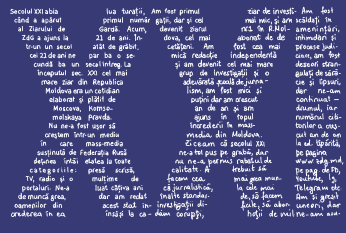
# ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT

# 2025



Years of Investigations

spune adevărul
zdg
ZIARUL de GARDĂ

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*If you are not criticized, it means you do not exist*


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# IMPACT

In 2025, **17** ZdG reports led to the opening of criminal cases, reversed decisions, or amended laws

Moreover, the reporters' work was recognized with dozens of national and international awards, including the European Press Prize — the first time a newsroom from the Republic of Moldova has received the most prestigious European distinction in journalism. The investigative series "Kremlin's Digital Army," which revealed how the information space was being "bombarded" on the eve of the parliamentary elections, was widely shared in Moldova, Romania, and abroad, and was viewed by hundreds of thousands of people. At the same time, following the evidence gathered on Șor's illegal financing pyramid, the "Moldova Mare" party was excluded from the electoral race.

MARCH

## The ‘Beneficiaries’ of Abuse

Three employees of the Bădiceni Temporary Placement Center for Persons with Disabilities named in the ZdG investigation, including the institution’s director — Vasilii Palamari, were **placed in pre-trial detention and house arrest for human trafficking** and for coercing the victims into giving false statements.

As of April 2026, the criminal case has not yet been sent to court, according to data on the courts’ portal. Vasilii Palamari still holds the position of director of the center and is also a councilor on the Bădiceni commune council, according to the wealth declaration filed on 20 March 2026.

## “Crooked Justice” — Set Right

**A bill was adopted** after ZdG wrote about the case of Iosif Rudeanu — a person with disabilities who had fallen victim to a “gap in the legislation.”

APRIL

## A Prosecutor, a Doctor When Needed?

After ZdG reported that prosecutor Vasile Buzu had allegedly arrogated to himself the status of medical specialist in a criminal case, according to the conclusions of the Prosecutors’ Inspectorate; the **prosecutor was disciplined** with a reprimand by the Discipline and Ethics Board.

## Mom Is Being Abused by Dad

**ZdG revealed that law-enforcement officers had intervened in a case of “domestic conflict,”** discovering that it involved the family of MP Vasile Bolea. The case subsequently drew heightened public attention. Several state institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations, took up the matter on their own initiative and stepped in with explanations or information about the case. In November 2025, former MP Vasile Bolea  was fined 500 lei by the court.

JULY

## A War Veteran's Car, Stuck in Customs for 17 Years

A veteran of the war for the independence and integrity of the Republic of Moldova, Nicolae Besedovschi, **was able to collect his car, which had been held in customs for 20 years, after ZdG wrote about this case.**

## "They Interpreted the Law However They Wanted"

Banners that subtly promoted gambling **were taken down** after ZdG wrote about them.

## Ion Ceban Banned from Romania on 'Security Grounds'

ZdG revealed exclusively that the capital's mayor, **Ion Ceban, was subject to a travel ban within the Schengen area.** Ceban challenged the order in court, but in September a Bucharest court rejected his request. The mayor appealed the court's decision. The dispute is still being examined.

## 'The European Village': Corruption Accusations and Electoral Score-Settling

**National Anticorruption Center searches** in Bilicenii Vechi after ZdG showed how a project under the "European Village" program, worth 10 million lei, had been carried out.

AUGUST

## "Protesters to Rent" (2022)

**Two ZdG journalists were prosecution witnesses in the case that led to Evghenia Guțul's conviction.** Natalia Zaharescu and Vasile Ursachi were named in the sentence handed down against Evghenia Guțul. The başkan was sentenced to 7 years in prison at first instance, and on 28 May 2026 she is due to learn the appeal ruling.

SEPTEMBER

## The Kremlin's Digital Army I and II (2025): see below

OCTOBER

## A Double Murder Case: From ‘Negligence’ to Delay?

Less than a month after the article appeared, on Wednesday, 15 October, the Chișinău Municipal Prosecutor’s Office announced that it had completed the criminal investigation and sent the case to court, and on 30 January 2026, Eduard Apostol, **accused of double murder and violent robbery, was sentenced to life imprisonment.**

NOVEMBER

## The Yandex Case and Its Company in Moldova with Revenues of 0 Lei

The Competition Council **fined Yandex 800,000 lei two years after an investigation** was launched and two weeks after ZdG inquired about the case.

DECEMBER

## The President of the Judo Federation, Indicted in a Criminal Case, Decorated by Maia Sandu with the “Order of Honor”

**President Maia Sandu revoked the state distinctions** awarded to Andrei Golban and Grigore Postică after ZdG wrote that Golban had been indicted in a criminal case.

## Chișinău City Hall Sells, at auctions worth millions, plots of land that belong to it only on paper

Chișinău City Hall **withdrew from an auction a plot of land** after ZdG wrote that it was fenced off.

## A Prosecutor Allegedly Suspected of Sexually Harassing a Student, Under Scrutiny by the Discipline and Ethics Board

The prosecutor from the Chișinău Municipal Prosecutor's Office, Râșcani division, Igor Buliga — about whom ZdG wrote in November 2024, citing sources, that he was suspected of having sexually harassed a student doing her internship at the institution — **was removed from office.**

## Former 'Deputy Minister' in the Tiraspol 'Government,' with a Habilitated Doctor's Thesis Defended in Chișinău, After Promoting Transnistrian 'Statehood' and 'Identity'

The National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research **did not confirm the scientific title of habilitated doctor in education sciences** for Svetlana Turceac, the former so-called "deputy minister" of education in the Tiraspol "government," who had previously promoted Transnistrian "statehood" and "identity."

# ZdG Undercover in the Kremlin's Digital Army

In September, ZdG published the investigation "The Kremlin's Digital Army" (part 1 and part 2), in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 28 September. Hundreds of accounts with fake identities, created by activists of the "Victory" Bloc, controlled by Ilan Șor from Moscow, were spreading Russian propaganda on TikTok and Facebook in support of the "Moldova Mare" party. The posts were coordinated through secret Telegram groups and channels. ZdG documented this network from the inside, with two journalists working undercover.

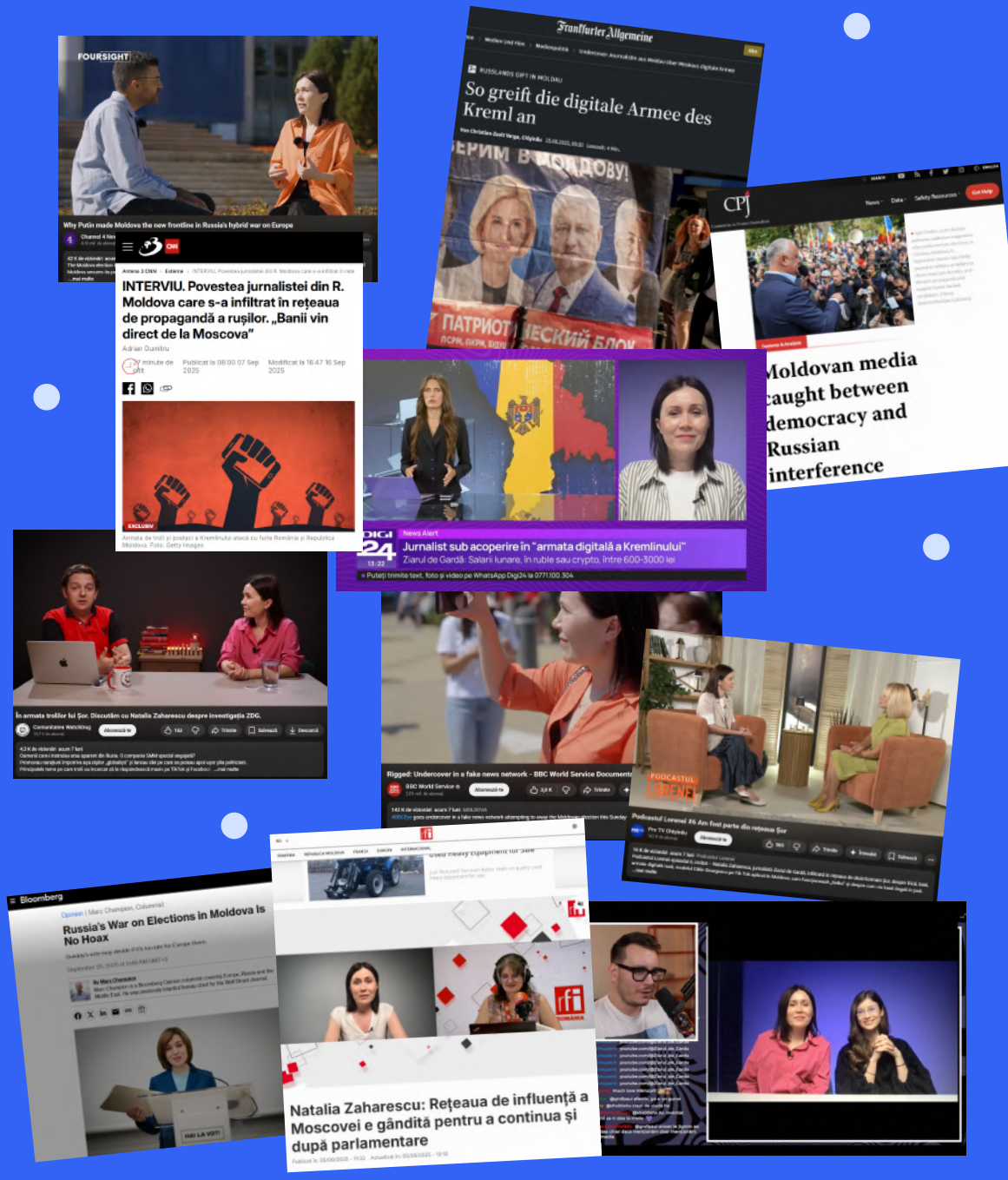
Subsequently, Măriuța Nistor, co-author of the investigation, was questioned by law-enforcement bodies in a criminal case that was also examining the issues raised in the investigation. Several data points from the investigation were used by the National Inspectorate of Investigations in a referral to the Central Electoral Commission, after which the “Moldova Mare” party, led by Victoria Furtună, was removed from the electoral race.

After the investigations were published, we received thousands of supportive comments and suggestions for investigation topics, and dozens of media outlets in Moldova, Romania, and beyond the Romanian-speaking world shared or quoted this material (TV8, Jurnal.md, Agora, Moldova 1, ProTV.md, anticorupție.md, veridica, and others, as well as abroad — RFI, G4 Media, Veridica, context.ro, investigatoria, Novaya gazeta, France24, etc.), and it was also broadcast by television stations here (Moldova 1, TV8, TVR Moldova, TVR Info).

Dozens of foreign journalists requested interviews about Russia's malign influence, with ZdG's journalists doing a veritable "speed dating" round in the newsroom and online (Channel 4, Frankfurter Allgemeine, BBC, RFI, Antena 3, CPJ, Bloomberg, Pro TV, Comunitatea WatchDog). Journalists Natalia Zaharescu and Măriuța Nistor also reached a different audience through a new format for ZdG — namely a stream: WHAT IS HAPPENING IN MOLDOVA?

Moreover, across the Prut, they were honored at the RePatriot TOP 100 români de pretutindeni Gala, organized by the Romanian Business Leaders Foundation.

In addition, people felt the need to support us financially. On Patreon, more than 70 recurring donors joined us, and on zdg.one we received over 100 one-time donations, totaling almost 70,000 lei.



# 21 AWARDS in 2025



In 2025, ZdG's journalists and newsroom continued to receive awards. For the first time in history, a newsroom from the Republic of Moldova, that of Ziarul de Gardă, won the European Press Prize, the most important distinction in European journalism.

Also for the first time, a Moldovan newsroom received the grand prize at the Superscrieri Gala, held in Romania, the best-known event dedicated to journalism on both banks of the Prut.

In total, in 2025, ZdG's journalists and newsroom received no fewer than 21 awards.

# 7 distinctions for the investigation “Serving Moscow” and journalists Măriuța Nistor and Natalia Zaharescu:

## “Superscriere of the Year” in Moldova and Romania

## European Press Prize in the “Investigation” category

*“A stunning undercover investigation showing how Russian money and influence networks operated in Moldova (...)”*

## The “Tudor Iaşcenco Prize”

for courage in carrying out the investigation “Serving Moscow,” at the internal competitions of the Independent Press Association

## The Prize for Excellence in Investigative Journalism,

Print Press category, awarded by the Center for Investigative Journalism

## The Prize of the RePatriot Gala

TOP 100 români de pretutindeni Gala, organized by the Romanian Business Leaders Foundation.

*“In a region exposed to disinformation, they delivered exactly what journalistic ethics promises: truth verified at the source and courage when it is hardest. (...)”*

## The Champions of Change Gala,

organized by the Laboratory of Initiatives for Development (LID Moldova), honored the investigative journalists with a painting created by Mihail Jabinschi, a student at the Academy of Music, Theater and Fine Arts.

## The Prize “for excellence in investigating corruption — Impact,”

2025 edition, shared with two other investigative teams from the Cu Sens and Nord News newsrooms

# Another 15 awards for ZdG's reporters:

- **Tulip Press Awards for coverage of human-rights topics**

  "The 'Beneficiaries' of Abuse," by Daniela Calmîș, was awarded in the "Print Press" category (see "The 'Beneficiaries' of Abuse" and "The 'Beneficiaries' of Abuse (II))

  Luminița Cauliuc received an honorable mention for her articles reporting on domestic abusers ("I Admit My Guilt" and The Story of an Abuse)

- **'The Best' at the Independent Press Association internal competitions (8 awards in total):**

  ZdG: "Best Coverage of the Electoral Campaign" of 2024

  Luminița Cauliuc: "Best Reporter — News"

  Marina Gorbatovschi: "Best Reporter — Feature" and "Best Reporter — Feature/Human Story"

  Olga Bulat: "Best Reporter — Commentary/Analysis"

  Măriuța Nistor and Natalia Zaharescu: "Best Investigative Journalist — National"

  ZdG: "Best Visual on Social Media"

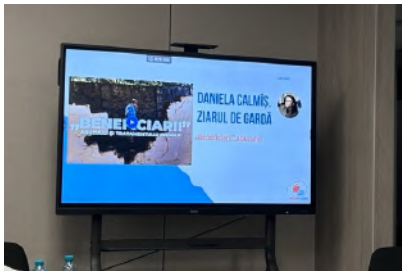
- **5 ZdG reporters were among the "Journalists of the Year" awarded at the Annual Gala of the Press Club, organized by the Center for Independent Journalism:**

  Natalia Zaharescu and Măriuța Nistor for the investigations: "The Kremlin's Digital Army" (I and II)

  Felicia Ganev, Daniela Calmîș, and Victor Moșneag for the investigation "The People Behind the Special 'Diaspora' Operation: Money and Connections, Including Political Ones, in Chișinău, Bucharest, and Moscow"

- **ZdG journalist Măriuța Nistor, named "Person of the Year" at the "Gânditorul de la Hamangia" Gala,**

  organized as part of the show "Vânturile, Valurile," with Val Butnaru, on Jurnal TV.



# ZdG at the Museum

On 9 December 2025, Ziarul de Gardă inaugurated the exhibition “The Digital War and Informational Peace,” a project dedicated to International Anti-Corruption Day, now in its 5th edition, which brings the achievements of investigative journalists to the public’s attention. The exhibition launch was attended by ZdG readers, journalists, diplomats, officials, and students, and addressed topics related to territorial, political, and informational integrity.

During the opening event, the Media-Guard Association presented the “awards for excellence in investigating corruption, Impact,” 2025 edition.

Three newsrooms — Cu Sens, Nord News, and ZdG — were honored for investigations of public interest and with an impact on society, carried out over the course of 2025.

The ZdG team conducted guided tours for groups of pupils, students, and members of the diaspora, and the exhibition was visited by over 1,000 people between 9 and 29 December 2025.

# Participation in International Events

In 2025, members of the ZdG team took part in dozens of national and international events, sharing the experience and impact of investigative journalism and of working in this independent newsroom. Team members were invited to international conferences to speak on topics related to investigations, countering disinformation, the importance of the media in electoral campaigns, media literacy, access to information, journalists' rights, the management of independent media, and so on.

ZdG reporters also took part in various study visits, in order to gain experience and improve their journalistic skills.

16 - 21 March | Helsinki, Finland

**Luminița Cauliuc**

***Event:*** Comprehensive Security, Resilience and Finland's OSCE Chairpersonship media visit

3 - 5 April | NATO Headquarters, Belgium

**Vasile Ursachi**

***Event:*** Meeting of the foreign ministers of the member states of the North Atlantic Alliance

9 - 13 April | Perugia, Italy

**Alina Radu**

***Event:*** International Journalism Festival (IJF)

11 - 13 April | Turda, Romania

**Vasile Ursachi**

***Event:*** The Rațiu Forum

26 - 28 May | Bucharest, Romania | Bari, Italy

**Natalia Zaharescu și Mărițuța Nistor**

***Event:*** Award ceremony of the Superscrieri competition; European Press Prize award ceremony

3 - 4 June | Prague, Czech Republic

**Olga Bulat**

***Event:*** The Architecture of Communication in Projects, and a practical session on distributing partners' content

11 - 14 September | Kyiv, Ukraine

**Alina Radu**

***Event:*** The 17th Ukrainian Investigative Journalism Conference

9 June | Bucharest, Romania

**Natalia Zaharescu și Victor Moșneag**

***Event:*** "How We Did X", organized by the "Media DoR" Association

9 - 11 October | Rīga, Latvia

**Alina Radu**

***Event:*** Safeguarding Democracy and Parliamentary Elections 2025 in Moldova: Struggle Against Hybrid Warfare

28 - 29 October | Brussels, Belgium

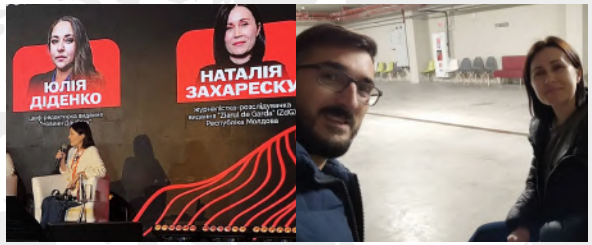
**Victor Moșneag**

***Event:*** Journalism in the Age of Influence

10 - 11 October | Kyiv, Ukraine

**Natalia Zaharescu şi Anatolie Eşanu**

***Event:*** Donbas Media Forum




23 - 25 October | Vienna, Austria

**Alina Radu**

***Event:*** The World Congress of the International Press Institute and the Media Innovation Festival

17 December | Strasbourg, Franţa

**Alina Radu**

***Conference:*** European Moldova: Reforms, Governance and the Role of the Media in the European Integration Process

5 - 7 December | Cartagena, Colombia

**Alina Radu**

***Event:*** The “Floodlight” Summit organized by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)

Between June and September 2025, Felicia Ganev, a ZdG reporter, served as Brussels correspondent for Ziarul de Gardă.

*As the Republic of Moldova advances in the European integration process, the need for reporters or correspondents based in Brussels — the place where many of the decisions that will directly influence our country's European path are discussed and adopted — becomes increasingly evident. At present, Moldova has no journalists permanently accredited in Brussels or Strasbourg, which makes it more difficult to document and report on subjects of major importance to citizens.*

*The "Maison du MediaLab" project offered a concrete solution in this regard, bringing together under one roof, in Brussels, journalists from the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. The initiative facilitates reporters' presence in the European capital, giving them the opportunity to interact with journalists from international newsrooms, exchange experience, better understand how European institutions work, and become familiar with the bureaucratic procedures required, for example, to obtain long-term accreditation.*

**Felicia Ganev**
ZdG reporter

# AUDIENCE

In one year, ZdG's digital community grew by more than **44,000 followers** on social media.

*We use social networks as channels for communicating with the public, not as a substitute for the website. Each platform has its own, singular and identifiable audience, with distinct content preferences and different modes of communication, which influences the way we publish news, investigations, and journalistic inquiries. In the case of voluminous investigations, we select and highlight the most important revelations. Through adaptation, we try to reach the entire community.*

*We turn editorials into carousels on Instagram, with an illustration or collage on the cover, in order to visually convey the subject of the article. Breaking news we publish on Facebook and Instagram in card format, since speed is essential in this case. Short video content is distributed on most networks, but with a focus on TikTok and YouTube, where the noise generated by disinformation is greatest. Our Telegram channel is a "miniature" model of the website, because there we distribute the news briefly and concisely. And the Facebook page, home to ZdG's largest community, features several formats: links, informational cards, and short video.*

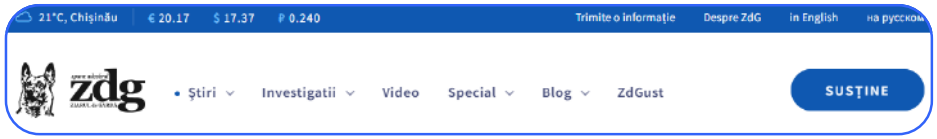
**Mihaela Melnic**
Social Media Manager

On the website, we had over

# 5 million active users

from around the world — the highest traffic in ZdG's history, achieved through organic growth, without dependence on social networks. This is good news, because more and more readers come directly to zdg.md, even though studies show a tendency toward getting information predominantly from social networks.

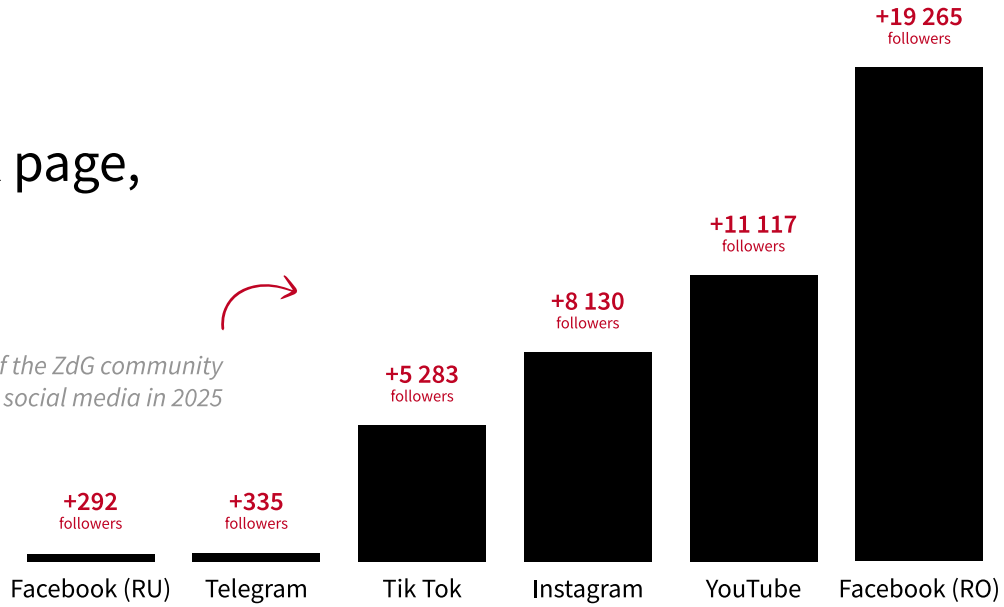
In October, zdg.md was also the most-visited media website in the Republic of Moldova, according to the Gemius research agency, with over 360,000 users.



# ZdG’s community grew on all platforms, especially on Ziarul de Gardă’s Facebook page, followed by YouTube and Instagram.

And we, in turn, grew alongside our community, with the best driver of development being feedback: comments, shares, and any mark left by or on ZdG’s work.

*Growth of the ZdG community on social media in 2025*




## Who Reads Us?

AVERAGE AGE

**43 years**

a mature audience, civically and professionally active

PREDOMINANTLY WOMEN

**On 4 of 6 platforms,**

women are more numerous

DOMINANT SEGMENT

**35–44 years**

the largest group on most platforms

MOLDOVA

**the #1 country on 5 of 6 platforms;**

the exception is the website, where Romania ranks first

ITALY

**the #1 diaspora country, present in the top 5 on all 6 platforms**

# Different Platforms. Different Audiences

## Website RO+RU: the most mature audience

**Average age**
~48 years

**Gender**
54% men

**Dominant groups**
45–54 years (1 million active users) and 65+ (700,000)

**Geography**
Romania — 2.2 million users, Moldova — 2.1 million

## Facebook RO: ZdG's largest social-media community

**Average age**
~43 years

**Gender**
56% women

**Dominant groups**
35–44 years (31% of the audience)

**Geography**
Moldova — 48.5%, Romania — 17%, then Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom

## Instagram: the youngest audience

**Average age**
~35 years

**Gender**
58% women

**Dominant groups**
25–34 years (over 36% of the total)

**Geography**
Moldova — 46.8%, Romania — 16.9%; Ireland and the Netherlands enter the top 10

## YouTube: the most even distribution across ages

**Average age**

~44 years

**Gender**

67% men — the most pronounced male majority

**Even distribution**

each group between 25 and 64 years accounts for 15–24%; the 55+ audience — almost 30%

**Geography**

Moldova — 46.9%,
Romania — 15.9%,
Italy — 8.8% (Italy's highest share across all platforms);
Canada in the top 10

## TikTok: the most contradictory platform

**Average age**

~38 years

**Gender**

55% men

**Dominant group**

35–54 years — 51% of the audience

**Geography**

Moldova — only 26.7% (the lowest share across all platforms), Romania — 11.5%; France enters the top 5

## Russian-language Facebook: the most "local" audience

**Average age**

35–54 years

**Gender**

60% women

**Geography**

Moldova — 65.8%, ZdG's most "local" audience; Russia and Ukraine in the top 5

*To attract a younger audience as well, we adapt investigations and other voluminous materials into formats such as infographics, animations, reels, and carousels of images, combinations of images and video sequences, or content made exclusively of video clips for social networks. Audience analysis shows that infographics are especially appreciated by users around 25 years of age.*

*At the same time, we publish the same content in several formats in order to identify the preferences of different audience categories. To this end, we run A/B tests, although this process is sometimes hampered by the restrictions imposed by social platforms. We do, however, notice a growing interest from the Ukrainian public in our Russian-language materials, reflected in the number of views and interactions.*

**Olga Bulat**
deputy editor-in-chief

# At Home and in the Diaspora

ZdG is followed from over 100 countries. Moldova and Romania form the core of the audience on all platforms, while Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France, the main destinations of Moldovan migrants, outline the map of the diaspora.

## TOP 10 COUNTRIES WHERE ZdG IS FOLLOWED:

**HONORABLE MENTIONS:**

Russian Federation, Canada, Belgium, Poland, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Kazakhstan, Belarus

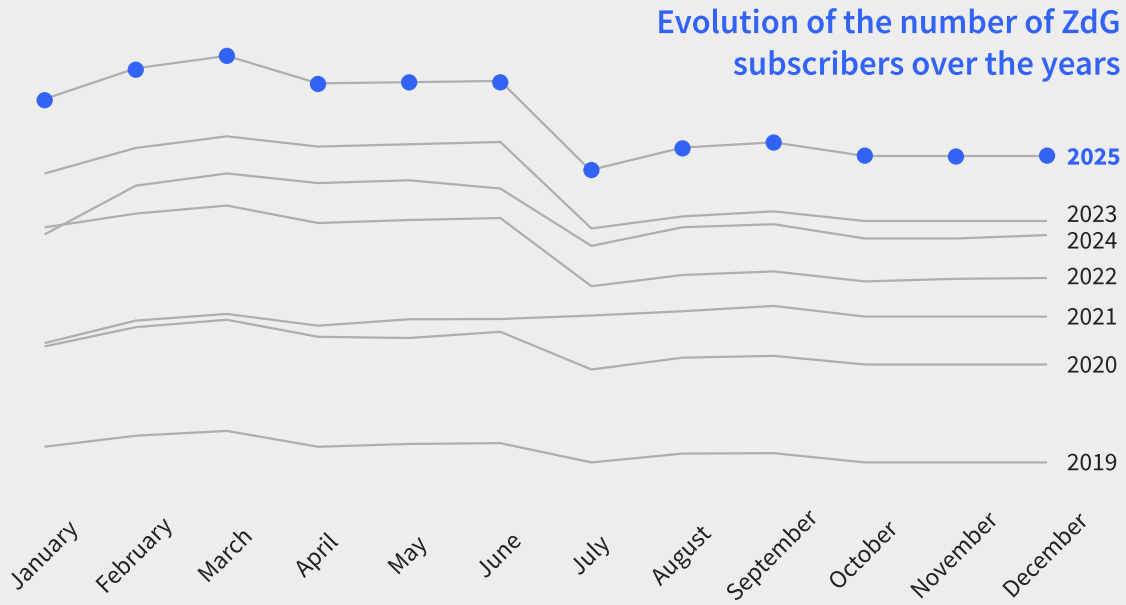
Note: This is a composite ranking, based on the position and frequency of each country in the rankings of the 6 platforms.

*data were collected from Google Analytics, Meta Business Suite, YouTube Studio, and TikTok Studio over the period 01.01.2025 – 31.12.2025, except for the Meta data, which statistically represents the audience of the last 2–3 years.

# THE MOST POPULAR NEWSPAPER IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

In January, we celebrated the largest number of subscribers in ZdG's history,

# 18 075




ZdG also remained the most popular newspaper in the Republic of Moldova, an enormous success for an investigative weekly, considering that more and more people get their information online and that, worldwide, newspaper circulation is in continuous decline.

The majority of our subscribers are **pensioners,** financially vulnerable people for whom we keep prices as low as possible, while greatly valuing their interest in staying well informed.

At the same time, we deeply appreciate the effort of the many citizens who read us for free on the website but who, in return, **donate subscriptions** for elderly people in villages who want to read this newspaper: parents, grandparents, cousins, teachers, as well as institutions such as libraries, care homes, and penitentiaries.

Because we also keep pace with technology, each week we share the digital version of the newspaper with the **community on Patreon,** who choose to support us with 2, 5, or 10 dollars a month.

Another 200 people have chosen to subscribe to the **newspaper in PDF format,** which arrives every Thursday in their virtual mailbox.

# CONTENT

# ZdG’s Content in Figures

## Site (ro+ru)

**10.000+**
texts published on zdg.md

**1.000+**
texts published during the electoral campaign

**4.000**
texts published on zdg.md/ru

## Facebok (RO)

## Facebok (RU)

At the time this report was published, precise data were not available; however, estimates indicate that at least **4000** posts had been published across the Romanian- and Russian-language Facebook pages.

## Instagram

**800+**
posts

**700+**
stories

## YouTube

**≈400**
long videos

**200+**
short-form videos

**6+ milioane**
million views

## TikTok

**≈300**
videos

## Telegram

**3.000+**
posts

## Ziar

**48**
printed editions

**1.100+**
pages

# Coverage of the Campaign for the Parliamentary Elections

For the parliamentary elections of 28 September 2025, Ziarul de Gardă provided one of the most extensive journalistic coverages in the newsroom's history, with over a thousand texts published in a single month (+500 compared with 2024): from voter-education and counter-disinformation materials to candidate profiles and undercover investigations.

All the materials were brought together in a special section dedicated to the elections, titled "Parliamentary Elections 2025", available on zdg.md, and distributed weekly through the print edition with a circulation of around 20,000 copies. The content was adapted simultaneously for video, text, and social media, in order to reach as many citizens as possible. The "Parliamentary Elections 2025" section was also translated into Russian, to ensure access to accurate, verified information for the Russian-speaking public. The Russian-language version of the section can be accessed at zdg.md/ru under the title "Выборы 2025".

# During the campaign, ZdG published:

NEWS ABOUT THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, THE DECISIONS OF THE ELECTORAL AUTHORITIES, AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CAMPAIGN

19 ELECTORAL SUMMARIES

19 PARTY PROFILES

AT LEAST 14 INVESTIGATIONS AND ARTICLES VERIFYING CANDIDATES' INTEGRITY

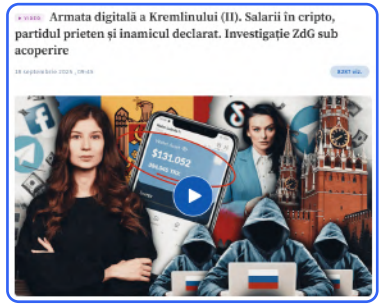
ARTICLES DEBUNKING FALSEHOODS

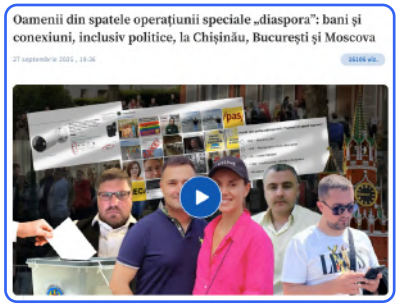
8 INFOGRAPHICS ON THE WEALTH OF THE LEADERS OF THE FORMATIONS WITH THE BEST CHANCES OF ENTERING PARLIAMENT

# The Investigations That Mattered

The greatest impact came from the investigations into the Russian Federation's interference in the elections. ZdG documented, including through undercover work, the networks paying directly from Moscow for electoral activity in Moldova, the cryptocurrency financing mechanisms, and the political connections of the operators of these networks.

A separate investigation showed how religious institutions and digital platforms (Telegram, TikTok, Facebook, Viber) were used as instruments of electoral propaganda.



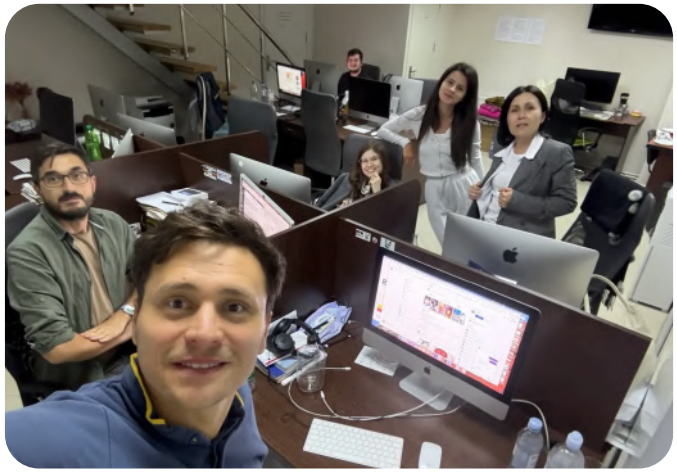



Many of these materials were picked up by national and international press. See IMPACT.

# Countering Disinformation

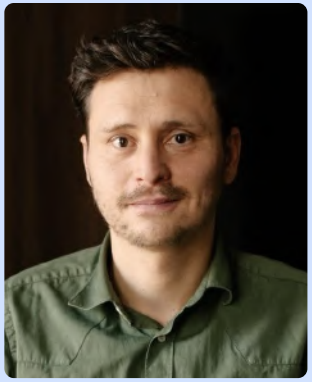
Beyond investigations, the newsroom consistently published debunkings of electoral falsehoods and civic-education articles, explaining voting procedures, campaign rules, and the mechanisms of the electoral system. In collaboration with the portal moldovacurata.md, profiles of candidates raising integrity concerns were also published.

On election day, ZdG provided live video and text broadcasts with results in real time.



The ZdG team on Election Day

# TOP 10 Investigations and Features on zdg.md



*In 2025, Ziarul de Gardă was everywhere. We were applauded, both at home, and abroad, and our materials came to be quoted all over the world. We were also criticized, often unfairly, being the target of the politicians we wrote about or were about to write about, or of obscure Telegram channels, many of them controlled by those politicians or their people. We were attacked perhaps more than ever before. But we held firm and came out of all these attacks stronger and even more eager to seek the truth. The fact is that in 2025 we were more visible than ever. They say that if you are not criticized, it means you do not exist. And Ziarul de Gardă certainly existed in 2025. An old proverb goes: "Only the tree without fruit is not struck with stones." And I think that describes Ziarul de Gardă in 2025 perfectly. It was the year in which all of us in the newsroom grew and learned new things.*

**Victor Moșneag**
ZdG editor-in-chief

# TOP 10 Investigations and Features on zdg.md

1

The Corruption Case at the “Gheorghe Asachi” High School

115 000 views

2

The Kremlin’s Digital Army

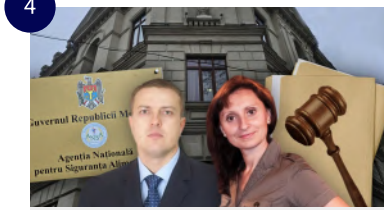
88 000 views

3

The Finnish Education System

51 000 views

4



Millions of Lei from the Budget Spent on the Unlawful Dismissal of State Employees

44 000 views

5

Legislative Gaps and the Rights of Former Ministry of Internal Affairs Employees

32 000 views

6

The Mysteries Surrounding the Attic Gutted by Fire in Durlești

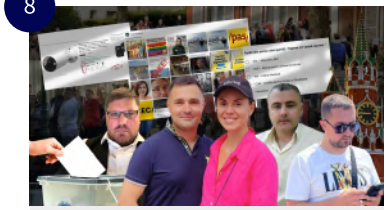
31 000 views

7

The Masters of the Home-Appliance Stores

18 000 views

8



The People Behind the Special “Diaspora” Operation

18 000 views

9

Secret Correspondence Attributed to Victoria Furtună and a Russian Handler

18 000 views

10

A Mysterious Death in Florești

15 000 views

# YouTube

*In 2025, the investigations, features, interviews, editorials, and other types of video content published on Ziarul de Gardă's YouTube channel accumulated over 6 million views. The most-watched were the investigations, especially those about Russia's interference in the 28 September parliamentary elections.*

*Some of ZdG's video products can also be seen by the audiences of TV8 and Elita TV, which carry the content under collaboration agreements.*

*For our audience on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, we tried to adapt the video materials into shorter, easier-to-watch formats. Over 200 such video materials were published on the three platforms, generating millions of views, comments, and reactions.*

**Anatolie Eşanu**
Manager of the video department

1

The Kremlin's Digital Army, | Undercover Investigation

194 000 views

2

A Mysterious Death in Floreşti. A Young Farmer Found Shot on a Hill

130 000 views

3

The Testimonies of Those Fined for Selling Their Vote

91 000 views

4

The Kremlin's Digital Army (II). Salaries in crypto, the friendly party and the declared enemy

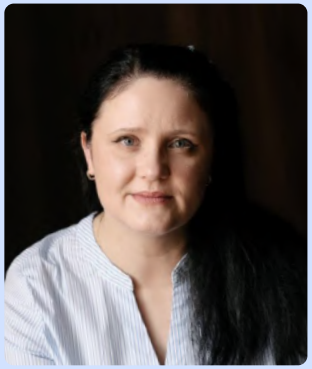
90 000 views

5

The Village with an Indicted Mayor and a Family Seeking Justice for Their Son

80 000 views

# The Russian-Language Edition of ZdG



*Throughout the year, we constantly followed the war in Ukraine, publishing on ZdG's Russian-language page news and analytical materials about its impact on Moldova and about the phenomenon of disinformation. At the same time, we translated and published the investigations, features, and other materials of major interest produced by ZdG's reporters, in order to make them accessible to the Russian-speaking public as well.*

*Likewise, collaboration with international media partners allowed us to obtain information relevant to documenting complex materials, including investigations into civil security and the country's preparedness for crisis situations, such as the investigation "You Can Run, But You Can't Hide. The Bunkers of the 21st Century, or Where to Hide in Case of War" (Russian-language version is here). Thanks to the information obtained from our partners, we were able to draw a comparison between the situation in our country and that in Ukraine or Estonia.*

**Olga Bulat**
ZdG deputy editor-in-chief

1

Компенсация за электроэнергию для всего населения Молдовы до декабря 2025 года.

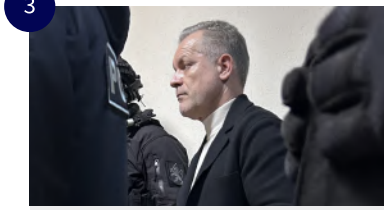
47 000 views

2

На сколько будут проиндексированы пенсии и увеличены зарплаты в 2025 году

41 000 views

3



Выступление Плахотнюка в суде: «Прошу дать мне шанс доказать свою невиновность и пролить свет на кражу миллиарда»

30 000 views

4

Крах мечты: как Исполком ставленницы Шора решил распорядиться гагаузскими деньгами в 2025 году

17 000 views

5

Как приостановка американского финансирования повлияет на Республику Молдова

17 000 views

# Social Media

## Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Telegram

**Mihaela Melnic**
Social Media Manager

*On social networks, the consumption trends of ZdG's users reveal a constant interest in current news, but also in analytical and editorial content.*

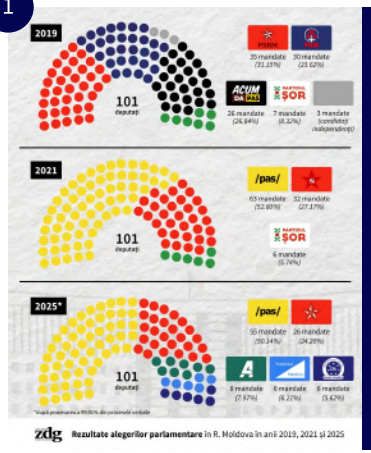
*The posts that generated the most engagement reflect the shift in the public's preferences over the course of the year. In spring and summer, topics related to justice recorded the highest level of interest, while autumn was dominated by political topics, especially content related to the parliamentary elections. This highlights users' interest in staying informed about political developments, including via social networks, but it also reveals a common thread that unites the audiences across all of ZdG's social networks: civic engagement. This engagement manifests itself through shares, comments, and reposts that produce chain reactions, contributing to the impact of ZdG's work.*

*The data collected from the digital platforms show that, after the electoral period ended, the public's attention turned toward topics related to justice and social issues. The fluctuation in engagement levels also revealed a certain information fatigue generated by the rapid pace of news consumption during the electoral period.*

*In 2026, we aim to preserve the same curiosity to understand our audience and to continue our work with even greater determination.*

# Top 3 posts on Instagram and Facebook

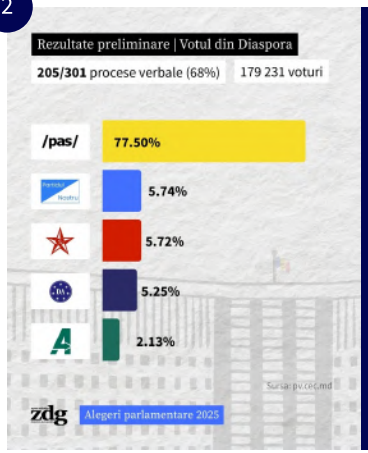
1




The Distribution of Seats in the Parliamentary Elections

991 000 views

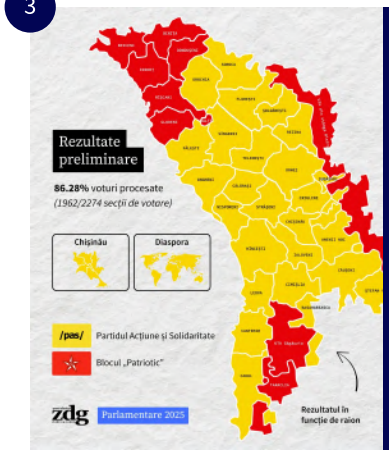
2




Preliminary Results. The Diaspora Vote

834 000 views

3




Preliminary Results. The Vote in Moldova

737 000 views

# Top 3 short videos on TikTok

1

Life imprisonment for the former police officer who kidnapped, raped, and killed a pregnant 19-year-old woman

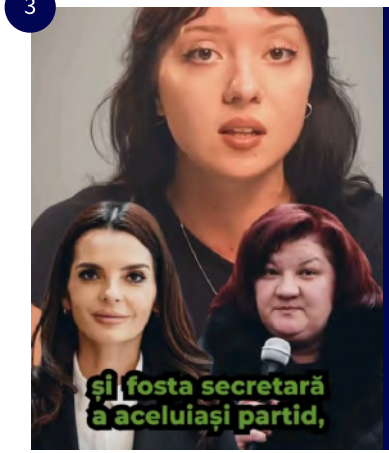
377 000 views

2

A father of three, found shot on the outskirts of his native village

339 000 views

3




Evghenia Guțul, the başkan of Gagauzia, sentenced to 7 years in prison

316 000 views

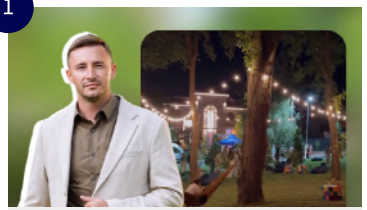
# ZdGust

*ZdGust grew nicely over the year, both in terms of the content published and the audience. The number of views and the number of followers on the Facebook page increased. It is clear that people are especially interested in visible figures and influencers, their lives and activities, and these topics get the most reactions and shares. At the same time, I am glad that there is also interest in articles about health, which are read and appreciated.*

*I enjoy working on a variety of subjects, but above all on everything that is beautiful, tasteful, and suited to the ZdGust audience. We try to keep a balance between light, appealing topics and more serious subjects. I would love for people to read just as much and even more about culture, education, and work.*

**Doinița Guțu**
ZdGust reporter

1



Emilian Crețu reveals how much he invested in the park in his neighborhood, recently inaugurated

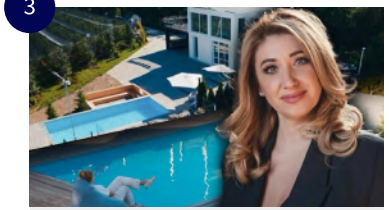
194 000 views

2

The message of a firefighter who took part in pulling the 13-year-old girl out of the elevator shaft at the Național hotel

130 000 views

3



The owner of the unattended apple stall on the Chișinău – Criuleni road, which went viral, was the spokesperson of the Șor Party

91 000 views

In total, on zdgust.md we published **2 700+** texts.

# Cititorul de Gardă:

## 2025, the Year Readers Continued to Make ZdG

**Aneta Grosu**
readers' ombudsman

***Gheorghe Mogâldea,*** *a pensioner from the village of Zubreşti, Străşeni district;* ***Valeriu Urschi,*** *a senior police lieutenant in the reserve, from the village of Cotiujenii-Mari, Şoldăneşti district;* ***Alexei Agachi,*** *habilitated doctor in history, principal researcher at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Moldova;* ***Vasile Morozan,*** *a pensioner from the village of Micleşti, Criuleni district;* ***Stanislav Cebotari,*** *criminal psychologist, doctor of education sciences;* ***Elizaveta Fratea,*** *from the village of Peresecina, Orhei district;* ***Andrei Olari,*** *a former deportee from the village of Ţahnăuţi, Rezina district;* ***Olga Ojog,*** *a lawyer;* ***Anatol Cristea,*** *parish priest of the church in Badicul Moldovenesc, Cahul, Diocese of Southern Bessarabia;* ***Nichita Dushak,*** *a young man in a wheelchair. These are just a few of the readers who wrote, called, and sent online messages to ZdG, flagging various problems.*

*Whether they spoke to us about the injustices committed by the local administrations in their villages, or referred to the impossibility of some elderly people surviving on extremely small pensions, or wrote to us about irregularities in the police, or expressed outrage at corruption in the justice system, or voiced their disagreement with the political strategies of Moldova's parties or the art of manipulation, every message sent by readers was important and valuable to the ZdG newsroom and was treated with attention and engagement.*

Principală — Blog — Cititorul de gardă — Cititorul de gardă/ De ce...

CITITORUL DE GARDĂ De ce mor îngerii?

Principală — Blog — Cititorul de gardă — O femeie - atacată cu...

O femeie – atacată cu acid de concubin. Ordonanță de protecție formală și o anchetă care stagnează, în timp ce atacatorul este în libertate

Principală — Blog — Cititorul de gardă — De ce mor îngerii: declarațiile...

De ce mor îngerii: declarațiile mamei Mariei, fetița care și-a pierdut viața venind pe lume, la Maternitatea din Edineț

Principală — Blog — Cititorul de gardă — Cititorul de gardă/ Cine îl...

CITITORUL DE GARDĂ Cine îl poate ajuta pe Vili?

All of ZdG's content is guided by the newsroom's editorial policy, available on zdg.md.

# IV THE LIFE OF ZdG

## THE WORDS OF THE YEAR:

stress

blocked funding

minus 40% of the salary budget

“USAID criminals”

“Soros agents”

investigations

elections

pressure

grant hunting

higher bills

awards

people

successes

recognition

applause

# THE ZdG TEAM

If we were to draw a composite portrait of the ZdG team, we would find a young, curious person with a well-developed critical spirit, who knows how to work under pressure, at speed, in depth, and with responsibility, and who does not stop when intimidated, harassed, attacked, and constantly taunted by corrupt politicians, digital armies, and anonymous accounts.

**ZdG employs 35 people, of whom:**
18 - editorial and journalistic staff
5 - management and governance
4 - video & photo team
2 - communications & community
2 - IT & digital
2 - translators
1 - legal support

**The team's average age is 36.**
24 are women (68.6%)
11 are men (31.4%)

**In 2025, ZdG hired 2 young people.**
Departed from ZdG: 1 person

# CUM AJUNG TINERII LA ZdG

*I came to ZdG after taking part in the Camp for Informational Resilience, where I met reporters from the newsroom who told me that, even without experience or studies in the field, there was an opportunity to learn what journalism truly means.*

*From the very beginning, I managed to contribute through the "Electoral Summary" section, through which I informed the public daily about the most important news from the campaign for the parliamentary elections. In this way, I took part in countering the disinformation and propaganda funded with money from the Kremlin.*

*I stayed at ZdG because I found myself here. I found an environment made up of people with similar values, people who believe in justice and truth, who are motivated to contribute to properly informing society and to fight against corruption and against those who place personal interests, money, and power above the good of citizens.*

**Vlad Găluşcă**
ZdG reporter

# The State of the Team

The ZdG team works under difficult conditions and continuous stress, which is why each year we maintain a series of measures to support the newsroom’s well-being, which we divide into 3 chapters:

**PREVENTION**

extra days off, cultural vouchers, bonuses, team-building and professional-development activities

**COHESION**

shared lunches, hikes, group events and celebrations

**PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING**

individual and group, support for medical needs

# ZdG Day

ZdG's annual anniversary falls on 29 July, the day the first issue appeared. On the eve of its 21st anniversary, the newsroom traveled to the north of the Republic of Moldova and discovered the picturesque places of that region: from the real "Heart of Moldova" to the oldest monument built by humans on the country's territory, and the Blue Lake.

We chose as our base the village of Naslavcea, the northernmost locality in the country and the point where the Dniester River enters the Republic of Moldova. We explored, we talked, we said kind words to one another, and together we looked toward the future of the country and of ZdG.

We also chose to “spend time” in the north of the country not only for the beautiful places we wanted to discover, but also because we wanted to talk with people who, as the results of every election over the past 30 years show, are, for the most part, nostalgic for the Soviet Union and view the Republic of Moldova’s integration into the European Union with reluctance.

We wanted to get to know them, to see them, to listen to them, to give them the chance to set out, uncensored, their problems, fears, aspirations, and ideas, without interrupting them, without criticizing them, and without judging them.

On ZdG’s 21st anniversary, we invited you to get to know 21 people from the north of the country, as they are, as they think, and as they live, day by day, in our Moldova, the Moldova of us all.

# The EU Commissioner for Enlargement — a Guest at ZdG

In May 2025, the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Marta Kos, paid a visit to the Ziarul de Gardă newsroom. Dressed in a traditional Romanian blouse, she met with ZdG's journalists and also gave an interview for the ZdCe Podcast.

The Commissioner also came with a gift for the ZdG team — a jar of honey from her home country, Slovenia.

# V CALENDAR OF CHALLENGES

**Alina Radu**
ZdG manager

*The year 2025 brought us new problems, unprecedented, unexpected, the kind we thought could not happen. But with all the bad came, once again, the good: we learned to solve unprecedented problems, and we became convinced once more that problems must be viewed in only one way, as opportunities for development and for building resilience.*

## 25 January 2025. #finances

The year began with the halt of USAID funding in the Republic of Moldova, which caused a 40% hole in ZdG's 2025 budget. When you have contracts signed with serious institutions, you are not prepared for them to be terminated without notice. Likewise, when contracts are terminated at the start of the year, no one is waiting with an open purse to cover your gaps. And yet, if you have demonstrated for years on end that you serve the public interest and know how to carry out professional investigations, there are always people and institutions who reach out a hand to help you get through a new calamity.

Media institutions from around the world wrote about this unfortunate event, citing ZdG:

Source: franceinfo.fr/

## February 2025

After the funding was withdrawn, the ZdG newsroom was accused by politicians with integrity problems (and not only them) of having been funded by the “USAID criminal group.” The messages were picked up by digital groups that criminalized us non-stop for having received lawful grants.

## February 2025 #digital armies #fakes

People with exotic names were posting hundreds of comments on ZdG’s social-media pages (as well as those of other institutions), spreading various falsehoods and scare stories about a potential war in Moldova. It is not easy to fight bots, especially when they are part of criminal networks.

## 7 March 2025 #offline violence

Journalists Măriuța Nistor and Igor Ionescu were struck by a “protester” while reporting at a rally in support of the defecting MP Alexandr Nesterovschi. They also came under accusations of “funding from a criminal group,” referring to USAID.

## 3 April 2025 #intimidation

The people of Irina Vlah’s “Inima Moldovei” attacked reporter Natalia Zaharescu and accused ZdG of being a “government newspaper,” of having received money for propaganda from USAID, and of being funded by… Ilan Șor.

*I managed to keep my calm, because my goal was to do my work as a journalist, not to get into disputes with politicians who attack the press. I had conflicting feelings, because the way they reacted seemed to me both amusing and pitiful, but I felt the injustice being done to journalists who are simply doing their job, because I am not the only one to have been attacked in this way by politicians and their supporters, politicians who want to end up governing this country.*

**Natalia Zaharescu**
ZdG reporter

## 13 June 2025 #cloning #phishing

A web page cloned from ZdG’s image was posting fake texts, with links leading to another page that was in fact a financial scam. It was ZdG’s readers who alerted us to the fact that a clone of ZdG, using Ziarul de Gardă’s image and graphic identity, was being used in an illegal scheme to extort money from citizens. The page’s address changed daily, but the identity stolen from ZdG remained the same.

## 1 July 2025 #threats and #intimidation

Journalist Măriuța Nistor was threatened and intimidated by Alexei Lungu, president of the "Șansă" party, affiliated with Ilan Șor, inside a public institution, on the premises of the District Court, while she was carrying out her professional duties.

## 12 October 2025 #threats and #intimidation

Soldiers of the so-called peacekeeping forces on the Dniester forbade ZdG journalists Marina Gorbatovschi and Igor Ionescu from filming/photographing and interviewing citizens crossing the bridge in the town of Rezina.

*It was a surreal moment. In my own country, on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, as a citizen with full rights, I had to give explanations to an officer in a Russian uniform, then to another, and all the while I was being filmed by yet another officer. They recorded our names, our faces, and the car's license plate. I felt like a captive in my own country. To top it all, they kept trying to persuade us to cross to the other side, into the territory they control, to give explanations to yet another officer, but I refused every time.*

**Marina Gorbatovschi**
ZdG reporter

## November 2025 #intimidation

The ZdG newsroom was attacked by armies of digital trolls after a document circulated in the public sphere claiming that it had received state subsidies amounting to four million lei. Dozens of posts shared from malign accounts affiliated with the Russian Federation reached an audience with tens of thousands of views. We answered a number of questions point by point here.

Throughout 2025, the Ziarul de Gardă newsroom was among the most frequent targets of attacks, with 12 reported incidents, according to the Annual Report on Attacks Against Media Workers, produced by the Independent Press Association for the "Justice for Journalists" Foundation.

# ZdG in Court



Over the course of 2025, ZdG was a defendant or a secondary intervener in **12 court proceedings**, of which 11 concerned the protection of honor, dignity, and professional reputation, and one concerned copyright. Of these, 5 cases against the newsroom were initiated during 2025, while another 7 had been opened in previous years.

Who is suing us? Those who took ZdG to court are: an MP, a politician, a former minister, a doctor, a former judge, a political party, and also a state institution. All of them claimed that the publication had defamed them.

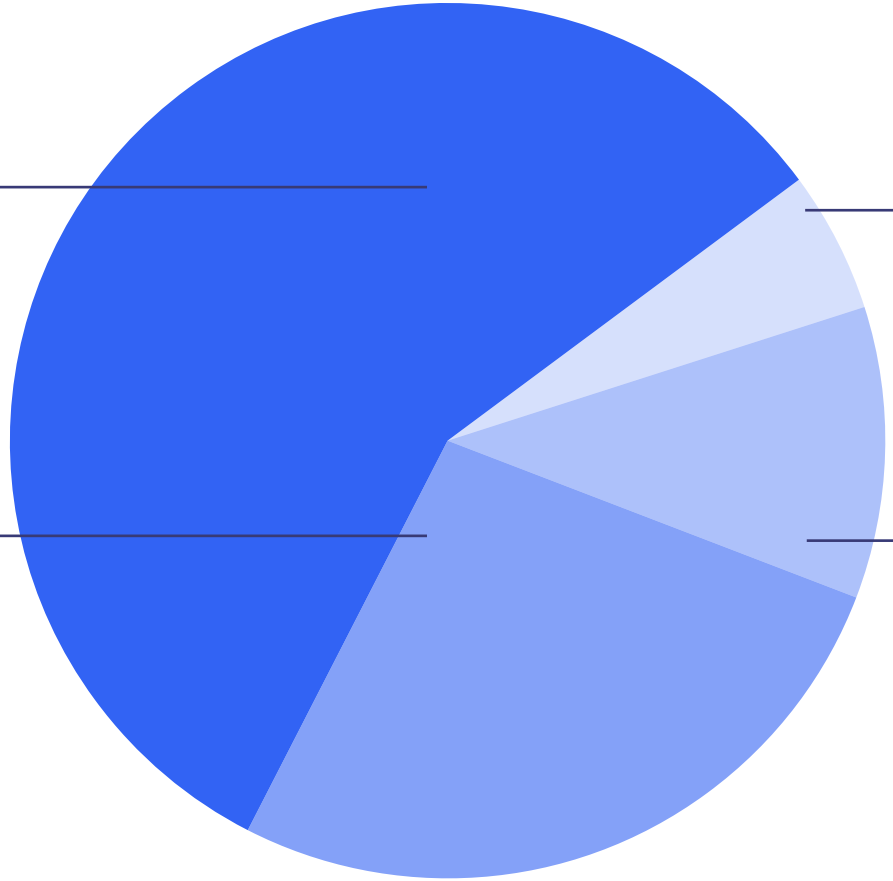
Also in 2025, we took part in 8 court proceedings in which the newsroom was the plaintiff. Of these, four cases concern the protection of honor, dignity, and professional reputation; two cases involved challenges to the decisions of enforcement officers, and two concerned the review of the legality of administrative acts. Three of the 8 proceedings were initiated by ZdG during 2025.

# VI MONEY AND SUPPORT

# Where Does ZdG's Money Come From?

**57%**
**Grants**

**27%**
**Subscriptions and print-edition sales**



**5%**
**Crowdfunding**
One-time donations (zdg.one);
Patreon

**11%**
**Advertising**
Print-edition advertising
Online & YouTube advertising

# THE ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORTED US

Grant donors represent the largest share of those supporting ZdG's work.

Over the course of 2025, the newsroom benefited from grants large and small, some for a few months, others as part of 2–3-year grants; some for single activities or specific investigations, others for ZdG's comprehensive development, but together they meant ensuring the continuity of all the activities aimed at serving the public interest in the Republic of Moldova.

NED National Endowment for Democracy — Supporting Freedom Around the World

International Fund for Public Interest Media

IMS — Good Journalism | Better Societies

People in Need

CFLI/FCIL — Canada Fund for Local Initiatives / Fonds canadien d'initiatives locales

France — AFD Agence Française de Développement — Expertise France Groupe AFD

Internews — Local voices. Global change.

United States Embassy Chisinau

Free Press Eastern Europe — Endowment Fund

Free Press Unlimited

BBC Media Action

Kingdom of the Netherlands

Centrul Pentru Jurnalism Independent

Open Information Partnership

PractNet — International Practitioners' Partnership Network

GFMD — Global Forum for Media Development

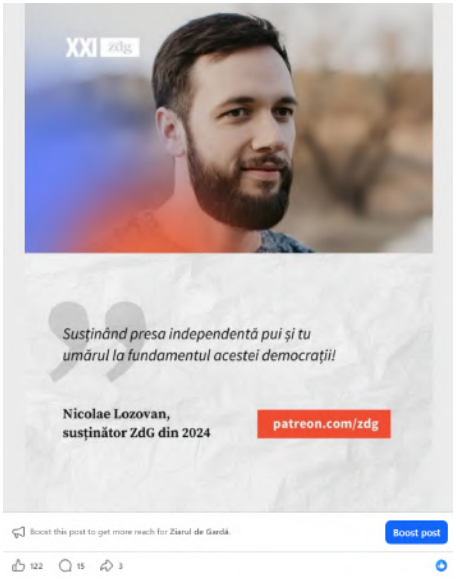
Thomson Foundation

erim — Equal Rights & Independent Media

# THE INTEREST IN DONATING TO PUBLIC-INTEREST PRESS

In 2025, we wanted to better understand what motivates our readers to support ZdG financially and what holds them back. The 171 respondents to our survey told us clearly: **they donate because they trust the journalists, see the impact of the investigations, and value the effort to serve the public interest,** and the main barrier is not money, but the fact that they do not know who stands behind a newsroom.

Then we tested whether donors could persuade others to donate: donor testimonials published between August and September 2025 gathered up to 28,000 views, multiplied visits to our Patreon page by almost 8 times, and 63% of the readers surveyed on Instagram said that such messages would motivate them “a great deal” to donate.



The result also depended a great deal on the publication of the investigative series “Kremlin’s Digital Army,” which coincided with the testimonial-testing period. Our conclusion is that when people feel the impact, they will donate or, as one reader wrote to us: “The truth is not for sale. But it needs support in order to survive.”

*P.S.: if you are a ZdG donor, any message of appreciation can become an encouragement for someone else to donate.*

## WHY WE DID NOT ACCEPT ELECTORAL ADVERTISING

### ZdG did not accept political or electoral advertising in the 2025 electoral campaign either.

The decision was made because conditions could not be ensured to uphold the integrity and transparency of the financial activity of all electoral contenders.

In the 2024 electoral campaign, too, ZdG did not accept advertising.

## ADVERTISING AND PARTNERSHIPS

### We thank the companies that collaborated with ZdG in 2025.

You can view our advertising kit HERE. We look forward to making Moldova more prosperous together!

# 2026. AN AMBITIOUS PLAN FOR A PERSEVERING NEWSROOM

At the end of every year, ZdG makes time for a large newsroom gathering. We retreat to a quiet place, with plenty of water, coffee, and tea, and we take stock. First we discuss what we did and how we did it, then we think about how to do (even) better next year.

**For 2026, the editorial plan is very strong from the standpoint of the public interest:**

- To monitor the government and public money
- To monitor the reforms, especially that of the justice system
- To monitor corruption cases in court, especially grand corruption
- To monitor and explain the European-integration agenda
- To develop and adapt journalistic formats to the public's interests on different social networks
- To find journalistic bridges to audiences who do not yet know us, such as those in Gagauzia or the Transnistrian region
- To give citizens confidence in the media
- To share our successes and achievements with teams of professionals from Moldova and around the world.
- To create some memorable products for the 35th anniversary of the Republic of Moldova

**Within the team, we also have the following priorities:**

- to attract new reporters from among the students studying in Moldova or in the diaspora
- to strengthen our investigative skills
- to learn to better respect human rights and journalistic standards
- to become resilient in the face of digital challenges
- to look after the security of team members
- to work hard, but to communicate well and prevent professional burnout
- to seek solutions for reporters' well-being

To achieve these goals, we need you.

# Support the public interest. Support ZdG.

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You can find more information here:

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