

Resignation or resistance, Bulgaria's embattled press hesitates

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by Reporters Without Borders

[Reporters Without Borders](#) today published a report on press freedom in Bulgaria, where investigative journalism and media pluralism are seriously threatened by organised crime and by different forms of pressure from political and business quarters.

Bulgaria is struggling to meet its commitments to its European partners, Reporters Without Borders said today in a report on a fact-finding visit two years after the country joined the European Union in January 2007. The hopes of democratisation born at the start of the 1990s have not all evaporated but their realisation depends on major reforms that are slow in coming.

"Press freedom is not progressing in Bulgaria," the organisation said. "Organised crime groups that have understood the advantages that can be derived from controlling news and information have extended their ascendancy over the media. The grey economy's hold over the press is now threatening news diversity and the survival of investigative journalism. We are disturbed by the situation we found on our visit to Sofia."

Reporters Without Borders continued : "Some journalists are resigned to censoring themselves, while others continue to actively resist business and political pressure. But Georgy Stoev's murder last April and a brutal attack on Ognyan Stefanov in September have served as reminders of the risks run by those who refuse to let the press be transformed into nothing more than a communication tool in the service of private interests."

The Bulgarian press is not the only one in the European Union to be subjected to violence and pressure from organised crime and paramilitary groups. Around 10 journalists are still receiving police protection in Italy. Others are being protected in Denmark and France while, in Spain, ETA keeps up the pressure on journalists who criticise its terrorism and insist on the right to media diversity.

"The fight against these organised crime groups and their ability to undermine the press must, more than ever, be tackled at the European level and must be a priority commitment for the politicians participating in the European elections in June," Reporters Without Borders secretary-general Jean-Francois Julliard added.

As the report says, Bulgaria continues to be one of the priorities for Reporters Without Borders in the European Union. The organisation urges European institutions and news media to maintain an interest in Bulgaria and to extend their support for the country, as this would be of great help in reinforcing the effectiveness of its press freedom NGOs and its news media.

Bulgaria was ranked 59th out of 173 countries in the latest Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

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