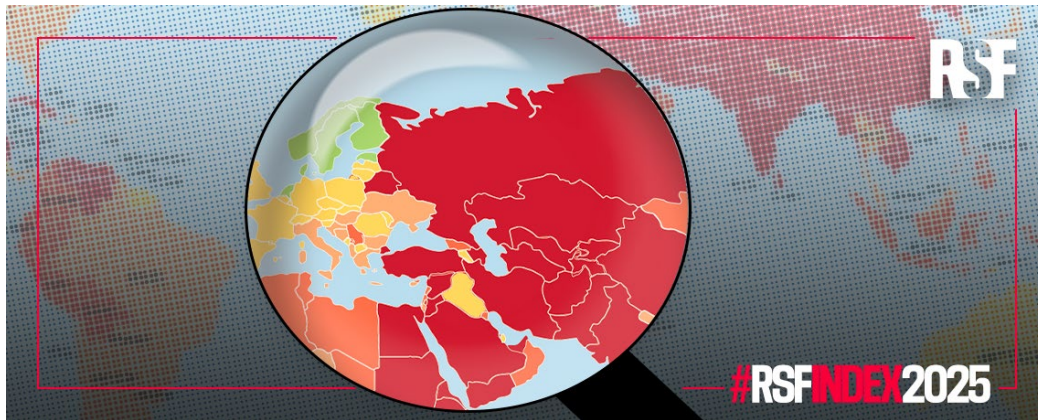
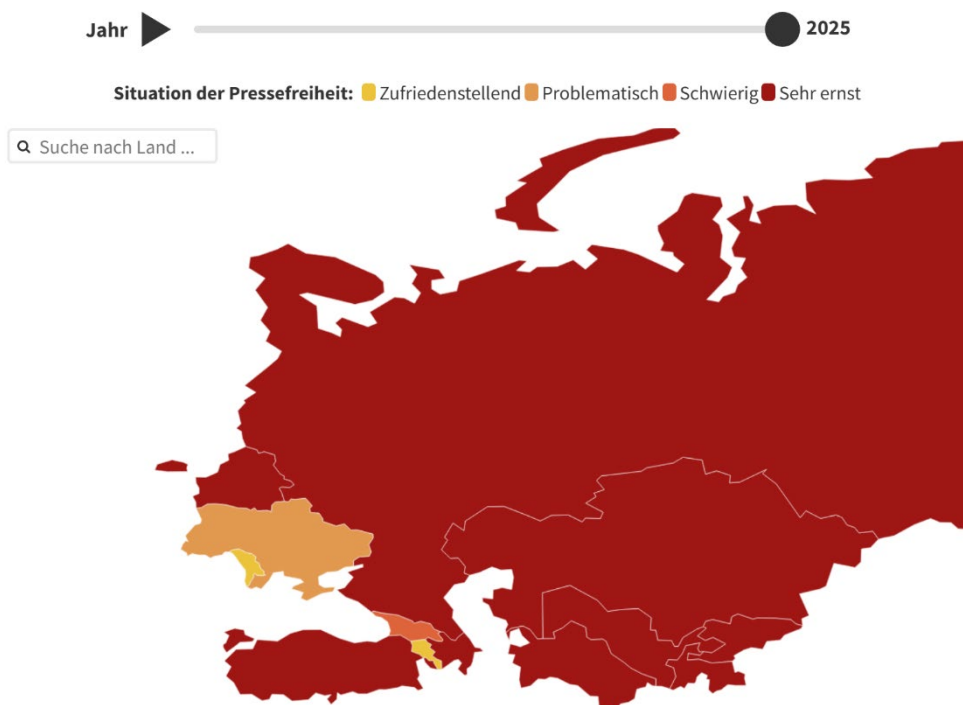


Europe - Central Asia:

The slow economic asphyxiation of the independent press



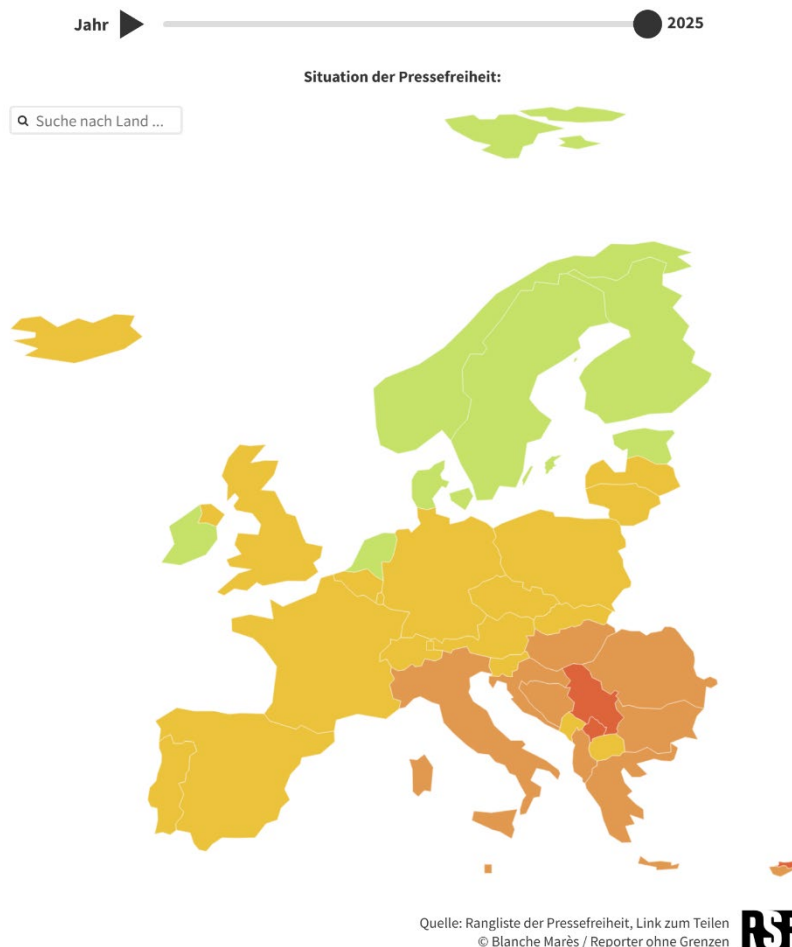
Independent outlets in Europe and Central Asia are facing an unprecedented economic crisis exacerbated by the abrupt halt of American aid and the growing influence of Russian propaganda. Budget cuts under the Trump administration – notably the suspension of funding for *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)* and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) – have severely weakened an already vulnerable sector, especially in countries grappling with authoritarian regimes, corruption and war.



An economic crisis intensified by geopolitics

In [Ukraine](#) (62nd in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index), where the Russian invasion has made access to reliable information more crucial than ever, around [90 per cent](#) of newsrooms were surviving thanks to subsidies, primarily coming from the US. The withdrawal of this aid has threatened reliable coverage of Russian war crimes and corruption, while the Kremlin possesses considerable means to disseminate its propaganda.

The economic asphyxiation of the media also affects exiled newsrooms originating from the region. Deprived of local revenue and US support, these outlets are carrying out mass layoffs, further weakening access to independent information in [Russia](#) (171st) and [Belarus](#) (166th) in particular. In [Georgia](#) (114th), the advertising market is controlled by oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, founder of the ruling party — which is being challenged by mass protests — and the law on “foreign influence” blocks other sources of funding. In [Azerbaijan](#) (167th), the lack of possibilities for funding has reduced independent outlets to silence or exile.



The media's economic crisis is also palpable within the European Union (EU) and the Balkans, where the implementation of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) – which could benefit the news economy – is still pending. The funding of public broadcasting has become a decisive test of how countries support their media landscape: [Czechia](#) (10th) has chosen to strengthen the sustainability of its public media budget, unlike Germany (11th) and [France](#) (25th). In [Slovakia](#) (38th), [Bosnia](#) (86th), [Serbia](#) (96th) and [Kosovo](#) (99th) – the Index's worst-ranking country in the EU-Balkans area – public service media are experiencing an existential crisis due to budget cuts and political control.

The political instrumentalisation of the media, worsened by economic decline

This economic decline fuels a dangerous dynamic: the political instrumentalisation of the media, which contributes to the normalisation of impunity for crimes against the press. In [Moldova](#) (35th), investigative journalists are discredited by politicians on social media. In [Kyrgyzstan](#) (144th), the takeover of the independent outlet *24.kg* by a former presidential spokesperson illustrates how reliable sources of information are being transformed into propaganda tools. In [Uzbekistan](#) (148th), the few independent journalists still reporting operate in a repressive environment and authorities often try to bribe bloggers. [Türkiye](#) (159th, down 2) stagnates at the bottom quarter of the RSF Index due to the continued repression of journalists.

Within the EU, this dangerous proximity between the news media and those in power plays out in [Hungary](#) (68th) and [Cyprus](#) (77th) through the opaque, unequal distribution of state advertising. The media landscape in [Albania](#) (80th) and [Greece](#) (89th) is defined by conflicts of interest. What's more, when outlets in the region resist pressure, they face strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) that drain their finances — this can be seen in [Croatia](#) (60th) and [Bulgaria](#) (70th). However, signs of hope are emerging. [Poland](#) (31st) is rebounding after the withdrawal of abusive legal actions against the press. The media sector in [Austria](#) (22nd) is showing signs of positive economic momentum. [Estonia](#) (2nd) is now the highest-ranking EU country for press freedom, just behind [Norway](#) (1st).