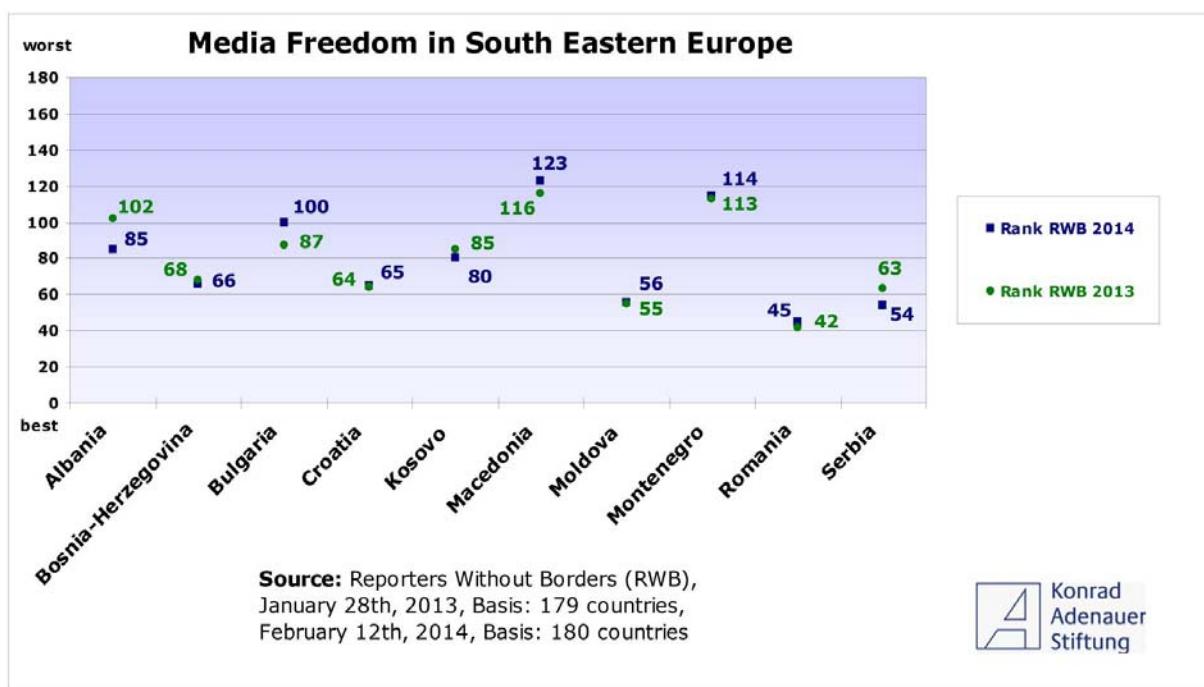


## South Eastern Europe in Press Freedom Ranking: Albania thrives, situation in Bulgaria deteriorates

Spahr: "Media freedom is more than absence of political pressure"

The latest ranking by "Reporters Without Borders" (RWB) shows both positive and negative developments in South Eastern Europe. The country making best progress is Albania. The strongest deterioration of media freedom was observed in Bulgaria. Romania achieved the overall best score in the region (rank 45 of 180 worldwide), Macedonia the worst (123).

After years of decline in media freedom, individual countries in South Eastern Europe have been making observable progress again. This is shown by the recent freedom of the press ranking of "Reporters Without Borders". Especially Albania has witnessed improvements – it moved up from rank 102 to 85 of all countries analysed. RWB emphasised that by law media ownership is becoming more transparent and public broadcasting more independent. Furthermore, media could access public information more easily. Large improvements have also been observed in Serbia and Kosovo.



Bulgaria, on the other hand, increasingly worries the experts: its rating dropped from rank 87 to 100. According to the report, Bulgaria continues to be the worst performing EU country. Eight years ago the country still ranked

35<sup>th</sup>. "Reporters Without Borders" criticises that journalists were repeatedly victims of police violence during the 2013 anti-government protests. The NGO also mentions the setting fire to two investigative journalists' cars. Other media experts and foreign observers have moreover detected an increasing concentration of print media ownership. Additionally, a press law is lacking, while self-regulation is deficient.

Factors like media pluralism, legislation and transparency in the media sector are taken into account by RWB and other rankings. "Media freedom is more than the absence of direct political pressure," explains Christian Spahr, director of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Media Program South East Europe. "The Balkan countries have constitutional guarantees for media freedom, but practice is still lagging behind. Politicians and media owners have a common responsibility to improve the freedom of the press. This holds especially true for EU candidate countries, where improvements in media freedom and pluralism are vital. Without free media, democracy is not possible."

RWB recognises Macedonia as the worst performing country in South Eastern Europe (rank 123). The organisation criticises the prison sentence of four and a half years for a journalist, who allegedly revealed the name of a protected witness in a murder case. Also mentioned is the case of a journalist who was arrested under an international arrest warrant for "espionage".

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