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# MONTENEGRO

In 2016, Montenegro was marked by political instability, a government crisis, and a parliamentary election. Economic growth at 3 percent was promising but high public debt and 19 percent unemployment still dog the country's recovery. The European Union (EU) and NATO accession process continue to unfold: Montenegro has opened 24 out of the 35 Accession Negotiation Chapters required for admission to the EU and it is quite realistic to expect that next year Montenegro will be the 29th NATO member-state. While two-thirds of citizens support accession to the EU and a narrow majority also in favor of joining NATO, Serbian nationalists, bolstered by strong Russian support, oppose the process along with the influential Serbian Orthodox Church.

Conflict within the ruling coalition, between the dominant political party (the Democratic Party of Socialists, or DPS) and its long-standing ally (the Socialist Democratic Party) resulted in an election on October 16. The DPS won again and, with allies from minority parties, the ruling bloc won 42 seats, while the opposition got 39. The election boasted a 73-percent voter turnout but also saw the arrest of 20 Serbian nationals. They were suspected of preparing a post-election terrorist attack in Montenegrin capital of Podgorica, abetted by two Russian nationals. Subsequently, the opposition still has not conceded the election, although a majority of local electoral observers and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said that the election was fair, democratic, and free.

Negative trends in the media sector persist, prompting the EU to request improvement as part of Montenegro's advancement. Little, if any, progress has been achieved with regard to solving old cases of violence against media actors. Montenegro also has issues with public media independence, and clashes between private media and public media. The public media support Montenegrin authorities nearly unequivocally, and private media deal with a climate where outlets struggle for advertising dollars. Perennial confrontations between influential media are absent any self-regulation, demonstrated by huge gaps in journalistic professionalism and enforcement of the country's code of ethics. This past year, national public broadcaster Radio and Television of Montenegro (RTCG), was under immense political pressure. It resulted in the dismissal of both the television director and the general director. Politicization and destruction of the national public broadcaster is particularly problematic because, in line with the law, it is supposed to act on behalf of Montenegrin citizens and in the interest of a pluralistic and democratic society.

Despite the rise of digital platforms, media are experiencing an overall deterioration. Journalism remains a battleground, with deep divisions rooted in commercial and political problems. Few of Montenegro's 73 media outlets distance themselves from political polarization. It is reflected in a lack of professionalism, unacceptable political pressures, and a discrepancy between the expectations of citizens and information provided them by the media.

# MONTENEGRO at a glance

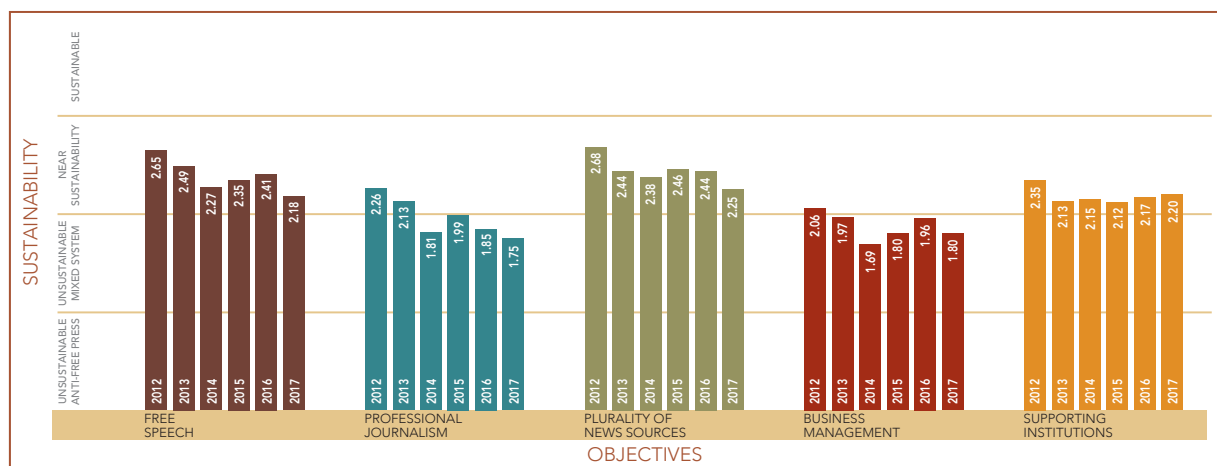
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 644,578 (July 2016 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **Capital city:** Podgorica
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Montenegrin: 45%, Serbian: 29%, Bosniak: 9%, Albanian: 5%, Serbo-Croat 2%, other 3.5%, unspecified 4% (2011 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Orthodox 72%, Muslim 19%, Catholic 3.4%, 1.2% atheist, 3% unspecified (2011 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Serbian 43%, Montenegrin (official) 37%, Bosnian 5.3%, Albanian 5%, Serbo-Croat 2%, other 3.5%, unspecified 4% (2011 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **GNI (2015-Atlas):** \$4.495 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- > **GNI per capita (2015-PPP):** \$15,860 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- > **Literacy rate:** 98.7%; male 99.5%, female 98% (2015 est., CIA World Factbook)
- > **President or top authority:** President Filip Vujanovic (since April, 2008)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active media outlets:** Print: 5 dailies, 3 weeklies, 30 monthlies; Radio Stations: 57; Television Stations: 18; Cable operators: 8 (2016, Agency for Electronic Media of Montenegro)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** *Vijesti* (circulation 3,300, private); *Dan*, (circulation: 8,500 private); *Dnevne Novine* (circulation: 2,800, private); *Pobjeda*, (circulation 3,000, state-owned); *Informer* (circulation 1,700, private), (2016, est., Direct Media Ltd.)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Mina News Agency (private)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** €9.5 - €10 million
- > **(2016, est.:** Direct Media Ltd.)
- > **Internet usage:** 418,000 (65% of population) (2015 est., CIA World Factbook)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: MONTENEGRO



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2017: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



### CHANGE SINCE 2016

▲ (increase greater than .10) □ (little or no change) ▼ (decrease greater than .10)

**Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):** Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

**Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):** Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

**Near Sustainability (2-3):** Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

**Sustainable (3-4):** Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

Scores for all years may be found online at <https://www.irex.org/msi>

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Montenegro Objective Score: 2.18

Media legislation in Montenegro has not changed significantly for years. Overall, regulations are aligned with international standards and the spirit of democratic and free societies. The only significant legislative move this year was an amendment to the Law on the National Public Broadcaster. The changes have set additional regulations on its legal and commercial status. Article four of the law states, "RTCG core activity is to provide broadcast services, i.e. production of radio, broadcast and multimedia programs; musical production; provision of audio, broadcast, and multimedia services; and electronic publication services as a form of public services."

Panelists nearly unanimously stated that media legislation in Montenegro is well drafted, and that the adopted norms contain international professional standards. As such, the panelists identified no major issues with the regulations in and of themselves. Media regulations do enable and protect free speech and, at the same time, represent a fair legal framework for the operations of media companies. With regard to print and electronic media, relevant media regulations are clearly founded on international experiences that enable free establishment and operation. However, problems occur in enforcement, which is clearly visible in daily media practice as well as in the number of limitations that result from political interferences. Duško Vuković, an independent media analyst and researcher, said, "Regulation is fair, especially bearing in mind

### LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

#### FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

the alignment with international legal frameworks. Actually, our journalists' community wrote the media law. However, for years, the national parliament has not performed regulation enforcement monitoring, so we have no clear insight into how media legislation is enforced."

Other laws include the regulation of website registrations, which journalist Pedrag Zečević of Portal Analitka said has contributed to reducing hate speech online. Aneta Spaić, a media law professor at the University of Montenegro said, "Montenegrin media regulation deserves high marks... On top of that, the Montenegrin constitution additionally emphasizes the supremacy of international legal documents, while media law relies on the European Convention on Human Rights. Furthermore, European case law plays an important role when it comes to media regulation enforcement in Montenegro, and consequently, the creation of a quality media framework."

Some of the issues in enforcement may emerge from interpretation. Vladan Mićunović, director of the Montenegrin Media Institute, pointed out, "Media laws were drafted in a different social and political climate. There was a kind of intimacy within media community. Today, we can't agree even on what constitutes a freedom of expression violation. National regulations are quite solid, but we have problems in the enforcement area."

While Montenegro has good and sustainable legislation, as in previous years, there are concerns regarding the discrepancy between media laws and journalistic practice. Panelists expressed nearly unanimously that journalists are under the influence of media owners or editors, external commercial interests, and political interests, and thus are prone to ignore controversial topics, despite public demand. Although 2016 had no significant cases of attacks on journalists, shadows linger from unsolved cases from the past and lead to self-censorship. Vuković said, "Journalists do not feel free to investigate cases of organized crime and corruption, and especially those where there is a potential link between people in power and criminal groups. Fear is additionally reinforced by the unresolved murder of the editor-in-chief of *Dan*, Duško Jovanović, as well as many other attacks on journalists and their property."

Panelists criticized law enforcement's inability to prevent violence against media actors. According to Mićunović, "There are still numerous cases of attacks on journalist and media companies. Government bodies are not trying hard enough to protect journalists and media companies' assets, although they are working to create a social environment in which attacks and perpetrators would be strongly condemned." The general impression is that the police and judiciary are still not efficient or competent enough to resolve cases of violence against journalists. In these cases, the rule of law must be applied fully in order to bring justice.

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Defamation is also not adequately addressed by the rule of law. In reference to slander and libel laws, Mićunović said, “Judges and courts do not apply, in a uniform manner, international case law in defamation cases. A standard in which the general public holds public officials accountable for their actions is still not fully accepted.” Jadranka Rabrenović, a journalist with *Pobjeda*, added a positive attribute of the legal system: “Internet providers and bloggers have never been held accountable for the contents they are publishing; for example, readers’ comments.”

Libel is not a criminal offense in Montenegro, with cases heard by civil court. However, this issue is controversial among the general public, and some believe civil courts enforce soft sanctions in cases of libel, enabling the abuse of the journalistic profession and discrediting free press. A debate on the criminalization of libel has emerged, with arguments that Montenegrin society is not advanced enough to decriminalize libel.

Individual journalists are not required to obtain a license or permit, and media companies are free to set their own rules and criteria to recruit journalists. There are no major issues in media licensing or in other general licensing. Any criticisms usually refer to complex procedures and the lengthy time needed to obtain appropriate licenses. Two national regulators, the Electronic Media Agency and the Electronic Communications Agency, manage licensing. Rabrenović said, “In Montenegro, only electronic [broadcast] media are submitted to licensing procedures. These licenses are issued by Electronic Media Agency, but their operations are regulated by law.”

One problem that panelists did identify is the regulations for Montenegrin media versus international media. Rajka Raičević, a journalist with *Dan* daily newspaper, explained, “In Montenegro, we have a paradoxical situation in that so-called imported media, such as *TV Pink*, *TV Prva*, and the daily *Informera* [all from Serbia] do not help improve the quality and objectivity of

reporting. Instead, they are at the service of the ruling political groups, and they have national frequency licenses. Regulators are to be blamed, because their decisions in most of the cases go in favor of these media companies and to the detriment of others.”

Dailies and periodicals all pay a tax rate of 7 percent, lower than most businesses. Some advocate for additional allowances for media entities, based on the social importance of media.

Marijana Bojanić, director of television station *Vijesti*, placed the responsibility for success on media businesses themselves. “What media regulations are missing is actually incorporating some solutions that would foster media viability,” she said. “We lack a media sector development strategy, and the business viability of media is an obvious problem in Montenegro.”

In general, while Montenegrin law establishes a good framework and allows for editorial independence, problems stem from practice. Despite a new code of ethics in 2016, issues remain with implementation. As Raičević observed, “Generally speaking, legislative framework is good. But traditionally, regulations are not enforced in practice, and therefore laws are just dead letter.”

Often, media members struggle to access what should be legally public information based on selective enforcement of Freedom of Information laws. According to Mićunović, “The public does not have easy access to public information. Journalists still have a hard time accessing documents of government bodies in controversial cases. There is still no awareness among representatives and heads of administration bodies that the results of their work belong to taxpayers.” Raičević added, “The Freedom of Information Act implies that upon request, civil servants should provide requested information. Generally speaking, we can say that in this facet, minimal progress has been recorded, and in sensitive cases, the administration provides poor and incomplete information. An additional problem is that we do not have joint and uniform reaction [to the lack of information] in the media community, although these are issues relevant for all media in Montenegro.”

Just as in previous years, panelists concluded that experiences differ regarding enforcement of the Freedom of Information Act. They depend on the individual agency, political will, and often the inefficiency of national and local administration bodies. Representatives of the media community and NGO sector are the biggest critics of problematic enforcement of the act.

Panelists said that they view the programs on public media as not serving the public interest and not consistent with the rules and needs of social pluralism. Despite national and local media receiving public funding, they are largely dependent on

ruling political structures, resulting in repercussions on editorial independence.

Montenegro has no legal or practical limitations on accessing international or local news, with news from international, national, and local sources uncensored. In recent years, the media sector has witnessed an upward trend of online journalism (websites, bloggers, social networks, etc.) that is putting pressure on classic media. More than 400,000 Montenegrin citizens have Internet accounts, a clear sign of dynamic development of online communications.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Montenegro Objective Score: 1.75

As in previous years, panelists held the view that the journalistic profession is being downgraded. The economic status of journalists is low, their trade unions are weak, and the quality of their profession is under threat, and as such Montenegro has few reputable journalists. According to Damir Ramović, a journalist and the editor of RTVCG, “Journalists in most media companies are reporting on events by putting them either in positive or negative context, depending on their editorial policies. In addition, financial insecurity affects journalists and the quality of their reporting.”

Impartiality is often a struggle for Montenegrin outlets, as journalists are influenced both internally and externally. The political beliefs of owners and editors influence the slant of reporting. Rabrenović elaborated and gave an example. “In Montenegro, we have deep division within the media sector, which goes along with political aspirations of the owners of private media. On the eve of recent elections, the opposition requested dismissal of the TV Montenegro director, and their request was accommodated. Furthermore, some printed media reported in line with political interests of their founders, which didn’t have to do anything with the journalistic profession.”

Mićunović agreed, saying, “The quality of journalism in Montenegro is decreasing. It is clear that the media community cannot agree on the basic journalistic standards. For example, we have huge differences in the application of professional and ethical standards between so-called pro-government and critically-oriented media. The Montenegrin market has numerous sources of news, both local and international, making it unlikely any important political or social event goes unreported. However, although events are covered by most of the media, we are witnessing diverse interpretations of the same event, depending on understanding of professional standards, editorial policies, external political interferences, or commercial interests of the media companies.”

Additionally, because media owners often look for the correct slant in reporting, self-censorship remains a problem in Montenegrin journalism. As Rabrenović confirmed, “Self-censorship is very much practiced. This phenomenon is becoming more frequent among journalists, because they are expected to advocate the editorial policy of their media companies, even on their personal Facebook or Twitter profiles.”

Self-censorship is even more present in public media, which are under government or local councils’ influence. Weak enforcement of professional standards, the poor economic status of journalists, ineffective trade unions, divisions on institutional methods to protect the profession, numerous internal and external pressures—all of these foster self-censorship and limit professional credibility.

Extremely low salaries have made journalism an unattractive profession. Few journalists have monthly salaries more than €1000, while the average salary in journalism is below the national average of €500. In conjunction, the number of unemployed journalists is rising. According to Vuković, “Incomes of journalists and other media professionals are low, and their real value is continuously decreasing. For some time now, journalism has been seen as a profession unable to attract talented and brave people.”

Editor-in-chief of TV Prva Sonja Drobac added, “A key problem regarding remuneration policy in media companies is a small and financially weak Montenegrin market, making it difficult to achieve operational viability of companies and consequently an adequate living standard for journalists.” This kind of remuneration policy will have long-term effects on the outflow of quality journalists from this profession to others. Media owners are not interested in investing additional funds in

## JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

training or improved wages—something partly attributed to weak trade unions.

The lack of investment in journalists has led to a dearth of investigative reporting. The media sector has few examples of specialized journalism, and obstacles are economic, educational, and professional in nature. Most media do not have financial capacities to support the development of specialized journalists, and media owners have not expressed an interest in investing in this type of journalism. “A lack of staff in editorial rooms and their limited skills and knowledge have resulted in the type of journalist who does anything and everything, instead of having journalists specialize in certain areas,” Radio Antena M journalist Zerina Ćatović said. “Therefore, we don’t have enough of specialized media and we can’t have viable specialized journalism in Montenegro.”

Ilmira Lika, manager of TV Teuta, noted that not many professional education programs or workshops are available to help young journalists develop these skills. As such, only a few print and electronic outlets offer truly investigative articles and programs, according to Mićunović. “Faced with ever-tougher business environments and economic difficulties, media owners

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are not investing in professional journalism or in journalists’ specializations. Investigative journalism is fostered by a handful of media, usually those critical of the government,” he said.

Many outlets focus on entertainment shows instead of hard news. According to Vuković, “Electronic media, and in particular TV stations, favor entertainment programs, usually of very poor quality. Public media are less prone to broadcast this kind of content, but are still not immune from the need to promote entertainment programs.”

Montenegro has 73 active media outlets, and predominantly they produce commercial, entertainment, musical, or sports programs. Few have the sustainable organizational, financial, and professional capacities needed for producing news segments, educational programs, or cultural programs. Private media in particular are focused on entertainment content,

including reality shows; over-commercializing media space; and forgetting the principles of free press and socially responsible editorial policies. Public media have more educational and news programs. However, the degradation of media professionalism in recent years is resulting in more lightweight entertainment content, and editorial policies that ignore deeper social and national issues.

In 2016, the media community adopted a new code of ethics, representing a step forward in professionalism. The new solutions improve the rules of professional ethics and essentially standardized the journalistic profession in Montenegro with modern international rules of liberal democracies. Problems in ethical standards do not stem from the regulatory framework, but rather from practice, in ignoring code rules. “Our profession failed to respond to new socio-economic phenomena and to create specialized professional codes,” Ćatović said. “Standards, such as protection of privacy, presumption of innocence, and similar values are being violated on a daily basis—especially in online media.”

Similar problems emerge in enforcement. While the code is monitored by a self-regulatory board, the board itself is divided, further hindering professionalism. According to Vuković, “The code of ethics has been silently accepted by all media and journalists, but we do not have a single credible and respectable self-regulatory body to monitor the application of ethical norms.” Mićunović provided further details on the issues with implementation. “The Media Self-Regulatory Council is biased and not objective, using one criterion for pro-government media and a completely different one for those critical of the government. Most of the leading media have their own ombudspersons but they are not sufficiently active. The code of ethics has been revised, and in terms of its quality, it is in line with European practice, but the application of ethical standards is at a very low level.” As such, the public has low expectations of the new code, panelists said.

Technical capacities, including those for production and distribution of news, have been significantly modernized, on par with international counterparts, allowing for more complex operations.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Montenegro Objective Score: 2.25

Montenegro’s 73 national and local media outlets translate to roughly one outlet per 8,500 citizens—well above the European average. In the Montenegrin market there are five national dailies (*Vijesti*, *Dan*, *Pobjeda*, *Dnevne Novine*, and *Informer*) and four national television stations (TVCG, the public broadcaster; *Vijesti*; PRVA; and PINK). There are also two national radio

stations (Radio Montenegro, the public service; and Antena M, a private station) and around 50 electronic media sources at the local and regional levels.

Montenegro's media digitalization process is in the final stages. The national public broadcaster is currently transitioning to digital, while the leading private broadcasters have gone digital already. Online media are increasingly influential. In 2017, four web outlets are dominant: Vijesti, CDM, Analitika, and Antena M. They are also the leading broadcast media companies. Websites such as these are pushing out printed media.

Beyond traditional media, social networks exert a strong influence, with more than 400,000 registered Facebook accounts in Montenegro. The country also has numerous cable operators, so the majority of the population is able to access cable programs from Montenegro and abroad. Čatović confirmed that Montenegro has a plurality of voices. "Different media groups, local media, [and] blogs and social networks offer the possibility to access conflicting or simply different positions," she said. But the panelists also assessed that the quality and strength of media is still lacking.

National and local public media alike are under strong pressure or even control of the ruling parties and influential politicians. In this way, they are stultifying the concept of public media, while ignoring modern legislative solutions and vulgarizing the social needs of media consumers. "Public media are not neutral," Rastoder said. "They often do not serve public interests and they do not provide balanced reporting. These problems were present in the past and they are still very topical, but they are also the subjects of political divisions. This is clearly seen if one reads European Commission Progress Reports on Montenegro."

#### MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

##### PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

But according to Čatović, Montenegro's "own media production is poor, and even if media outlets do have it, this production is subject to private interests and sources of funding [donors and advertisers], but not to the citizens."

Radio Cetinje director Ivan Mijanović described conditions in municipalities. "The position of local broadcasters is downgraded and reduced to the needs of local councils. For example, in Cetinje the impact of local politics is quite visible, because the local administration is funding the radio and therefore has influence on editorial policy. We also have the phenomenon of self-censorship, which is additionally degrading local public media."

While panelists noted a slight improvement in the public national broadcaster after the recent dismissal of the broadcast team, they still find the content lacking. As Čatović pointed out, "The public national broadcaster is not offering its viewers a plurality of different positions, especially not on important socio-economic issues. The second major problem is the trivialization of media content, so citizens are unable to view educational and cultural programs, which should be an integral part of a standardized and quality media offering."

In Montenegro, citizens' access to local and international media is not legally limited and in this respect, Montenegro can be deemed as a free country. The only limitations are related to prices for Internet services and cable programs, while Internet portals largely allow free access to their news. Additionally, state registries are accessible online to all interested parties, and as such, consumers can check the ownership structure, investment capital, and company managers of various media companies. Furthermore, agencies monitor ownership to prevent monopolization, and that situation has not yet occurred in Montenegro.

The panelists did note a case of government imposition on media freedom. During the October elections, the government blocked access to Internet services for a period—an act Mićunović called a "rigid form of censorship." Raičević explained the events. "On election day, October 16, 2016, the Agency for Electronic Communications decided to block citizens' access to Internet services (Viber and WhatsApp) for two hours. This proves that we are living in an authoritarian society, where is possible to block Internet access and mobile telephony if the government wants."



Although the government has proven that it can limit access, Montenegro has international telecommunications companies that contribute to the development and improvement of Internet services, cable television, mobile technology, social networks, and an overall pluralistic environment.

Leading electronic and printed media, as well as websites, have their own news production. A few electronic media produce their own political or culture shows, documentaries, and research programs. Social networks have brought about a type of democratization in the media environment, and a stronger presence of different forms of online journalism.

As for local media, limited financial and human resources sometimes worsen news production. Teuta television station director Ilmira Lika described the outlet's sources for news. "We, as a local media, have our own information. But we do broadcast news from other media sources that refer to events in the country, region, or the world," she said. But according to Čatović, Montenegro's "own media production is poor, and even if media outlets do have it, this production is subject to private interests and sources of funding [donors and advertisers], but not to the citizens."

Montenegrin media make the effort to cover news of local, national, and international relevance. Rabrenović said, "Most of the leading media outlets have correspondents in all bigger towns. So the local interests are covered by the national media, but also by the local ones that are exclusively focused on local issues."

Still, media do not adequately report on a wide spectrum of socially important subjects. Lika said, "Local media are covering different social interests, but there are topics less talked about." Editorial policies in Montenegrin media are in the hands of political and economic centers of power, resulting in the marginalization of poorer social groups. NGOs and outlets that operate in the languages of ethnic minorities help report on problems facing different social groups. But overall, news media do not address such issues sufficiently. No comprehensive research on the state of media has been conducted in years, leaving a large gap in social needs, citizen interests, and actual media policies.

With regard to media drawing on outside sources, Rastoder said, "Montenegrin media use information both from local or foreign news agencies or wire services, tending to rely heavily on reputable regional services. Montenegro has a deficit when it comes to proper news agencies; for years, there was only one private wire service, MINA, but it lacks the capacity and a cadre of journalists to be truly successful."

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Montenegro Objective Score: 1.80

Media businesses have free access to the market. The sector does not enjoy any privileges compared with other businesses in Montenegro. National corporate legislation gives equal opportunities to all forms of business entities and eventual benefits are not related to specific industries. However, printed media, dailies as well as periodicals, pay a lower tax rate of 7 percent. Some advocate for additional allowances for media entities, based on the social importance of media.

The number of media outlets does not prove that media is profitable or even economically viable in the long run. Numerous electronic and print outlets are recording losses, with salaries owed to journalists, taxes paid late, and/or mounting debt. Many outlets have responded by cutting costs to the minimum, paying low salaries, and limiting production. Others rely on cash injections from owners or donations from national or local budgets for survival. Just 1.5 percent of employed Montenegrins work in the media, with numbers shrinking yearly and poor wages largely the cause. Mićunović confirmed, "Most of the media in Montenegro is not economically viable. The national public broadcaster is the only media with stable funding because it is financed by the government. Other media outlets are sustainable only if the government or public companies are pumping money into them through different forms of advertising, usually through non-transparent means." Vuković agreed, adding, "It is very difficult for media in Montenegro to be self-sustainable due to the small market and the competition from regional media players, which enjoy either direct or indirect support from Montenegrin authorities."

### INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

#### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

**Marijana Bojanić, the director of TV Vijesti, said, “What media regulations are missing is actually incorporating some solutions that would foster media viability. We lack a media sector development strategy, because the business viability of media is an obvious problem in Montenegro.”**

Media outlets, particularly local news organizations, are seeing reduced advertising revenues. “The situation in the media market is bad,” Bojanić said. “Global advertisers do not advertise in Montenegro. Even big regional advertisers consider the Montenegrin market as marginal. On top of that, we are facing the issue of a poorly regulated market. The government has allowed cable operators to broadcast advertisements without any limitations. However, the TV advertising market is only €4 million.” Mijanović added, “Our market advertising revenues are almost zero.”

Advertising revenues are insufficient to make a viable income base, so outlets must also turn to other sources of revenues in order to survive. The media business in Montenegro has been unprofitable for years and hovering on the brink of closure. Some panelists said that, in order to survive, the media industry needs assistance from the government; other panelists warned about potential further degradation of media with more government interference.

Market trends from recent years have continued. The Montenegrin advertising market depends on the wider regional advertising market, and its average valuation of around €10 million covers all commercial advertisers. Observers also note that beyond this commercial market is another advertising market, created by national and local administrations and state-owned public companies. They are advertising their institutional needs, and annual valuation of this market is approximately €2 to €3 million.

As in previous years, more than 80 percent of advertising budgets are contracted by dominant advertising agencies, with the remaining 20 percent direct contracts between private companies and media companies. The main advertisers are focused on private national media, neglecting local media outlets. Again this year, public media services are supported from national and local budgets but also enjoy undisturbed access to advertising markets. They compete with private outlets and violating basic standards of fair competition, to the detriment of commercial broadcasters.

There is fierce competition among media companies in the advertising market. Key advertisers are motivated to advertise solely based on media ratings, and this favors national broadcasters. More than 90 percent of commercial advertisers’ budgets go to four television stations. Less than 7 percent of the overall advertising budget goes to online media. Mićunović described other flaws in the advertising system. “Procedures implemented by government institutions and public companies for their advertising are non-transparent, with no marketing logic, and statistics on spent money are either non-existent or poorly updated and unclear,” he said.

Some assessments indicate government and local administration bodies, as well as public (state-owned) companies spend in excess of €2 million annually, with all of these funds directed toward media not critical, and actually supportive, of the government. In this way they are practically suspending the freedom of press, developing clientelism, and promoting private media that are friendly towards ruling structures, or at least do not pose a threat to holders of political and economic power.

No one in the Montenegrin media sphere has conducted market research in recent years due mainly to an inability to finance it. The absence of data leaves media companies with no sense of social demand, and, further hinders the development of business plans to help increase advertising revenues and improve long-term sustainability. Marijana Bojanić, the director of TV Vijesti, said, “What media regulations are missing is actually incorporating some solutions that would foster media viability. We lack a media sector development strategy, because the business viability of media is an obvious problem in Montenegro.”

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Score: 2.20

The perennial problems in Montenegro’s media industry are due in part to the lack of business associations and trade unions. While some associations exist, their impacts are small and sporadic. Furthermore, conflicts within the media community are preventing some media owners from effectively joining forces to protect common interests.

While journalist organizations exist, most are inactive and have no influence. Only around 20 percent of journalists are members of professional associations. Raičević elaborated on the issues with media support groups. “Polarization within the media sector brought about duality in terms of professional associations. We have two journalists associations and two trade unions, but we don’t have common organizations that would advocate for rights of all the journalists in Montenegro. To

make things worse, there are no indications that something will change in this respect in the near future.”

Mićunović mentioned one organization of note. “There are several associations but only on paper practically, although I would single out the Independent Trade Union of Journalists, which is demonstrating a solid level of interest for the status of journalists and their protection.”

Montenegro does have a strong NGO sector. Several thousand NGOs operate in the country and have built a strong social standing throughout the past decade. They participate in parliamentary committees and electoral processes, and show an active interest in free press. NGOs and media generally have a cooperative relationship, with journalists utilizing NGOs as article sources and also covering NGO activities. This is particularly true with NGOs that address corruption, human rights, promoting democracy, media freedoms, environmental issues, the protection of minorities, and advocating rule of law. “There are several respectable NGOs that play an important role in supporting free media and freedom of expression,” Vuković said. “The activities of NGOs are important for the democratic development of society, free press, and the empowerment of the entire civic community.”

Though the majority of journalists in Montenegro have university degrees, the quality of education is often poor. Schools have seen an overall deterioration, with academic problems as well as practical. Mićunović said, “Journalistic studies at the state university are very conservative, and students lack opportunities to obtain practical skills during their studies. Furthermore, the quality of studies is not enviable... The Media Institute currently does not have capacity to organize a journalism school, [but] in previous years played an important role in the practical training of journalists.” Vuković called

Raičević elaborated on the issues with media support groups. “Polarization within the media sector brought about duality in terms of professional associations. We have two journalists associations and two trade unions, but we don’t have common organizations that would advocate for rights of all the journalists in Montenegro.

journalism programs today “old-fashioned,” with unqualified lecturers.

Additionally, there is no cooperation between the Department of Journalism at the School of Political Sciences, the Media Institute, and media companies, which disempowers young journalists and students from succeeding. According to Raičević, “At the Political Sciences School Department for Journalism, some 50 students graduate every year, but they have a hard time finding a job due to the poor economic situation in the media industry. Therefore, many of these graduated journalists are forced to work in other professions.” The problem is two-fold: many journalism graduates are unable to find work, and media companies have no journalists with adequate training or skills.

Practicing media members also lack opportunities for continued education or on-the-job training. With the tough financial situation, many media owners do not pursue these sorts of investments. “Apart from occasional seminars organized by NGOs and several training programs funded by foreign embassies, journalists have few chances to improve their skills because their media companies have no funds to pay for their vocational training,” Raičević said. Mićunović had a similar view. “There are some possibilities for the short-term training of media professionals, but nothing systematic or continuous, only on an ad-hoc basis. These are usually courses lasting several days, organized by foreign or local NGOs. Unfortunately, journalists, other media professionals, or media for that matter, are not very interested in this type of vocational training,” he said.

Bojanić, the director of Vijesti, has attempted to rectify the lack of training in her own organization by working with foreign colleagues. “My news team is trying to compensate for these systemic gaps in terms of journalists training by implementing in-house training,” she said. “Occasionally we organize 15-day trainings with the help of U.S. experts, although we are aware of our own gaps in terms of in-house capacities to implement more quality trainings.”

#### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

##### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists’ rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

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In Montenegro, the growth of IT infrastructure and communication technologies is coming close to European standards. Almost all Montenegrin households are now covered with a digital signal. Panelists said that they predict with certainty a further development of IT infrastructure and an increasing number of users. Internet and mobile services are growing. Almost all of Montenegro is covered by telephony, and nearly all adults and many youth have cell phones. Montenegrins increasingly use mobile phones to access websites, advertisements, applications, and social networks.

## List of Panel Participants

**Damir Ramović**, news editor, RTVCG, Podgorica

**Marijana Bojanić**, director, TV Vijesti, Podgorica

**Sonja Drobac**, editor-in-chief, TV Prva, Podgorica

**Zerina Čatović**, journalist, Radio Antena M, Podgorica

**Predrag Zečević**, journalist, Analitika.me, Podgorica

**Branimir Mandić**, columnist, *Vijesti*, Podgorica

**Jadranka Rabrenović**, journalist, *Pobjeda*, Podgorica

**Rajka Raičević**, journalist, *Dan*, Podgorica

**Ilmira Lika**, director, TV Teuta, Ulcinj

**Ivan Mijanović**, director, Radio Cetinje, Cetinje

**Samir Rastoder**, journalist, *Dnevne Novine*, Podgorica

**Vladan Mićunović**, director, Montenegrin Media Institute, Podgorica

**Aneta Spaić**, professor, Faculty of Law, University of Montenegro, Podgorica

**Duško Vuković**, independent media analyst, Podgorica

## Moderator & Author

**Rade Bojović**, executive director, Media Ltd., Podgorica

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