

Teleradio-Moldova's Task-Book for 2009

Case study

Introduction

The Task-Book “drafted by the president of the Company, by the radio director, by the television director, by the heads of departments of the company” (art.62 (2), approved by the Observers Council (OC), endorsed by the BCC (art. 40 (e) and finally approved by the Parliament lies at the basis of the activity of the company Teleradio-Moldova”. The Task-Book includes the Financial Plan and the Program Policy Declaration. Upon its quality and reasoning, the financing of the company from the state budget depends, on the one hand, and the degree of the company's credibility in the public eyes, on the other hand. Given the importance of the Task-Book for the company, respectively, for building a genuine public radio and TV service, this subject is considered by monitors in this case study.

According to art. 58 of the Broadcasting Code, the Observers Council has the competence to approve the company's Task-Book, which explicitly contains two distinct components: the Financial Plan and the Program Policy Declaration (for the company, and separately for each program service) which serve as basis to insure the transparency and the public support of the company's activities, as well as to approve its annual budget (art. 62 para.1 of the Broadcasting Code.)

Exposition

On June 27, 2008, the OC's discussed the draft Task-Book of the National Public Broadcasting Institution (NPBI) Teleradio-Moldova for 2009.

According to the draft, Teleradio-Moldova was to ask for 127 million lei for 2009 from the state budget of Moldova.

Following public debate, the OC unanimously approved the draft Task-Book of Teleradio-Moldova for 2009 at the same session, adding provisions raising the initial sum with 20 million lei.

Findings

The 51-page draft Task-Book contains most of the elements provided in the Broadcasting Code in art. 62, para. (3) and (4), although, in their internal structure, they are not presented in the succession they are presented in the Code. Thus, the draft first contains the Program Policy Declaration of the company; the list of radio/tv channels, the broadcasting volumes (total/daily;) the volume of programming in the official language and in minorities' languages; the volume of air-time dedicated to news; the volume dedicated to movies and documentaries, the plays produced and procured; the total annual air-time used to broadcast own productions; the program exchange with foreign countries; the broadcasting time dedicated to foreign countries.

The First Section of the Task-Book has the following structure:

Compartment “Program Policy Declaration”;
Compartment “Television”;
Compartment “TV News Department”;

Compartment “TV Programs” with sub-compartments “Morning Programs”, “Socio-economic Programs”, “Youth Programs”, “Culture, Religion, Ethics, Morals Programs”, “Children Programs”, “Ethnicities Programs;”
 Compartment “TV Programming, Coordination and Broadcasting”;
 Compartment “Film Procurement and Preparation for TV Broadcasting Section”;
 Compartment “Actions and events to be mirrored by Moldova-1 outside the schedule”;
 Compartment “Winter holidays on Moldova-1” (pp 1-12);
 Compartment “Radio-broadcasting” (Program I and RMI);
 Compartment “Literary-Artistic Programs”;
 Compartment “Teens and Youths Programs”;
 Compartment “Knowledge-Utilitarian Programs”;
 Compartment “News and Current Affairs”;
 Compartment “Children Programs”;
 Compartment “Heritage Direction”;
 Compartment “Programs for Ethnicities”;
 Compartment “Radio Moldova International” (pp. 13-31).

The content analysis of the first section of the Task-Book Draft.

In “The Program Policy Declaration”, on one page, the second paragraph reads: *“Through its programs, the company will insure the exercise (our underlinings everywhere – authors' note.) of the fundamental human rights – the right to live, to work, to be informed, the freedom of expression the pluralism of ideas and opinions, etc.”* May we draw the attention to the unrealism found. No matter how it may want, the company cannot *“insure the exercise of the fundamental rights... to live, work, to be informed, the freedom of expression, the pluralism of ideas and opinions, etc.”* As other social institutions, it can only contribute to the exercise of those rights. In addition, the specificity of the company's work tells of its necessity and obligation to contribute to insure the citizens' access to the information of public interest, to contribute to the expansion of the space for public dialog. These activities are prerogatives of a media entity. The mentioned ones are strange to it, or exceed its prerogatives.

The third paragraph reads: *“The Television and Radio shall inform, educate, instruct and entertain the listeners, promote authentic values. The programs will largely use Moldovan music, will exhaustively mirror the Moldovan reality, will enhance the country's positive image”*. May we point out the following errors:

- a) the radio and television do not have the main function *“to instruct”*. This function pertains to other social entities;
- b) one may suppose they neglected the viewers by lack of attention since only the listeners are mentioned;
- c) the topic of *“authentic values”* is very questionable. As there always appears the question: “Who is the judge? Who establishes the value's authenticity?” It would be too bold (and absolutely subjective) for someone to claim he knows what is *“authentic”*, or, for example, what is *“correct”*;
- d) although laudable, the draft authors' intention to *“exhaustively mirror the Moldovan reality”* is impossible to attain. The monitors start from realizing that no event – no matter how simple – can be mirrored fully. The reality always means more than man's ability to perceive it. What the journalist covers is but reporting on the reality, and in doing so (because of man's ability to perceive the reality, of time and technology boundaries), he misses a lot of details more or less important. It would be more realistic, more useful and more correct in the relation with the public, if the document's authors wanted to cover, multilaterally, truthfully, impartially all kinds of events relevant for the public, than to set unreal tasks. Most certainly, the authors have not thought of some feasibility research for the tasks they set for themselves. And thus there remains the question: why unachievable tasks are committed to and how they relate to the financial requests?;

e) the monitors repeatedly find an unnatural concern of the national public broadcaster for enhancing the country's positive image, which is both pushful and dangerous for the truth. It is not related to journalism, but to PR. May we use this opportunity to suggest the Declaration authors to set a difference between journalism and PR. The company's core mission is “to offer the public” the real image of the country and not to create its image, especially a polished one. This commitment of the Declaration authors, in other words, would mean: regardless of what is going on in the country, we will say everything is OK; we'll hide corruption cases, won't talk of poverty, about bad roads, small wages, high prices, about inflation, crime, trafficking in human beings, about quarreling politicians, etc., because those subjects damage the country's image. Seemingly, unwilling, without perceiving the essence of the written words, the authors set for themselves taboo subjects, in a self-censorship system. The monitors believe that such a commitment represents a sufficient motive to censor any criticizing subject or program that would envisage the objective Moldovan reality and to impel journalists to exclusively select events able to enhance the country's positive image. The monitors are confident in case the national public broadcaster made genuine journalism and did not mistake it for PR, the positive image of the country would certainly increase, especially in the eyes of the bodies appreciating the freedom of the Moldovan media. The monitors state they favor the positive image of the country, but are against a positive image artificially created. Such a dangerous trend, able to promote double standards and non-truth, is against the right to be informed. Without fully realizing this desideratum, the public radio and TV service cannot be built.

Then, the Program Policy Declaration reads: “*The Radio and TV stations will mirror:*

- ☞ *processes of strengthening democracy;*
- ☞ *realizing the European integration program;*
- ☞ *promoting social programs;*
- ☞ *mirroring the implementation of the Moldovan Village Program;*
- ☞ *the process of reforming the science, especially its role in re-launching the economy;*
- ☞ *the way of identifying solutions in solving serious problems of social-political, economic and cultural order;*
- ☞ *promoting healthy life-style and everything meant by this desideratum;*
- ☞ *family and educational values, the feminine activism;*
- ☞ *memorable dates, national and international anniversaries of the countries of the world and of Moldova in 2009;*
- ☞ *the anniversary of 650 years since the formation of the Moldavian State (according to a special program);*
- ☞ *phenomena related to Christian morals, patriotic education, love for the country, aesthetic education, etc.”*

Further below, we'll shortly analyze several of the mentioned desiderata. So, the radio and television will mirror “*the processes of strengthening democracy*”. A noble task, only there is a small question: say, in the cases when strengthening democracy degrades into demolishing democracy, is Teleradio-Moldova going to neglect such a process? Will it show the good side and will ignore the bad side? The Declaration offers no answer.

The radio and television will mirror “*realizing the European integration program.*” But will they mirror the stagnation in carrying out the European integration program? No answer.

The radio and television will mirror “*promoting social programs*”. It's a natural commitment, but a minor one for the national broadcaster. According to the logic, someone develops, approves, promotes and then implements social programs. What is written means: the broadcaster commits only to mirror the way in which the social programs are promoted. The question is: wouldn't it be more useful for the authors of social programs and for the audience that Teleradio-Moldova should watch more carefully the whole chain of the process – from drafting it to implementing it, with all the inherent aspects and without promoting it?

The radio and television will mirror “*mirroring the implementation of the Moldovan Village Program*”. Despite the authors' faulty wording, we want to believe however they will

mirror “the actions” and not other media's “mirroring” “of the implementation actions” of this program, noting that its link with the democratization is forced, too.

The radio and television will mirror “*the process of reforming the science, especially its role in re-launching the economy*”. A reasonable commitment, although confusing, because of the question: why priority will be given to the role of the science in relaunching the economy? Why this role is not granted equality with other roles, say, the role of the science in reinvigorating national conscience, the spiritual revival, in reinvigorating the mentality, in improving the environment situation, etc.?

The radio and television will mirror “*the way of identifying solutions in solving serious problems of social-political, economic and cultural order.*” As can be understood, the authors of the Program Policy Declaration are interested only in the way in which solutions are identified. But namely the process of solving all kinds of stringent issues represents no interest, neither concerns.

The radio and television will mirror “*family and educational values, the feminine activism*”. It looks like a new subject – the values of the feminine activism, although, in the monitors' opinion, the commitment to mirror social commitment in general would have been more reasonable and more exact. The way in which the commitment is worded as if underlines the preponderant role of woman in establishing family and educational values, or, in building any value system, it would be good that man and woman share the responsibility and contributions equally. At least the pleading should be organized this way.

The radio and television will mirror “*memorable dates, national and international anniversaries of the world countries and of Moldova in 2009*”. We are inclined to believe the authors of the Declaration wanted to write that the radio and television will mirror “memorable days, national and international anniversaries”. At least, such a commitment would have been realistic and, in addition, written in Romanian. To mirror all the memorable days and all the national and international anniversaries, no matter how much we'd like to, is both impossible and useless.

The radio and television will mirror “*the anniversary of 650 years since the formation of the Moldavian State (according to a special program)*”. The monitors here have a single suggestion to avoid the tautology: the phrase “the anniversary of 650 years” should be worded as: “the 650th anniversary” or “the jubilee of 650 years”.

The radio and television will mirror “*phenomena related to Christian morals, patriotic education, love for the country, aesthetic education, etc.*” The monitors want to believe that “etc.” means also: “the social morale”, “the political morale”, “economic education”, “political education”, “civic education”, “sexual education”...

The Program Policy Declaration continues with: “*These and other program desiderata will be implemented through:*

- *broadcasting quality programs in Moldovan, Russian, Ukrainian, Gagauz, Bulgarian, Yiddish and Polish;*
- *popularizing and promoting the experience and culture of different co-habiting ethnicities and civilizations from everywhere;*
- *mirroring the social-political and cultural life in the contemporary Moldovan society, tolerant and full of respect for every citizen;*
- *broadcasting TV and radio programs on the entire territory of the country;*
- *enhancing the efficiency of the work of all subdivisions”.*

Let us decrypt what is written. “*These and other program desiderata ...*” The question is: what “*other desiderata*”? And if they are “program”-related, where should they be sought for if not in the Program Policy Declaration? The monitors have big reserves as for the real possibility that some vague commitments, abstract and inexact, may be implemented through “quality” programs. Perhaps the “quality” is conditioned, first and foremost, by exactly and concretely

wording the goal, the “program” desiderata. The monitors doubt, but hope promoting “*the culture*” of different ethnicities will be done by using an elaborate language. (*Monitors criticize the faulty Romanian used by the authors – translator's note*) The monitors hope popularizing the experience of different civilizations “from everywhere” will make the public curious. Attempting to understand Teleradio-Moldova's program policy, the monitors repeatedly returned to the text, and they also performed the following operation: the radio and television **will mirror** “*the processes of strengthening democracy*” (as a program desideratum) “**by mirroring the social-political and cultural life in the contemporary Moldovan society, tolerant and full of respect for every citizen.” Beyond the “*elegance*” of the written wordings, beyond neglecting the economic life, the phrase “*tolerant and full of respect for every citizen*” becomes absolutely unclear and unintelligible for monitors. What work is it taken from, why does it give a priori appreciations, what is it about and what does it refer to?**

Finally, the Declaration authors commit to implement the program desiderata by “*broadcasting TV and radio programs on the entire territory of the country*” and by “*enhancing the efficiency of the work of all subdivisions*”. Probably what they mean here is improving the quality of the technical signal, because Teleradio's programs are aired not only nationally, but also internationally. As for “*enhancing the efficiency...*” these are gratuitous words. In order to enhance the efficiency, you first need to set your goals clearly and exactly. It's impossible to increase the efficiency in reaching an unclear goal.

The draft does not provide separately the Declaration of the program policy of the radio service and of the television service, but they are found, partially, in the objectives and commitments of each creation subdivision, shortly exposed, and sometime rather confusingly.

Examples:

1. The program “*My Dwelling*” is a “*Program about architecture, interior design, exterior arrangements (in field), mirrored through the prism of social sympathy. They will go to the dwellings of people socially vulnerable – elderly, disabled, helpless youths, orphan children, orphanages, schools, kindergartens to help them in repairing their dwellings, to install a kitchen, to donate different household stuff.*”

The viewers are proposed practical solutions to arrange and repair dwellings. *The local producer offering construction materials, furniture, household equipment, etc. will be propagated. They will cultivate the taste for a better life quality...*” (Compartment TV, pg. 6). We find an obvious dissonance between the title of the program and its objectives, truly speaking, objectives unnatural and strange for a TV station. Making abstraction of the verbal wording of the confuse ideas, we'll anyway remark that the taste for a better quality of life cannot be cultivated by “the Moldovan producer” offering construction materials, furniture, etc. Such donations rather cultivate a taste for sloth;

2. The program “*Focus*”, classified in the Compartment “*Programs of culture, religion, ethics, morals*”, aims “*to discover interesting people with non-traditional occupations and to tell about interesting things and places, less known. They will produce reports about forgotten phenomena and events, that may be interesting now, too.*” We won't decline the need for such a program, but neither its title, nor the compartment it is in are justified;

3. One learns about the program “*Evening tale for children and parents*” that it is a “*theatralized intermedia with cartoons*” and that “*the theatralized intermedia entails multiple behavior elements, expressive speech, qualitative educational information, receptive vocabulary.* The goal – promoting the interaction between children and parents after watching the Tale together. Lacking space and time, we'll pay attention to the phrase “receptive vocabulary”. The (Romanian) dictionary gives 3 definitions for “*receptiv*”: a) able to receive impressions from outside; easily accepting the remarks one is made; b) easily learning, assimilating; c) easily

catching a disease. What significance matches more? Seemingly the third one – a vocabulary “easily catching a disease”... of the text author expressing oneself;

4. The program “*Unda Bugeacului*” will contribute “*to the national revival of Bulgarians, to the return to the folk culture, to keeping the old rituals, which in the new conditions acquire another significance*” (p.10). We find: it's a pity when the old rituals acquire another significance. We so may get that the birth ritual acquires the significance of the death ritual;

5. The radio programs for adolescents and youth have, among other goals, the following: “*Mirroring, in each program, the youth's role in consolidating the country's statehood and the youth's participation in marking 650 years since the formation of the Moldavian state*”; “*Preventing some risky behaviors of the new generation and the healthy life style*” (p. 15). Apparently, neither in the first case, nor in the second have the authors thought of what they have written;

6. The knowledge-utilitarian programs, among many others, have the following objective: “*Supporting and promoting the attractive image of the country and of the public company “Teleradio-Moldova” under social, cultural, media aspects.*” (p. 18). It's to be supposed the attractive image will be hard to be supported with such an “attractive” speech;

7. The program “*Matinal juridic*” (Legal Morning) is presented as follows: “*The population knowing the national legislation regarding the rights and duties is possible in practice only, which often can have grave consequences. The program conceived as a dialog, with questions and answers, will contribute to cultivating an attitude, socially correct, towards the action or non-action of an individual, because it is namely the attitude which can cause a reaction in the other members of society*” (p.20). We suppose the broadcast, in fact, would claim to be one of legal education, but one would find that the respective education will be hard to realize with a void attitude and faulty speech. The juridical texts require maximum exactitude;

8. As to the program “*Tineradio*” they specify that “*The topics are suggested and realized by young journalists, as they feel them, as they see solving them*” (p.26).

9. The contest “*Steaua de vineri*” (Friday Star), nobody knows why, “*has the goal to discover new talents and encourage children from socially-vulnerable families, who have special gifts and study at arts schools*” (p.27). We find a weird “discrimination”. We consider all the owners of “special gifts” should be encouraged;

10. Radio Moldova International has such goals as: “*Creating a favorable image, but also truthful of Moldova in the world; Promoting the political interests, the democratic attainments, the business opportunities, the spiritual values of Moldova*”. Further we find even more “novelties”: that “*RMI's audience are the consumers from abroad*”, that “*The topics are diverse, covering all the activity spheres – politics, economy, society, culture, tourism*” (truly they cover all the 5 spheres), that RMI will unfold a contest and 2 mini-contests. “*The Contest “Know Moldova”, ...has the goal to promote the beneficial image of the country abroad, to enhance the interest of foreign listeners for the country's history and present, for the national values of the nation*”. The mini-contests - “*The Wine's Route*” ... *have the goals to promote the priority interests for Moldova, creating a beneficial image of the country abroad as a tourism attraction and an exporter of quality wines.*”(p.31). We thus find an “*extremely variegated*” scope of preoccupations of RMI for the coming year.

We will specify the following: the objectives should be concrete, pursue measurable results. If it is so, the results of most objectives won't be measurable, including:

- creating the positive image (attractive, beneficial, favorable) of the country;
- strengthening the country's statehood;
- the interaction between children and parents;
- the population knowing the legislation, etc.?

Because it is normal that, by year-end, they will have to make an honest report before the audience about the results of implementing the program policy by subdivisions, services and the company, it will be impossible however to demonstrate the set objectives have been attained.

The analysis of the contents of the first section of the draft Task-Book **demonstrates**:

- a clearer structuring compared with the former (current) so-called Task-Book (which in the long run has not taken the shape of a Task-Book as required by the law);
- a clear and accessible presentation of the commitments of the Programming, Coordinating and TV Broadcasting Direction and of the Film Procurement and Preparation for TV Broadcasting Section;
- an extensive presentation of the knowledge-utilitarian programs, having premieres worth to be mentioned as “Radio Documentary” and “Detailed Truth (Adevar defasurat). (p.21). We'd like to believe the second title is a working one and another, more suggestive and adequate, will be found before the investigations start;
- the most accurate presentations (still not to be set as examples) have been developed as to the News and Current Affairs programs and as to the programs of the Radio Heritage Direction.

At the same time, the section in question contains many confusing things and poses many questions, as:

- why the TV program „*Împreună, în viitor!*” (Together, in the future!) is a social-economic program, not a program for youth?;
- why marking the *Lovers' Day* on the TV gets the same amount of air time – 2.5 h (p.6) as the Honorary Ceremony of Awarding the Youth Laureates? In addition, why the Lovers Day will be marked on February 14 and not on Dragobete day, since we “swear” by love for the nation, and for the nation,s history, etc.?
- how justified is the special presence of the sportive dance in the TV program „*Miracolul dansului*”?
- Why the folklore music is not “united” in a single cycle called either „*Evantai folcloric*”, or „*La noi în sat*”?;
- why, among the video productions to be bought (p.11-12), don't they expressly provide to buy productions from Moldovan independent producers?;
- why the rallies for the *Independence Cup* are granted 8 h of TV air time, while the international festival “*Maria Bieșu invites*” – 7 hours? (if we still commit to make the country's image more attractive, what event should be granted more attention?);
- why the radio programs „*Medicina pentru toți*” and „*Farmacia naturistă*” cannot be joined? (p. 20);
- why many music programs “mix” the professional and amateur singers?;
- why the children programs don't deal with the topic “*the children and the IT*”? The vision of the one planning so many programs promoting books seems outdated, since the reality (good or bad) points to other preoccupations of the children;
- isn't the radio cycle “*Traietoria succesului*” (p.29-30) a useless dubbing of the work of music program producers?;
- why does the radio plans programs to be aired rarer than once a week?;
- why don't they repeat most of the original radio and TV programs, since one writes in the draft Task-Book about the efficiency of the work of the company? It's an expensive luxury and a tactical error in the relationship with the audience to produce a large program on a topic to be broadcast once only. As the audience is getting more and more mobile, the repetitions are not just efficient. They are timely;

The second section of the draft Task-Book envisaging the financial plan contains the elements provided for in the Broadcasting Code, art. 62, para. (3), let. a), b), d), e).

Thus, the Financial Plan contains:

The draft budget of the company for 2009 (p.32);

The explanatory note to the financing plan of the company for 2009 (pp. 33-42);

The list of the transmitters to be rented by the company in 2009 (pp.43-45);

The project of re-equipping the radio at the initial stage (pp. 46-51).

In the monitors' opinion, the second section is elaborated with much more accuracy than the section 1. The comparative analysis of the main indexes of the company's work from 2005 through 2008 confers the contents more clarity and arguing of the company's needs in 2009. Worth of mention are the planned re-equipping of the radio and the trend of boosting the expenses for training employees – from 1,900 lei in 2006 to 50,000 lei in 2009.

However, the content of the second section is not spared of ambiguities and confusing things.

Examples:

The explanatory note to the financing plan (p.33) reads the budget is drafted also taking into account the objective of bettering the quality of *“the TV and radio programs”* and *“broadcasting some more creative programs”*. We will find that the budget cannot be computed starting from the cost of broadcasting *“some more creative programs”*. Further, a strategic line in attaining the company's objectives is worded: *“Training the editorial corps and carrying out some performance criteria linked to the quality of the audiovisual product, increasing the audience indexes”*. May we specify *“the criteria”* cannot be carried out. They can be drafted and applied to establish, measure, determine something.

Certain confusing aspects:

The money, very modest however, to train employees is to be taken from special means. The special means are planned, but not guaranteed.

If planning the money for travels within the country is clear, then the planning of the allowances for trips abroad is not. It is not clear, for the monitors at least, what *“5 % from the expenses to re-equip the radio shall be used to train the personnel from the re-equipped subdivision”* means.

Conclusions:

- The draft Task-Book of Teleradio-Moldova for 2009 is better developed structurally than the former one, for 2008, but is far from acceptable in terms of presenting the editorial policy;
- The draft Task-Book, especially its section 1, needs essential corrections;
- The draft Task-Book was voted by the OC, without sufficiently analyzing its contents and without preliminary public debates, which may have improved its quality;
- The draft Task-Book is confusing for the public and, consequently, cannot contribute to boosting the credibility of the OC and the company before the public.

Recommendations:

- The Broadcasting Coordinating Council should return the draft Task-Book for essential redaction, especially to eliminate the risks of censorship/self-censorship and of replacing journalism with image building;
- The Broadcasting Coordinating Council should condition to counter-sign the draft Task-Book by its being drafted transparently and debated publicly;
- The Observers Council of Teleradio-Moldova should return to discussing the draft Task-Book for 2009 in order to have it improved and to oust the confusing matters.