

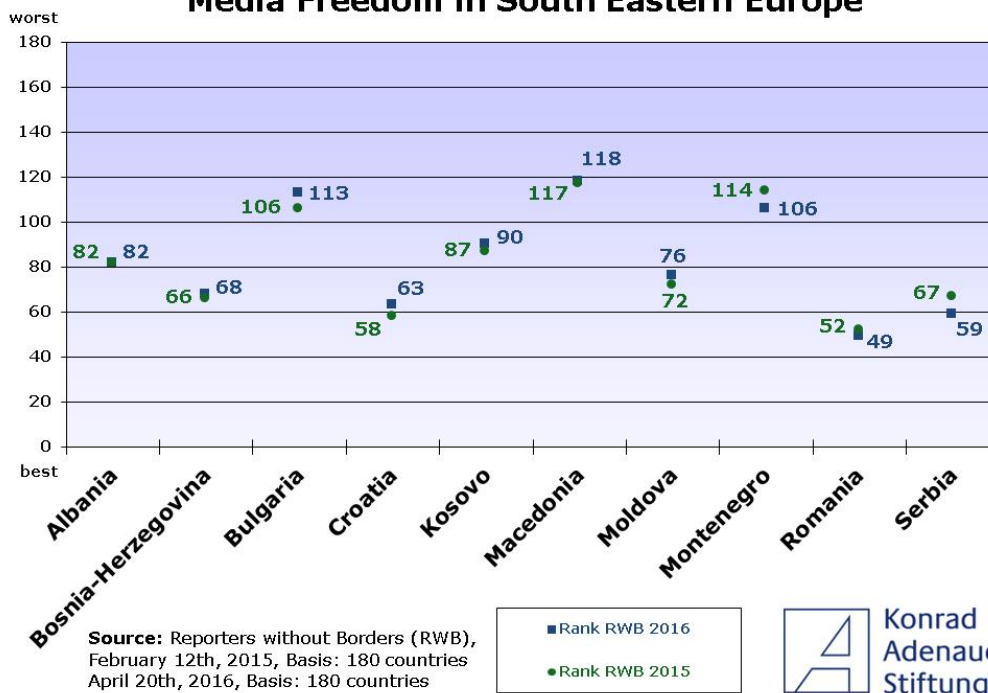
## New press freedom ranking: Setback instead of progress in South East Europe

Spahr: "EU enlargement is only successful with free reporting"

In six South East European countries, media freedom is under stronger pressure than before. Only three countries made progress; one country has kept its rank: This is the result of the press freedom ranking of the NGO "Reporters Without Borders" (RWB). Romania and Serbia achieved the best scores (ranks 49 and 59 out of 180 countries). Macedonia and Bulgaria are the worst performing countries (rank 118 and 113), according to RWB.

Thereby the negative trend in the Balkan region continues. "Despite an advancing integration into EU structures, the media landscapes of South East Europe are still dealing with serious obstacles to achieve media freedom and pluralism," says the Head of the KAS Media Program South East Europe, Christian Spahr. "Although journalists are officially independent, they are put under pressure not only by political stakeholders, but also by owners of media outlets and advertisers. There are only few widely recognised standards in professional reporting, and public support for media freedom is low."

Media Freedom in South Eastern Europe





According to Spahr, the ranking of Reporters Without Borders could not reflect in all details the media-related developments in every single country. However, it is an important indicator for the overall conditions. "As there is a long-term negative trend, politicians and media representatives need to react."

According to the KAS Media Program South East Europe, the following issues in media freedom and pluralism are typical for transformation countries in the region:

1. Tendencies of monopolisation in individual media sectors
2. Non-transparent ownership structures and sources of funds of media
3. State and public agencies are the biggest advertisers, especially in print media
4. Political interests prevail for media owners
5. Participation of media in political campaigns
6. Partially unequal access to distribution networks
7. Insufficient legal guaranties for media freedom
8. Weak self-regulation and lobbying of media representatives
9. Inadequate working conditions for journalists
10. Missing consensus amongst media representatives about ethical standards

The interaction of these factors causes that even some EU countries achieve low ranks. For example Bulgaria is ranked between the Maldives and Zambia, according to RWB. "Critical journalists in Bulgaria are not systematically oppressed, but poor conditions within the media sector massively limit their freedom," states Spahr.

In Bulgaria as well as in Romania, citizens' trust in the independence of media is considerably low. This is also shown by a KAS survey. Only 12 percent of Bulgarians and only 28 percent of Romanians believe that the media in their country are independent (results from 2016 and 2015).

According to another KAS study, every second journalist in Bulgaria experiences pressure from political and economic stakeholders. Every third media representative says that in his media outlet it is not allowed to report about certain topics, persons and companies, or only in a biased way.

"Political stability is an important factor for the EU enlargement. However, societal values like freedom of expression or media pluralism have to be firmly established as well," says Christian Spahr. "If the EU wants to successfully continue its enlargement, it needs to consider more strongly the implementation of these democratic values."

Germany is rated on rank 16, Austria on rank 11 and Switzerland on rank 7 in the list of RWB.

For more information visit: [www.kas.de/medien-europa](http://www.kas.de/medien-europa)