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FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Macedonia

[Macedonia](#) | [Freedom of the Press 2013](#)

The Macedonian constitution includes basic protections for freedom of the press and of expression, but government representatives do not uphold them impartially. The government continued to clash with the Constitutional Court in 2012 over the country's lustration law, which was originally intended to identify public officials who had worked with the communist-era secret police. In March, the court struck down a dozen provisions in the law, including one that required journalists and variety of other professionals to swear that they had never served as police informants. However, a new version of the law, approved by the parliament in June, would effectively still allow investigations of journalists and other professionals by means of individual requests. The parliament voted in November to remove defamation from the penal code, but a parallel change to the civil defamation law authorized fines of up to €27,000 (\$34,000)—€2,000 for the reporter, €10,000 for the editor, and €15,000 for the outlet owner. Journalists were typically punished with fines rather than imprisonment under the old criminal law, and the large number of cases has hindered freedom of expression and encouraged self-censorship. Also in November, lawmakers enacted new rules for the accreditation of foreign journalists, shifting responsibility for issuing permits from a low-level government press office to the Foreign Ministry; the new law tightened the requirements for such permits and instituted penalties for foreign journalists who worked without valid permits. For a foreign outlet to operate a bureau in the country, its home government now must sign an agreement with Macedonian authorities.

The law on open access to public information is unevenly and selectively enforced. Collection of fees used to finance the Broadcasting Council, which regulates television and radio outlets, and Macedonian Radio and Television (MRTV), the public broadcaster, has improved in recent years, but the two entities lack independence from the government in practice. A 2011 legal change allowed government-controlled bodies to appoint six new members to the Broadcasting Council. Enforcement of media regulations is weak, and the licensing process is subject to undue political and economic influence. However, the Broadcasting Council in 2012 set a September 30 deadline for compliance with a long-unenforced rule that bars public officials and their immediate families from owning broadcast outlets, affecting Macedonia's two top television stations and a radio network. The individuals in question renounced their public positions or media assets, but the outlets reportedly remained in the hands of proxy owners.

Most private media outlets are tied to political or business interests that influence their content, and state-owned media tend to support government positions. The government of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and its media allies have shown growing hostility toward critical news outlets. The media landscape was drastically altered in the government's favor by the 2011 closure of four opposition-oriented outlets owned by Velija Ramkovski: A1 TV, then the country's leading television station, and the popular newspapers *Špic*, *Vreme*, and *Koha e Re*. Their assets had been frozen in connection with a criminal case against Ramkovski, who was sentenced in March 2012 to 13 years in prison for tax evasion and money laundering. As many as 18 codefendants received jail terms ranging from two years and three months to seven years. In June, the Broadcasting Council withdrew the license of A1's sister channel, A2, on the grounds that it did not air enough news content. In 2011, the station had been forced to switch to more cost-effective music and entertainment programming after the accounts of Ramkovski's media outlets were frozen. In May 2012, A2 had announced plans to resume news content, leading press freedom organizations to criticize the regulator's decision as unfair and politicized. Both A1 and A2 continued to operate as news websites, and a cable channel announced plans in September to relaunch as A3, hiring a number of former A1 journalists.

Journalists do not enjoy equal access to government officials, who typically speak only to friendly outlets. In late December 2012, as the ruling coalition sought to pass budgetary legislation over the vocal objections of the opposition, security personnel forcibly removed opposition lawmakers and journalists from the chamber, ostensibly to restore order. The Macedonian Journalists' Association later called on members to boycott government press conferences. There have been occasional cases of physical harassment of journalists and media outlets. Some reporters had their equipment damaged, received threats, or were slightly injured during anti-Albanian protests

2013 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

**Partly
Free**

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

56

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

17

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

22

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

17

triggered by the murder of five ethnic Macedonian men in April. Past death threats and other forms of intimidation have not been prosecuted.

Macedonia has a large number of broadcast and print outlets for its population, but the closure of Ramkovski's media group gave progovernment media—including the public MRTV and several private television stations and newspapers—a dominant position in the market. In January 2012, the only significant foreign media investor in the country, Germany's WAZ Media Group, sold its three dailies to local businessman Orce Kamcev, who has been described as close to the government. Kamcev in turn sold 50 percent stakes in the papers to a Serbian online media company in August. The former WAZ unit in Macedonia included the country's largest printing facility and distribution network, which enjoyed a virtual monopoly after the dismantling of Ramkovski's media assets. Foreign media content is not restricted.

The government is regularly criticized for its liberal use of promotional advertising, which increases the media's financial dependence and allegedly favors progovernment outlets; the government is among the country's largest advertisers. Journalists face low salaries, poor job security and working conditions, and editorial pressure from owners. In May 2012, the Broadcasting Council canceled the operating permit of the Serbian-owned Pink 15 TV after workers went eight months without wages.

Access to the internet is restricted only by cost and infrastructural obstacles, with around 57 percent of the population accessing the medium in 2012, according to Internet World Stats. Use of online social media is increasing, and news sites and blogs have expanded, but most news content reportedly originates in traditional media.

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