



Freedom of the Press 2015 - Montenegro

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2015 Scores

Press Status: Partly Free
Press Freedom Score (0 = best, 100 = worst): 39
Legal Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 10
Political Environment (0 = best, 40 = worst): 18
Economic Environment (0 = best, 30 = worst): 11

Negative official rhetoric and serious physical attacks against reporters continued in 2014. The government took some steps to investigate cases of violence against journalists, but convictions in such cases remain rare.

Legal Environment

Freedom of the press is guaranteed by the constitution, and Montenegro decriminalized defamation in 2011. However, a backlog of civil defamation cases has been reported. In recent years, the independent dailies *Vijesti* and *Dan* and the weekly *Monitor* have been fined hundreds of thousands of euros in damages for insulting Prime Minister Milo Đukanović and his family. In November 2014, a parliamentary committee passed a measure that would ban media outlets that violate hate speech laws. Observers have noted that court proceedings are slow, investigations inadequate, and judges unprepared for media-related cases.

The right to access information is guaranteed in the constitution, and journalists can request public information via a 2005 freedom of information law. However, the government does not always adhere to this law, particularly when journalists request information that could reveal corruption. The country's media regulators are not financially independent and have inadequate monitoring capacity. A code of ethics for journalists was adopted in 2003, but Montenegrin journalists have struggled to establish a common self-regulatory body since then.

Political Environment

Government officials often show blatant favoritism toward particular media outlets, and independent journalists face pressure from business leaders and the government. Reporting by both private and state-owned media outlets frequently lacks objectivity. Journalists who investigate government corruption often face allegations from officials that they seek to harm the state of Montenegro.

Journalists face threats, attacks, and vandalism of their property, with new incidents reported each year, leading to increased self-censorship. Among the most severe such incidents in 2014 was a January attack on *Dan* reporter Lidiya Nikčević, who was beaten with a baseball bat. In December, five men convicted in connection with the attack received jail sentences ranging from 11 to 15 months. However, many other cases of attacks against journalists remain open, and convictions remain the exception. The government in February 2014 reopened the 2004 murder case of *Dan* publisher and editor Dusko Jovanović, and in July two suspects were brought to justice for a December 2013 explosion in front of *Vijesti*'s offices. The government has also established a commission to oversee investigations of violent acts against media representatives. It remains to be seen whether more convictions will follow.

The European Union in its October 2014 progress report on Montenegro expressed concern that some older, unsolved cases of violence against journalists may soon exceed the statute of limitations. The report urged the government to refrain from voicing statements about the media that "may be understood as intimidation." For example, in March Đukanović said he would "deal with all kinds of mafia, including the media mafia."

Economic Environment

The media environment is diverse for a small country, with about 24 television stations, 54 radio stations, 5 daily print outlets, 3 weeklies, and 30 monthlies. Access to the internet is not restricted, and approximately 60 percent of the population had access in 2014. The public broadcaster faces financial difficulties and generally relies on the government as its primary source of information. In December, the government took over the broadcaster's debt, worth €2.4 million (\$3.2 million).

Many media outlets lack professionalism and produce tabloid-style journalism. Media content is significantly influenced by the business and political interests of owners, and the media landscape is heavily polarized along political lines. While technically transparent, media ownership structures are widely believed to mask the true power forces involved. The government and government-run organizations and businesses do not advertise in outlets that criticize Đukanović's administration.

The global financial crisis exacerbated the financial problems of Montenegro's media environment, which has yet to recover. Some 500 journalists have been laid off since 2011, according to the country's media union. Journalists are not highly paid, and combined with poor training and political and business influence, this often leads to biased coverage. In November 2014, the chronically indebted progovernment daily *Pobjeda* was taken over by Media Nea, which is owned by Greek businessman Petros Stathis. The development brings the government in line with a 2002 law that required it to sell its shares in the paper. Media Nea indicated that it would merge *Pobjeda* with another Montenegrin newspaper it owns, *Dnevne Novine*; lay off roughly half of *Pobjeda*'s staff; and establish a fresh editorial board for the new outlet. Despite robust government advertising contracts, the paper had been declared bankrupt in July.