

THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE POLITICAL CRISIS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA BETWEEN 2011 AND 2013. THE CASE OF THE PERIODICALS "TIMPUL" AND "MOLDOVA SUVERANA"

Georgeta STEPANOV¹

¹ Assoc. Prof., PhD., Moldova State University
Corresponding author: garseni@mail.ru

Abstract

The media coverage of the crisis is a dynamic phenomenon, marked by both stable development intra media tendencies and also by the extra media tendencies resulting from changes in conceptual and pragmatic variations of crises. Regardless of magnitude and duration, the impact of the crises may be diminished or magnified depending on how they are reflected. However, the information covering the crisis, media form a general perspective of the problem and of the environment where it happens, or which affects, influencing the general perception of the crisis by the consumers of the media product.

Keywords: *political crisis, crisis situation, media coverage, media genre, editorial objectives, media language, editorial policy, approach, logical focus, documenting sources.*

The media coverage of the crisis situation is a dynamic phenomenon, marked not only by the stable development intra media tendencies, but also by the extremely shifting extra media tendencies- conceptual and pragmatic innovations of the crises. "In recent years, due to the internationalization of the field of action and the intrusion of the new players, the crisis phenomenon grew and spread in space and time"¹, generating disruptions not only in the domain of origin, but in secondary domains as well. The multi-dimensional aspect of the crisis is generated by a complete set of factors: political, social, economic, cultural, psychological etc. For instance, the crisis in the Republic of Moldova between 2011 and 2013, although primarily political, cannot be seen as purely political. It was produced and amplified at the point of gathering of a geopolitical crisis created by an imbalance in the world security, suddenly appearing in 1991, a serious economic crisis, a

cultural one and a decades-old political crisis (the crisis of the Moldovan democracy, mentality, behavior and political culture). But, irrespective of its magnitude and duration, the impact of the crisis may be diminished or amplified to a large extent, by taking into account the way in which it is reflected. On the other hand, through the informational coverage of the crisis situations, mass-media form a general perspective of the matter and its environment, thus influencing the overall perception of the crisis by the consumers of the media product.

The point of the present research is the media coverage of the political crisis between 2011 and 2013, displayed in the periodicals "Timpul" and "Moldova Suverana". We have selected two main points in order to identify the media means:

1. the question of electing/ failing to elect the president of the Republic of Moldova, the time lapse researched December 16, 2011- March 16, 2012;
2. the governmental crisis generated by the dismissal of the second Filat Cabinet, the question of validating the new government and starting the early election procedure, the time lapse researched January 6- April 6, 2013.

The political crisis in the Republic of Moldova between December 16, 2011 and March 16, 2012, as reflected in the newspapers "Timpul" and "Moldova Suverana"

The media coverage of the political crisis in the Republic of Moldova between December 16, 2011 and March 16, 2012 was extremely varied, depending on the various editorial policies and the journalists' attitudes and the attitudes of the

media institutions as well, towards the political players and the political forces involved in the issue. Taking this into account, in order to document the media means involved in the coverage, we have selected the Friday issues of the national newspapers: “Timpul” and “Moldova Suverana”, known at that time for their distinct editorial policies, political views of the journalists and their target audiences.

From a quantitative perspective, the media coverage displayed by these two periodicals was very distinct. In this respect, “Timpul” published 56 articles discussing the failure to elect the president, while “Moldova Suverana” published just 12 (see the table below).

The table of the proportional representation of the articles covering the political crisis between December 16, 2011 and March 16, 2012.

Date of issue	No. of articles in <i>Timpul</i>	No. of articles in <i>Moldova Suverana</i>
December 16, 2011	2	1
December 23, 2011	7	1
December 30, 2011	3	1
January 6, 2012	2	day off
January 13, 2012	3	2
January 20, 2012	2	2
January 27, 2012	5	2
February 3, 2012	3	1
February 10, 2012	5	-
February 17, 2012	3	1
February 24, 2012	7	-
March 2, 2012	2	-
March 9, 2012	2	day off
March 16, 2012	10	1
Total	56	12

Based on the data included in the table, we are able to identify the significance displayed by each newspaper concerning the matter in question and their editorial intentions. The 44-margin proves that the newspaper “Timpul” assigned a large significance to the matter, seeing it as major and covering it in a continuous and varied manner. By contrast, “Moldova Suverana” did not assign an important editorial significance

to this matter, which led to an occasional and irregular approach. The small amount of articles in “Moldova Suverana” can be partially explained by taking into account the size of the newspaper: 4 pages with a A2 format, equivalent to 8 pages with a A3 format (by comparison, the newspaper “Timpul” comprises 32 pages with a A3 format). However, the editorial policy prevails over the size or the format of the newspaper in terms of frequency and consistent approach of various matters from different areas by a newspaper.

Another extremely influential indicator for our study is the media genre in which the media product can be included. Between December 16, 2011 and March 16, 2012, among the 56 articles published in “Timpul” about the political crisis, 28 were news, 17 were the editor’s views, 7 were opinions, 4 were interviews, while among the 12 articles published in “Moldova Suverana” 9 were news, 2 were opinions and 1 was the editor’s view. We underline the fact that both newspapers put weight on the news, either released following the event or written following statements on particular points. It is worth mentioning that 5 out of 9 news in “Moldova Suverana” is taken from the news agency “Moldpress” and the news portal “Tribuna.md”, while the news in “Timpul” is writer-news, with a few exceptions.

From a qualitative perspective as well, the media coverage displayed by these two periodicals was very different. The qualitative analysis of the media products concerning the 2012 political crisis pinpoints not only the distinctiveness of the coverage from one newspaper to another, but also the factors generating the behavior in relation with the matter approached.

In the periodical “Timpul” the news featured on page 2, in the “Retrospective” section. On a number of occasions, they were brief stories of the events taking place from Monday to Friday, their major characters were Igor Dodon, Mihai Ghimpu, Vlad Filat, Marian Lupu, Iurie Leanca and other high ranking state dignitaries. The news came with the photos of the people mentioned or collages whenever the news featured more people.

It is worth mentioning that the news writers generally observed the realization criteria of a

such media genre, notwithstanding that in some cases they used a single information source. Three and more sources were identified in the complex, developed news, including different opinions on the matter, for instance, "Moldova facing «the Referendum of Responsibilities» proposed by PAD".

Equally, the language used in the news featured in the newspaper "Timpul" corresponds to the requirements of this type of press: official, classic, unambiguous, lacking the writer's interpretations. In connection with the titles of the articles, we can assert that two types of titles were primarily employed: the classic title which reflects the overall idea of the news and the statement title which implies a phrase or a sentence from the statement given by a source mentioned in the news. Generally speaking, the titles were reduced in size and conveyed the overall idea of the body of the news: "Will we have a president?"², "The president will be elected at 2 p.m."³, "The present Constitution is a good one"⁴, "The Moldovan Metropolitan will pray for a president in 2012"⁵, "Dogs die of long roads and the Communist Party of concern towards Romania"⁶. From the multitude of titles, some interrogative ones are worth underlining: "Will we have a president?"⁷, "Leonid Talmaci-president?"⁸, which, although simple in composition, remain vague in terms of meaning due to the question mark. In fact, the general rules related to writing a title require avoidance of question marks, exclamation marks, dots, punctuation marks, generally speaking. The question mark pushes the readers away from the text and they feel that they are being questioned instead of receiving an answer and, therefore, they can avoid the entire article. But such titles were rather an exception than a rule in relation with the newspaper "Timpul", while, on the other hand, the vast majority of the titles observed the classic tradition of conceiving the title.

Other tendencies and states of affair may be identified and pinpointed in terms of the qualitative analysis of the media coverage of the political crisis using the analytical journalism. The vast majority of the editorials in "Timpul" were written by the editor-in-chief of the newspaper, Constantin Tanase. On a number of

occasions some editorials were written by George Damian, even though they may be seen somewhat between opinion and editorial. In comparison to the news, as appropriate, the editorial is double or even triple in size. It implies the attitude of the journalist, thus, there is a certain degree of side-taking in it. This leads to deviations from the classic language, objectivity and correctness.

Traditionally, Constantin Tanase's editorials appeared on page 2, rarely on page 8, 9 or 22. To a large extent, the editorials during the three months reflected the problems and the events in close connection with the failure to elect the president. In the editorial "Who will win if Lupu fails?"⁹ Constantin Tanase offered new information, meditated on the existing conditions, praised and criticized. The critical comments targeted Vlad Filat, Vladimir Voronin, Igor Dodon and others, the eulogies went solely to Marian Lupu. The journalist promotes the idea that Lupu must become the Republic's president and, if he is not supported, the entire society will suffer. The author's proclivities for some political players are obvious in this matter. Generally speaking, this is a classic editorial which informs, offers inferences and conclusions about a fact and the editorialist has full rights in offering his reflections to his audience. It is worth mentioning that there is the 3x4 photo of the author on the upper part of each editorial.

"The Premier pushes his baboons to the early election game"¹⁰ is an editorial, contrary to the above one, pretty biting. Its title gives the tone of the entire text: partial, ironic and mocking. In fact, the whole article comes as an indirect accusation targeting the premier: being guilty of failing to elect the president. The author makes a comparison between the Moldovan politics and the jungle, between the rules of the jungles and the rules of the Moldovan politics. Although the comparison underlines certain aspects of the matter, it is sometimes exaggerated and some players of the national politics are overshadowed and even humiliated.

The opinions are journalistic products in which the author's attitude is largely dominant. Furthermore, this type of articles includes a high degree of side-taking in relation with the fact that the journalist writes his own opinion

concerning a particular matter. The opinion articles featured on pages 8, 9 and 11 of the newspaper "Timpul", written by Moni Stanila, George Damian and Alexandru Vakulovski. Characteristic of these articles is the use of popular phrases and proverbs such as "until playing dead in the corn field", "when the president's away, the mice will play" or the use of various suggestions, metaphors, comparisons, which force the reader to adopt the author's attitude.

In the same time lapse, four interviews concerned the matter of the crisis of failing to elect the president: "Moskow doesn't give a damn about us" and "the bastard Filat wants to reach me"¹¹, "Alexandru Tanase: The secret vote is an integrant part of the legitimacy of the democratic process"¹², "What does Nicolae Timofti think of the unification with Romania"¹³, "Valeriu Pasat: Rosca and Voronin are 2 extremists fighting against Moldova"¹⁴.

These interviews intended to circulate the views and the opinions of some political personalities concerning the political crisis and the questions were formulated in such a manner as to provide a certain approach to the matter. Several provocative questions were used, such as: "How are we to understand the massive support provided by Moskow, including Kremlin, when you were jailed, while not a Russian citizen?"¹⁵ or questions far too long, anticipated by major conclusions, such as: "If Lupu creates the commission you requested, its results may equal to zero, as in the case of the parliamentary commission which investigated the April 2009 events. You requested the General Prosecutor's Office to bring Voronin and Rosca to justice, but I assure you nothing will happen. Did you notice that the AEI protects the Communists' crimes?"¹⁶.

The majority of the titles of the interviews were based on phrases or sentences of the interviewed. The most successful and the most representative sentences were not always selected, while, on the other hand, some titles miss any meaning, such as "Moskow doesn't give a damn about us" and "the bastard Filat wants to reach me"¹⁷- title made of two fragments from totally different sentences.

The interviews displayed various formats: half a page (with Nicolae Timofti), a page (with Vladimir Voronin, Alexandru Tanase) and 2 pages (with Valeriu Pasat). The sizes of the interview depended on the interviewed, the complexity of the matter discussed or the number of topics approached. The photos accompanying the interviews were iconic photos, not taken at the time of the interview.

The periodical "Moldova Suverana" published 9 news about the political crisis between December 16, 2011 and March 16, 2012. The news was relatively small in size, simply structured, and covered a single issue or a single event, the exposure being clear, in a classic language, characteristic of the informative journalism. The writer-news was written by the journalist who made them and, at the end of the relayed news, the primary media institution was mentioned.

Some news was accompanied with photos, often iconic photos. Whenever the news featured a number of officials, "Moldova Suverana" used everyone's photos, equally sized and placed. In the time lapse researched no photo collages were recorded. Generally speaking, the news was impartial and objective even though in some case a single opinion was presented.

"Moldova Suverana" published just two opinion articles: "Gentlemen from the government, stop"¹⁸, written by the political scientist Bogdan Tirdea, and "Legitimacy, popularity and political efficiency"¹⁹, written by the political scientist Vasile Nazarie, during three months. Both authors are not the newspapers' contributors.

The article "Gentlemen from the government, stop" was relayed from Bogdan Tirdea's blog and placed on the front page of the newspaper with the author's photo. His title is a brief, clear and strong prompt, a message aimed at the government, the request of stopping being motivated by the conditions of the legal framework.

The second opinion article "Legitimacy, popularity and political efficiency" was not relayed, the author writing it especially for the newspaper. Along the proper body of the article, the author's photo was displayed.

During these three months, the newspaper "Moldova Suverana" published just one editorial concerned with the crisis of failing to elect the president, even if the editorialist Mihai Contiu published his editorials on a weekly basis. Placed on page 3, the editorial "If they were responsible, the president would be elected in a week"²⁰ discussed the civic responsibility of the stakeholders, more precisely its absence. The author provided pieces of advice and proposed the government a "recepte" for the president's election.

The photo accompanying the articles was more than indicative. The photo of the author was not placed on the upper part of the text, according to the custom, while it displayed the photo of the political player Marian Lupu, at that time the candidate for presidency on behalf of the Alliance. Therefore, the photo anticipated, in some way, the conclusions by displaying the potential president or the one who may be elected.

The political crisis in the Republic of Moldova between January 6 and April 6, 2013, as reflected in the pages of the newspapers "Timpul" and "Moldova Suverana"

The present research focused on the way in which the mass-media approached the governmental crisis generated by the dismissal of the second Filat Cabinet, the matter of validating a new government and calling the early elections. The monitoring and the analysis were realized between January 6- April 6, 2013, the starting moment of the crisis and its full manifestation. In order to identify the way in which the information about the government's dismissal, the Alliance's disappearance and the negotiations about the new Cabinet and the nomination of a candidate for the Cabinet was approached, we researched the related articles of the Friday editions of the national newspapers "Timpul" and "Moldova Suverana".

From a quantitative perspective, the media coverage of the governmental crisis displayed by the periodicals in question is very complex, on the other hand, during these three months the newspaper "Timpul" published 46 articles

whereas the newspaper "Moldova Suverana" published 28 articles (see the table below).

The table of the proportional representation of the articles reflecting the political crisis between January 6 and April 6, 2013

Date of issue	No. of articles in <i>Timpul</i>	No. of articles in <i>Moldova Suverana</i>
January 11, 2013	2	3
January 18, 2013	1	1
January 25, 2013	5	1
February 1, 2013	4	1
February 8, 2013	3	1
February 15, 2013	4	3
February 22, 2013	4	3
March 1, 2013	4	7
March 8, 2013	9	day off
March 15, 2013	5	1
March 22, 2013	2	3
March 29, 2013	1	1
April 5, 2013	2	3
Total	46	28

Based on the data shown in the table we are able to identify the frequency of the media coverage of this matter, which demonstrates the significance given by each newspaper. The margin between the number of articles is relatively large, its causes remaining the same as in the case of the media coverage of the election and failure to elect the president of the Republic of Moldova between 2011 and 2012.

Another major indicator of our study is the media genre displaying the media product. In the time lapse January 6-April 6, among the 46 articles about the political crisis published in "Timpul", 9 articles were news, 6 were reports, 1 was an interview, 1 was an investigation, 10 were editorials, 19 were comments and opinions, whereas among the 28 articles published in "Moldova Suverana" in the same period 12 were news, 4 were opinions and 12 were editorials.

Therefore, as in the case of the media coverage of the 2011-2012 political crisis, the dominant genre remained the news and its realization and

publication did not observe a conceptual transformation: "Moldova Suverana" continued using relayed news, whereas "Timpul" continued using the writer-news: in both newspapers, the news, either event-related or written following one or more statements concerning a particular matter, were displayed on page 2, dedicated to political events and statements taking place during the week, but also on page 3.

Both newspapers continued using the official, classic language, which present the information without interpretation, but mostly from a single source, the focus remained on certain personalities, not facts or events, for instance: "Gheorghe Cretu, charged with murder, resigns"²¹ or "Pro-Filat meeting in front of the Palace of the Republic"²².

The qualitative analysis of the articles centred upon this topic underlined new tendencies related to the accomplishment of the media coverage of the 2013 crisis. A particular trait of this media coverage was the tendency to promote the commentatorial and opinionative journalism. There was a considerable growth in the number of editorials: 10 in "Timpul", all written by Constantin Tanase ("I shall write about Filat no more"²³) and 12 in "Moldova Suverana", all written by Mihai Contiu ("Mr. Ghimpu, Mr. Lupu, when will you stop twisting your tails?"²⁴). In both newspapers the editorials were frequently placed on the first and third page.

Furthermore, we notice the growing and massive presence of the opinionative articles, primarily promoting the owner's viewpoint, therefore augmenting the intended results. During three months, 19 opinions were published in "Timpul", written by Valentin Naumescu, Valentin Buda, Tudor Cojocariu, George Damian, Moni Stanila and Pavel Păduraru, whereas in "Moldova Suverana" four opinions were published, belonging to Vasile Nastase, Valeriu Vasilica and Bogdan Țirdea.

Another particular trait of the media coverage of the 2013 crisis was the diversification of genres. Thus, the crisis was covered also by means of reports and press investigation, which did not happen in 2012, as documented.

From the perspective of sources, we infer that the news were mostly written following a

statement or an event and did not include more sources. In fact, this is the new tendency influenced by the online journalism which frequently and dominantly favors more news with a single source rather than a news with more sources.

In the newspaper "Timpul" we are able to identify a tendency to realize the articles, which comprise elements from the news, report and investigation. This type of writing was named by the authors "selection" because, in fact, it represents a collection of sources and statements which are gathered and ordered in such a manner as to offer a large depiction in a particular case. Such «selective» articles are frequently written by Pavel Paduraru.

The year 2013 saw the emphasis on the process of media being split according to the political criterion: «Plahotniuc's media» and «Filat's media». This separation, indirectly caused by the editorial policy of the media institutions, impacted the newspaper "Timpul" and "Moldova Suverana". Whereas the year 2011 saw a number of tendencies coming to take shape, then the year 2013 saw the political side-taking changing into direct and subjective writing, intending to annihilate everything named and related to Filat. The case of the newspaper "Timpul" was particularly noticeable, which, following some speculations, started sharing the Democratic Party's views openly. But both newspapers were credited with a single "political master".

The present research demonstrated the fact that the 2011-2013 political crisis was variously covered in the periodicals "Timpul" and "Moldova Suverana". Although both newspapers informed, signaled and gave warnings of the events shapping the crisis, their crisis-related media product was distinct, from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective.

The frequency and the type of the media articles, the approach, the logical focus, the authors' arguments, the sources being used etc.-all emerged from the editorial objectives of the newspaper. Therefore, whereas "Time" largely focused on the crisis and the situation being created, "Moldova Suverana" treated the topic rather superficially and sporadically. Whereas "Time" circulated their own media articles, "Moldova Suverana" filled its pages with relayed

news, with experts' opinions, without a contributor's status.

Hence, the media coverage made by the newspaper "Timpul" had two aims: at the stakeholders pushing them towards remedial measures in order to stop the emergence of the crisis, and at the public intending to warn them about the potential dangers and pushing them towards pressing for actions on behalf of the stakeholders. The newspaper undertook a situation oversight activity, forming the public opinion and also monitoring the management of the developing issues. Generally speaking, their media products were informative-analytical. By contrast, the media coverage made by the newspaper "Moldova Suverana" was unidimensional, that is informative, with weak results and short-termed.

The informational coverage of the crisis always bears the sign of the editorial policy of the media institutions involved. This leads to a distinct editorial interest in the crisis on behalf of the analyzed periodicals, not dismissing the varied means of achieving it.

References

1. Stepanov, Georgeta. Guzun, Igor. *Jurnalismul în situații de criză*. Chișinău: CEP USM, 2010.
2. The periodical journal "Timpul", Friday edition. Time lapse December 16, 2011- March 16, 2012.
3. The periodical journal "Moldova Suverana", Friday edition. Time lapse January 6-April 6, 2013.
3. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, January 6, 2012, p. 2.
4. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, January 6, 2012, p. 2.
5. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, January 13, 2012, p. 3.
6. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, January 27, 2012, p. 5.
7. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, December 16, 2011, p. 1.
8. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, January 13, 2012, p. 2.
9. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, December 23, 2011, p. 1.
10. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, February 10, 2012, p. 10.
11. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, December 23, 2011, p. 27.
12. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, January 13, 2012, p. 10.
13. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, March 16, 2012, p. 2.
14. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, February 10, 2012, p. 14.
15. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, February 10, 2012, p. 14.
16. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, February 10, 2012, p. 14.
17. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, December 11, 2011, p. 27.
18. The newspaper "Moldova Suverana", Friday edition, January 20, 2012, p. 3.
19. The newspaper "Moldova Suverana", Friday edition, January 27, 2012, p. 3.
20. The newspaper "Moldova Suverana", Friday edition, January 13, 2012, p. 1.
21. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, January 11, 2013, p. 3.
22. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, March 8, 2013, p. 2.
23. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, March 15, 2013, p. 2.
24. The newspaper "Moldova Suverana", Friday edition, March 29, 2013, p. 1.

Endnotes

1. G. Stepanov, I. Guzun. *Jurnalismul în situații de criză*. Chișinău: CEP USM, 2010, p. 23.
2. The newspaper "Timpul", Friday edition, December 16, 2011, p. 1.