



South East European Network
for Professionalization of Media

MORE MEDIA, RISING CHALLENGES FOR JOURNALISTS

The Future of the Media in Montenegro – Facts and Trends

Milica Bogdanović

OUR MEDIA:

A civil society action to generate media literacy and activism,
counter polarisation and promote dialogue



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The media in Montenegro faces challenges similar to those experienced globally, such as the rapid development of technology, shifts in media consumption habits, declining trust in the media, a crisis in journalism, and the growing trend of disinformation. Additionally, Montenegro has its specific issues, including ongoing political crises since 2020, following the end of the long-term rule of the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS). These challenges are compounded by the anti-democratic and anti-European tendencies of some ruling parties and the significant influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which affects the overall political and social environment.

The media landscape in Montenegro faces several significant issues:

- It is estimated that around 1,800 media workers are employed in the country. However, the exact number of journalists, female journalists, and those who have been laid off or left the profession in the past decade remains unknown. This lack of statistical data complicates efforts to gain a detailed understanding of the state of journalism and hinders the ability to conclude the future of the media.
- More than half of media employees in Montenegro earn a salary below the national average of EUR 800. Despite this, journalists are unionized and, with the support of media organizations, continue to advocate for better working conditions and opportunities for further education.
- In 2023, 16 attacks on journalists were recorded. While the number of physical attacks has decreased, online threats have increased.
- Self-regulatory mechanisms in the media are weak and have limited capacities. Recently, media outlets have been required to develop internal self-regulation to qualify for funding from the Media Pluralism Fund. This requirement could serve as an opportunity to strengthen self-regulation within the industry.
- It is estimated that there are currently around 230 media outlets in Montenegro, nearly double the number from previous years. However, part of the expert public warns that this increase in media pluralism does not necessarily equate to quality. Many new media outlets are often launched to achieve political influence, a trend that could continue.

- The media scene in Montenegro is under strong foreign influence, predominantly from Serbia. Foreign owners control four out of five national TV stations and two out of three newspapers. These media outlets significantly impact public opinion and are used to spread political influence, which could threaten the survival of locally owned media in the future.
- The value of the advertising market in Montenegro is estimated to be between 11.7 and 12 million euros. The largest advertisers are telecom operators, with around 50% of the advertising share going to television. This trend has remained unchanged in recent years.
- Commercial media in Montenegro receive funding not only from advertising but also from the Media Pluralism Fund and state aid. In 2023, the total amount of these funds was 1.23 million euros, which is higher than in previous years.
- The public service Radio-Television of Montenegro (RTCG) is financed through the state budget. However, it is under significant political influence from the ruling parties, and its general director was reappointed despite court rulings.
- The representation of women in the management bodies of RTCG and the national regulatory body, the Agency for Audiovisual Media Services¹ is low. Minority media are funded by the Fund for the Protection and Realization of Minority Rights, and their content is influenced by minority organizations.
- More than half of Montenegro's citizens trust the media, but there is a noticeable trend of declining trust. Montenegro has a Media Strategy and revised media laws, but these do not adequately address several key challenges within the media community and are not fully aligned with European regulations, suggesting that new amendments may be expected soon.
- The Agency for Audiovisual Media Services and civil society organizations promote media literacy, which is an elective subject in primary and secondary schools. Over 90% of citizens believe that media literacy is important.
- International studies monitoring democracy, the rule of law, perceptions of corruption, and media freedoms show progress compared to previous years. However, the current state of media and journalism does not indicate a promising future.

¹ With the adoption of the Audio-Visual Media Services Law, the Agency for Electronic Media (AEM) became the Agency for Audiovisual Media Services, in September 2024.

I.

INTRODUCTION

The accelerated development of technology, changes in citizens' media habits, declining trust in the media, the crisis in journalism, and the growing trend of disinformation fuelled by artificial intelligence tools raise questions about the future of the media. Although these challenges are faced by all countries striving for a more developed democracy, Montenegro's specific perspective on the future is not optimistic.

In recent years, Montenegrin society has grappled with an unstable political situation that promotes the spread of disinformation, propaganda, and hate speech. The media market is small and has recently been characterized by significant foreign influence in the ownership structures of the most influential media. The media strategy and amended media laws adopted in 2024 have not adequately addressed the issue of foreign influence in the media or the problem of disinformation spread.

The European Commission (EC) has emphasized the need to ensure consistent application of all media laws related to the media and insist on a zero-tolerance policy toward any form of pressure or harassment of journalists, including pressure from public officials. Weak points in the media sector still include ineffective self-regulation, the poor socio-economic status of media workers, and unresolved attacks on journalists and media outlets. The EC also warned that the Radio and Television of Montenegro (RTCG) must be protected from any form of undue influence on its editorial, institutional, or financial independence, and it must fully respect the law and the highest standards of professional integrity and accountability (European Commission, 2024).

The Montenegro Media Institute conducted research in the media sector, focusing on several segments: the future of journalism, the future of the media through the concept itself, environment, ownership, financing, representation, and participation, as well as the future use of media and trust. Each segment included a series of questions to provide insight into the current state and trends in these areas.

Given that the state of the media sector is directly linked to the overall state of democracy, one segment of the research analyzed the development of democracy through a group of indicators.

Montenegrin media market is small and has recently been characterized by significant foreign influence in the ownership structures of the most influential media.

The research is carried out in two phases:

First Phase (April to August 2024): Data collection focused on the period up to 2023. Data and information were gathered through the analysis of regulations, ethical codes, and publicly available relevant research and analyses from international and domestic institutions and organizations in the fields of media and democracy. This phase also included decisions from regulatory and self-regulatory bodies and inquiries to institutions in the areas of media and democracy, media organizations, regulatory and self-regulatory bodies, and media outlets. Researchers received the requested information from institutions without obstruction, but media outlets did not respond to the inquiries. The lack of response from the media may indicate a lack of awareness regarding the importance of analytically assessing their position in the future.

Second Phase (2025): The collected data and analysis will serve as a starting point for qualitative research on the future of the media. This phase will be supplemented with findings from interviews and focus groups with media professionals and other relevant stakeholders from Montenegro.

This brief overview is accompanied by a comprehensive set of data, presented separately, which can serve as evidence and inspiration for future activities and initiatives for researchers and activists in this field. Our goal with this analysis is to contribute to the discussion on the future of the media and the development of democracy in Montenegro. This research is significant for strengthening the capacity of media organizations within civil society and other media actors dedicated to addressing challenges in the media sector.

The research on future of the media was conducted simultaneously in all countries of the Western Balkans and in Turkey, aiming to identify and analyze the current state of play and emerging trends in media, journalism, and democracy. In the first part of the research, carried out between April and September 2024, a large set of data on journalism, media landscape, ownership and finances, media representation and participation, media use, media trust, and democracy was gathered and analyzed on the country level. The identified trends, risks and opportunities will be further analyzed through interviews and focus groups with different stakeholders in the second part of the research in 2025, resulting in recommendations for safeguarding journalism, media, and democracy. The research is a part of the regional project “Our Media: A Civil Society Action to Generate Media Literacy and Activism, Counter Polarization and Promote Dialogue”, implemented by nine media organizations from the Western Balkans, Turkey, and Slovenia in the period 2023–2026. The factual data presented in the tables in this report are only the part of the extensive data collection presented in the separate data report, available at the web site of the Our Media project.²

2 Here is link to the Our Media project web site: <https://seenpm.org/our-media-publications/>

II.

GENERAL DATA ABOUT MONTENEGRO

The population of Montenegro is 633,158, with young people aged 15 to 27 making up 21 per cent of the total. Over half of the population has completed secondary education, while 17 per cent hold higher or university degrees. Approximately 1.5 per cent of those over the age of 10 are illiterate, with more illiterate women than men. In 2023, the gross domestic product per capita was 10,998 euros. The average gross salary is 1,018 euros, and the average net salary is 814 euros. The average net salary has risen by 12 per cent compared to the same period in 2022. Economic experts caution that rapid wage growth could lead to inflation and destabilize public finances in Montenegro.

Table 1: **GENERAL COUNTRY DATA**

Total population of the country in 2023	633,158
Population literacy rate in 2023	1.5% of the total population consists of illiterate people
GDP per capita in the country in 2023 (based on purchasing power)	11,700 EUR
Average salary in the country in 2023	EUR 814 (NET)

Sources: Statistical Office of Montenegro (2023c); Marković (2017); Statistical Office of Montenegro (2023b); Statistical Office of Montenegro (2023a); Višnjić (2024); International Monetary Fund (2023)

III.

THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM

In 2023, approximately 1,800 media workers were employed in Montenegro. Currently, there are 10 unemployed journalists registered with the Employment Agency of Montenegro, while 87 individuals educated in sports journalism, communications, and related professions are awaiting employment. This number has not significantly changed over the past three years. However, media organizations have struggled for years to determine the true state of the industry, including the exact number of employees, the number of journalists who have left the profession in the last decade, and those who have been dismissed. Statistics from the Statistical Office of Montenegro and the Tax Administration differ, and the media itself refuses to disclose these figures. Due to this lack of accurate data, there is no clear picture of the state of journalism, making it difficult to predict its future.

Journalists in Montenegro are educated at the University of Montenegro (UCG), specifically at the Faculty of Political Science, and at the University of Donja Gorica (UDG), at the Faculty of Communications and Media. In 2023, 51 students enrolled in these programmes. Since 2012, 33 students have graduated from UDG, while 290 have graduated from UCG since 2014.

The socio-economic status of media employees is poor. More than half of media workers earn less than the average salary, receiving less than 800 euros per month. There is no data available on whether salaries in public media differ from those in private media. Only Radio and Television of Montenegro (RTCG) and the local radio and television station in Budva have collective agreements in place for their employees. Over half of the media workers in Montenegro, including those at RTCG and some of the largest private media outlets, are unionized and members of the Media Union of Montenegro. The Media Union and the Association of Professional Journalists offer support and assistance to media workers. Additionally, the Media Institute of Montenegro and other civil society organizations frequently organize programmes aimed at the professional development of journalists.

The socio-economic status of media employees is poor. More than half of media workers earn less than the average salary, receiving less than 800 euros per month.

Journalists' work in Montenegro has long been affected by an insecure working environment. In 2023, 16 attacks on journalists were recorded. While no physical assaults occurred, the number of online threats has risen. Female journalists, in particular, have increasingly become targets of these attacks.

SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) are not recognized by the Montenegrin legal system, and there is no anti-SLAPP protection mechanism in place. However, several cases involving journalists can be described as SLAPPs.

Self-regulation in Montenegro is based on the Code of Ethics, which is accepted by all media outlets. However, the Code is outdated and does not offer guidance on addressing challenges in the digital environment, such as content moderation, social media management, combating disinformation, verifying advertising content, artificial intelligence, and other emerging issues. As a result, self-regulation is inadequate. The existing self-regulatory bodies, operating within their limited capacities, make efforts to promote and uphold the Code of Ethics, but they receive only a small number of complaints each year. They are rarely proactive, and the public has not yet recognized them as effective self-regulatory authorities within the media community.

With recent amendments to the Media Law, media outlets will now be required to establish self-regulatory mechanisms if they wish to apply for funding from the Media Pluralism Fund. If this provision is properly implemented, it could lead to stronger self-regulation in the future. However, there is concern that media outlets may adopt this provision merely as a formality to access budgetary funding. An additional challenge is the lack of both the will and the capacity within the media community to build stronger self-regulation that the public would recognize as an authority and to which they would trustfully submit complaints.

Recent amendments to the Media Law provide better protection for journalistic sources. Unlike the previous provision, which required journalists to reveal a source upon request from the prosecutor in certain circumstances, the new law now stipulates that this can only be done at the request of the court.

However, issues such as protection from surveillance and the use of intrusive surveillance software on any materials, digital devices, or tools used by journalists have not yet been debated within the journalistic community. In addition, extensive discussions have not yet taken place on other important issues for the media sector, such as new EU legislation on media and artificial intelligence.

Table 2: **DATA ON JOURNALISTS AND JOURNALISM**

Overall number of journalists in 2023	1,800 media workers
Number of unemployed journalists in 2023	10
Number of students of journalism (and communication and media studies) in 2023/2024	51
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of journalism students growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Remaining the same
Average salary of journalists in 2023	450–830
Number of attacks on journalists (and media) in the country in 2023 (including threats, intimidation, smear campaigns, physical attacks)	16
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of attacks on journalists growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of complaints to the relevant national-level self-regulatory body growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Remaining the same

Sources: IREX (2023); Sekulović (2023); Bogdanović (2023); A letter from the Employment Agency of Montenegro dated June 2024; A letter from the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro dated June 2024; Letters from self-regulation bodies dated June 2024; Letters from the University of Donja Gorica and the Faculty of Political Science dated June 2024; Đukić (2023)

IV.

THE FUTURE OF MEDIA

4.1. CONCEPT OF MEDIA

The Media Law defines a media outlet as a service provider responsible for the production and dissemination of media content intended for an indefinite number of people. These media outlets have editorial control or oversight over the content and adhere to professional and ethical standards. The dissemination of media content includes any form of broadcast, publication, or distribution, regardless of the technological platform. Media content is considered to be content published in the media in the form of information, analysis, commentary, opinion, or creative work in textual, audio, audiovisual, or other forms, to inform and meet the cultural, educational, and other needs of the public.

Additionally, the law defines for the first time a journalist as an individual engaged in collecting, processing, shaping, sorting, editing, or otherwise intervening with information published in the media. A journalist may perform these activities as an employee or in another capacity for a media outlet or media owner in Montenegro or abroad or as a freelancer. Some experts in the field have argued that there was no need for a legal definition of who a journalist is.

Table 3: DATA ON THE CONCEPT OF MEDIA

The definition of media is established in national regulation. YES/NO/Partly	YES
The definition/concept of media and legal obligations arising from the legal definition of media have been subject of public debate and contesting arguments? YES/NO/Partly	NO

Sources: Article 3 of the Media Law (2024)

4.2. MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The number of media outlets in Montenegro has doubled in the last three years, with an estimated 230 currently in operation. Some experts warn that this media pluralism does not necessarily equate to quality, as new outlets, particularly in times of ongoing political crisis, are being launched with the aim of exerting political influence. This trend could continue in the Montenegrin media sector.

There are 27 public media outlets (Radio and Television of Montenegro and local radio and TV stations) and 41 commercial radio and TV stations. The number of daily newspapers has decreased compared to 2022, with one newspaper closing in that year, leaving three in circulation (Dan, Pobjeda, Vijesti). There are also two weekly newspapers and 20 regional publications. Currently, eight television stations (RTCG with three channels, Vijesti, Adria, Prva, Nova M, TV E, TV Pljevlja, TV Nikšić) have national coverage, double the number from 2021. Additionally, 10 radio stations have national coverage (RTCG with two programmes, D Plus, Elmag, Play, Arena Radio, TDI, Srpski, Fatih, Svetigora). The number of online media outlets is steadily growing, with around 120 registered. Estimates suggest that another 15 outlets operate without registration, some of which are recognized as sources of disinformation and controversial content.

There is no institution responsible for monitoring online media, but to curb the impact of unregistered outlets, the Media Law prohibits advertising by public institutions and state-owned companies in such media.

Table 4: DATA ON MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Total number of media in the country in 2023	Over 230
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of media. growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing
Total number of public service media in the country (national, local) in the country in 2023	27
Total number of private, commercial media in the country in 2023	41 (radio and TV)
Total number of private, non-profit media in the country in 2023	3 (radio)

Total number of daily newspapers in the country in 2023	3
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of daily newspapers in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Declining
Total number of national TV channels with news content in the country in 2023	8
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of national TV channels with news content in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing
Total number of online news media in the country in 2023	120
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of online news media in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing

Sources: TV E (2024); Response from the Media Union from June 2024; Response from the Ministry of Culture and Media from June 2024; Response from the Agency for Electronic Media from June 2024.

4.3. MEDIA OWNERSHIP

Media ownership in Montenegro is one of the most pressing issues affecting the media community. Although the law requires the publication of ownership structure data, the lack of regulations to limit foreign ownership in the media has a negative impact on both the market and democracy in Montenegro. The small Montenegrin market has become a fertile ground for foreign owners, primarily from Serbia. Two out of three newspapers and four out of five national television stations are now under foreign ownership. These media outlets inevitably influence public opinion and seek to exert political influence over Montenegrin society.

The owners of the two largest media groups are United Media Group (owned by Dragan Šolak from Serbia), which controls TV Vijesti and the independent daily newspaper Vijesti, including its print edition and online portal, and Petros Stasis, a Greek businessman, who owns the daily newspaper Pobjeda, the CDM portal, and Analitika. The owner of Nova M is indirectly United Media Group through their company, Direct Media, while the owner of Prva TV is Kopernikus, controlled by Srđan Milovanović from Serbia.

Although ownership information is available on the national regulator’s website, researchers point out that for several ultimate owners, there is no publicly available biographical information, and they are not widely known to the public, raising concerns about hidden ownership.

Table 5: **DATA ON MEDIA OWNERSHIP**

<p>Name the 3 biggest media owners in the country (owners of the biggest number of media and/or with the biggest audience reach and/or biggest share in the advertising market).</p> <p>Add information about the country of origin for each of the 3 biggest media owners.</p>	<p>Dragan Šolak (Serbia) Petros Statis (Greece) Srđan Milovanović (Serbia)</p>
<p>TREND in the past 3 years: The list of top 3 media owners in the country has changed. YES/NO</p>	<p>YES</p>
<p>Media ownership concentration is regulated in the country. YES/NO/Partly</p>	<p>YES</p>
<p>Transparency of media ownership is regulated by law? YES/NO/Partly</p>	<p>YES</p>
<p>Media ownership is transparent in the country (credible information about who owns media is published). YES/NO/PARTLY</p>	<p>PARTLY</p>

Sources: Article 14 of the Media Law (2024); BIRN (2023)

4.4. MEDIA FINANCING

RTCG is funded by the state budget, receiving 0.3% of GDP, which amounted to 17.2 million euros in 2023. This public service is heavily influenced by the ruling political parties, as evidenced by the adoption of the final version of the Law on RTCG. The Ministry of Culture and Media initially proposed stricter amendments for the selection of the general director of RTCG, but the Prime Minister’s office altered this proposal in the final version sent to Parliament, lowering the criteria.

Over the past four years, the courts have issued seven rulings declaring the selection of the general director of RTCG illegal. However, the Council of RTCG re-elected him for the position based on the new Law on RTCG. The European Commission has warned that RTCG must be protected from any form of

inappropriate influence on its editorial, institutional, or financial independence, and must fully comply with the law as well as the highest standards of professional integrity and accountability.

Local public services are financed through local government budgets, but consolidated financial data is not available. Recent amendments to the law now stipulate the share of local government budgets allocated to local public services.

In addition to revenue from advertising, commercial media receive funding from the Media Pluralism Fund (administered by the Agency for Electronic Media and the Ministry of Culture and Media) as well as state aid. The total amount of these funds in 2023 was 1.23 million euros, an increase compared to previous years.

Some media outlets are also funded by donations from international donors. A simple search of media websites, however, did not reveal information about international donations. Available research shows that 327,198 dollars were donated for media development and journalism support in 2023 through various programmes.

There are no objective or methodologically standardized data on the value of the advertising market or the share of different types of media. However, internal estimates from the leading marketing agency in Montenegro suggest that the market value is between 11.7 and 12 million euros. This estimate includes all local media and advertising channels but excludes advertising costs on global platforms such as Google and Meta, which could total over half a million euros. After a significant decline during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the advertising market has experienced a growth trend of 5–10 per cent over the past two years, and experts predict this trend will continue. The largest advertisers are telecommunications companies (Mtel, Telekom, One). Television continues to capture the largest share of advertising, around 50 per cent, and this trend has remained stable in recent years.

There are no objective or methodologically standardized data on the value of the advertising market or the share of different types of media.

Institutions are legally required to publish information about the funds allocated from public revenues for media content sponsorship, advertising, and other contracted services. The total amount spent on these services in 2023 exceeded 6.8 million euros, showing a growth trend compared to the previous year. However, the number of media outlets that provided data to the Ministry of Culture and Media in accordance with the law decreased in 2023.

Table 6: DATA ON MEDIA FINANCING

Total value of the national advertising market (including all types of media) in 2023 in EUR	Over EUR 11–12 million
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the total value of national advertising market growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing
Share of TV in the value of the national advertising market in 2023	Over 50%
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the share of TV in the value of the national advertising market. growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Remaining the same
Total budget of the national public service broadcaster in 2023, in EUR.	EUR 21.1 million
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the total budget of the public service broadcaster growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing
Share of the total budget of the national public service broadcaster in 2023 received from the state budget	81%
Total amount of public funding (grants and subsidies) from national government and local governments to media in the country in 2023.	EUR 1.23 million
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the total amount of public funding (grants and subsidies) to the media in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing
Obligations of public bodies, institutions, and companies to publish data on funding to media are regulated by law? YES/NO/Partly	YES
Data on allocated amounts of public funding to media outlets are published. YES/NO/Partly	YES
The total amount of state advertising (advertising of state bodies, institutions, and state-owned companies) in the media in the country in 2023	EUR 6.8 million

TREND in the past 3 years: Is the total amount of state advertising in the media in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing
The total amount of international donor funding to the media in the country in 2023	NO DATA
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the total amount of international donor funding to the media in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	NO DATA

Sources: The internal estimate by the leading Montenegrin marketing agency can be used for this research; Articles 17–25 of the Media Law (2024); Response of the Ministry of Culture and Media to the inquiry from June 2024; Ministry of Culture and Media (2023); Global Forum for Media Development (2024)

4.5. MEDIA REPRESENTATION

Data regarding the number of female journalists employed in Montenegrin media is not available. The most recent study, conducted in 2015, indicated that 61% of media workers were women. However, it remains unclear what proportion of women hold editorial and managerial positions, as key television and radio stations, along with daily newspapers, did not respond to inquiries. Furthermore, no data has been provided on the representation of minorities or individuals under 40 in editorial and managerial roles.

Information on the representation of women in the governing bodies of RTCG and the national regulator is accessible on their respective websites, revealing a notably low percentage. The lack of response from media outlets complicates efforts to assess the current state of affairs in this area and makes it difficult to predict future trends.

The Ministry of Culture and Media, which maintains records of the media, does not categorize minority media separately, resulting in a lack of available numerical data in this regard. Minority media are funded through the Fund for the Protection and Realization of Minority Rights, and their content is shaped by minority organizations. In 2023, the following outlets received funding from the Fund’s budget: Srpske novine, Radio Dux – the Voice of Croats in Montenegro, the magazine Hrvatski glasnik, the portals muslimanski.net and bošnjacki.net, and the magazine Almanah.

Table 7: **DATA ON MEDIA REPRESENTATION**

Share of women in the governing/ supervisory body of the national public service broadcaster in 2023	37%
Share of women on the board of the national regulatory authority for media in 2023	20%
Share of persons under the age of 40 on the board of the national regulatory authority for media in 2023	20%
Minority media were supported by public funding in 2023. YES/NO/Partly	YES
Minority programming (in minority languages) was a part of national public service broadcasting in 2023. YES/NO/ Partly	YES

Sources: The website of RTCG is rtcg.me and that of the national regulator is amu.me; Fund for the Protection and Realization of Minority Rights (2023)

4.6. MEDIA PARTICIPATION

Most media in Montenegro use various mechanisms to communicate with their audience. The most common form of audience participation is through reader comments, which are regulated by strict legal frameworks to prevent the spread of hate speech. The second most common form of participation is through reader comments on media social media accounts, which in recent years have increasingly become a source of illegal and prohibited speech.

Although citizens have the opportunity to influence media content, only a small number file complaints with ombudsmen. It has not been observed that media outlets, as a rule, are focused on developing new forms of audience involvement in content creation, nor do they make full use of new technologies to encourage greater interaction, participation in media work, and, ultimately, to strengthen trust in media organizations.

Table 8: DATA ON MEDIA PARTICIPATION

<p>The majority of the media in the country commonly provide mechanisms for participation and interaction with citizens/ readers, listeners, viewers (comment sections, letters to editor, forums, blogs, readers' editor, ombudsman, other type of complaint mechanism, membership, internship, focus groups...). YES/NO/Partly</p>	<p>YES</p>
<p>TREND in the past 3 years: Is the number of mechanisms for participation in the media in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same? (e.g. comment sections closing down or opening, ombudsman established or shut down etc.)</p>	<p>Remaining the same</p>
<p>3 most common mechanisms of (citizen) participation in media in the country</p>	<p>Comment sections, comments on social media pages and complaints sent to the media ombudspersons</p>

Sources: Bogdanović, Đurnić and Rajković-Nenadić (2023); Bogdanović (2023)

V.

THE FUTURE OF MEDIA USE AND TRUST

5.1. MEDIA USE

Television has long been the primary source of information for the majority of the population in Montenegro, with social media serving as the second most common source. Although nearly 78% of citizens report watching television daily, this represents a noticeable decline compared to 2021, when 88% of the population watched TV, and 2020, when the percentage was 91%. Social media is used daily by 63% of the population, a figure that has remained stable over the past four years. Online media is used daily by 56% of citizens, though there is a slight downward trend in the use of online portals, with the proportion of citizens accessing news portals daily decreasing by about 10% compared to 2020. Nearly 50% of citizens listen to the radio, while almost one-third of the population reads print media. Print media has experienced a consistent decline over the years, while the percentage of daily radio listeners has stabilized in the past two years.

Young people, aged 15 to 29, primarily get their information from social media. Research indicates that the most popular social networks among young people are Snapchat, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram, while the most widely used communication apps are Telegram, WhatsApp, and Viber.

In Montenegro, there is growing interest among institutions and organizations focused on media and education to enhance media literacy through various initiatives. However, according to the Media Literacy Index, Montenegro ranks 33rd out of 41 countries. Beginning with the 2023/2024 school year, media literacy has been introduced as an elective subject for the final grades of primary schools, while high school students have had the option to choose this subject since 2011. Despite this, no studies have been conducted to assess how effectively young people, through the education system, have developed critical thinking skills or resilience to the misinformation they encounter on social media. Over 90% of citizens believe that media literacy is important.

There is growing interest among institutions and organizations focused on media and education to enhance media literacy through various initiatives.

Table 9: DATA ON MEDIA USE

Which media type was most often used source of news and information for citizens in the country in 2023?	TV
TREND in the past 3 years: The media type which is the most often used source of news and information for citizens in the country has changed. YES/NO If yes, from which type to which type?	No change
Which media type was the most often used source of news and information for youth (age between 15 and 29) in the country in 2023?	Social media
Audience reach of the media type "Television" in the country in 2023	77.9%
Top 3 most popular (most used, visited) social media in the country in 2023	Facebook, Instagram, X
Top 3 most popular (most used, visited) social media among youth (age between 15 and 29) in the country in 2023	Snapchat, Tiktok, X and Instagram
Top 3 most popular (most watched) TV news shows in the country in 2023	Talk show "Načisto" (TV Vijesti)
Media Literacy Index for the country in 2023	33rd place out of 41
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the Media Literacy Index growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Declining
Media literacy is a separate subject in elementary or secondary schools. YES/NO/ Partly	YES, an elective subject

Sources: Digital Forensic Center (2023); Ipsos (2023); MAJE (2023); Responses of Self-Regulatory Bodies to Inquiries from June 2024; Open Society Institute Sofia (2023)

5.2. MEDIA TRUST

More than half of the citizens of Montenegro generally or fully trust the information published by the media. Data on media trust indicate a declining trend. In terms of media types, citizens consistently express the highest level of trust in television, followed by online media and radio. Traditional media generally enjoy higher trust levels than social media, which is the least trusted. When compared to other societal actors, both the media and political parties are trusted to a lesser extent. However, the level of trust in journalists specifically is not known, nor is there data on how this profession ranks in relation to other important professions in society.

Table 10: DATA ON MEDIA TRUST

Level of overall trust in media in the country in 2023 (in percentage)	54%
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the level of overall trust in media in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Declining
Top 3 most trusted media types in the country in 2023	TV (60%), online (47%), radio (45%)
TREND in the past 3 years: The order of the top 3 most trusted media types in the country has changed. YES/NO. Which media types have changed places among the top 3?	NO CHANGE
In which place are the media in the ranking of the most trusted institutions in the country in 2023?	In last place, together with political parties
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the ranking (place) of the media among the most trusted institutions in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Remaining the same
In which place are journalists in the ranking of trusted professions in the country in 2023?	NO DATA

TREND in the past 3 years: Is the ranking (place) of journalists among the most trusted professions in the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	NO DATA
Citizens use self-regulatory mechanisms to submit complaints when they observe violations of professional conduct of media and journalists. YES/NO/PARTLY	PARTLY
TREND: Is the number of citizens using self-regulatory mechanisms to submit complaints when they observe violations of professional conduct of media and journalists growing, declining, or remain the same?	Remaining the same

Sources: Digital Forensic Center (2023); Ipsos (2023); MAJE (2023); Responses of Self-Regulatory Bodies to Inquiries from June 2024

VI.

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

According to the Democracy Index by The Economist, Montenegro is classified as a country with deficient democracy. In 2023, it ranked 52nd out of 167 countries, with a score of 6.67, marking an improvement of ten positions compared to the previous year. The area with the lowest rating is political culture in Montenegro. Based on the Rule of Law Index, Montenegro scored 0.56, ranking 57th out of 142 countries. Public trust in the judiciary increased by 10% in 2023, reaching 44%.

The Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks countries by their perceived level of corruption in the public sector, placed Montenegro 63rd out of 180 countries. Compared to last year's report, Montenegro's score increased by one index point, and its position improved by two places. According to the Media Freedom Index, Montenegro advanced 24 places in 2023, although the report by Reporters Without Borders did not provide a detailed explanation for such a significant improvement.

International observers assess the electoral process as free and fair, although they note irregularities that did not affect the results. Local civil society organizations highlight the long-standing issue of a lack of political will to improve electoral laws and the electoral environment. Research shows that 58% of citizens believe the elections are free and fair. The most recent elections showed decreased citizen interest in voting. In the 2023 early parliamentary elections, 56.4% of voters participated, the lowest turnout since the introduction of multiparty elections.

Citizens have low trust in key political institutions, such as Parliament and the Government. The most trusted institutions are the education system, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the healthcare system.

In the area of freedom of expression and access to information, Montenegro has regulations that align with international standards. However, their implementation is often inconsistent. In recent years, there has been an increasing trend of hate speech, verbal threats, and insults directed at journalists and civil society activists. Politicians, critical media outlets, and activists—particularly members of the academic community who criticize the current government and its ally, the Serbian Orthodox Church—are frequent targets.

Table 11: DATA ON DEMOCRACY

Democracy Index of the country in 2023	6.67
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the Democracy Index of the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Growing
Rule of Law Index of the country in 2023 (according to the World Justice Project)	0.56
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the Rule of Law index of the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	NO DATA
Corruption Perceptions Index for the country in 2023	63 of 180 ranked countries
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the Corruption Perceptions Index for the country growing, declining, or remaining the same?	Declining
Media Freedom Index in the country in 2023	39 of 180 ranked countries
TREND in the past 3 years: Is the Media Freedom Index in the country is growing, declining or remaining the same?	Growing
Is there transparency and open public access to data about the spending of public funds? YES/NO/PARTLY	PARTLY
Legislation on access to public information follows international standards. YES/NO/Partly	YES
There is a functional and credible independent institution supervising implementation of legislation on access to public information, including the administration of complaints regarding denied access. YES/NO/Partly	PARTLY

Were there were government or parliament members under prosecution for charges of corruption or other criminal charges in 2023? YES/NO	NO
Legislation allows political party ownership in the media in the country? YES/NO/Partly	NO
There is significant political party ownership (i.e. ownership of a group of media of the same or different types, or a media outlet with a large audience or market share or strong influence on public opinion) in the media in the country? YES/NO/Partly	NO

Sources: Vijesti Online (2024); World Justice Project (2023); Transparency International (2023); CEMI (2023); Reporters Without Borders (2023)

VII.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the change of the long-standing DPS government in mid-2020, Montenegrin society has faced political crises. Frequent election cycles and instability in ruling majorities have affected the speed and quality of Montenegro's integration into the EU, the work and functioning of institutions, and the general social and political environment. After the reconstruction of Montenegro's 44th government, anti-democratic and anti-European tendencies emerged. These tendencies are reflected in the advocacy for legislation aimed at changing the constitutional order regarding language and citizenship, suppressing criticism from the civil sector, and undermining relations with neighbouring Croatia, an EU member state. This has been accompanied by a decline in trust in key political institutions and an overall unsatisfactory political culture.

Although several international studies monitoring the state of democracy, the rule of law, corruption perception, and media freedoms show progress compared to previous years, the current situation in media and journalism is not encouraging. In recent years, institutions have attempted to strategically address the media sector through the adoption of a Media Strategy and amendments to media laws. However, these regulations have not adequately addressed some of the key issues affecting the media landscape, such as media ownership transparency, strong foreign influence in media ownership structures, unregistered portals, and the fight against disinformation. Additionally, they have not implemented new European regulations in this area, indicating that media laws will need to be revised again.

The significant increase in the number of media outlets in Montenegro has not led to greater media pluralism or improved journalistic standards. The media market is small, and the launch of new outlets lacks economic justification. The media scene is heavily influenced by foreign actors, predominantly from Serbia. Owners from Serbia control four out of five television stations with national frequency, and two out of three daily newspapers are foreign-owned. These media outlets inevitably influence public opinion and are used to expand political influence, which affects the quality of media reporting and threatens the survival of locally owned media outlets.

Year after year, the amount of public funds allocated to media outlets through the Media Pluralism Fund has increased, which is important for their sustainability. The Agency for Electronic Media and the Ministry of Culture and Media distribute the funds transparently, but mechanisms for evaluating the quality of financed projects need to be established.

The national regulator, the Agency for Electronic Media, has improved its communication with the public. Recent amendments to the law have expanded its jurisdiction, enabling it to impose measures of varying intensity. While it remains responsible only for electronic media, there is clear potential for the agency to develop into an independent and professional regulator that consistently applies regulations.

Current self-regulatory mechanisms in Montenegro's media sector are not effective, but there is potential for further development in the new amendments to the law. These amendments require media outlets to develop internal self-regulation if they wish to receive funds from the Media Pluralism Fund. Implementing this legal provision must be accompanied by raising awareness among media and journalists about the importance of strong self-regulation. This will help citizens recognize self-regulation as an independent authority capable of improving the quality of reporting and providing a reliable platform for submitting complaints.

RTCG, which is currently under strong political influence from the ruling parties, has legally guaranteed funding from the state budget. However, to create a professional and independent public service, it is essential to ensure the lawful appointment of the general director and independent decision-making in its governing bodies.

The greatest challenge for building a better future for media and journalism in Montenegro is the poor media environment for journalists. This includes their poor socio-economic position, lack of collective bargaining agreements, and weak protection from threats and attacks, making the profession less attractive to journalism students. However, thanks to unionization and the efforts of professional and media organizations, journalists have opportunities for further professional development and can collectively fight for better status in society.

Determining detailed trends about the future of journalism is complicated by the lack of statistical data in this field. Institutions do not have accurate data, and the media outlets are unwilling to share information about the number of employed journalists, gender representation, ethnic minorities, etc., for the purposes of civil society research.

An additional challenge for the future of media and journalism is the declining trust in the media among citizens. There is a noticeable trend of negative perception of media work, and social media is becoming an increasingly common channel for information, especially among young people. These trends may hinder traditional media from fulfilling their primary role of informing and educating citizens in the long term.

Citizens largely recognize the importance of media literacy for society. Therefore, the active role of institutions and the civil sector in promoting media literacy can be significant and impactful in the long run. In addition to media literacy being introduced as an elective subject in primary and secondary schools, where young people develop critical thinking skills, institutions must also work to build resilience against disinformation among other social groups.

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A letter from the Ministry of Culture and Media dated June 2024

A letter from the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro dated June 2024

Letters from self-regulation bodies dated June 2024

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MORE MEDIA, RISING CHALLENGES FOR JOURNALISTS

The Future of the Media in Montenegro – Facts and Trends

This publication is the result of research undertaken as part of the project **“Our Media: A civil society action to generate media literacy and activism, counter polarisation and promote dialogue”**. The second research series was conducted in the thematic framework titled **“The Future of the Media in the Western Balkans and Turkey”**, focusing, in 2024, on collecting and analysing the facts and trends on media and democracy in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey.

The project **“Our Media: A civil society action to generate media literacy and activism, counter polarisation and promote dialogue”** is jointly implemented by nine media development organisations from the Western Balkans and Turkey with the financial support of the European Union. The coordinator of the three-year project is the Foundation Mediacentar Sarajevo. Partners in the project are the Albanian Media Institute in Tirana; Bianet in Istanbul; the Macedonian Institute for Media in Skopje; the Montenegro Media Institute in Podgorica; the Novi Sad School of Journalism; the Peace Institute in Ljubljana; the Press Council of Kosovo in Pristina; and the South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEENPM).