

Europe Area



Central Asia, Turkey and the Ukraine cause concern, while the European model weakens.

Already denounced in the 2009 edition of the World Press Freedom Index, the often liberticidal legislative activity of certain European Union Member States, and the new upsurge in anti-press proceedings brought by political leaders, are weakening the European freedom of expression model and, in so doing, are undermining its external policy and the universal impact of its values. **Ireland** is still punishing blasphemy with a EUR 25,000 fine. **Romania** now considers the media a threat to national security and plans to legally censor its activities. In **Italy**, where ten or so journalists still live under police protection, only an unprecedented national media mobilisation's tenacity helped to defeat a bill aimed at prohibiting the publication of the content of telephone call intercepts, one of the main sources used in judicial and investigative journalism. Although **the United Kingdom** still benefits from a free and high-quality media, its defamation laws offer grounds for assembly-line trials brought by censors of every sort. Not only would this be counter-productive, but all such actions would complicate the mission of those who, outside of the EU, are trying to secure the decriminalisation of press offences.

The heads of European governments, like their parliamentary colleagues, are gaining notoriety for their increasingly systematic use of proceedings against the news media and its journalists. The latter have to endure the insults which political leaders allow themselves to indulge in ever more frequently in their statements, following, in such matters, the deplorable example of press freedom predators, and overlooking the moral obligations inherent in their pu-

blic office. In **Slovenia**, the former Prime Minister is thus competing with Silvio Berlusconi and Robert Fico by demanding no less than 1.5 million euros from a journalist who denounced irregularities tainting certain procurement contracts. In France, the presidential majority could not find words harsh enough to label journalists who inquired into the Woerth/Bettencourt affair. But the prize for political meddling goes to the Greek government which, in a manner not unlike most of the government censors, went so far as to request its German counterpart to apologise for the Greek economic crisis headline used by the magazine Stern.

Among the EU-27 countries whose rankings declined the most, **Bulgaria** continues its slide and has ended up, along with **Greece**, in 70th place – the worst position held by EU member countries. **France** (44th) and **Italy** (49th), still dealing with some major interference in media activity by their political leaders, confirmed their status as the “dunces” of the EU's founding countries. Although we may welcome with cautious relief the ebbing ETA attacks against the media in **Spain** (39th), we cannot help but be concerned by the court verdict of 21 months in prison and the prohibition to exercise their profession brought against **Daniel Anido**, director of the private radio station *Cadena SER*, and **Rodolfo Irigo**, the news director of the same radio network. In **Denmark** (11th) as well as **Sweden** (1st), press freedom is faring well, but murder attempts against cartoonists Kurt Westergaard and Lars Vilks are opening a door to self-censorship, which until now had been negligible, in a climate of rising extremism and nationalism. **Slovakia** (35th), which is just emerging from former Prime Minister Robert Fico's tumultuous era, now merits watching, while among the Baltic States, **Latvia** (30th) is experiencing an odd return to violence and cen-

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sorship in an electoral period. Although weakened, the European Union remains one of the rare areas in which the media can exist under acceptable conditions. Naturally, constant vigilance is needed to ensure that this weakening can be freely fought. The European Parliament, though legitimately very active internationally in such issues, has shown the full limits of its exercise of power in refusing, by one vote, in plenary session, to address the subject of press freedom in Italy.

The Balkan Peninsula is still a concern and has recorded major changes. **Montenegro** (-27), **Macedonia** (-34), **Serbia** (-23) and **Kosovo** (-17) constitute the most substantial losses. Although the legislative reforms required for accession to the EU have been adopted in most Balkan countries, their implementation is still in the embryonic – if not non-existent – stage. Control of the public and private media by the calculated use of institutional advertising budgets and the collusion between political and judicial circles is making the work of journalists increasingly difficult. In a precarious situation, caught in a vice between the violence of ultranationalist groups and authorities who have not yet rid themselves of old reflexes from the Communist era, an increasing portion of journalists are settling for a calculated self-censorship or a mercenary journalism which pays better, but gradually ruins the profession's credibility. Blighted by mafioso activities which, every year, strengthen their financial stranglehold on the media sector, independent publications are waging an ongoing battle which deserves more sustained attention from European neighbours.

At Europe's doors, **Turkey** and **Ukraine** are experiencing historically low rankings, the former (138th) being separated from Russia's position (140th) only by **Ethiopia** (139th). These declines can be explained, as far as Turkey is concerned, by the frenzied proliferation of lawsuits, incarcerations, and court sentencing targeting journalists. Among them, there are many media outlets and professionals which are either Kurd or are covering the Kurd issue. **Ukraine** is paying the price of the

multiple press freedom violations which have broadsided the country since February 2010 and Viktor Yanukovich's election as Head of State. These violations initially met with indifference by the local authorities. Worse still, censorship has signalled its return, particularly in the audiovisual sector, and serious conflicts of interest are menacing Ukraine's media pluralism.

Russia now occupies a position (140th) more like it had in previous years, with the exception of 2009, which was marred by the murder of several journalists and human rights activists. Nonetheless, the country has recorded no improvement. The system remains as tightly controlled as ever, and impunity reigns unchallenged in cases of violence against journalists.

Central Asia's prospects are dismal. In addition to **Turkmenistan**, which – in the 176th place – is still one of the worst governments in the world in terms of freedom (only the state-owned media is tolerated there and even that is often "purged"), **Kazakhstan** (162nd) and **Kyrgyzstan** (159th) are ranked dangerously close to **Uzbekistan**, holding steady in the 163rd position. Almaty has gained notoriety through repeated attacks on the rights of the media and journalists in the very year in which he presides over the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), when the country is bound to be subjected to particularly close scrutiny. Despite repeated calls for remedying problems of all kinds which are hampering media activity, authorities have not deemed it necessary to do so, nor to release Ramazan Eserguepov, detained in prison for political reasons. Kazakhstan's neighbouring country, Kyrgyzstan joined this descent into the depths of the Index, to the discredit of April's change of power and June's inter-ethnic conflicts. As for Uzbekistan, the core of independent journalists who refuse to give up is now in the judicial authorities' line of fire. Documentary film-makers, like trusted journalists, have also been victims of the regime's paranoia. All of these developments have only been met with indifference on the part of the European States, too concerned about energy security to protest scan-

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dalous practices which violate every international commitment made by Central Asian governments.

Lastly, the situation is dreary and stable in **Belarus**, torn between two allegiances – one to Moscow and the other to the EU

– and caught up in a delicate balancing act between these two powers. The regime makes no concession to civil society and continues, as the December presidential elections approach, to put pressure on the country's few remaining independent media outlets.

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Europe falls from its pedestal, no respite in the dictatorships

“Our latest world press freedom index contains welcome surprises, highlights sombre realities and confirms certain trends,” Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Jean-François Julliard said as his organisation issued its ninth annual index today. “More than ever before, we see that economic development, institutional reform and respect for fundamental rights do not necessarily go hand in hand. The defence of media freedom continues to be a battle, a battle of vigilance in the democracies of old Europe and a battle against oppression and injustice in the totalitarian regimes still scattered across the globe.

“We must salute the engines of press freedom, with Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland at their head. We must also pay homage to the human rights activists, journalists and bloggers throughout the world who bravely defend the right to speak out. Their fate is our constant concern. We reiterate our call for the release of Liu Xiaobo, the symbol of the pressure for free speech building up in China, which censorship for the time being is still managing to contain. And we warn the Chinese authorities against taking a road from which there is no way out.

“It is disturbing to see several European Union member countries continuing to fall in the index. If it does not pull itself together, the European Union risks losing its position as world leader in respect for human rights. And if that were to happen, how could it be convincing when it asked authoritarian regimes to make improvements? There is an urgent need for the European countries to recover their exemplary status.

“We are also worried by the harsher line being taken by governments at the other end of the index. Rwanda, Yemen and Syria have

joined Burma and North Korea in the group of the world’s most repressive countries towards journalists. This does not bode well for 2011. Unfortunately, the trend in the most authoritarian countries is not one of improvement.”

European Union loses its leadership status

Reporters Without Borders has repeatedly expressed its concern about the deteriorating press freedom situation in the European Union and the 2010 index confirms this trend. Thirteen of the EU’s 27 members are in the top 20 but some of the other 14 are very low in the ranking. Italy is 49th, Romania is 52nd and Greece and Bulgaria are tied at 70th. The European Union is not a homogenous whole as regards media freedom. On the contrary, the gap between good and bad performers continues to widen.

There has been no progress in several countries where Reporters Without Borders pointed out problems. They include, above all, France and Italy, where events of the past year – violation of the protection of journalists’ sources, the continuing concentration of media ownership, displays of contempt and impatience on the part of government officials towards journalists and their work, and judicial summonses – have confirmed their inability to reverse this trend.

Northern Europe still at the top

Several countries share first place in the index again. This year it is Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. They have all previously held this honour since the index was created in 2002. Norway and Iceland have always been among the countries sharing first position except in 2006 (Norway) and 2009 (Iceland).

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These six countries set an example in the way they respect journalists and news media and protect them from judicial abuse.

They even continue to progress. Iceland, for example, is considering an exemplary bill, the Icelandic Modern Media Initiative (IMMI), that would provide a unique level of protection for the media. Sweden distinguishes itself by its Press Freedom Act, which has helped to create a particularly favourable climate for the work of journalists, by the strength of its institutions and by its respect for all those sectors of society including the media whose role in a democracy is to question and challenge those in positions of power.

Ten countries where it is not good to be a journalist

In recent years, Reporters Without Borders drew particular attention to the three countries that were always in the last three positions – Eritrea, North Korea and Turkmenistan. This year, a bigger group of ten countries – marked by persecution of the media and a complete lack of news and information – are clumped together at the bottom. The press freedom situation keeps on deteriorating in these countries and it is getting harder to say which is worse than the other. The difference between the scores of the “best” and worst of the last 10 countries was only 24.5 points this year. It was 37.5 points in 2009 and 43.25 points in 2007.

It is worth noting that, for the first time since the start of the index in 2002, Cuba is not one of the 10 last countries. This is due above all to the release of 14 journalists and 22 activists in the course of the past summer. But the situation on the ground has not changed significantly. Political dissidents and independent journalists still have to deal with censorship and repression on a daily basis.

Freedom is not allowed any space in Burma, where a parliamentary election is due to be held next month, and the rare attempts to provide news or information are met with imprisonment and forced labour.

Finally, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Mexico, countries either openly at war or in a civil war or some other kind of internal

conflict, we see a situation of permanent chaos and a culture of violence and impunity taking root in which the press has become a favourite target. These are among the most dangerous countries in the world, and the belligerents there pick directly on reporters such as French TV journalists Stéphane Taponier and Hervé Ghesquière, who have been held hostage in Afghanistan for the past 300 days.

Economic growth does not mean press freedom

The BRICs – Brazil, Russia, India and China – may all be at a roughly similar stage of economic development but the 2010 index highlights major differences in the press freedom situation in these countries. Thanks to favourable legislative changes, Brazil (58th) has risen 12 places in the past year, while India has fallen 17 places to 122nd. Russia, which had a particularly deadly preceding year, is still poorly placed at 140th. Despite an astonishingly vibrant and active blogosphere, China still censors and jails dissidents and continues to languish in 171st place.

These four countries now shoulder the responsibilities of the emerging powers and must fulfil their obligations as regards fundamental rights.

Heavy falls

The Philippines, Ukraine, Greece and Kyrgyzstan all fell sharply in this year's index. In the Philippines this was due to the massacre of around 30 journalists by a local baron, in Ukraine to the slow and steady deterioration in press freedom since Viktor Yanukovich's election as president in February, in Greece to political unrest and physical attacks on several journalists, and in Kyrgyzstan to the ethnic hatred campaign that accompanied the political turmoil.

The changes are unfortunately often deceptive. Some countries have risen sharply in the index this year but in fact all they have done is recover their traditional position after a particularly difficult if not disastrous 2009. This is the case with Gabon, which rose 22 places, South Korea (+27) and Guinea-Bissau (+25).

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World Press Freedom Index 2010

The rankings

Rank	Country	Note	
1	Finland	0,00	=
-	Iceland	0,00	↑
-	Netherlands	0,00	↑
-	Norway	0,00	=
-	Sweden	0,00	=
-	Switzerland	0,00	↑
7	Austria	0,50	↑
8	New Zealand	1,50	↑
9	Estonia	2,00	↓
-	Ireland	2,00	↓
11	Denmark	2,50	↓↓
-	Japan	2,50	↑
-	Lithuania	2,50	↓
14	Belgium	4,00	↓
-	Luxembourg	4,00	↑
-	Malta	4,00	↓
17	Germany	4,25	↑
18	Australia	5,38	↓
19	United Kingdom	6,00	↑
20	United States of America	6,75	=
21	Canada	7,00	↓
-	Namibia	7,00	↑↑
23	Czech Republic	7,50	↑
-	Hungary	7,50	↑
25	Jamaica	7,67	↓
26	Cape Verde	8,00	↑↑
-	Ghana	8,00	↑
-	Mali	8,00	↑
29	Costa Rica	8,08	↑
30	Latvia	8,50	↓↓
-	Trinidad and Tobago	8,50	↓
32	Poland	8,88	↑
33	Chile	10,50	↑
34	Hong-Kong	10,75	↑↑
35	Slovakia	11,50	↑
-	Surinam	11,50	↑

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Rank	Country	Note	
37	Uruguay	11,75	↓
38	South Africa	12,00	↓
39	Spain	12,25	↑
40	Portugal	12,36	↓↓
41	Tanzania	13,00	↑↑
42	Papua New Guinea	13,33	↑↑
-	South Korea	13,33	↑↑
44	France	13,38	↓
45	Cyprus	13,40	↓↓
46	Slovenia	13,44	↓
47	Bosnia and Herzegovina	13,50	↓
48	Taiwan	14,50	↑↑
49	Burkina Faso	15,00	↑
-	Italy	15,00	=
51	El Salvador	15,83	↑↑
52	Maldives	16,00	↓
-	Romania	16,00	↓
54	Paraguay	16,25	=
55	Argentina	16,35	↓
56	Haiti	16,38	↑
57	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States	16,50	nc
58	Brazil	16,60	↑↑
59	Guyana	16,63	↓↓
60	Togo	17,00	↑
61	Cyprus (North)	17,25	↓↓
62	Botswana	17,50	=
-	Croatia	17,50	↑↑
64	Bhutan	17,75	↑
65	Mauritius	18,00	↓↓
-	Seychelles	18,00	↑
67	Guinea-Bissau	18,25	↑↑
68	Macedonia	18,40	↓↓
69	Central African Republic	18,50	↑↑
70	Benin	19,00	↑
-	Bulgaria	19,00	↓
-	Comoros	19,00	↑↑
-	Greece	19,00	↓↓
-	Kenya	19,00	↑↑
75	Moldova	19,13	↑↑
76	Mongolia	19,42	↑↑
77	Guatemala	20,25	↑↑
78	Lebanon	20,50	↓↓
79	Malawi	21,00	↓↓
80	Albania	21,50	↑

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Rank	Country	Note	
81	Panama	21,83	↓↓
82	Zambia	22,00	↑↑
83	Nicaragua	22,33	↓
84	Liberia	22,50	↓↓
85	Serbia	23,00	↓↓
86	Israel (Israeli territory)	23,25	↑
87	Kuwait	23,75	↓↓
-	Tonga	23,75	↕
-	United Arab Emirates	23,75	↓
90	Lesotho	24,00	↑
91	Sierra Leone	24,25	↑↑
92	Kosovo	24,83	↓↓
93	Senegal	25,00	↓
-	Timor-Leste	25,00	↓↓
95	Mauritania	25,38	↑
96	Uganda	25,50	↓↓
97	Dominican Republic	26,13	↑
98	Mozambique	26,50	↓↓
99	Georgia	27,00	↓↓
-	United States of America (extra-territorial)	27,00	↑
101	Armenia	27,50	↑↑
-	Ecuador	27,50	↓↓
103	Bolivia	28,13	↓
104	Angola	28,50	↑↑
-	Montenegro	28,50	↓↓
-	Niger	28,50	↑↑
107	Gabon	28,75	↑↑
108	Burundi	28,88	↓
109	Peru	30,00	↓↓
110	Djibouti	30,50	=
111	Samoa	33,00	↕
112	Chad	33,17	↑↑
113	Guinea	33,50	↓↓
114	Congo	33,60	↑
115	Tajikistan	34,50	↓
116	Madagascar	34,88	↑↑
117	Indonesia	35,83	↓↓
118	Côte d'Ivoire	36,00	↓↓
119	Nepal	36,38	↓
120	Jordan	37,00	↓
121	Qatar	38,00	↓↓
122	India	38,75	↓↓
123	Zimbabwe	39,50	↑↑
124	Oman	40,25	↓↓

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Rank	Country	Note	
125	Gambia	40,50	↑↑
126	Bangladesh	42,50	↓
127	Egypt	43,33	↑↑
128	Cambodia	43,83	↓↓
129	Cameroon	44,30	↓↓
130	Iraq	45,58	↑↑
131	Ukraine	46,83	↓↓
132	Israel (extra-territorial)	47,00	↑↑
133	Algeria	47,33	↑
-	Venezuela	47,33	↓
135	Morocco	47,40	↓
136	Mexico	47,50	↑
-	Singapore	47,50	↓
138	Turkey	49,25	↓↓
139	Ethiopia	49,38	↑
140	Russia	49,90	↑↑
141	Malaysia	50,75	↓↓
142	Brunei	51,00	↑↑
143	Honduras	51,13	↓↓
144	Bahrein	51,38	↓↓
145	Colombia	51,50	↓↓
-	Nigeria	51,50	↓↓
147	Afghanistan	51,67	↑
148	Democratic Republic of Congo	51,83	↓
149	Fiji	52,75	↑
150	Palestinian Territories	56,13	↑↑
151	Pakistan	56,17	↑
152	Azerbaijan	56,38	↓
153	Thailand	56,83	↓↓
154	Belarus	57,00	↓
155	Swaziland	57,50	↓↓
156	Philippines	60,00	↓↓
157	Saudi Arabia	61,50	↑
158	Sri Lanka	62,50	↑
159	Kyrgyzstan	63,00	↓↓
160	Libya	63,50	↓
161	Somalia	66,00	↑
162	Kazakhstan	68,50	↓↓
163	Uzbekistan	71,50	↓
164	Tunisia	72,50	↓↓
165	Vietnam	75,75	↑
166	Cuba	78,00	↑
167	Equatorial Guinea	79,00	↓
168	Laos	80,50	↑
169	Rwanda	81,00	↓↓

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Rank	Country	Note	
170	Yemen	82,13	↓
171	China	84,67	↓
172	Sudan	85,33	↓↓
173	Syria	91,50	↓
174	Burma	94,50	↓
175	Iran	94,56	↓
176	Turkmenistan	95,33	↓
177	North Korea	104,75	↓
178	Eritrea	105,00	↓

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