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Freedom of the Press 2011 - Montenegro

Status: Partly Free

Legal Environment: 11

Political Environment: 16

Economic Environment: 10

Total Score: 37

Freedom of the press is guaranteed by the constitution and generally respected in practice in Montenegro. Libel remains criminalized and is often used to place pressure on the media, although less frequently than in the past, and it is punishable with high fines of up to €14,000 (\$18,500). In 2010, there were a number of libel cases brought against journalists who had covered connections between government officials and organized crime. On July 27, the legislature adopted a new Law on Electronic Media, which transferred the authority to issue broadcasting licenses from a government-controlled council to the legally independent Agency for Electronic Media. Members of the media report that access to public information is difficult due in part to discrepancies between the Information Secrecy Law, the Law on Protection of Personal Data, and the Law on Free Access to Information.

There were no reports of major incidents of violence against journalists in 2010, although five journalists from the daily *Vijesti* reported receiving threats by mail in September. Past incidents of threats and attacks against *Vijesti* and other papers often have not been adequately investigated. In August 2009, the mayor of Podgorica and his son allegedly attacked a deputy editor in chief and a photo reporter from *Vijesti* after the reporter photographed the mayor's illegally parked car. Pretrial proceedings in the closely watched case had yet to be completed by the end of 2010, although in January 2010 a court fined the mayor €400 (\$539) for insulting the journalists during the incident. Despite these threats and attacks, self-censorship is reportedly not a major problem.

The media environment is diverse, and pluralism has been strengthening in recent years. Both broadcast and print media are active and sometimes play the role of political opposition in the absence of strong opposition parties. The print media consist of private newspapers and *Pobjeda*, a state-owned newspaper with national circulation. In 2002, parliamentary legislation required the government to sell off its majority stake in *Pobjeda*, but it has failed to do so and in 2010 increased its share of the company from 51 to 86 percent. While there are a high number of print media outlets in Montenegro – particularly for a small country – the overwhelming majority of the population receives its print news information from Belgrade-based publications, particularly the two

dominant outlets, *Vijesti* and *Dan*. The public broadcaster is largely independent, but its capacity still needs to be strengthened. The members of the Radio and Television Council, which oversees the public broadcaster, are appointed by nongovernmental organizations and professional groups.

In addition to the national public broadcaster, there are 14 local public radio stations, 4 local public TV stations, 41 private radio stations, and 19 private TV stations. The financial sustainability of the media is weak, particularly the print media, and journalists are not highly paid. Combined with poor training and political and business influence, this often leads to biased coverage. Access to the internet is not restricted, and approximately 52 percent of the population had access in 2010.

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