

# How to protect media from soft censorship in Montenegro

## Abstract

Free and independent media are the basis of every democratic society. In order for media to fulfil their watchdog role, they need to be politically and economically independent in their work, operate under clearly prescribed legal standards and be free from inadequate external political influence. In this way the competition would define the market, and not the political influence.

Freedom of expression and media freedoms are under constant political pressure in Montenegro resulting in deep polarization of media environment. The non transparent and non competitive state distribution of public funds disrupts the media market in Montenegro, and additionally weakens the economic independence of media, directly determining on how media report on governmental activities.

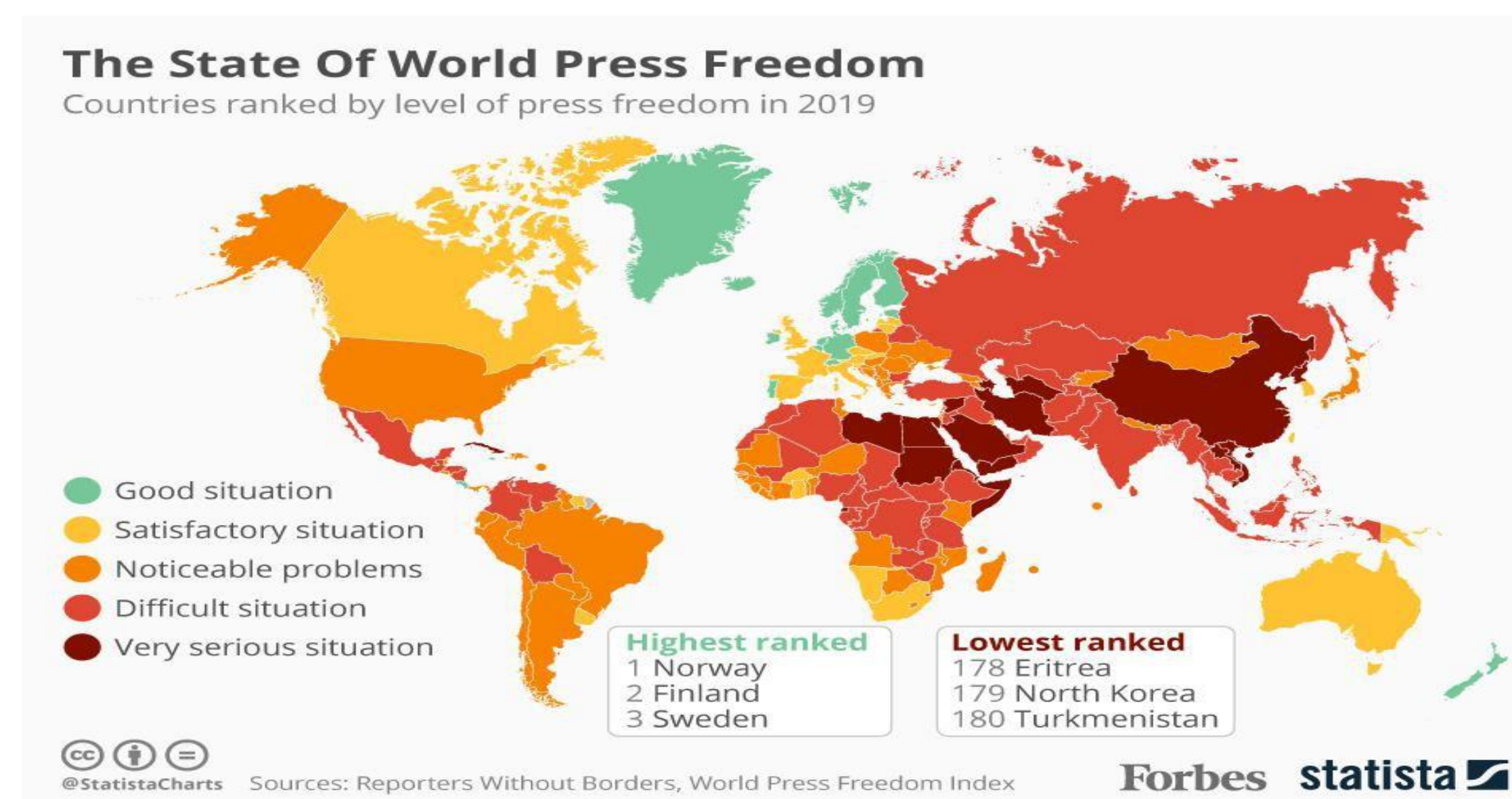
## References

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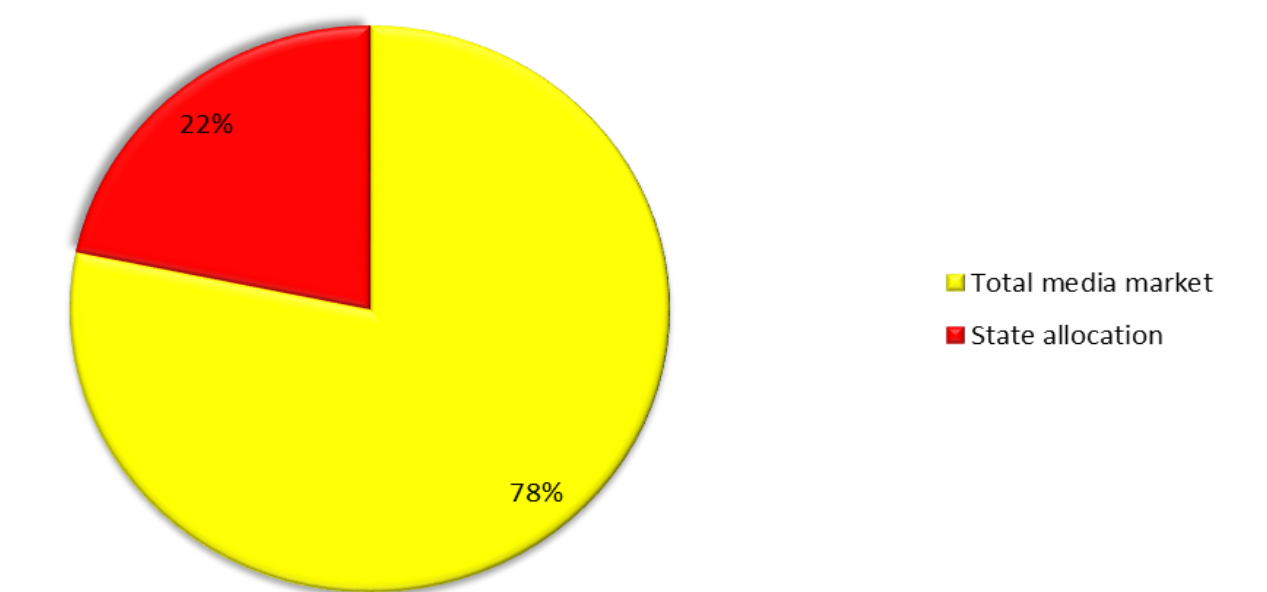
## Introduction

Soft or indirect censorship, as it was described by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is „*the exercise of power and the use of public funds by the state, the arbitrary and discriminatory placement of official advertising and government loans, and the concession of radio and television licenses, among others, when undertaken with the intent to put pressure on and punish or reward media because of the opinions they express*”. (Declaration on Principles of Freedom of Expression, 2000, p 13)

Montenegro has been marked as one of the countries with the highest level of soft censorship in the world, by the EU, Council of Europe, WAN-IFRA and CIMA and used as an example to show the consequences of this phenomenon on media freedoms, pluralism and diversity.



According to the Reporters without Borders World Press Freedom Index report Montenegro is positioned on 104th place out of 180. Source: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2019/04/23/the-state-of-world-press-freedom-in-2019-infographic/#d8e9c1d8bbab0>



Available data collected by domestic NGO Centre for Civic Education (CCE) show that the government has spent at least 2.64 million EUR in 2011 and 2.2 million in 2013 on advertising and other media services out of 9.5 million EUR of total estimated media market.  
Source: <http://cgo-cce.org/en/izdavastvo/demokratija-izdavastvo/>



## Recommendations:

- ❖ Clear oversight mechanisms for public financing and allocation of state aid to media must be established. Public funding must be accessible to all media that meet clear criteria, via public calls or tenders under identical conditions for all interested media. (R. Lansner, D.Uljarević, A.Vujošević, V.Vučković, 2015)
- ❖ Amendments to the Law on Media should clearly regulate and ensure transparent financing of media from public funds, as well as funds of state institutions, local self-governments and all organizations which are financed partially or entirely from the budget (D.Uljarević, A.Nenezić, D.D. Vuković, 2017)
- ❖ Independent and reliable readership and viewership data for Montenegro's media outlets should be collected and serve as bases for fair and impartial allocation of official advertising (R. Lansner, D.Uljarević, A.Vujošević, V.Vučković, 2015)