



FREEDOM HOUSE

[Print](#)

Freedom Of The Press - Belgium (2011)

Status: Free
Legal Environment: 3
Political Environment: 4
Economic Environment: 5
Total Score: 12

Freedom of the press is safeguarded under articles 19 and 25 of the Belgian constitution, and the rights of the press are generally respected in practice. The law prohibits hate speech, including Holocaust denial, which carries a maximum sentence of one year's imprisonment. Roeland Raes questioned the authenticity of Anne Frank's diary in 2001 and was charged with Holocaust denial in September 2010. Journalistic sources are protected under a 2005 law, which also protects journalists from search and seizure. In March 2010, police raided the Roj TV headquarters in Denderleeuw under suspicion of financial fraud and of disseminating propaganda for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). More than 10 members were detained, including the station director and three journalists. In September 2010, the Belgian computer crime unit led raids in 12 countries, which resulted in the arrest of 10 people and the closure of 48 servers that were suspected of illegally distributing copyrighted material online.

Media ownership is highly concentrated, and a small number of media groups own the major newspapers. Ownership and distribution are distinct in Belgium's two regions, Flanders and Wallonia. Three major companies dominate newspaper distribution in Flanders, and two in Wallonia. The two regions have completely autonomous public broadcasters, one that broadcasts in French and the other in Flemish; each also has its own domestic and international broadcasting network. While this is not often an issue, in May 2010 the French language public broadcaster cancelled the electoral political debate that it was supposed to broadcast with its Flemish language counterpart. The Belgian media felt the effects of the 2008 financial crisis, so much so that in March 2009, the minister of media in Flanders called a states assembly and invited all media actors to discuss the severity of the situation. There are no government restrictions on the use of the internet, and 79.26 percent of the population had access in 2010.