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## Freedom Of The Press - Estonia (2011)

**Status: Free**  
**Legal Environment: 5**  
**Political Environment: 6**  
**Economic Environment: 7**  
**Total Score: 18**

The constitution provides for and the government respects freedom of speech and of the press. Libel is not a criminal offense. Numerous media outlets operate throughout the country, and the independent media express a wide variety of views without government interference. The Public Information Act, the primary law governing freedom of information, obliges the authorities to assist the public 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.

In 2010, the Ministry of Justice introduced legal amendments that included provisions regarded by many as a threat to freedom of speech, including one 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 on March 18 in protest. In November, parliament approved a less controversial version of the amendments that still included a provision allowing authorities to seek damages from media outlets deemed to have engaged in libel or slander, in order to prevent them from causing further damage. The law as passed still allowed journalists to be jailed for refusing to disclose sources, but only in investigations of the most severe crimes.

The country's public broadcasters are Estonian Television, which runs two channels, and Estonian Radio. 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 programs in Russian, Russian-language newspapers, as well as access to broadcast and print media from the Russian Federation. 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 publications were forced to cease publishing, while other media outlets cut staff and salaries and reduced international and regional news coverage. The recession also led to declines in the media advertising market. However, as the economy showed signs of recovery by the end of 2010, the decline in advertising revenues had slowed, even registering positive growth of 13 percent in the second quarter of 2010 in the internet sector.

The government allows unrestricted access to the internet. Estonia remains among the leading countries in the world

regarding internet penetration, with approximately 74 percent of the population active online in 2010, up from about 50 percent in 2006. In June 2009, the Estonian Supreme Court ruled that web portals, as well as online news websites, could be held responsible for reader comments posted on their sites. The case was appealed to the European Court of Human Rights and is pending.