

World's Press Groups assess media scene in EU-hopeful Montenegro

PODGORICA, MONTENEGRO: Three global press organisations have agreed to assess the media landscape in Montenegro, a young democracy which hopes to join the European Union but whose candidacy has raised press freedom concerns.



The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), the International Press Institute (IPI) and the South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO) recently sent a joint delegation to the southeastern European republic to assess the threats to a free and independent press, and determine how to improve conditions in which a free press can thrive.

The delegation, which visited Montenegro from 2 to 4 March, met with publishers and editors of independent and state-owned newspapers, with government and non-governmental officials, and with representatives of the United States, German and European Union delegations to Montenegro.

Violent attacks, murder

"The European Union has rightly placed improving media freedom as a condition before it can begin negotiations with Montenegro for membership," said Larry Kilman, deputy CEO and executive director of Communications and Public Affairs for WAN-IFRA, who led the delegation. "This position recognises that free press is a fundamental precondition for democratic development, and needs the full commitment of Montenegrin authorities."

Montenegro, which became independent of Serbia in 2006, has been accused of using its criminal defamation laws and economic pressure to punish and inhibit critical reporting. There have been a number of violent attacks on the independent press as well, notably the 2004 murder of Dusko Jovanovic, publisher and editor-in-chief of the independent newspaper *Dan*. The country has recently taken steps to repeal its criminal defamation laws.

The assessment from the global press organisations will be contained in a report to be issued by the end of March.

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