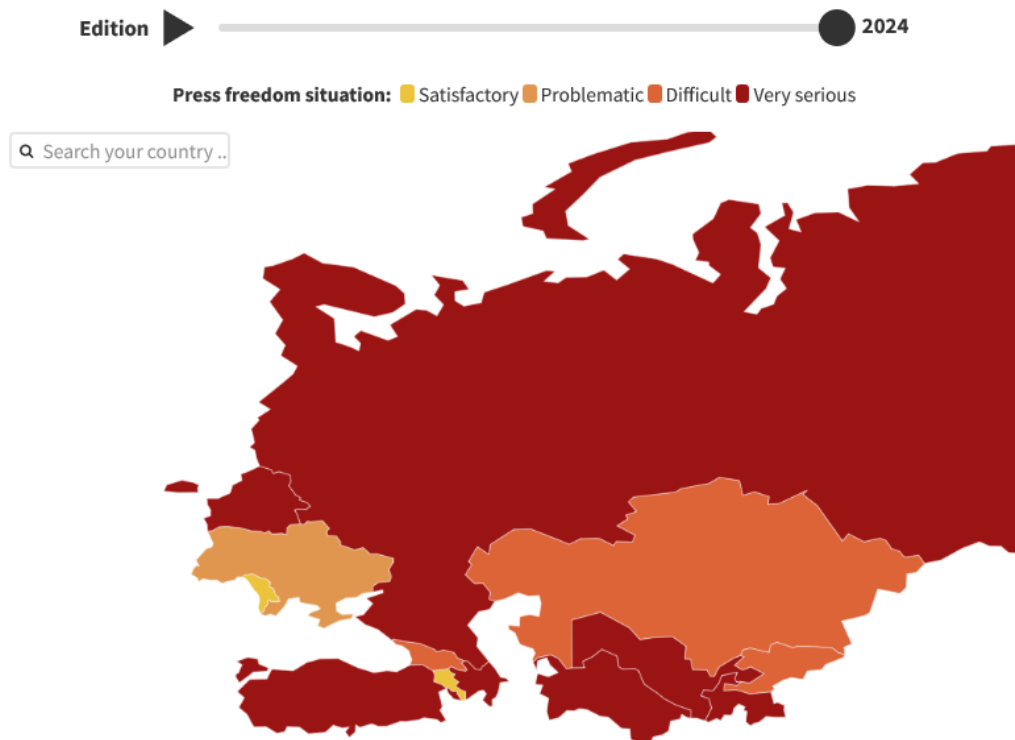


**Under embargo until May 3rd 2024, at 6:00 AM (GMT+2)**

## Europe and Central Asia: toxic Kremlin influence reaches EU

### Politically throttled east

The situation has suffered an overall decline in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where press freedom is not guaranteed and the media are increasingly used as transmission belts for disinformation campaigns.



Source: [World Press Freedom Index](#), [Link to share](#) **RSF**  
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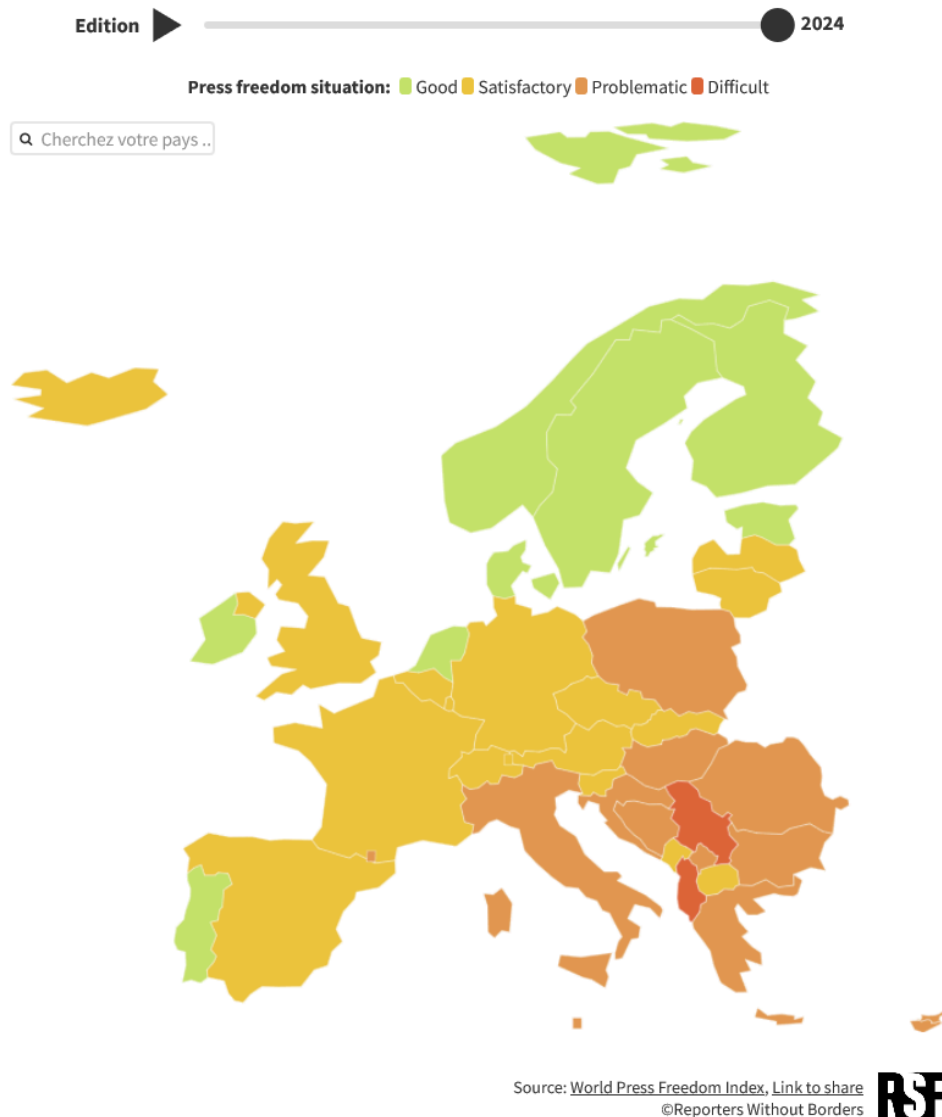
The [Russian state](#) (162nd) has pursued its crusade against independent journalism, while more than 1,500 journalists have fled abroad since the invasion of [Ukraine](#). [Russia's](#) two-place rise in the 2024 World Press Freedom Index, due to other countries falling, obscures a fall in its global score as the list of journalists and media branded as “foreign agents” or “undesirable” has lengthened and journalists continue to be jailed arbitrarily. The two rivals for the region’s lowest ranking are [Belarus](#) (167th), whose government persecutes journalists on the pretext of combatting “extremism,” and [Turkmenistan](#) (175th), whose president has unlimited power and bans all independent reporting.

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Countries that have suffered significant falls include [Georgia](#) (103rd), which has fallen 25 places. Its ruling party continues to polarise society, cultivates a rapprochement with [Moscow](#) and conducts a policy that is increasingly hostile to press freedom. [Azerbaijan](#) (164th) has also seen all of its indicators fall, especially its political indicator, after [cracking down](#) on the media before its presidential election.

One of the Index's surprises is the 18-place jump by [Ukraine](#) (61st) due to improvements in both its security indicator – fewer journalists killed – and its political one. Although the rule of law has not been enforced over the entire country since the Russian invasion, which has prevented the Ukrainian authorities from guaranteeing press freedom in the occupied territories, political interference in free [Ukraine](#) has fallen. This kind of pressure is limited by the fact that the media denounce it.

### European Union v. “Orbanisation”



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In the west, despite the European Union's adoption of its first media freedom law, the EMFA, and the fact that three European countries – [Norway](#), [Denmark](#) and [Sweden](#) – still top the Index, politicians are trying to reduce the space for independent journalism. Those at the forefront of this dangerous trend include [Hungary's](#) pro-Kremlin prime minister, Viktor Orban, and his counterpart in [Slovakia](#) (29th), Robert Fico. Press freedom is being put to the test by the ruling parties in [Hungary](#) (67th), [Malta](#) (73rd) and [Greece](#) (88th), the EU's three worst-ranked countries. Giorgia Meloni's [Italy](#) (46th) has also fallen three places.

Political interests stifle journalism in several countries that are candidates for EU membership – [Bosnia-Herzegovina](#) (81st), [Serbia](#) (98th) and [Albania](#) (99th). [Türkiye](#) (158th) continues to imprison journalists and undermine media by means of online censorship and its control of the judiciary.

The political environment for journalism has improved in [Poland](#) (up 10 at 47th) and [Bulgaria](#) (up 12 at 59th) thanks to new governments with more concern for the right to information. [Germany](#) has joined the ranks of the Index's top ten countries, improving its political indicator with a decline in attacks on journalists by far-right groups. In [France](#) (21st) and the [United Kingdom](#) (23rd), press freedom is not threatened by major political violations. But vigilance is still needed, as seen with French journalist Ariane Lavrilleux's arrest in response to a complaint by the armed forces ministry, and with Julian Assange's continuing detention in the [United Kingdom](#), where exile journalists, especially Iranians, are also threatened by their country of origin without effective protection by the host nation's authorities.