



Freedom of the Press 2012 - Montenegro

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2012 Scores

Press Status: Partly Free

Press Freedom Score: 35

Legal Environment: 9

Political Environment: 16

Economic Environment: 10

Freedom of the press is guaranteed by the constitution and is generally respected in practice, and the current government of Prime Minister Igor Lukšić has made efforts to increase protections for media freedom and independence. In the recent past, Montenegro had been criticized for criminal defamation laws that were used to place pressure on the media. For example, in February 2011, journalist Petar Komnenic was convicted in a libel case brought by a judge following an article he wrote in the weekly *Monitor* in 2007, and was ordered to either pay a €3,000 (\$4,200) fine or spend four months in jail. But in July 2011, as part of a broad reform of its criminal code, Montenegro fully decriminalized defamation and libel, leaving them entirely a matter for civil litigation, with monetary compensation as the only possible sanction. In addition, the Supreme Court has adopted guidelines regulating the level of compensation in defamation cases against the media in keeping with European standards and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. Since the government decriminalized defamation in July, the European Commission has reported a decrease in the number of court cases filed against journalists.

There were no reports of significant physical violence against members of the media in 2011. However, the daily *Vijesti* continued to face harassment. Journalists from the paper have in the past reported receiving death threats, and on several occasions in 2011, cars belonging to *Vijesti* were set on fire. Although the government condemned the attacks, local media organizations reported that the authorities failed to identify or apprehend a single perpetrator.

The media environment is very diverse for such a small country, with 23 television stations, 53 radio stations, 4 daily print outlets, 3 weeklies, and 30 monthlies operating. In the absence of strong opposition parties, both broadcast and print media sometimes play the role of political opposition, and content is also significantly influenced by the business interests of media owners. The print media consist of private newspapers, including major outlets *Vijesti* and *Dan*, and *Pobjeda*, a state-owned newspaper with national circulation. At the end of 2011, the state still held a majority stake in *Pobjeda*, despite a 2002 law requiring the government to sell its shares. The

public broadcaster has been accused of favoring the government in its news coverage. The country's media regulator is not fully financially independent and has an inadequate monitoring capacity.

Journalists are not highly paid, and combined with poor training and political and business influence, this often leads to biased coverage. The global financial crisis exacerbated the financial problems of Montenegro's media environment, in which a large number of broadcast and print media compete for a small advertising pool. The slowdown in economic growth in 2011 continued to weigh on the sector, although the government allocated state funds to support media outlets in financial trouble.

Access to the internet is not restricted, and approximately 40 percent of the population had access in 2011.

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