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Freedom of the Press 2010 - Bosnia-Herzegovina

Status: Partly Free

Legal Environment: 9

Political Environment: 23

Economic Environment: 16

Total Score: 48

- Freedom of the press in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is guaranteed by the constitution as well as the human rights annex to the Dayton Peace Accords. Freedom of information is protected by law, but institutions are often slow to respond to journalists' requests. Political leaders put pressure on the media, and ethnic divisions pose an obstacle to the free flow of information. Domestic and foreign investment in the media is insufficient.
- Media outlets and journalists occasionally face lawsuits in response to their coverage. For example, the prime minister of Republika Srpska sued the BETA news agency and a journalist, Ljiljana Kovacevic, for reporting on his alleged criminal activity in relation to construction contracts.
- There are public broadcasters for each of the country's two constituent entities – the Federation of BiH, with a mostly Bosniak and Croat population, and Republika Srpska, largely populated by Serbs – and for the country as a whole, a complex and costly arrangement. Political pressure on the central broadcaster, BHRT, prevents journalists and media executives from carrying out their work independently. On December 30, Mehmed Agovic, general director of BHRT, resigned under political pressure, according to the South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO). This followed his resignation and reinstatement by court order more than a year earlier.
- An independent Communications Regulatory Agency licenses and monitors broadcast media. The Press Council, a self-regulatory body for print outlets, responds to alleged violations of the Press Code.
- According to the Ministry of Security, there was a 40 percent increase in verbal and physical attacks against journalists during the first nine months of 2009. Other sources reported six death threats and four physical attacks against journalists during the year. In one incident in March, Slobodan Vaskovic, an investigative journalist with a news program broadcast in the Federation, was physically and verbally assaulted in Republika Srpska while filming a story exploring links between the Orthodox Church and local politicians. In other incidents, the investigative journalist Bakir Hedziomerovic, editor in chief of the program *60 Minutes*, and another journalist, Avdo Avdic, received death threats linked to their reporting on organized crime. Both were placed under police

supervision.

- According to the U.S. State Department, some journalists based in Republika Srpska alleged that they were the targets of government surveillance, wiretaps, and pressure from tax authorities and lenders.
- In addition to the three state- and entity-wide public broadcasting systems, there are a total of 183 electronic media outlets in BiH – 42 television and 141 radio stations. This remains far more than the country's limited advertising market can support. Most radio stations are local and either limit their broadcasts to entertainment or focus on local political and ethnic interests.
- Most of the 128 registered print media are characterized by strong divisions along ethnic and ideological lines. Total circulation of the seven daily newspapers does not exceed 90,000 copies.
- The government of Republika Srpska decided in September to provide about US\$3.6 million to public and independent media organizations, raising concerns about editorial independence.
- Internet access is unrestricted, and almost 38 percent of the population uses the internet.

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