

## FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

# Estonia

[Estonia](#) | [Freedom of the Press 2012](#) | 

The constitution provides for and the government respects freedom of speech and of the press. Libel is not a criminal offense, but journalists can be sued for civil defamation. In 2010, the Ministry of Justice introduced legal amendments that many observers regarded as threats to freedom of speech, including a provision that would allow courts to jail journalists for refusing to disclose their sources. The proposals were widely condemned by press freedom advocates and Estonia's journalistic community, and the country's major newspapers published blank pages in protest. In November of that year, the parliament approved a less controversial version of the amendments, though they included a measure allowing authorities to seek damages from media outlets deemed to have engaged in libel or slander. The legislation as passed also still allowed journalists to be jailed for refusing to disclose sources, but only in investigations of the most severe crimes. In May 2011, the Estonian Human Rights Center officially criticized the parliament for not including journalists in the drafting process for the amendments.

The Public Information Act, the primary law governing freedom of information, obliges the authorities to assist citizens in accessing public documents. In June 2009, Estonia was among 12 European countries that signed the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents, which establishes the right for anyone to request information held by public authorities at no charge.

The National Broadcasting Council adopted regulations in 2010 to ensure unbiased coverage of electoral candidates on Estonia's public broadcaster. However, the council did not conduct official monitoring of the parliamentary election campaign in March 2011 and relied on registered complaints to measure compliance with the new regulations, a system that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) considered insufficient for monitoring media bias.

Numerous media outlets operate throughout the country, and independent media express a wide variety of views without government interference. Eesti Rahvusringhääling (Estonian Public Broadcasting, or ERR) is a public-service media organization with two television stations (ETV and ETV2) and five radio stations. There are two primary national commercial television stations—Kanal 2 and TV3—and a large number of private radio stations and cable and satellite services. The Estonian-language print media landscape includes four national dailies as well as regional, municipal, and weekly papers. For the country's sizable Russian-speaking population, there are television and radio programs in Russian (including on ERR), Russian-language newspapers, and access to broadcast and print media from Russia.

Media ownership has become increasingly concentrated over the years, with Scandinavian business interests taking a sizable share. As a result of the economic crisis in Estonia in 2009, some smaller print outlets were forced to cease publishing, while others cut staff and salaries and reduced international and regional news coverage. The recession also led to declines in the media advertising market. However, the economy showed signs of recovery by the

## 2012 SCORES

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**Free**

### PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

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end of 2010, and the decline in advertising revenues slowed or reversed, particularly in the internet sector. Still, newspaper sales have been steadily declining since 2007, with sharp drops in production of many papers in 2011.

Estonia remains among the leading countries in the world regarding internet penetration, with approximately 77 percent of the population active online in 2011. The government allows unrestricted access to the internet. In June 2009, the Supreme Court ruled that web portals and online news outlets could be held responsible for reader comments posted on their sites. The case was appealed to the European Court of Human Rights, and a decision was pending at the end of 2011. Cybercrime legislation was a topic of debate during the year. Although they supported the introduction of new laws to govern internet security, both Defense Minister Mart Laar and Foreign Minister Urmas Paet publicly emphasized the importance of drafting legislation that does not infringe on freedom of expression or other human rights.

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