
FREE PRESS IN KOSOVO IMPROVES, SAYS REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

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Jumping from 78th to 75th place out of 180 countries, Kosovo is on the right track for media and information freedom, says Reporters Without Borders, RWB, in their 2019 Press Freedom Index that was published on Thursday.

The report, which evaluates the level of media freedom in countries across the world, highlights areas of improvement for Kosovos media landscape, raising concerns for the freedom of Kosovo Serb journalists in the country.

However, the international media freedom watchdog praised the Kosovo press and the public for their strong reactions to political developments over the last 12 months.

The political situation in Kosovo became increasingly tense and unstable in 2018 as a result of neighboring Serbias rapprochement with the European Union, which left Kosovos government isolated diplomatically, RWBs country report on Kosovo reads. The governments lack of transparency on the issue of Europe elicited strong reactions from the Kosovar public and journalists.

Furthermore, Reporters Without Borders praised the Kosovo media landscape for its pluralism.

Many media outlets have owners with no direct political links, which results in more diverse editorial policies and opinions, the report reads.

However, the report states that some journalists in Kosovo remain at risk.

The media outlets of the Serbian minority in Kosovo are often the targets of verbal attacks, cyber-harassment and campaigns by pro-government media, RWB stated in their report. Kosovos ethnic divisions are the source of these disturbing problems.

Reporters Without Borders criticized President Hashim Thaci and the Kosovo government, highlighting the fact that government called critical journalists traitors or Serbian sympathisers.

In 2016, Kosovo was in 90th place on the Press Freedom Index. In 2019, that spot now belongs to Serbia, who dropped 14 places in just one year, from 76th to 90th.

Reporters Without Borders attributed Serbias drop in the rankings to the government of Serbian President Aleksander Vucics relationship to the press, stating that Serbia has become a place where practicing journalism is neither safe nor supported by the state.

Elsewhere in the Balkans, media freedom has been decreasing, said RWB. Montenegro, Albania, Croatia, Romania, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina all dropped in the rankings. The biggest drop in press freedom after Serbia is Albania, moving down seven places to 82nd on the index.

The biggest improvement in press freedom in the Western Balkans was in North Macedonia, which climbed 14 places from 109th to 95th.

Despite an ingrained tendency from senior government officials in North Macedonia to threaten and insult journalists, said RWB, journalists safety improved markedly. The number of attacks on journalists in 2018 was just one third of the previous years figure.

Greece and Croatia also climb the ranks of the Press Freedom Index in 2019. Greece jumped from 74th to 65th place, and Croatia from 69th to 64th.

In Bulgaria, no change in ranking was recorded by RWB in 2019. However, press freedom in the country remains the worst in the region, with Bulgaria remaining at 111th place.

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