[MD] New legal protections for journalists in the Republic of Moldova come into force

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Since 14 February, journalists in the Republic of Moldova have benefitted from a strengthened legal framework aimed at protecting them from intimidation, violence, pressure and interference in the exercise of their professional duties. Amendments to the Criminal Code and the Contravention Code, adopted through Law No. 252/2025, have introduced new sanctions and clarified liability for acts directed against journalists and media institutions.

The amendments have introduced a revised version of Article 180¹ of the Criminal Code, which explicitly criminalises the intentional obstruction of the activity of the media or of a journalist in connection with their professional work. The provision defines obstruction to include, among other acts, the use of physical violence or threats of violence, damage to journalistic equipment, and interference carried out through information systems, such as online attacks, unauthorised access or other forms of digital sabotage.

Under the new provision, such conduct may be punished by a fine ranging from 550 to 850 conventional units (MDL 27 500 to MDL 42 500), 150 to 200 hours of unpaid community service, or imprisonment for up to three years. The explicit inclusion of interference carried out through digital means reflects the increasing prevalence of online pressure and attacks against journalists.

The law also provides for aggravating circumstances. Where the obstruction of journalistic activity is committed by two or more persons, against several journalists, through abuse of an official position, or during a public gathering, such as a rally, protest or demonstration, the offence may be punished with a fine of between 750 and 1 150 conventional units (MDL 37 500 to MDL 57 500), 180 to 240 hours of community service, or imprisonment for a period of one to five years, with the possibility of a ban on holding certain positions for up to five years.

The amended provision also expressly covers situations in which a journalist is pressured to disclose a confidential source, thereby reinforcing the legal protection of journalistic source confidentiality, a key safeguard of press freedom.

In more serious cases, where the act involves death threats or results in moderate bodily injury or damage to health, the applicable penalties increase. The offence

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may be punished by imprisonment for a period of three to six years, a fine ranging from 1 000 to 1 500 conventional units (MDL 50 000 to MDL 75 000), or a ban on holding certain positions for up to five years.

Alongside the criminal law amendments, the Contravention Code introduces two new administrative offences. The first concerns insulting a journalist, defined as the intentional humiliation of the honour, dignity or professional reputation of a journalist while performing their duties. This offence is punishable by a fine ranging from MDL 500 to MDL 1 500.The second concerns unjustified interference in the activity of a journalist or newsroom which does not reach the threshold of a criminal offence. Such conduct may result in an administrative fine ranging from MDL 1 500 to MDL 3 000 and is intended to address forms of pressure or obstruction that affect the exercise of journalistic activity without constituting a criminal act.

The entry into force of these amendments represents an important step toward strengthening the legal safeguards protecting journalists and media activity in the Republic of Moldova. At the same time, the effectiveness of these provisions will depend on their consistent and effective application in practice.

Codul penal al republicii Moldova,Nr. 985 din 18-04-2002

https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=152643&lang=ro

Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova, No. 985, 18 April 2002

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