



Freedom of the Press 2013 - Czech Republic

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2013 Scores

Press Status: Free

Press Freedom Score: 19

Legal Environment: 4

Political Environment: 8

Economic Environment: 7

Freedom of the press is constitutionally guaranteed, though the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms prohibits speech that might infringe on national security, individual rights, public health, or morality, or that may evoke hatred based on race, ethnicity, or national origin. Libel remains a criminal offense, but prosecutions are rare. The Press Law provides a sound basis for independent journalism, and media protections have been bolstered by Constitutional Court and other institutional rulings. In August 2012, a district court reversed fines imposed by police on the weekly *Respekt* for refusing to divulge the source of a document related to a corruption scandal. The court found that the information was not necessary to the police investigation. In March, however, the Constitutional Court rejected a complaint by the Prima television station. The owners claimed that their right to freedom of expression was violated by the Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting, which had fined the station 3 million koruny (\$153,000) for airing a report during daytime hours about the risk-taking prank group Jackass Praha that was capable of "endangering the physical, mental, and moral development of minors." According to the Institute for the Protection of Journalists, members of the Czech Syndicate of Journalists – the largest professional organization of journalists in the country – are "often consulted on media matters by judges."

In 2011 the legislature amended the controversial 2009 "muzzle law," which banned the publication of information – particularly the names of individuals – obtained from police wiretaps, as well as information about individuals involved in criminal acts (both victims and perpetrators). Violators were subject to exorbitant fines and up to five years' imprisonment. Critics complained that the law hindered reporting on corruption cases. The amendment makes an exception for information considered to be of "public interest," though courts retain the authority to determine whether the level of public interest outweighs the privacy rights of those involved. In 2010, legislators had already softened the law to allow journalists to publish the names of politicians or other state officials involved in criminal proceedings related to corruption, and reduced the severity of the prescribed punishments.

Physical attacks and harassment aimed at journalists or media outlets are rare. Freedom of expression advocates were shocked by an unusual March 2011 raid on the offices of Czech Television, the public broadcaster, by 10 armed military police officers in masks. In searching for an allegedly classified version of a declassified military report that had been shown on the air, the officers confiscated newsroom computers, lists of sources, personal items, and papers unrelated to the military document. The television station lodged a formal complaint of abuse of office, leading Defense Minister Alexandr Vondra to immediately suspend three officers responsible for the raid. In September 2012 the Constitutional Court ruled that the search warrant was unconstitutional.

National print media consist of a variety of daily newspapers, weeklies, and magazines representing diverse points of view, though the economic crisis that began in late 2008 has had a lasting effect on the media market, leading to four consecutive years of decline. German and Swiss corporations own 80 percent of newspapers and magazines. However, in recent years a few wealthy Czech business tycoons have entered the market, a development that could signal an unhealthy concentration of ownership and influence. There are three broadcasting companies operating at the national level: one public – Czech Television, with four channels – and two private – TV Nova and Prima TV. The switchover to digital broadcasting in June 2012 resulted in a more diverse media sector, featuring the launch of several new television channels.

Most electronic media outlets are privately owned, and they generally convey diverse views without fear of government or partisan pressure. Media-related legislation includes minimal ownership restrictions, and none on foreign ownership. Media advocates have expressed concern, however, that while public media are widely respected, their financial sustainability is being undermined by tighter control of public funds and increasing restrictions on advertising. Observers also point to a decline in the depth and quality of reporting in Czech news media, with weak accountability among the tabloids in particular, which have gained popularity at the expense of the traditional press. This problem is most acute in the media's portrayal of the Romany minority, who are often depicted as criminals or "unadaptables."

The internet continues to develop rapidly, with 75 percent of the population enjoying regular and unrestricted access in 2012.

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