, a government initiative financed by the states of Liechtenstein, Iceland and Norway, which has spent some US\$ 1.8m in the Romanian media since 2009. Other foreign donors present in Romania include Arcus Foundation, a charity with offices in the U.S. and U.K., focused on the rights of the LGBTQ people, National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a U.S. Congress-funded body, and Wikimedia Foundation, a San Francisco-based NGO that hosts Wikipedia and funds knowledge-sharing projects.

There is no local philanthropy money in the Romanian media. Only a few privately owned companies now and then finance journalism projects. For example, Avon, a cosmetics maker, has been offering small funds (couple of thousands of euros) to journalists to cover specific topics such as domestic violence.

A bigger initiative is Fundatia9 (The Foundation9), established in 2015 by BRD - Groupe Société Générale, a bank, to finance cultural and educational projects, some of which are journalism-based. The bank is funding Scena9 and Scoala9, a cultural journalism platform and its education-focused sister platform, and is planning to launch more content platforms.

A notable initiative that has attracted the participation of 24 media outlets, both local and national, is PressHub. Run by Freedom House Romania, a local office of the U.S.-funded NGO Freedom House, PressHub is envisaged as an “innovative and independent press network” and “a hub for excellence in journalism.” PressHub has initiated a series of investigations with fairly high impact in society such as Justitiecurata.ro (meaning “clean justice” in Romanian), a platform covering corruption. Freedom House Romania has been attracting funding from government agencies and private foundations to finance its projects.

## *State Funding*

The state plays an important role in funding news media in Romania mostly through the allocation of budget subsidies to the country’s public service media company and state advertising purchases.

The Romanian public service media, consisting of a television broadcaster (TVR) and a radio station (SRR), have experienced multiple changes in the last three years. In 2016, the Social Democratic Party (PSD)-led government approved cancelation of 102 non-fiscal taxes, which included the “radio and television tax” (as license fee is known in Romania). The revenue from this tax was the main source of funding for the public service television and radio broadcasters. At the time of its cancelation, it was less than €2/month per household and €7/month for companies. Scrapping the tax effectively turned the public service media from a public-funded institution into a state-financed institution as the government funds the broadcaster directly from

its budget. In practice, the elimination of the tax did not ease the financial burden that the two companies supposedly represented for the Romanian households, which was the main argument used by the government to bin the tax. The measure only moved the source of funding directly into the hands of the government.

The public service television has six nationwide channels, an international channel (TVR International) and a channel serving the neighboring Republic of Moldova (TVR Moldova) where Romanian language is spoken by most of the population. TVR also runs six local stations. The broadcaster's flagship channel, TVR 1 has been on a steady 8th position in the audience charts since 2016 with a very small audience. The radio broadcaster, SRR is a complex operation led by Radio Romania Actualitati, a channel focused on news and current affairs. In addition, SRR has six local studios, two culture-focused stations, a channel airing internationally, and its own news monitoring agency known as Rador.

### Public media accounts

#### *Income of public service media in Romania, 2015-2018*

		Total income	License fee	Advertising	State budget	Other sources
<b>Television</b>						
2015	RON	485,077,000	324,475,000	20,477,000	123,083,000	17,042,000
	€	109,251,576	73,079,954	4,611,936	27,721,396	3,838,290
2016	RON	455,836,526	327,767,426	16,234,470	95,458,519	16,376,111
	€	101,522,611	72,999,426	3,615,694	21,260,249	3,647,242
2017	RON	1,020,013,936	36,939,605	18,161,995	946,614,643	18,297,693
	€	223,687,266	8,100,790	3,982,893	207,590,930	4,012,653
2018	RON	n/a	n/a	n/a	440,000,000	n/a
	€	n/a	n/a	n/a	94,623,655	n/a
<b>Radio</b>						
2015	RON	419,296,354	206,731,871	5,718,800	195,529,157	11,316,526
	€	94,436,115	46,561,232	1,288,018	44,038,098	3,783,883
2016	RON	423,803,751	209,737,102	4,905,280	192,918,817	16,242,552
	€	94,388,363	46,712,049	1,092,489	42,966,328	6,270,729
2017	RON	418,693,861	48,253,026	6,213,605	344,188,894	20,038,336
	€	86,198,202	10,581,803	1,362,632	75,480,020	1,226,253
2018	RON	n/a	n/a	n/a	375,000,000	n/a
	€	n/a	n/a	n/a	80,645,161	n/a

n/a: not available

Source: TVR and SRR annual reports, Romanian Ministry of Finance<sup>[54]</sup>

A large proportion of the budget of both TVR and Radio Romania comes directly from the state budget. Their budgets are comparable with some of the largest commercial television stations. For 2018, TVR received from the state budget a total of RON 440m, which is higher than

[54] Radio Romania, reports available online at <http://www.srr.ro/RadioRomania/rapoarte-20> (accessed on 21 March 2019); Romanian Television (TVR), reports available online <http://www.tvr.ro/raport-de-activitate.html#view> (accessed on 21 March 2019). For the 2018 budget, see Ministry of Finance data available online at <http://www.mfinante.ro/pagina.html?categoriebunuri=legea-bugetului-de-stat-pe-anul-2018,repatrizare-pe-trimestre-buget-2018&pagina=domenii&menu=Buget> (accessed on 21 March 2019).

Antena's annual turnover, for example. Radio Romania's annual budget dwarfs the revenue of any commercial radio station in the country. Some of the large commercial radio channels generate only some 10% of Radio Romania's yearly budget.

Advertising is for both TVR and Radio Romania a marginal source of income accounting for less than 10% of their yearly income. The consequences of the broadcasters' financial dependence on state funding are increasingly being felt. Journalists at the public media have to face insults from their management for things such as critical reporting about members of the ruling party,[55] for not inviting enough ministers to their talkshows[56], and for objectively covering anti-government protests.[57]

Nevertheless, the revenue and infrastructure of the public service media do not help the two broadcasters achieve high ratings. Both broadcasters have fairly low audience shares, with the radio (mostly thanks to its local stations) having a bigger presence in people's homes than TVR's channels. Much of the predicament TVR is in has been caused by the extreme politicization of the station, which has intensified after it became fully funded by the state. The appointment of its management by Parliament via the lawmaking body's media committee also contributes to the station's capture. In addition, the boards of both broadcasters can be dismissed if their annual report is not approved by Parliament. The mechanism is used quite often, which was the reason why only one board (whose tenure should last four years) has finished its mandate since 1990.

On top of TVR and Radio Romania, the state also allocates subsidies to Agerpres, the Romanian state-owned newswire. Although its budget is much smaller than what TVR and Radio Romania receive, it is still substantial for a media organization operating in the current environment. In 2018, the government doled out some RON 20.4m (€4.4m) to Agerpres.

The government also spends money in the media in the form of advertising, a practice that has been used to reward or punish media outlets for how they covered the authorities and their friends. In recent years, however, budget cuts have forced authorities to slash their marketing and advertising budgets as well, according to local experts interviewed for this report. However, data about state advertising spend has not been made public for more than seven years.

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[55] Cătălin Tolontan, "Există înregistrări în care conducerea TVR îi insultă pe jurnaliști pentru că sunt critici la adresa Puterii!" (There are recordings in which TVR's leadership insults journalists for being critical about the Power!), România Curată, 2 May 2018, available online at <http://www.romaniacurata.ro/exista-inregistrari-in-care-conducerea-tvr-ii-insulta-pe-jurnalisti-pentru-ca-sunt-critici-la-adresa-puterii/> (accessed on 25 March 2019).

[56] "Un interviu acordat de Cioloș pentru „Viața satului” NU a mai fost difuzat de TVR. Gorghiu acuză șefimea PSD" (An interview given by Ciolos for "Life of the Village" show has NOT been broadcast by TVR. Gorghiu accuses the PSD bosses), Gândul, 27 November 2016, available online at <https://www.gandul.info/politica/un-interviu-acordat-de-ciolos-pentru-viata-satului-nu-a-mai-fost-difuzat-de-tvr-gorghiu-acuza-sefimea-psd-16007389> (accessed on 25 March 2019).

[57] Petrișor Obae, "AUDIO. Fabulos jurnal la Radio România: opt știri cu opt miniștri! În plus: cum a fost "dezamorsată" știrea cu protestul Vrem Autostrăzi" (AUDIO. Fabulous news bulletin at Radio Romania: eight news pieces with eight ministers! Moreover: how was "defused" the news about the protest We Want Motorways), Paginademedia.ro, 19 March 2019, available online at <https://www.paginademedia.ro/2019/03/audio-fabulos-jurnal-la-radio-romania-opt-stiri-cu-opt-ministri-stirea-cu-protestul-vrem-autostrazi-dezamorsata> (accessed on 25 March 2019).

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**Technology,  
Public  
Sphere and  
Journalism**

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Romania's information technology and communication field is following general trends present in most countries in the European Union (EU), with a few notable differences that have an impact on media practice and consumption. The use of technology by Romanians is slightly different than how EU citizens generally use technology: Romania has lower internet penetration rates, higher television consumption and a saturated mobile telephony market.

Worrying trends in access to technology include a wide digital gap between urban and rural areas and between younger and older Romanians. While Romania has one of the fastest internet connections in the world, less than 80% of its population is connected.

Technology giants such as Google, Facebook and Microsoft are dominating the operating system, browser and social media markets. A concentration of economic power is also present in the telecom market with four big players (Orange, Vodafone, Telekom and Digi) dominating the telephone, internet and cable business.

Convergence of services usually affects the quality and price of services offered by providers. However, this has not been the case in Romania yet. People benefit from a very competitive market and enjoy fairly cheap services, but the implications of

convergence on the content made available to consumers are less beneficial for citizens. If three major companies start controlling both the infrastructure and the media content, the production of good quality journalism is likely to be affected and tastes and ideas could be shaped in unexpected ways. If these companies establish ties with the political elites as well and start endorsing certain ideologies, they can start having an unwarranted impact on society. Although these concerns are now hypothetical, they are grounded in practices that could be observed already for years in Romania.

Social media is becoming increasingly influential as a source of information, with more than two-thirds of Romanians getting their news from Facebook, YouTube and other social media platforms.

Recent debates surrounding fake news have prompted calls for regulation of the online media in a similar way broadcast activities have been regulated for decades. Civil society organizations have been critical of such initiatives, fearing that they could pave the way to the reintroduction of censorship disguised as user protection.

People lack understanding of how the internet works, how algorithms function and how news is spread online, a problem that needs to be addressed if any serious debate on freedom, privacy and access is going to be socially inclusive.

# TECHNOLOGY OVERVIEW

The tools Romanians use to access the internet, either to sift through information or to communicate reflect larger trends in technology and use of digital media. Smartphones are now ubiquitous whereas fixed telephone lines are steadily disappearing. The internet is now used by more than two-thirds of the population. Tech giants such as Microsoft in the operating-system (OS) market, Google in the browser and search engine market, and Facebook in the social media market, are the biggest technology players in the country.

What is specific for Romania is the country's sometimes surprisingly performant and accessible technology: the speed of the internet oftentimes reaches high levels and data and mobile packages are affordable for many. If access were measured strictly on technical terms, Romanians would look like a highly privileged people.

Nevertheless, the digital divide remains wide. Some Romanians are luckier than others in having performant technology available to them: young and mature adults from urban areas benefit the most. In contrast, older people living in rural areas still lack affordable and easy access to the internet.[1]

Like in other European countries, fixed telephony in Romania is seeing a steady decline in usage and market penetration. Since 2012, the share of households with landlines has decreased from 50% to 40% of the total homes. Fixed telephony in Romania was always a predominantly urban infrastructure as most villages in the country used to be served by only one or two landlines, usually located in a public institution such as a post office, healthcare unit, local bar or business. When mobile phone operators entered the Romanian market some two decades ago, their coverage was almost inexistent in rural areas. However, it improved significantly with the introduction of 3G networks in 2010, which promised coverage of up to 90% of the population, including remote rural areas. In 2012, 4G networks were already being tested in Romania.[2]

Today, the mobile telephony is an oversaturated market. The number of active mobile phone users in Romania is higher than the actual population of the country, a total of 19 million people. In mid- 2018, there were over 22 million active mobile Subscription Identification Module (SIM) cards, which means a 113% penetration rate. Nevertheless, this figure is lower than in 2015 when the country had 26 million mobile users. The explanation for such a high mobile penetration is the multiple ownership of SIM cards, which in some cases are an addition to a phone subscription.

The price of mobile phone subscriptions is relatively low, ranging from €7 to €16 a month. Use of pre-paid SIM cards costs as low as €5 a month. The packages included in these subscriptions are very generous. Common subscription and pre-paid packages now include unlimited minutes for same-network users, a minimum of 200-300 minutes and messages to other national networks and fixed numbers, and a minimum of 100 international minutes to countries within the EU. Data packages start at 2 GB, but are often higher than that.

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[1] National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications (Autoritatea Națională pentru Administrare și Reglementare în Comunicații, ANCOM), Annual Report 2018, available online: [http://www.ancom.ro/rapoarte-anuale\\_268](http://www.ancom.ro/rapoarte-anuale_268)

[2] ANCOM, Press Release 2012, "Rezultatele licitației de spectru pentru comunicații electronice mobile" (The results of the tender for mobile communications frequencies), available online (in Romanian) at [http://www.ancom.org.ro/uploads/links\\_files/24\\_09\\_2012\\_Rezultate\\_licitatie\\_spectru\\_radio\\_.pdf](http://www.ancom.org.ro/uploads/links_files/24_09_2012_Rezultate_licitatie_spectru_radio_.pdf) (accessed on 8 July 2019).

The implications of such generous and affordable packages are immense in terms of accessibility to information.

### A mobile revolution

#### *Overview of telephony penetration in Romania, 2012-2018*

Indicator	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Fixed-line telephony (total number of subscriptions, m)	4	4	3.9	3.7	3.6	3.4	3.2
Fixed-line telephony (per 100 households, %)	50.8	51,0	49.9	46.5	44	42	40
Mobile telephony (active users)	22.8	22.9	25.2	26.2	22.9	22.4	22.2
Mobile telephony (per 100 inhabitants, %)	113	114	114	116	116	114	113

\*data for mid-year

Source: ANCOM Annual Reports, 2012-2018

Romania became famous for its high internet speed in 2016 when the then candidate for the U.S. presidency and governor of Vermont, Bernie Sanders, tweeted that the internet speed in Bucharest was higher than in most of America. Little did he know that Romania's internet connection consistently scored amongst the five countries with the fastest internet in the world.

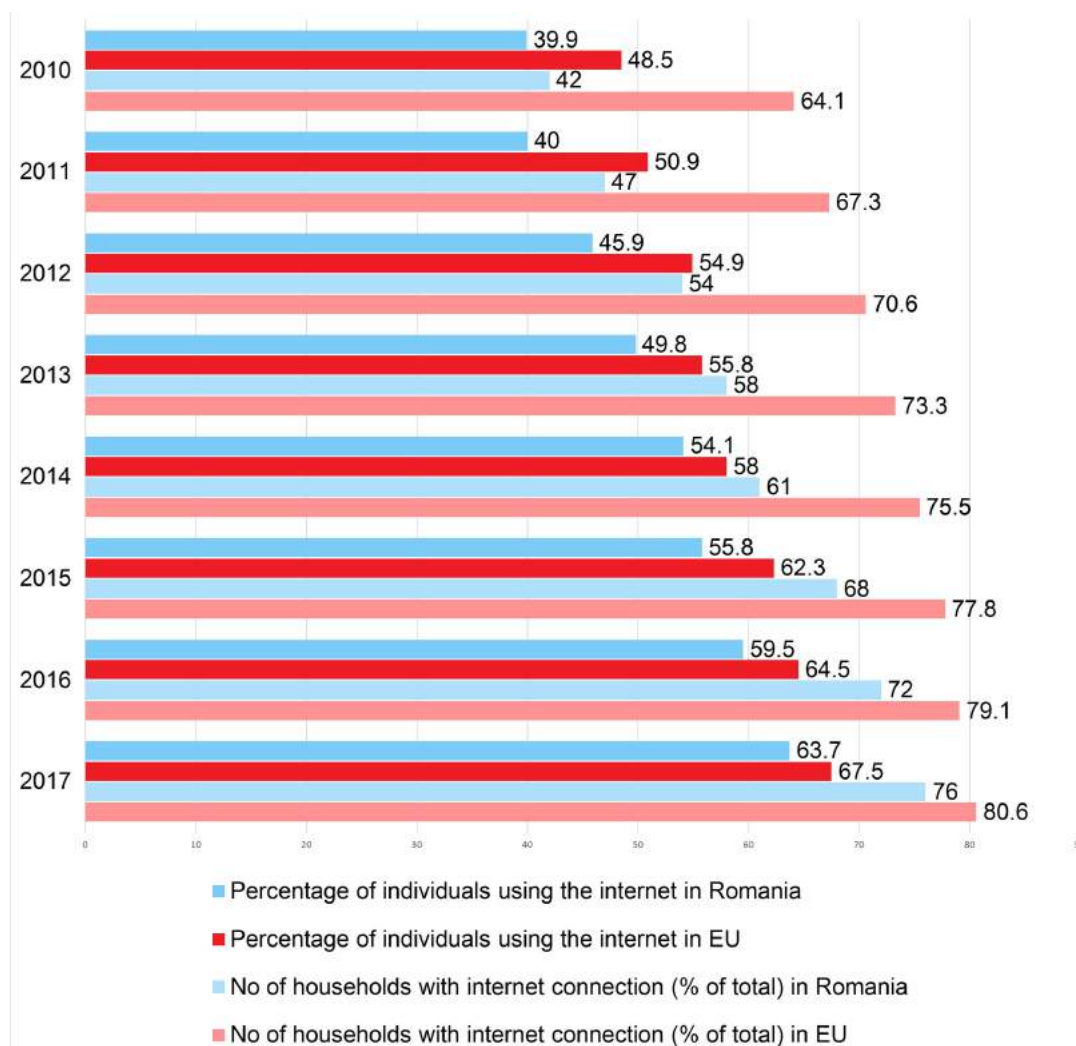
High internet speeds in Romania are often said to be a sign of accessibility and connectivity, but a quick glance at the actual penetration rates shows a slightly different picture. Romania's famed high-speed broadband, in fact, does not reach everybody. In the past seven to eight years the gap between the EU average penetration rate and that of Romania was steadily decreasing, but Romania's rate is still behind by several percentage points (p.p.). In 2010, there was a 22-p.p. difference between the number of households with internet connection in Romania (42.0%) and the EU average (64.1%). In 2017, this gap was lower than 5 p.p.: 67.5% in the EU versus 63% in Romania.

According to data published by the National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications (Autoritatea Națională pentru Administrare și Reglementare în Comunicații, ANCOM), the Romanian telecom regulator, access to fixed internet increased by 3.6% p.p. in mid-2018 compared to the previous year to 60% of households. Mobile internet connections represented a penetration of 85% at the time.[3] The gap between urban and rural areas is still present, but it decreased in 2018.

[3] This includes high-speed 3G and 4G mobile connections. According to ANCOM, if slower 2G connections in use in Romania are taken into account, the penetration rate for mobile internet is close to 99% of the population.



## Internet penetration and usage in Romania, 2010-2017



Source: CMDS based on data from Eurostat, ITU

The number of households with internet connection in 2018 stood at 80%, but broadband coverage (fixed and mobile combined) is slightly lower (74% in 2017, according to the latest data available). Fixed broadband penetration is slightly lower, with 60% of households in Romania having a subscription.

## Broadband connectivity in Romania, 2012-2018

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (mid-year)
Households with broadband connection (fixed and mobile), share in the country's total population (%)	50	56	58	65	70	74	n/a
Fixed broadband (total number of subscriptions)	3	3.8	4	4.3	4.4	4.8	4.9
Fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 households (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	51.8	53.7	58	60

n/a: not available

Source: CMDS based on data ANCOM

If availability of the internet is increasing in Romania, there are still obstacles for different categories to access the internet. Younger people will use the internet more often, with a percentage of 88% of Romanians between 16 and 34 using the internet on a daily or almost daily basis. The percentage drops for older adults, between 34 and 54 years of age, to 73%. Only half of the 54+ used the internet daily in 2017. There has been, however, a steady increase in internet usage over the past five years. If in 2013 only 60% of Romanians aged between 16 and 74 years used the internet almost daily, the figure increased to 75% in 2017.

### Individuals regularly using the internet (every day or at least once a week), breakdown by age, 2014-2018



Note: the figures are calculated based on total population aged between 16 and 74 (in %)  
Source: CMDS based on data from the National Institute for Statistics (INS) in Romania

Other forms of digital divide are related to gender, residence (urban/rural) and economic status. Statistics from the INS about active users (daily or almost daily use) show that in 2018, men used the internet in lower proportions than women (74.9% vs 76.2%). A year earlier, a higher number of people living in cities used the internet daily than rural residents (77.5% vs 65.5%). People known to be economically privileged (in the capital city Bucharest and its surroundings) are the most avid daily internet users (87.3%). In contrast, in poorer regions like northeastern Romania, less than 70% of the population use the internet regularly.

Romanians have very similar internet usage habits as other EU members.[4] They spend a considerable amount of time using social networks, reading the news[5], sending and receiving

[4] Eurostat, "Internet activities in the past three months by age group EU-28," 2016, available online at [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Internet\\_activities\\_in\\_the\\_past\\_three\\_months\\_by\\_age\\_group\\_EU-28,\\_2016\\_\(%25\\_of\\_internet\\_users\)4.png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Internet_activities_in_the_past_three_months_by_age_group_EU-28,_2016_(%25_of_internet_users)4.png) (accessed on 9 July 2019).

[5] INS published in 2018 its "Access to Information Technology" study without this item in the questionnaire; hence, we use in this report the figure for 2017, the latest available.

emails, and finding information about goods and services online. It appears that the internet is a platform primarily used for communicating and for collecting information. Using the internet for banking, watching videos, and selling or buying goods is still not very frequent in Romania where these online activities are common for 8%-10% of internet users, opposite to EU averages that are in excess of 50%. Video streaming services like HBO GO and Netflix are not extremely popular among Romanians yet.

### What's in the internet for me?

#### *Purpose of using the internet among Romanians, 2018*

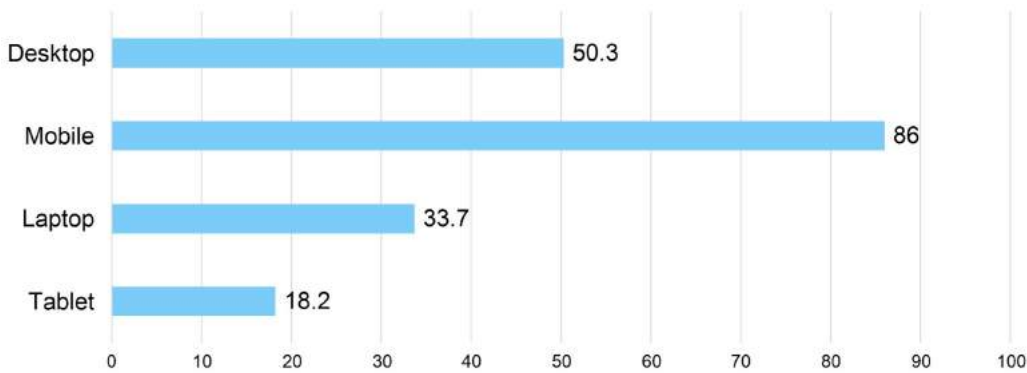
Communication	%
Sending / receiving e-mails	59.3
Calling over the internet/video calls (via webcam) over the internet (using applications, e.g. Skype or FaceTime)	51.1
Participating in social networks (creating user profile, posting messages or other contributions to Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	86
Access to information	
Reading online news / newspapers / news magazines*	69.5
Seeking health-related information (e.g. injury, disease, nutrition, improving health, etc.)	43.4
Finding information about goods or services	58.6
Entertainment	
Downloading games	32.8
Listening to music (on the radio, recorded music)	50.9
Watching online TV transmissions (live or recorded)	18.9
Watching on-demand video streaming platforms (Netflix, HBO GO)	10.2
Watching video content on sharing platforms (YouTube)	8.1
Other online services	
Selling of goods or services, e.g. via auctions (e.g. eBay)	4.8
Internet banking	9.7

\*figure for 2017; the question was not included in the 2018 survey  
Source: INS

Most Romanians (86%) use mobile devices to access the internet. Yet, desktop and notebooks remain popular as well. Tablets are the least popular devices to access the internet. For news consumption, the mobile phone remains the preferred device for young and mature adults (aged 18-44) and becomes less popular for people aged above 44.[6] Overall the computer is still used more to read the news (71%) than the mobile phone (66%) or the tablet (18%).

[6] Raluca Petre, "Romania" in Digital News Report 2018, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ), available online at <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2018/romania-2018/> (accessed on 7 June 2019).

### Use of devices to access internet in the previous 3 months (% of total), 2018



Source: StatCounter, 2019

There is a clear correlation between the (high) use of desktop and laptop devices and the market dominance of the Windows platforms. Apple products are still considered a luxury item in Romania, one of the EU's lowest income countries. Similarly, in the mobile device market, although Apple's iPhone sells much better than the Apple notebooks, it can hardly compete with Android-carrying smartphones produced by companies like Samsung. The tablet market is far more balanced. Tablets operating on Android are still more popular in Romania, but iPads hold a higher market share in this segment than their sister products, Apple notebooks and iPhones, in their own segments.

### The OS game

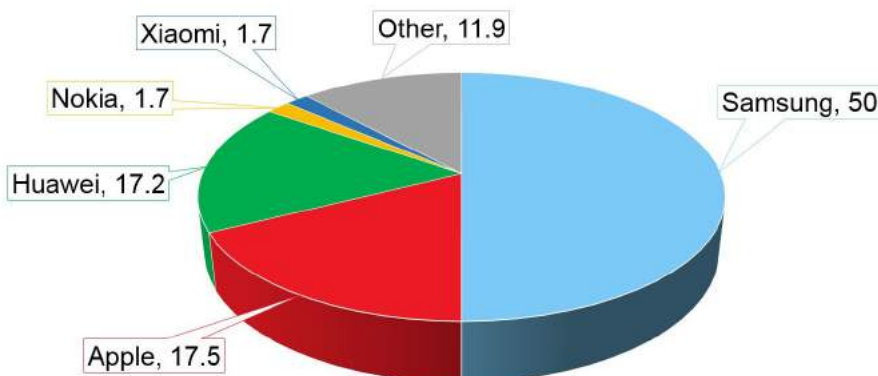
*Operating System market share (%) in Romania, June 2019*

OS	Windows	Android	iOS	OS X	Linux
All platforms	48.6	37	8.6	2.9	0.9
Desktop	89.7	0	0	5.5	1.6
Mobile	0.3	81.5	17.5	0	0
Tablet	0.1	55.1	44.8	0	0.02

Source: StatCounter, 2019

### Prominent mobile makers

*Mobile vendor market share (%) in Romania, June 2018-June 2019*



Source: StatCounter, 2019

Across platforms, Chrome reigns supreme, with Firefox and Safari lagging. Chrome and Safari were developed by Google and Apple, respectively. If on mobiles and tablets, Safari fairs better, while on the desktop segment, Firefox comes a distant second after Chrome.

Samsung Internet is popular on mobile devices thanks mostly to its popularity as a mobile vendor. Preinstalled browsers are highly popular among Romanians, which shows that people in Romania usually choose the browser that is handy for them to use. Chrome is highly popular mostly thanks to Google, which is the dominant search engine in Romania. Open source browsers such as Mozilla Firefox have similar performance parameters like Chrome (in terms of uploading speed, Random-access memory (RAM) consumption, user-friendly interface and add-ons), but they must be installed by the user.

The sole browser produced by a technology giant that has almost disappeared from the Romanian market is Microsoft's Internet Explorer.

### The browser game

*Browser market share (%) in Romania, June 2018-June 2019*

Browser	Chrome	Firefox	Safari	IE	Opera	Samsung Internet	Edge	Android
All platforms	71.6	7.3	8.9	0	3.1	4.9	1.7	0
Desktop	73.8	13.1	2	2.6	5	0	3	0
Mobile	69.9	0.6	16	0	0.8	11.3	0	0.7
Tablet	46.4	1.2	39.6	0	0.4	0	0	11.8

Source: StatCounter, 2019

Google dominates the search engine market in Romania, as in many other countries. Bing and Yahoo! have insignificant market shares of 1% to 2% on all platforms, while open-source alternatives such as DuckDuck Go are almost unknown (although, considering that DuckDuckGo has a similar market share on tablets as browsers produced by Yahoo! and Microsoft, we can say that its 0.42% is decent).

### Search engine market share (%), 2018-2019

Search Engine	Google	Bing	Yahoo!	DuckDuck Go
All platforms	98.2	0.8	0.7	0.1
Desktop	96.3	1.8	1.4	0.2
Mobile	99.6	0.1	0.1	0.01
Tablet	98.6	0.5	0.4	0.4

Note: Figures are calculated based on page views from June 2018 to June 2019  
Source: StatCounter, 2019

The reality of open-source use in Romania is generally quite bleak. Platforms such as Linux and search engines such as DuckDuck Go are almost unheard of and rarely used. This has implications for the security and privacy of users.

Open-source software and operating systems have consistently been more conscientious about the privacy and security of their users. Linux is a free platform and highly resistant to malware, mostly because of its unpopularity. DuckDuck Go was set up as a privacy company from its inception. This does not make them more user friendly or efficient, as open-source alternatives tend to need a higher level of computer literacy when employed, due to problems such as incompatibility with many software products from technology powerhouses like Microsoft and Apple.

However, the dominant position of large technology companies in both the hardware and the software markets, combined with a low level of internet and computer literacy, has implications for the digital security of the Romanian users.

Romania is a Facebook country. Across platforms and devices, Romanians primarily use Facebook to socialize online. Surprisingly, YouTube fares worse than Pinterest while Twitter and Instagram are niche platforms. According to the Digital News Report[7], 69% of Romanians trust Facebook as a news source while 31% trust YouTube and only 7% trust Twitter. Facebook is one of the key sources of news and information in the country.

## Socializing online

### *Social media market share (%), 2018-2019*

	Facebook	YouTube	Pinterest	Twitter	Instagram
<b>All platforms</b>	91.5	1.4	5.3	0.8	0.6
<b>Desktop</b>	86.4	3.8	5.8	1.8	0
<b>Mobile</b>	92.7	0.9	5.1	0.5	0.7
<b>Tablet</b>	86.2	1.2	9.6	2.6	0

Note: Figures are calculated based on page views from June 2018 to June 2019  
Source: StatCounter, 2019

[7] The Digital News Report 2018, The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ), available online at <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/interactive/> (accessed on 7 June 2019).

# ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

## Overview and Profiles of Key Players

### Company Profiles

#### *Internet and mobile*

#### Internet players: the big players

*Key players in the Romanian internet and mobile market, breakdown by services*

Company	Email service	Messaging and VoIP	Mobile ecosystems	Search	Social network & blog	Video & photo	Cloud Services
Apple		✓	✓				✓
Facebook		✓			✓	✓	
Google	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Microsoft	✓	✓		✓			✓
Samsung			✓				✓

Source: CMDS based on company data

#### Facebook

Facebook, the most popular social media platform in Romania, does not have an office in the country. It covers Romania via its regional office in Warsaw, Poland. It doesn't declare any revenues that it generates from the Romanian market or information about how it handles content in Romanian language.



#### Google

Google opened in 2010 a local office in Romania, focused solely on business development. It invests in IT literacy and programming education[8] in a country that has become known as the Silicon Valley of Europe. Experts interviewed for this report say that this investment is strategic as Google is



[8] "Proiect pentru tineri susținut de Google, în 3 orașe din România" (Youth project supported by Google in three Romanian cities), Digi24, 16 April 2019, available online at <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/educatie/proiect-sustinut-de-google-pentru-tineri-in-3-orase-din-romania-1114575> (accessed on 7 June 2019).

building its future labor force. In addition to educational programs, Google has funded a series of journalistic initiatives through its Digital News Innovation Fund. (*See more about Google's funding media in Romania in Technology Companies & Media in this report*)

Since its launch, Google's operation in Romania has expanded significantly, growing from an annual turnover of less than €3m in 2013 to nearly €4.5m in 2018. The company has been profitable throughout all these years, its net earning registering a high record of €224,000 in 2018. The company is not known to have links to politicians or political parties. Its first CEO in Bucharest was Dan Bulucea, formerly a marketing director with Microsoft. As Mr Bulucea went to work in Google's Singapore office in 2016, Elisabeta Moraru was appointed the company's CEO in Romania in October 2016. Ms Moraru had various jobs at Google in Romania before she was promoted to the company's highest management position in Bucharest.

### Google's Romanian sales

#### *Key financial indicators for Google Bucharest, 2018*

		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Sales revenues	RON '000	12,799	16,290	16,211	17,085	19,738	20,838
	€ '000	2,902	3,668	3,651	3,805	4,328	4,490
Net profit	RON '000	502	883	901	886	988	1,040
	€ '000	114	198	203	197	216	224
Number of employees		11	12	14	14	14	15

Note: average exchange rate of the Romanian National Bank (BNR) was used  
Source: Finance ministry

### *Telecommunications*

Romania has a competitive telecommunication market in terms of available offers. However, the market is dominated by a few big players. Orange is the market leader, followed by Vodafone, Telekom and Digi (RCS&RDS).[9] All of them except for Vodafone are also in the cable and television retransmission business.

Digi Communications is by far the best-positioned firm in the cable business as it started in this sector and moved into offering mobile and fixed phone services only in the recent years. Digi is also a media content producer and owns several television and radio channels. The convergence of services combined with the growing domination by a few big players raised concerns at the Competition Council (Consiliul Concurenței), Romania's antitrust agency, and the European Commission. In a recent case, Orange Romania received a fine of €14m in 2019 for blocking the services of one of its partners, which led to a five-fold decline in that company's

[9] In the internet (fixed and mobile) market, the leading operator has a share of 38%, and its next two competitors shares of 24% and 19% whereas the other companies a combined 19%. In the mobile phone market, the leader has a share of 39%, and its next two competitors shares of 30% and 18% whereas the other companies a combined 13%. (ANCOM annual report 2018, available online at [http://www.ancom.org.ro/rapoarte-anuale\\_268](http://www.ancom.org.ro/rapoarte-anuale_268), accessed on 10 July 2019).



revenues.[10] In recent years, both Orange and Vodafone have been fined for abusing their dominant positions in the market.[11]

Vodafone is now looking to enter the cable and television market by purchasing UPC Romania, a major cable television provider, for €19.4bn. In July 2019, the European Commission cleared the acquisition. The purchase is part of a bigger deal whereby Vodafone is to take over UPC's assets in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Germany.[12]

### The telecom giants

*Net profits of prominent telecommunication operators and internet service providers in Romania, 2014-2017*

Company		Ownership	Country of ownership	Number of employees 2017	Net profit (€m)			
					2014	2015	2016	2017
Orange Romania		Orange S.A.	France	2,366	90.9	59	85.4	70
Vodafone		Vodafone Plc.	UK	2,508	35.7	40.6	42.1	13
Digi Communications		Digi Communications NV (87%) RCS&RDS S.A. (9%) Zoltan Teszari (1.8%)	Netherlands / Romania	11,703	-16	-51.6	-13.2	65.4
Telekom	Telekom Romania Communications S.A.	OTE International - 54,01% Romanian State - 45,99%	Greece / Germany / Romania	4,733	-74.6	-27.6	-183	-208
	Telekom Romania Mobile Communications S.A.	Cosmote Mobile Communications S.A. (69%) Telekom Romania Communications S.A. (30%)	Germany / Romania	866	-30	-53.4	-10.7	-98.5
UPC		Liberty Global	US	1,084	-46.5	-51.8	-61.7	-26.5

Source: CMDS based data from the Romanian finance ministry

## Technology Companies & Government

Telecom giants do not heavily intervene in policymaking in Romania and they refrain from taking positions on political matters.[13] Except for Digi Communications, telecom companies have rarely intervened in discussing or taking positions on public affairs in Romania.

A rare occasion in which they did was the recent passing of the Emergency Ordinance 114 (OUG. 114) in December 2018 that introduced a 3% tax (also known as the "greed tax") on certain businesses including banks, gambling companies and telcos. To justify the tax, the Government

[10] Competition Council, Press Release, available online (in Romanian) at [http://www.consiliulconcurentei.ro/uploads/docs/items/bucket13/id13820/amenda\\_orange\\_ian\\_2019.pdf](http://www.consiliulconcurentei.ro/uploads/docs/items/bucket13/id13820/amenda_orange_ian_2019.pdf) (accessed on 10 July 2019).

[11] In 2011, for example, Vodafone was fined €34.8m and Orange was fined €28.3m for abusing their market positions. Details about the fines are available (in Romanian) at <https://www.juridice.ro/135520/consiliul-concurentei-a-amendat-orange-si-vodafone-cu-peste-60-milioane-eur.html> (accessed on 10 July 2019).

[12] "Mergers: Commission clears Vodafone's acquisition of Liberty Global's cable business in Czechia, Germany, Hungary and Romania, subject to conditions," European Commission, 18 July 2019, available online at [https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-19-4349\\_en.htm](https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-4349_en.htm) (accessed on 1 August 2019).

[13] Interview Bogdan Manolea, director of the Technology and Internet Association (Asociația pentru Tehnologie și Internet, APTI), conducted online on 6 May 2019.

argued that these industries do not contribute enough to the state budget and should pay more of their revenues into the state coffers. The National Association of Internet Service Providers in Romania (*Asociația Națională a Internet Service Providerilor din România*, ANISP), an industry group, issued a public statement condemning the tax.[14] All major telecom companies publicly condemned the ordinance. One of them, Telekom, threatened to pull out its bid in a major tender for the introduction of the 5G technology in Romania, slated for the end of 2019, because of the ordinance.[15]

The introduction of the 5G network in Romania is most certainly going to mobilize all big telecom players. The move to 5G is expected to see investments of €2.9bn from the state (on top of investments that are going to be made by telecoms) and it is estimated that it will create around 250,000 jobs and revenue of €4.7bn.[16]

The institution managing the 5G implementation, ANCOM, is headed by Sorin Grindeanu, a former prime minister for the Social Democratic Party (PSD) government in 2017. His mandate last only about six months (between January and June 2017) as he got into a fight with the then leader of the Social Democrats, Liviu Dragnea, and was removed from his position through a no confidence motion. Mr Grindeanu was also excluded from the party following the no-confidence vote.

The two market leaders, Orange and Vodafone, seem to be the most competitive players (in terms of the infrastructure they already manage and their financial situation) and are likely to be awarded licenses to deploy 5G technology.

Digi Communications is the sole telecommunications player that is believed to have connections with the ruling party PSD, according to industry experts interviewed for this report. Digi Communications runs an internet service company, but also owns television and radio stations, being thus in a better position to influence public debates although it does not have the high ratings to compete with popular broadcasters (such as Pro TV, Antena 1 and Antena 3). (See more details about the most popular television channels in Romania and their sources of funding in *Funding Journalism: Romania* report in the Media Influence Matrix)

In the past year, media reported about a rapprochement between Digi24 (Digi Communications's main news channel) and the leadership of the Social Democratic Party. Local journalists who follow media also noticed that Digi24's reporting on government policy has become more favorable. At the same time, some of the channel's prominent journalists were sacked and their investigative journalism programs were shut down. Zoltan Teszari, the founder and leader of the company is also involved in the energy sector, especially in the renewable solar energy field. Some journalists expect the planned introduction of the 5G network combined with upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in the fall of 2019 and 2020, respectively, to bring Digi Communications closer to PSD.

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[14] ANISP, Press Release, available online (in Romanian) at <https://www.anisp.ro/blog/2019/01/23/oug-114-2018-reactia-furnizorilor-de-servicii-de-comunicatii/> (accessed on 10 July 2019).

[15] Lidia Neagu, "Telekom România ia în calcul să nu participe la licitația pentru 5G din cauza OUG 114" (Telekom Romania is considering not participating in the 5G bid because of the emergency ordinance 114), *Economica.net*, 22 February 2019, available online at [https://www.economica.net/telekom-romania-ia-in-calcul-sa-nu-participe-la-licitatia-pentru-5g-din-cauza-oug-114\\_165213.html](https://www.economica.net/telekom-romania-ia-in-calcul-sa-nu-participe-la-licitatia-pentru-5g-din-cauza-oug-114_165213.html) (accessed on 10 July 2019).

[16] Adrian Dumitrache, "Grindeanu, ANCOM: 5G va crea în România peste 250.000 de locuri de muncă. Comercial, serviciile vor fi disponibile în 2020. La cât se ridică investițiile pregătite" (Grindeanu, ANCOM: 5G will create in Romania over 250.000 jobs. Services will be available commercially in 2020. What the planned investments are worth.), *Profit.ro*, 21 November 2018, available online at <https://www.profit.ro/stiri/grindeanu-ancom-5g-va-crea-in-romania-peste-250-000-de-locuri-de-munca-comercial-serviciile-vor-fi-disponibile-in-2020-la-cat-se-ridica-investitiile-pregatite-18669283> (accessed on 7 June 2019).

## Technology Companies and Media

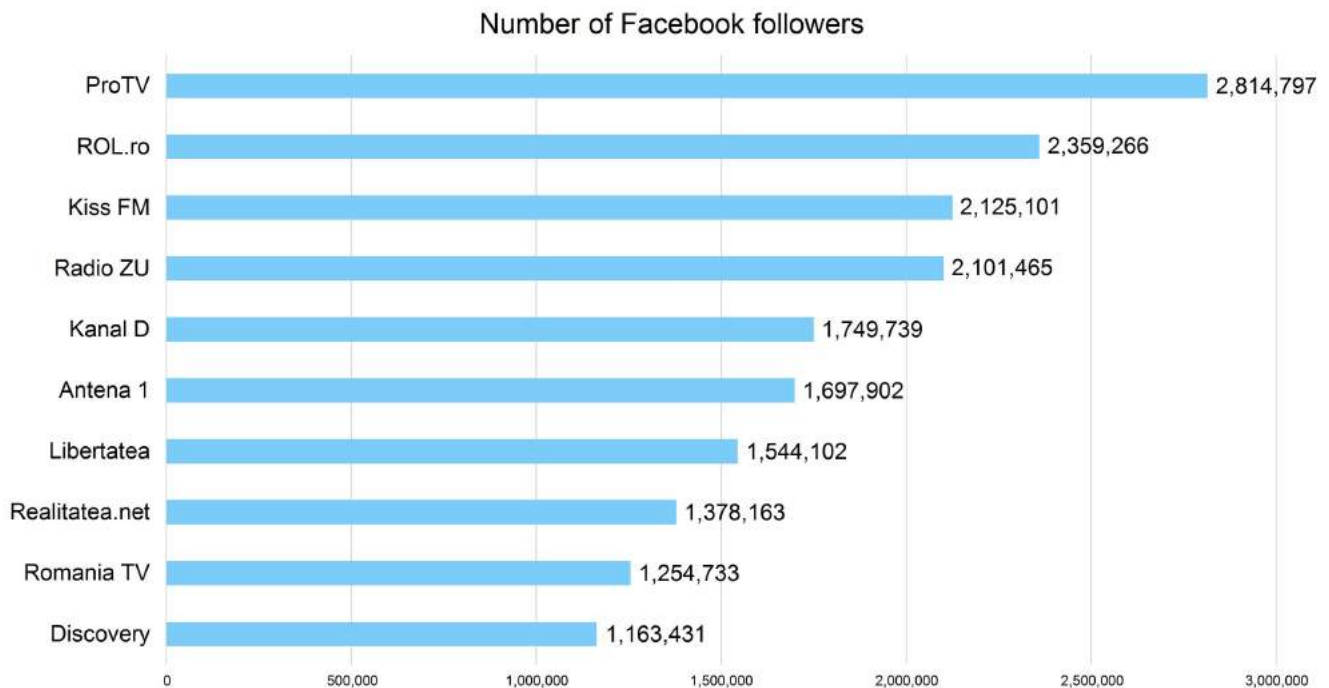
### *Social Media*

Social media have become a serious contender, along with television, on the Romanian news market. They play a major role, first of all, in distributing media companies' content. Among social media, clearly Facebook is the leading distribution platform for media content providers.

The main television channels in Romania are also the most popular online platforms, ProTV, Antena, Realitatea and Romania TV being among the 10 most accessed television news sources in the country, but also among the most followed news media on Facebook. Radio stations such as KissFM and Radio ZU are popular both on Facebook and on FM waves. With the exception of ROL.ro, an aggregator of over 40 thematic sites publishing articles on anything from gardening to foreign news, all other most "liked" media pages on the Romanian Facebook are traditional media operations, be they television, radio or print.

### In the likes

#### *Most liked Romanian media pages on Facebook, June 2019*



Source: Socialbakers

The Romanian YouTube is also dominated by some of the country's largest media outlets. Popular television channels such as Antena, Kanal D and the national broadcaster (TVR) have the most watched channels on the Google-owned video-sharing platform. Surprisingly, the market leader ProTV doesn't appear in the top 10 list, probably due to the low number of videos uploaded on their channel.

Other strong players on YouTube include Cartoon Network, which is a very popular children-focused channel, and RTL Klub, the most popular television channel in neighboring Hungary whose popularity in Romania is probably boosted by the 1.2 million ethnic Hungarians living in Romania.

### The motion picture

*Most watched media YouTube channels, June 2019*

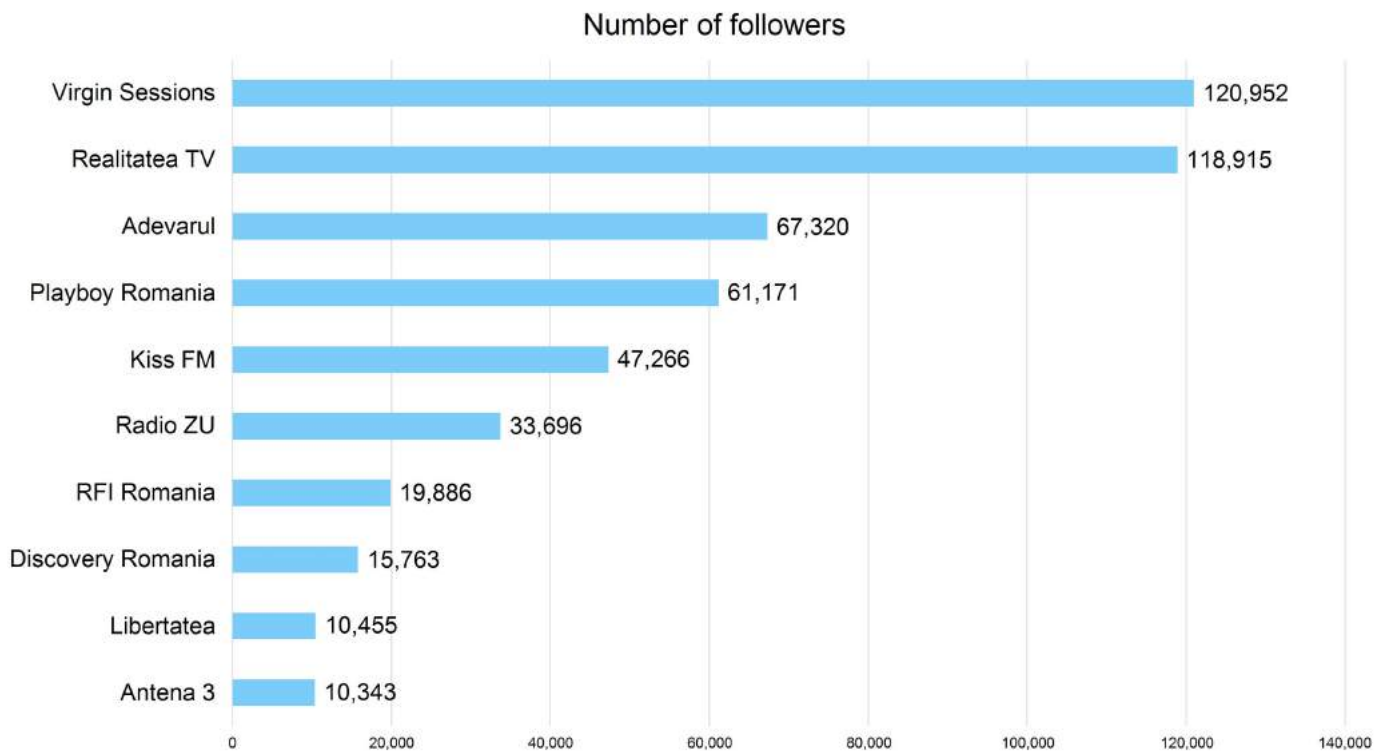
Outlet	Number of subscribers	Total views of uploaded videos
Antena 1	1,043,268	934,094,470
Kanal D Romania	690,424	563,035,272
Radio ZU	750,640	427,948,075
TVR	553,254	404,922,096
Kiss FM	578,166	179,662,380
Cartoon Network Romania	256,305	129,684,123
B1 TV	115,470	96,869,925
RTL Klub	88,880	82,692,346
Realitatea.NET	17,366	50,964,529
Radio 21	58,272	34,781,665

Source: Socialbakers

Twitter is not very popular in Romania. Compared to the number of subscribers for the top YouTube channel (about one million) the 120,000 followers of the leading media outlet on the Romanian Twitter is hardly impressive, to say the least.

The most followed news media accounts on the Romanian Twitter include some of the most popular media outlets in the country such as the dailies Adevarul and Libertatea, the radio stations Kiss FM and Radio ZU, and all-news television channels Realitatea and Antena 3, but also a couple of niche players such as Radio France International (RFI) Romania and the men's lifestyle magazine Playboy.

## Ranking of the most popular media on Twitter in Romania, June 2019



Source: Socialbakers

Facebook's role in disseminating information is so significant now that the network is often identified as a media company. Its content is regulated solely by its own community standards, which Facebook does not apply with a satisfactory degree of transparency. Facebook does not disclose enough about the implementation of its policies on freedom of expression and the privacy of its users, according to Ranking Digital Rights Index, a research initiative co-funded by the U.S. Government and private foundations.[17]

In practice, decisions about content takedown in Romanian language, made both by algorithms and people (Facebook's employees), often come under critical scrutiny. For example, the takedown of the accounts owned by former diplomats[18] for no apparent reason or the deletion prior to the European elections in May 2019 of accounts that Facebook decided to call "fake news"[19] stirred a heated debate about why and how such decisions are made. Significantly, it opened a discussion about why a privately held technology company is allowed to perform content moderation.

[17] Ranking Digital Rights Report 2019, available online at <https://rankingdigitalrights.org/index2019/companies/facebook/index/> (accessed on 7 June 2019)

[18] Codruța Simina, "De ce blochează Facebook conturi în România și ce se întâmplă când ești blocat" (Why is Facebook blocking accounts in Romania and what happens when you get blocked), PressOne, 22 March 2018, available online at <https://pressone.ro/de-ce-blocheaza-facebook-conturi-in-romania-si-ce-se-intampla-cand-esti-blocat/> (accessed on 7 June 2019).

[19] Facebook Press Release, available online at <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2019/03/removing-cib-uk-and-romania/> (accessed on 7 June 2019).

Also, in Romania, Facebook has recently published a list of advertisements paid for by political parties during the European elections campaign.[20] This decision again ignited a debate about the role of social media platforms in disseminating information online. Such debates, which have sprung up only recently in the Romanian public sphere, are much needed in a context in which traditional media is increasingly losing the trust of its public.

On top of the questionable regulatory decisions that Facebook is making, technology companies are sharply criticized in Romania for clobbering the country's media industry. Google and Facebook together control 66% of the total digital advertising market in Romania.[21] This is the most significant way in which the two tech giants influence news production in Romania. Much of this control is the direct result of the platforms' popularity. Although television is still the most used source of information for news (82% of Romanians saying that they receive their news from television[22]), social media is becoming increasingly dominant (with 62% of Romanians using social media platforms as a source of news). This increased consumption of content on social network is likely to drive the online ad revenues in the coming years, but much of that is likely to be attracted by Facebook and Google.

The EU is trying to push back. A recently adopted copyright directive, approved by the European Parliament, is arguably a reaction to practices that see most of online ad revenues go to intermediaries such as Google, YouTube and Facebook, and not to media producers. The directive will have to be adopted by member states by 2021. (*See Government, Politics and Regulation: Romania in Media Influence Matrix for more details*)

### *Ownership and financial relations*

Technology companies do not have any ownership or financial links with media content producers. They usually do not financially support media enterprises or journalistic initiatives in Romania.

The sole exception is Google, which in recent years has awarded grants to media outlets in Romania as part of its Digital News Innovation Fund, a project aimed to support journalism in Europe run between 2015 and 2019. In Romania, Google supported 16 projects, including fact-checking websites, investigative journalism projects and user-centered journalistic production initiatives. The funding went to both established news providers such as the publisher Ringier and HotNews, and smaller initiatives including startups and individuals. For example, Sorin Vasile Ozon, an investigative journalist working with the Romanian Center for Investigative Journalism (*Centrul Român pentru Jurnalism de Investigație*, CRJI), received a grant from Google to develop a database of documents that investigative journalists can use.

Most of the projects funded by Google in Romania, however, a total of 12 out of 16, were small grants worth up to €50,000. In total, Google doled out less than €2m to journalism projects in Romania over a period of four years, which is an insignificant sum in the overall media spending in the country. Although it helped some of the local media to pursue projects that otherwise they would not be able to run, Google's support was far from having any impact on the country's journalism.

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[20] Costin Ionescu, "Facebook publică în premieră date despre publicitatea electorală în România. Cât investesc partidele și pentru ce fel de mesaje" (Facebook publishes for the first time data on electoral advertising in Romania. How much do political parties spend and for what), HotNews, 6 May 2019, available online at [https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-europarlamentare\\_2019-23124462-facebook-publica-premiera-date-despre-publicitatea-electoral-romania-cat-investesc-partidele-pentru-fel-mesaje.htm](https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-europarlamentare_2019-23124462-facebook-publica-premiera-date-despre-publicitatea-electoral-romania-cat-investesc-partidele-pentru-fel-mesaje.htm) (accessed on 7 June 2019)

[21] Media Fact Book Romania 2019, available online at <http://www.mediafactbook.ro/> (accessed on 7 June 2019).

[22] Raluca Petre, Digital News Report 2018, cit.

## *Telecoms*

Among telecommunications operators, cable television providers do play a significant role in the Romanian media as they can exert leverage on smaller media content producers. Larger media companies are in a better position to negotiate distribution deals.

An example of the power game between media content producers and cable distributors was the conflict in Q1 2019 between ProTV and NextGen, Telekom's cable provider. While carrier fees-related negotiations between the two companies were ongoing, ProTV announced on its popular primetime news program at 7 p.m. that the channels part of ProTV group would no longer be available on NextGen's platform. The station also announced the same decision during one of its most popular shows, "Romania's Got Talent," which had been sponsored since 2011 by Telekom. The move was believed to be aimed at increasing the pressure on Telekom to accept paying a higher fee to carry Pro TV's programs in its television package. Telekom made a formal complaint with the CNA, the country's broadcast regulator. However, CNA couldn't intervene because financial disputes are not covered by its remit. In the end, the dispute between Telekom and ProTV was solved behind closed doors, Telekom agreeing to continue to carry ProTV's program.

Other than that, telecom providers exert unseen influence in the media through its zero-rating practices. Zero-rating deals allow for different charges to be applied on the type of traffic or internet consumption, meaning that internet providers can charge their customers different prices for the use of specific applications, websites or media content or formats (video vs audio for example). In many cases, some platforms or applications can be used without eating into the monthly data allowance customers pay for.

These practices have raised concerns regarding the impartial delivery of internet providers. In Romania, like in the rest of the European Union, zero-rating deals are not forbidden, but are closely monitored by relevant regulators. In the Romanian case, ANCOM monitors the activity of all internet providers, including their commercial practices. Some NGOs, including ApTI, also monitor such practices.

Three of Romania's large telecom companies offer zero-rating deals in the country, namely Telekom, Vodafone and Orange. The three companies offer either higher access speeds for certain applications (mostly video streaming) or no-cost deals for the use of social media, maps and messaging apps.

ANCOM publishes yearly a Net Neutrality Report[23] that details, amongst other indicators, the prevalence of zero-rating practices. According to ApTI, one of the zero-rating practices[24], a deal offered to its users by Vodafone (according to which, buyers of certain mobile subscriptions can access social media apps like Facebook, Instagram, Viber, WhatsApp and others for free) could have negative implications for net neutrality. The case was referred to ANCOM, but a decision was not published at the time of writing.

However, the hyper-competitive nature of the internet market in Romania shields the population from the potential negative effects of zero-rating deals. According to industry experts interviewed for this report, the generous data packages offered by both internet and mobile providers in the country makes zero-rating deals almost redundant in Romania.

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[23] For 2018, see the ANCOM's "Net Neutrality Report" at [http://www.ancom.org.ro/uploads/links\\_files/Raport\\_NN\\_2018\\_RO.pdf](http://www.ancom.org.ro/uploads/links_files/Raport_NN_2018_RO.pdf) (accessed on 28 July 2019)

[24] "ANCOM investigheaza ofertele de tip zero-rating" (ANCOM is investigating zero-rating deals), available online at <https://apti.ro/ancom-analizeaza-ofertele-zero-rating> (accessed on 28 July 2019).

### *The Business of Misinformation*

The role that social media, particularly Facebook, play in spreading misinformation, a phenomenon that has been increasingly affecting Romania, is very problematic for independent media and journalism.

Generally, Romanians have a fairly low trust in media, only 42% of them saying that they generally trust the news, and 48% saying that they trust news that they actually consume.[25] These figures are not surprising given a series of corruption scandals involving media owners that have rocked the country's media industry in the past ten years. Following these scandals, a few notable media owners, including founders of major television channels or owners of popular print media, ended up in prison.

Some 72% of Romanians think that fake news is a common phenomenon, a slightly higher proportion than the 69% average in the EU.[26] Because the online space is unregulated in Romania, there is no systematic monitoring of misinformation websites. However, fake news websites have mushroomed in Romania in recent years, according to various organizations and institutions that are mapping the field. Their number is continually changing as many of them oftentimes change their name, close down or resurface after a while.

Verifica sursa, a website that monitors the misinformation landscape in Romania, has identified a total of 84 fake news websites to date.[27] However, it's unclear how much impact these websites have on the Romanian public.

The Laboratory for the Analysis of Informational and Communication War (Laboratorul pentru Analiza Războiului Informațional și Comunicare, LARICS), part of the Romanian Academy of Sciences, collected around 200 websites that spread false information, concluding that they had an impact on more than 5,000 people.[28] This is by no means an impressive number. Nevertheless, as Romanians seem to trust social media more than they trust established news outlets, there is clearly potential for misinformation to reach a wider audience in the future.

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[25] Raluca Petre, Digital News Report 2018, cit.

[26] "Eurobarometru 90" (Eurobarometer 90), 2019, available online at [https://ec.europa.eu/romania/news/20190603\\_eurobarometru\\_standard\\_90\\_opinie\\_publica\\_UE\\_ro](https://ec.europa.eu/romania/news/20190603_eurobarometru_standard_90_opinie_publica_UE_ro) (accessed on 8 June 2019).

[27] See more <https://verificasursa.ro/> (accessed on 1 July 2019).

[28] Cristina Dobreanu, "Partidele, Facebook și paginile false. Cât de răspândite sunt fabricile de trolli în România?" (Parties, Facebook and false pages. How widespread are the troll factories in Romania?), Radio Europa Liberă, 9 March 2019, available online at <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/partidele-facebook-%C8%99i-paginile-false-cat-de-raspandite-sunt-fabricile-de-trolli-in-romania-/29811044.html> (accessed on 13 July 2019).



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# Methodology

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This report is part of the Media Influence Matrix project initiated by the Center for Media, Data and Society (CMDS) and run as part of the Media & Power Research Consortium.

The country reports in the Media Influence Matrix series aim to research the changing landscape of:

- government and policy space, with a focus on the changes in the policy and regulatory environment;
- funding, with a focus on the key funding sources of journalism and the impact on editorial coverage;
- technology in the public sphere, with a focus on how technology companies, through activities such as automation and algorithm-based content distribution, impact news media and journalism.

The research focuses on news media, including newly emerged players. The study is neither aimed at exhaustively mapping the entire media industry nor is it intended to target specific media sectors. Instead, it maps the most popular and most influential news media on a country-by-country basis and analyzes their changing relations with politics, government and technology companies.

Researchers are collecting data and information following a common set of research guidelines (*See Research Guidelines in Appendix below*). The analysis in these reports is carried out by researchers with experience in the country, under the guidance of a team of editorial supervisors and experts. The reports are reviewed by a team of experts selected by our advisory boards.

For each country report, a list of sources used in each chapter of the report is available. In the categorization of technology companies in all country reports we used the methodology of the Ranking Digital Rights project, which divides companies in two groups. The first group, internet and mobile, includes the so-called “mobile ecosystems,” companies that create mobile devices and products. In the second category, telecommunications companies, we include service operators that offer connection and access services such as voice, data or cable connections.

## DATA AND INFORMATION COLLECTION FOR THE ROMANIA REPORT

The report is based on:

- Data and information collected in the period February-May 2019 following a common set of research guidelines (*See Research Guidelines in Appendix below*)
- Interviews with 11 journalists and media experts based in Romania. The interviews were conducted between February and May 2019, in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca and Oradea, Romania. (Referred to in the list of sources below as “Media Influence Matrix Romania: Journalists Interview Series”)
- Monitoring of 17 news media outlets in Romania going back to 2007 (depending on the limit imposed by the outlet’s search engine, referred to in the list of sources below as “Media Monitoring Romania 2019”).

# GOVERNMENT, POLITICS AND REGULATION

## LEGAL OVERVIEW

- Legal analysis of key laws affecting news media and journalism
- Analysis of the Deontological Code for Journalists published in 2004 by the Convention of Media Organizations
- Media Influence Matrix Romania: Journalists Interview Series

## REGULATORY AUTHORITIES

Analysis of the regulatory environment in Romania focused on the following research questions:

- a) What have been the key changes in regulation of news content in the past 5-10 years?
- b) Who are the key influencers and most powerful institutions in regulation of news content?
- c) How transparent is the regulatory process when it comes to news media?
- d) What impact do these influencers have on news media and journalism?
- e) What is the role of civil society organizations in the regulatory process?

## Operational Aspects

### Broadcast Media and Frequency Spectrum

#### *Remit and Tasks*

- Official website of the National Audiovisual Council (*Consiliul Național al Audiovizualului*, CNA)
- Official website of the National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications of Romania (*Autoritatea Națională pentru Administrare și Reglementare în Comunicații*, ANCOM)

#### *Board Composition*

- Official website of the National Audiovisual Council (*Consiliul Național al Audiovizualului*, CNA)
- Official activity reports of the National Audiovisual Council (*Consiliul Național al Audiovizualului*, CNA)
- Official website of the National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications of Romania (*Autoritatea Națională pentru Administrare și Reglementare în Comunicații*, ANCOM)
- Additional literature: Raluca Petre, *Media Regulatory Bodies in Romania; the limits of institutional change, Models for Journalism and Communication*, 2010, Are Docendi, Bucharest, pp 290-298.

## *Funding*

- Official activity reports of the National Audiovisual Council (*Consiliul Național al Audiovizualului, CNA*)
- Official website of the National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications of Romania (*Autoritatea Națională pentru Administrare și Reglementare în Comunicații, ANCOM*)

## Data Protection Regulators

- The official website and the annual reports of the National Supervisory Authority for Personal Data Processing (*Autoritatea Națională de Supraveghere a Prelucrării Datelor cu Caracter Personal, ANSPDCP*)

## Other Institutions with Regulatory Powers

- The official website of the Ministry of Communications and Information Society (*Ministerul Comunicațiilor și Societății Informaționale*)
- The official page of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Mass Media (hosted on the website of the Lower House of the Parliament)
- The official page of the Committee for Technology and Communication (hosted on the website of the Lower House of the Parliament)
- The official website and the official activity reports of the National Council for Combating Discrimination

## Decision-Making Process

### Key Decision-Makers

- Media Influence Matrix Romania: Journalists Interview Series
- Media Monitoring Romania 2019

### Transparency of Decision-Making in Media Regulation

- Analysis of key media legislation and policy
- Literature review and data from reports on media regulation in Romania
- Media Influence Matrix Romania: Journalists Interview Series
- Media Monitoring Romania 2019

# FUNDING JOURNALISM

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## SOURCES OF FUNDING

Analysis of the key trends in funding journalism focused on the following research questions:

- a) What were the main changes in funding news media and journalism in the past 5-10 years?
- b) What are the main media consumption trends in Romania?
- c) Who are the key funders and owners of news media and journalism?
- d) How is local media funded?
- e) How big is the role of government in funding news media?
- f) How are sources of funding affecting independent reporting?
- e) What is the role of advertisers in shaping media content?

### Popular News Media

- Industry reports and statistics: Eurobarometer, Media Factbook, Romanian Association for Audience Measurement (*Asociația Română pentru Măsurarea Audiențelor*, ARMA), The Association for Audio Audience (*Asociația pentru Radio Audiență*), Romanian Joint Industry Committee for Print and Internet (*Biroul Român de Audit Transmedia*, BRAT)
- Financial data from the Ministry of Finance
- Corporate annual and financial reports
- Documents and reports from the Romanian National Television (TVR) and the Romanian National Radio (SRR)
- Media Monitoring Romania 2019

### Influential News Media

- Industry reports and statistics: Eurobarometer, Media Factbook, Kantar, Paginademedi.ro
- Corporate annual and financial reports
- Media Monitoring Romania 2019
- Media Influence Matrix Romania: Journalists Interview Series

## KEY FUNDERS

### Non-Governmental Funders

- Industry reports: Media Factbook
- Corporate annual and financial reports
- Media Monitoring Romania 2019

## State Funding

- Annual financial reports of the Romanian National Television (TVR) and the Romanian National Radio (SSR)
- Romanian Ministry of Finance
- Media Monitoring Romania 2019

# TECHNOLOGY, PUBLIC SPHERE AND JOURNALISM

Analysis of the key trends in technology and journalism focused on the following research questions:

- a) What are the main changes in news content consumption driven by new technologies?
- b) Who are the largest, most influential technology companies?
- c) How are the power relations between technology companies and government?
- d) How do technology companies influence news media and journalistic content?

## TECHNOLOGY OVERVIEW

- Industry reports and statistics: Eurobarometer, Eurostat, International Telecommunication Union (ITU), National Institute for Statistics (*Institutul Național de Statistică*, INS), Reuters Digital News Report, StatCounter
- Official annual reports of the National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications of Romania (*Autoritatea Națională pentru Administrare și Reglementare în Comunicații*, ANCOM)
- Media Influence Matrix Romania: Journalists Interview Series
- Media Monitoring Romania 2019

## ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

### Overview and Profiles of Key Players

- Company Data: Facebook, Twitter, Google
- Reuters Digital News Report
- Romanian Ministry of Finance

## Technology Companies & Government

- Media Monitoring Romania 2019
- Media Influence Matrix Romania: Journalists Interview Series
- Official press releases of the National Association of Internet Service Providers in Romania (*Asociația Națională a Internet Service Providerilor din România, ANISP*)
- Corporate news releases and official communication (websites, interviews)

## Technology Companies & Media

- Industry reports and statistics: SocialBakers, Media Factbook
- Official annual and the “Net neutrality” reports of the National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications of Romania (*Autoritatea Națională pentru Administrare și Reglementare în Comunicații, ANCOM*)
- Media Monitoring Romania 2019
- Media Influence Matrix Romania: Journalists Interview Series

## The Business of Misinformation

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- Industry reports and statistics: Eurobarometer, Reuters Digital News Report, Laboratory for the Analysis of Informational and Communication War (*Laboratorul pentru Analiza Războiului Informațional și Comunicare, LARICS*), part of the Romanian Academy of Sciences
- Media Monitoring Romania 2019
- Media Influence Matrix Romania: Journalists Interview Series

# APPENDIX

## Research Guidelines Media Influence Matrix Project

### GOVERNMENT SPACE

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#### REGULATORY AUTHORITIES

##### Operational Aspects

###### Broadcast Media and Frequency Spectrum

**Remit and tasks** (Describe the most media-relevant tasks of the regulators involved in these areas)

**Board composition** (Describe the composition of the main decision-making body, focusing on rules on the appointment and sacking of board members)

**Funding** (Present the annual budget of the regulators for the past five years and indicate the source of funding)

###### Print Media Regulators

**Remit and tasks** (Describe the most media-relevant tasks of the regulators covering print media operations)

**Board composition** (Describe the composition of the regulators' main decision-making body, focusing on rules for appointment and sacking of board members)

**Funding** (Present the annual budget of the regulators for the past five years and indicate the source of funding)

###### Internet Regulators

**Remit and tasks** (Describe the most media-relevant tasks of the regulators, focusing on rules on distribution of online content)

**Board composition** (Describe the composition of the regulator's main decision-making body, focusing on rules for appointment and sacking of board members)

**Funding** (Present the annual budget of the regulator for the past five years and indicate the source of funding)

###### Data Protection Regulators

**Remit and tasks** (If a data protection regulator is in operation, describe its remit focusing on the tasks that are most relevant for media)

**Board composition** (Describe the composition of the regulator's main decision-making body, focusing on rules for appointment and sacking of board members)

**Funding** (Present the annual budget of the regulator for the past five years and indicate the source of funding)

##### Sources of information recommended:

For Remit/tasks and Board composition

*Statutes and legal acts*

*Legal studies*

*Annual reports*



For Funding  
*Government budget documents*  
*Articles in the media*

## Decision-Making Process

**Key decision-makers** (Write short profiles of the key decision-makers working for the regulatory authorities described above, focusing on those with a known interest in the media)

**Transparency of decision-making** (Describe the main mechanisms in place to ensure transparency of the decision-making process and how they function in practice)

**Impact** (Present case studies of regulatory decisions that directly or indirectly had an impact, both negative and positive, on media and journalism)

### Sources of information recommended:

For Key decision-makers and Transparency  
*Articles in the media*  
*Academic studies*  
*Reports by think tanks and policy institutes*  
*Interviews with local experts and journalists*

For Impact  
*Articles in the media*  
*Interviews with representatives of media companies*  
*Academic studies*  
*Surveys*

## INFLUENCERS

### Internal/local

**Industry players** (Describe the main media companies that have the highest influence in the regulatory decision-making process. Refer to three categories of companies: news media operators, media-related companies such as advertising and PR agencies and companies totally unrelated to media that exert influence on media regulators. Explain the key motivations for their interest in the regulatory process)

**Civil society** (Profile the most prominent civil society groups, including NGOs, professional associations, academic institutions and think tanks, religious groups, community media that influence the regulatory process)

### External

**External factors** (Describe international bodies, including intergovernmental organizations that can influence the regulatory process in the country and present cases where they concretely influenced regulatory decisions)

**Sources of information recommended:**

For Internal/local

*Articles in the media*

*Investigative reports*

*Interviews with local observers and experts*

For External factors

*Articles in the media*

*Academic studies*

*Reports by think tanks and policy institutes*

*Reports by international bodies*

## FUNDING

### SOURCES OF FUNDING

#### Shifts in Journalism Funding

**Popular news media** (Describe changes in the funding of the most popular news media: refer to the share of funding sources – i.e. advertising, subscriptions, donations, etc. — in their total budget. Choose the news media according to the size of their audience, including both broadcasters and online-only media. Describe in a few sentences the editorial coverage of the media, highlighting any relevant biases, particularly ideological)

**Influential news media** (Describe changes in the funding of the most influential news media: refer to the share of funding sources – i.e. advertising, subscriptions, donations, etc. — in their total budget. Choose these news media according to their influence among policy makers, business elites, community leaders and other locally relevant communities. Include both broadcasters and online-only media. Describe in a few sentences the editorial coverage of the profiled media, highlighting any relevant biases, particularly ideological)

#### Key Funders

**Non-governmental funders** (Describe the biggest funders of media and journalism, including key advertisers, philanthropies, political parties or other organizations)

**Government funding** (Describe the main forms of public spending in the media, i.e. allocations for public media, state advertising or state subsidies, the institutions and people in charge of deciding whom to fund and the criteria used in selecting the recipients of public funding. Present the annual government spend in the media for the past five years and profile the key recipients focusing on their ownership, editorial coverage and audience)

**Sources of information recommended:**

For Popular and Influential news media

*Reports by trade and professional bodies*

*Interviews with media experts and representatives of media companies*

*Company annual reports*

*Articles in the media*

For Key funders

*State budget documents and analyses*

*Reports by the national audit authorities*

*Annual reports of public or state media*

*Advertising agency reports*

*Survey by industry bodies and professional associations*

*Annual reports of philanthropic organizations and political parties*

*Articles in the media*

## TECHNOLOGY, PUBLIC SPHERE AND JOURNALISM

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### ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

#### Overview and Profiles of Key Players

**Operational aspects** (Describe the largest technology companies, by number of users, that produce or distribute media content, focusing on their ownership (i.e. local or foreign players) and their local operations (i.e. physical office in the country). The companies profiled here can be social media, telecommunications companies, ISPs, etc.)

**Technology companies and government** (Describe the relation of the largest technology companies (as defined above) with the government, referring to compliance with local legislation and regulations, cooperation with government over data handling, ownership links to officials or people working with the authorities.)

**Technology companies and media** (Describe the relation of the largest technology companies (as defined above) with media and journalists, referring to mutual support or other forms of cooperation with media outlets, automation methods including algorithms used in distribution of media content, joint monetization models, ownership links with people in the media industry)

#### Sources of information recommended:

For Operational aspects

*Data from global social media*

*Local technology market reports*

*Trade registry data*

*Articles in the media*

For Technology companies and government

*Policy reports and analysis from think tanks and policy institutes*

*Legal studies*

*Trade registry data*

*Articles in the media*

*Interviews with social media representatives*

For Technology companies and media

*Academic studies*

*Market reports*

*Trade registry data*

*Heuristic analysis of social media data*

*Interviews with social media representatives*



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