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Freedom Of The Press - Croatia (2011)

Status: Partly Free
Legal Environment: 9
Political Environment: 17
Economic Environment: 15
Total Score: 41

Croatia is currently in the process of accession to the European Union (EU), which has exerted some pressure on the government to fight corruption and provide the conditions for independent media. As amended in June 2010, the Croatian constitution recognizes the right to information as well as freedom of the press. Despite this, the state has often tolerated harassment of journalists and used legal action as a weapon against media outlets. Defamation is a criminal offense, but the crime is only punishable by a fine. Hate speech, however, is a punishable offense that carries a maximum prison sentence of five years. Interior Minister Tomislav Karamarko's ongoing campaign of legal harassment against journalist Zeljko Peratovic continued in 2010. In 2009, Karamarko had made several complaints against Peratovic for "disseminating information likely to upset the population"; Peratovic was questioned by the police and the investigative judge, and in November 2010, the Zagreb prosecutor's office opened criminal proceedings against him for violating the confidentiality of Karamarko's original investigation. The state social services have also opened investigations against Peratovic on charges of pedophilia, which was dropped when no evidence could be found, and for neglecting to take proper care of his daughter, which was ongoing at the end of the year. Several other journalists faced legal harassment due to their work.

Broadcasting licenses are handled by the Croatian Telecommunications Agency, which has been criticized by media analysts for its lack of both transparency and independence from political control. The Croatian Journalists Association, of which more than 90 percent of journalists in the country are members, has a code of ethics to which the majority of journalists adhere and that reviews complaints from individuals and institutions.

Despite the country's Access to Information Act, journalists find it difficult to request and acquire information, including information open to the public domain, from the government. New amendments to the act expanding the definition of classified information raise further concerns about restrictions to information. In April 2010, Zagreb police searched the home of Marko Rakar and interrogated him after Rakar published a leaked list of registered war veterans on his blog. According to Human Rights Watch, "the government has resisted efforts to release the list, which civil society activists believe contains people fraudulently receiving pensions as war veterans." Starting in September, the government attempted to block the newspaper *Jutarnji List's* publication of reports by two investigative journalists, Sergej Trajkovic and Tomislav Kucec, on commercial abuses and lack of government oversight in the meat industry. SCOOP, a network of investigative journalists within the region, reported that several journalists were fired during the year.

because they were investigating corruption in the public sector.

Reporters also sometimes face extralegal intimidation and attacks as a result of their work or when attempting to cover the news. In August 2010, a reporter and journalist for national radio and television station HRT were accosted, threatened, and stoned by participants during a nationalist celebration they were covering. The attack on Ivonu Ramadzu and Kresimira Morica occurred in Čavoglave during the fifteenth anniversary of a Croatian victory during the Yugoslav Wars, at which the mayor of Zagreb was reportedly present and did nothing. The police eventually arrived but made no arrests, although more than 20 people reportedly participated in the hour-long incident. In October, staff members of Croatian weekly *Novosti* received death threats, in response to one of *Novosti's* cover articles about the collision and crash of two Croatian military aircraft. However, some progress was made in 2010 regarding past cases of harassment. In November, six persons were sentenced to prison for the murder of Ivo Pukanic, who had been killed by a car bomb in October 2008. In December, more than two years after journalist Dusan Miljus had been attacked in June 2008, four individuals were arrested and one charged with the attack on Miljus. Both Miljus and Pukanic were investigating corruption and organized crime.

The state-owned public broadcaster, HRT, is funded by advertising and a license fee. As in 2009, there were ongoing reports of political interference with the work of HRT journalists. In March 2010, the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) party sent a letter of protest to HRT complaining that recent coverage of parliamentary question time included only questions and comments from opposition Social Democrat legislators, and no responses from government members. At the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010, the head of HRT, Vanja Sutlic, and the chief editor of the news programming division, Hloverka Novak-Srzic, were dismissed by HRT's program council after a petition signed by thousands of citizens accused the two of censorship and violation of laws on freedom of expression. However, the following July the program council appointed Novak-Srzic acting programs director, over the protests of several members of the program council, who tendered their resignations. The program council was unable to find a replacement to take the helm of HRT, and at the end of the year it remained leaderless. HRT faced financial problems in 2010 that forced it to shut down its Belgrade bureau.

Other than HRT, there are dozens of private television and radio stations, both local and national, and cable and satellite access is common. German-owned Europa Press Holdings (EPH) and Austria's Styria control most of the print media market, which is in violation of the media law that states that no private owner should be allowed to control a market share of more than 40 percent. According to IREX, advertising revenue in 2010 continued to drop greatly, a pattern that has reoccurred in the past three years. The poor economic environment for media outlets and journalists' fear of being laid off have led to increased self-censorship. Many media outlets avoid discussion of government fiscal policy, because they fear there would be repercussions against their inability to pay tax and the threat of having to file for bankruptcy. The government did not restrict access to the internet, which was accessed by 60 percent of the population

during the year.