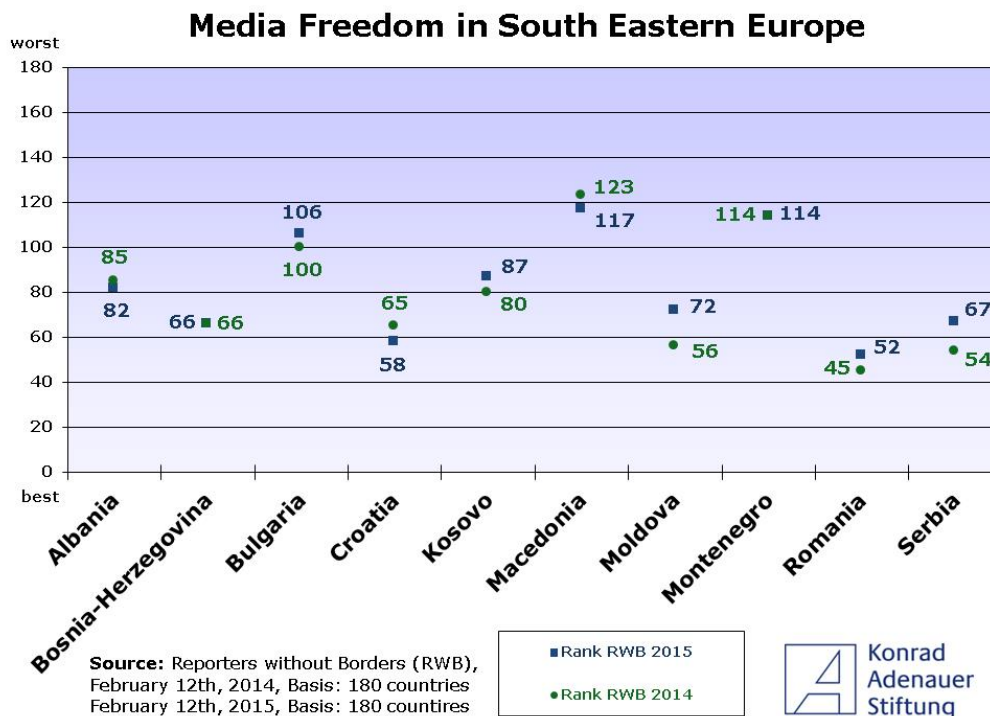


South East Europe in new press freedom ranking: Croatia enhances its position, Moldova deteriorates

Spahr: "In many countries, media suffer from crisis of confidence"

According to the latest ranking by the non-governmental organisation "Reporters Without Borders" (RWB), South East Europe lacks progress in terms of media freedom. The best development in 2014 was identified in Croatia. The strongest deterioration of media freedom was observed in the Republic of Moldova. Among the Balkan countries, Romania achieved the overall best score (52 of 180 worldwide) and Macedonia the worst (117).

Comparing the results with last year's report, media freedom in the most countries of South East Europe is declining. Only three countries indicate progress. The development of the situation in Croatia is evaluated as positive – it soared from last year's rank 65 to rank 58 in 2015. One main reason for the progress is Croatia's accession to the European Union (EU) and the harmonisation of the national legislation with EU standards. The situation of Albanian media improved slightly as well.



In contrast, press freedom in Bulgaria deteriorates: Its rating dropped from rank 100 to 106 and the country remains the worst performing EU member. Furthermore, the Bulgarian media suffer from a deep crisis of confidence. A recent study of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) revealed that only every sixth Bulgarian believes in the independence of media.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung - Media Program South East Europe

Head: Christian Spahr

19 Yanko Sakazov Blvd., 1st floor, apt. 2, 1504 Sofia, Bulgaria

Telephone: +359 2 94249-71, Telefax: +359 2 94249-79

E-Mail: christian.spahr@kas.de, Web: www.kas.de/medien-europa/en



Another KAS survey showed that more than 50 percent of Bulgarian journalists feel pressured by politics and economy.

Although Macedonia performed slightly better than in last years' rating, it remains the South East European country with the poorest rank (117). The imprisonment of the journalist Tomislav Kezarovski was criticised by RWB and several other NGOs as an attack on the media freedom in the country.

"In some of the South East European countries, real media freedom exists only on paper", says Christian Spahr, head of the KAS Media Program South East Europe. "This is not only caused by the political situation, but also by the conditions within the media sector. In practice, too many factors inhibit the independent work of journalists. The implementation of existing laws and the efficiency of self-regulation need to be improved. Media stakeholders need to understand that a serious crisis of confidence in the media exists in many countries of the region. Not only journalists and media owners are affected by this, also politicians who want to reach the public with the help of the media."

Germany is rated on rank 12, Austria on rank 7 and Switzerland on rank 20.

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