

# Handbook

## Media training for politicians



# Gagauzia

## Moldova



## Introduction

This handbook compiles best practices and tips on communication with media for female politicians. It has been produced following the workshop, "Media training for female politicians", organised by Thomson Media in Comrat (Republic of Moldova) on 13-15 December 2021, in the framework of the project "Whose news? Supporting gender-sensitive coverage in local media of Moldova", supported by the German Federal Foreign Office.

The handbook includes the content of the lectures and hands-on sessions of the workshop.

## Manual content

The training starts with a look at the media itself. What is the news all about? What do journalists want from you as politicians and public officials?

The manual then considers how to handle news conferences and making statements.

The final section is about preparing for all types of interviews and includes:

- \* How to deal with difficult questions from journalists.
- \* How to speak confidently in front of a camera.

**“In political journalism, the key actors are the politicians, public officials and/or their press secretaries or officers on one side and the journalists on the other. The institution of “press secretary” in Moldovan districts and regions is usually missing.”**

# Section 1

## What do journalists want from politicians / public officials?

In political journalism, the key actors are the politicians, public officials and/or their press secretaries and officers on one side and the journalists on the other. The institution of “press secretary” in Moldovan districts and regions is usually missing.

Only the key state institutions (in case of Gagauzia – the People’s Assembly and the Executive Committee) have press secretaries on the staff. Thus, the local politicians and public officials can rely only on themselves in relation with the journalists.

The media system is changing worldwide, including in Moldova. Audiences are fragmented from the abundance of TV channels, websites, social media sites, etc. In Gagauzia (an autonomy with circa 135,000 inhabitants) around 15 media outlets are competing for the same audience. This is around 50% more than in 2015. This means that many more journalists are keeping an eye on politicians’ activity.

The speed in publishing news has increased since the growth of online news portals. Journalists need only a few minutes to publish the news about an event. Speed sometimes is not synonymous of quality. The statements of politicians can be misinterpreted or quoted out of context. Thus, politicians have to be able to say things as clearly and concisely as possible, without any unnecessary remarks that may detract from the main idea.



## Exercise: The media landscape in Gagauzia

- \* Choose three different publications and media platforms
- \* Identify five key characteristics of media coverage of political events by the individual news outlets.
- \* Consider for example the language they use related to different political leaders and parties.
- \* How do they represent the Executive Committee of Gagauzia or the People’s Assembly of Gagauzia?

## Results of discussions of the “Media training for politicians” workshop December 2021

The participants carried out a similar exercise during the workshop. They agreed that every single media outlet in Gagauzia has an agenda. They felt that several media outlets support, directly or indirectly, the Executive Committee of Gagauzia or the People’s Assembly of Gagauzia; the others try to cover unbiased the political events in the autonomy and are quite often critical of executive and legislative powers.

# Section 2

## How to handle making speeches and statements

The stories produced by journalists might have come not from a reporter's research but from an organisation, institution, or politician. A news story is a written or recorded article or interview that informs the public about current events, concerns, or ideas. Quite often journalists produce news stories based on **statements or speeches by politicians and public officials** during public events, news conferences, or live events on social media.

### Tips for public speaking



## When making a statement or speech, you should keep in mind the following rules:

- \* **Avoid long and hard sentences.**

Long sentences are like labyrinths for journalists. They can get lost! A longer sentence is harder to understand than a short one.

- \* **Avoid abbreviations in your statements.** For example, instead of SARD Programme use the full title of the programme: Support for agriculture and rural development in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district.

- \* **Avoid reading the speech from paper unless you have to.** Try to maintain eye contact with the audience.

- \* **Pay attention to your body language and movement.** Nonverbal communication carries most of the message.

- \* **Speak calmly and pause.** Nothing shows nerves more than racing through your presentation.

- \* **Be prepared mentally and practice.** Find time before your speech to practice in solitude.



**“The former president of Republic of Moldova Nicolae Timofti (2012-2016) struggled to make clear and concise speeches in news conferences. He read his speech from paper and struggled to formulate clear answers to journalists’ questions.”**

# Case study

The former president of Republic of Moldova Nicolae Timofti (2012-2016) struggled to make clear and concise speeches in news conferences. He read his speech from paper and struggled to formulate clear answers to journalists' questions. Thus, Nicolae Timofti rarely spoke in public or gave interviews. However, he was lucky to have a great spokesperson, who was often interacting with the media.

**Watch this news conference with Nicolae Timofti:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Aej2JNYTYI>



## Exercise:

Consider local politicians or public officials that you know. Consider who makes good speeches and those who do not perform well.

Identify the key strengths of the good speakers and the errors made by the bad speakers.

**TIPS:** Consider the language they use. Look at how they stand. Are they reading a script?





# Section 3

## How to handle interviews

Journalists often ask politicians' opinions on various topics on the phone.

Always be prepared for **phone interviews**.

- \* Find time to prepare brief documents with key data and information from your field of expertise. Keep them in your office or computer and be ready to use them when called by journalists.
- \* Avoid accepting phone interviews while you are driving or walking. Politely explain that you cannot talk now and ask the journalist to call you back when you are in the office.
- \* Ask the journalist to explain who they are, what organisation they are working for and outline in detail the information they are looking for and the purpose of the story.
- \* Ask the journalist if the interview is being recorded. Ask them to inform you when recording starts and ends.
- \* Keep in mind the above-listed tips for making statements and speeches!

## Exercise:

Prepare brief documents containing key data and information that you will be able to refer to easily and quickly if and when you are approached by a journalist on the telephone.

### The ad hoc face to face interview

You are a public person and the journalists might ask for an ad-hoc interview while you are walking in the street or on the corridors of, for example, the Mayor's Office. This can be called "doorstepping". If the journalists "catch" you and ask for a quick interview then they really need to quote you. Most probably the camera or audio recorder is already running. So how do you handle it?

- \* The most inappropriate answer may be NO COMMENT!
- \* Listen to the journalist's question. If you are ready to answer, you can do it. Again, try to avoid long and hard sentences. Remember: the journalist needs to quote you on his/her story. They might need a quote of one minute, for example. If this is a television or radio journalist, do not hesitate to ask how much time he/she can devote to your statement. Try to formulate your ideas as clearly and concisely as possible.
- \* If you are not ready to answer immediately, invite the journalist to your office, for example, or ask him/her to wait until you finish the meeting, for example.
- \* If you are not the right person to answer a given question, it is okay to say so. Simply concede that is not your area of expertise and offer to connect the journalist with someone who is knowledgeable on the topic.

# Case study

Iurie Rosca, former Member of Moldovan Parliament and president of the Christian-Democratic People's Party, was very skilled in giving quotable interviews. He would ask the journalist before the interview, "How much time do you have for me: one minute, two minutes or five minutes?". And Iurie Rosca was able to give a perfectly quotable statement for the time frame indicated by the journalist. statements and speeches!

**Watch this news conference with Iurie Rosca:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XINs2Tx44-I>



## Exercise:

Find examples of politicians interviewed under pressure – YouTube can be a good place to look.

Listen to how they handle the questions, what words do they use? Do they react in a particular way with their body by, for example using their arm to create a barrier? Do their facial expressions betray their feelings about being "cornered" by the interviewer?

### Face to face interviews

The journalist might ask for a face-to-face interview. If so, please ask the journalist to send you in advance the key topics they plan to tackle in the interview. Avoid asking for the list of questions. A professional journalist will not accept this. However, it is fine asking the key topics. You can explain that you need to prepare the key data and information. Before arriving at the interview, you have to prepare.

You should anticipate the questions you will receive and think about how you will respond to them.

Maura Angle, a former journalist and now a media trainer, recommends dividing questions into three categories:

- \* Questions in your interest. These are questions that you can easily answer.
- \* Questions not in your interest. These are the most difficult questions.
- \* Question in the grey area. These are questions you are not sure about and many depend on the journalist or the situation.



## Exercise:

Now it's your turn to try out Maura Angle's recommendations.

Think about a subject you may be asked questions about write down.

- \* Two questions in your interest
- \* Two questions not in your interest
- \* Two questions in the grey area

## On/off the record and on background

Journalists use three terms in connection with the interviews: on the record, off the record and on background. You will find below the explanation of these terms according to The New York Times.

### On the record:

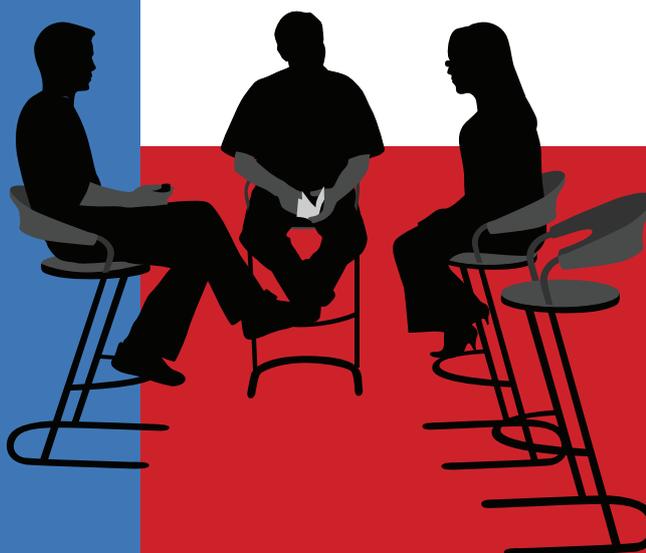
This is a journalist's strong preference at all times. Interviewees can be named and quoted. If no rules are set in advance, the assumption is that everything is on the record: comments, eye-rolls, life in all its majesty.

### Off the record:

Nothing from the conversation can be used for publication; journalists are reticent to enter into this arrangement, and rarely happy to agree to it.

### On background:

Generally, "on background" is understood to mean that the information can be published, but only under conditions agreed upon with the source. There can be good reasons for this — for example, government employees sharing news-making documents that they would only volunteer without a name attached.



## How to prepare for a media interview

Media interviews are an opportunity for you to get your voice heard, to get your key messages across and for people to understand exactly what you are doing as a politician or public official. If you want to become a voice in your community, you need to accept the invitations to media interviews. Here are a number of questions you should ask yourself or the journalist in order to prepare for interview.

- \* What is the topic of the interview?
- \* Will the text interview be accompanied by a video interview?
- \* Who is the journalist who will interview you? Research the journalist and watch some interviews he/she has done in the past. Do they seem combative or sympathetic? Try to understand what approach the journalist will be taking and prepare accordingly.
- \* Where will the interview take place?
- \* How much time will it take?
- \* When will the story be published/broadcast?
- \* What kind of story will it be? News, feature, interview?



**If you are invited to a TV or radio interview, it is important to clarify the following issues:**

- \* Is the interview live or recorded?
- \* Where will it take place? In the television or radio studio, in the outlet's office or your office, in the street?
- \* Will it be broadcast in its entirety or edited?
- \* How long will the interview be?
- \* What is the format of the interview?
- \* Will you be the only guest or is it part of a discussion?
- \* Will the questions be asked by the journalists or will members of the public ask from the audience or via phones or social media?



## Exercise:

**Research three studio-based interviews broadcast on television – YouTube again is a good place to start looking.**

- \* In which is the public figure/politician successful in putting forward their message? Why are they successful?
- \* Why do others fail to put their message across well? Is it because of the interviewer? Is it because the public figure isn't well briefed?
- \* Consider things such as their appearance, the language used.



**“Media interviews are an opportunity for you to get your voice heard, to get your key messages across and for people to understand exactly what you are doing as a politician or public official... If you want to become a voice in your community, you need to accept the invitations to media interviews.”**

# Interview content:

All right, you are almost there. You have accepted the invitation to interview and you need to prepare a bit.

- \* Try to identify and formulate a maximum of three key messages.
- \* Have in mind several examples or case studies to illustrate your messages.
- \* Check the main events that took place recently in connection with the topic of the interview. The journalist definitely will ask your opinion about the current developments.
- \* Formulate sentences and phrases that can be easily quoted. First, formulate the “quotable” statement, and then provide more details.
- \* Use positive words and phrases.
- \* Provide proof: facts, statistics, examples relevant for the autonomy and country.
- \* Explain the facts and statistical data. Numbers alone sometimes say nothing. Put them in a context. Try to round the numbers and avoid using too many.
- \* If the journalist makes a mistake in the question, do not hesitate to correct him/her.
- \* Do not be afraid of saying “I do not know”, if you really do not know the answer.
- \* Avoid statements that can be misinterpreted or quoted out of context.
- \* Avoid using legal jargon or expressions used by people of your profession only. You should speak using language that can be understood by everyone.



## Exercise:

“If you can’t beat them, join them”: By putting yourself in the role of the journalist, it may help you to understand how to perform better in interviews.

For this exercise you will need a colleague to help, someone you don’t know well. You have three minutes to question them and find something interesting and newsworthy about them.

Once your time is up, write a short paragraph based on the information that you have collected about them and that you think will be of interest to another person.



## “Bridging” in political interviews:

“Bridging” is a technique that gets you from the question asked to the answer you want to give (often a key message). It gives you the opportunity to rethink the answer or to politely avoid the question.

So as a politician you may use bridging phrases like:

- \* This is a very good / important question...
- \* But the real problem is...
- \* Let me add...
- \* I must point out that...
- \* This is part of a bigger problem...
- \* It’s too early to talk about it, but I can tell you that...
- \* Thanks for the question. Some may think so, but the truth is...

## Body language:

During the interview it is crucial to pay attention to your body language and movement. Non-verbal behaviours can allow people to be at ease, build trust and connections with others. However, they can also generate tension, and even create an uncomfortable environment.

- \* Look the journalist straight in the eyes. Avoid looking directly into camera or avoid looking at the floor or ceiling.
- \* Sit up straight, leaning slightly towards the journalist.
- \* Avoid being overly expressive with your gestures. It is good to supplement your words with some hand movement, but do it in a natural way.
- \* Do not play with or break the pen or pencil. Also, avoid common signs of nervousness: fidgeting your feet or fingers, biting your lips, etc.
- \* Try not to constantly nod your head while listening to your interviewer.
- \* Never cross your arms. It is a defensive gesture and creates a barrier with the audience and the interviewer.



# Behaviour during the interview:

**Here are a number of tips to take into consideration during the interview.**

- \* Be prepared mentally and have a positive mind-set and attitude.
- \* Speak calmly and pause.
- \* Avoid making odd sounds, like “Aaaa” or “Hmmm...”.
- \* Avoid long and hard sentences and phrases. Be concise.
- \* If you have to answer a difficult question, remain calm and keep the situation under control. Avoid verbally attacking the journalist and getting angry.
- \* Avoid giving your personal opinion. It is best to keep your opinions to yourself when it comes to tricky questions journalists may ask.

# How to dress for an interview:

Wear comfortable clothes. Choose a conservative skirt, three-quarter-sleeve top and a blazer for a professional look. Avoid black and white outfits.

Some outfits reveal more than you realize when you sit down. Test your outfit at different heights in front of a mirror in your home to see if your skirt or dress slides up.

Avoid busy patterns, especially narrow stripes. Simple jewellery is best. A long necklace can interfere with a lapel mic on your clothing. Do not try to be too trendy. Your message, not your fashion, should be the focus.

Bring an alternative outfit. A coffee spill can be a disaster ahead of a TV interview. Prepare for the worst by keeping an alternative outfit in your car or office (if it is situated close to the television station).

Do not wear sunglasses or chameleon glasses during the interview.

# Exercise:

This final exercise draws together all the tips and guidance given in the interview section. For this exercise on interviewing, you can either film yourself or ask a colleague to help you with the filming and asking questions.

Record the interview on your smartphone so you can review it later. The following guide gives you tips on filming on your smartphone and hacks on creating a homemade stand/tripod.



## Smartphone filming guide:

English Language

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BWxpa8RI6U&list=PLoZjkcRHSbv8AAAt78XPFTJP2e7Vzd-efU&index=1>

Советы по съемке с помощью смартфона

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyFmFoLwfeI&list=PLoZjkcRHSbv8AAAt78XPFTJP2e7Vzd-efU&index=4>

Create three different lists of questions in your key subject area; questions in your interest, questions not in your interest and questions in the grey area.

Ask your colleague to ask the questions and record your answers or, if you are working alone, read and then record your answers. Watch your answers back on your smartphone and analyze them.

If you think you can do better, try again. Practice makes perfect!

