

Media and anti-corruption

[Media](#)



In some countries, such as Bulgaria, Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina, and Albania to a much lesser extent, the independent media has brought to the fore numerous corruption cases, exposing high officials. It has also been a major force behind mobilizing public opinion against corruption, as in the case of Bulgaria. At the same time it has exerted indirect pressure on the respective governments to take steps to limit corruption practices.

The Bulgarian independent media, which has been marked by intensified anti-corruption reporting, stands out with its permanent engagement in the public debate about corruption and the efforts to curb it. It is characterized by improved quality coverage of corruption issues, expansion of the public dialogue in the media through inclusion of opinions of other civil society sectors and individuals and increased follow-up of reported cases, all of which speaks for a trend towards greater professionalism in its anti-corruption efforts.

However, the limited role of the independent media in some countries should also be noted. In some, such as Bosnia Herzegovina, this has been due to the fact the media is mostly state controlled. In others, such as Albania, corrupted individuals have instigated distrust in the media, which lacks the professionalism necessary for investigative journalism and has fabricated and then denied its facts in corruption cases.

A serious impediment to the greater role of the independent media is the fact that it is rarely truly independent. There is a problem of media ownership, symbiosis between business and media, the relations between the authorities and the owners of the media. On the Balkans the media is

often financed by international organizations and thus has to rely on foreign help because of the small market size, in the case of Bosnia Herzegovina, or by certain business lobbies in the case of Albania.

There are also cases of media close to current or former governments, in Bosnia Herzegovina, for instance, which can impede investigative journalism and its favorable impact on the efforts to combat corruption. Since it is also often regarded as a political tool by the owner, either the state or a private entity, the pressure exerted on journalists can often lead to biased coverage and impede impartial corruption investigation, which is illustrated by the Romanian press.

A further hurdle to a greater role of the media is the fact it often lacks access to essential government information. For instance, in Romania, because of few laws giving access to public information or lack of their enforcement, the independent media has to rely on unofficial channels in corruption cases. Because of this unofficial information, which may be incorrect, the official authorities are even more unwilling to cooperate with the media on corruption scandals.

The analysis of the media possibilities to investigate and report corruption represented the objectives of the Freedom House Assessment Report on media responses to corruption in some countries in the region summarizes the main difficulties:

- Lack of independence
- Lack of access to basic government information
- Punitive libel law and prosecutorial abuse

- Weak advocacy groups
- Disincentives to investigative journalism
- Lack of experience and training opportunities
- Public cynicism regarding corruption