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Freedom Of The Press - Czech Republic (2011)

Status: Free
Legal Environment: 4
Political Environment: 8
Economic Environment: 7
Total Score: 19

Freedom of the press is constitutionally guaranteed, though the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms prohibits speech that might infringe on national security, individual rights, public health, or morality, or that may evoke hatred based on race, ethnicity, or national origin. Libel remains a criminal offense, but prosecutions are rare. The Press Law provides a sound basis for independent journalism, and media protections have been bolstered by Constitutional Court and other institutional rulings. According to the Institute for the Protection of Journalists, members of the Czech Syndicate of Journalists—the largest professional organization of journalists in the country—are “often consulted on media matters by judges.”

No major media-related legislative changes were introduced until the final days of 2010, when an amendment was submitted to relax certain aspects of the controversial 2009 “muzzle law.” The law in question banned the publication of information gained from police wiretaps, as well as information about individuals involved in criminal acts (both victims and perpetrators). Violators of these terms were subject to exorbitant fines, and up to five years’ imprisonment. With the passage of the amendment, Czech media will resume the right to report information related to official corruption, and fines for violating the 2009 law will be reduced.

National print media consist of a variety of daily newspapers, weeklies, and magazines representing diverse points of view, although the economic crisis has perhaps increased the temptation to treat major advertisers favorably. Foreign corporations own a number of these publications, including most Czech dailies. Media-related legislation includes minimal ownership restrictions, and none on foreign ownership. Most electronic media outlets are also privately owned, and they generally convey diverse views without fear of government or partisan pressure. Media advocates have expressed concern that while public media are widely respected, their financial sustainability is being undermined by tighter control of public funds and increasing restrictions on advertising. Observers also point to declining depth and quality of reporting, with weak accountability among the tabloids in particular. The internet continues to develop rapidly, with 69 percent of the population enjoying regular and unrestricted access in 2010.