

Zelensky Expands Crackdown on Ukrainian Media

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President Volodymyr Zelensky has signed a new bill into law which strengthens government control over public access to news in Ukraine. Zelensky has already nationalized the country's media under martial law powers invoked after Russia's invasion last year, stoking criticism from press freedom groups.

Signed on December 29, the law expands the Ukrainian broadcast regulator's powers over news agencies "dramatically," now including both print and online sources, according to the [Kyiv Independent](#). The measure requires publications to obtain licenses to operate, and any media org without the proper paperwork can be shut down, the outlet reported, adding that the body handing out the permits will be under Zelensky's control.

According to Ukraine's Institute of Mass Information, under the law, the media regulator is likely to be controlled by the incumbent authorities because its members are appointed by Zelensky and the Ukrainian parliament, where his party has an absolute majority.

In March, Zelensky issued a [presidential decree](#) which nationalized Ukraine's broadcast media, stressing the need for a "unified information policy" to combat Russian disinformation and voices critical of the government. Around the same time, he also [banned](#) a long list of opposition political parties with alleged links to Russia, and has since taken [punitive action](#) against [Orthodox churches](#) also said to have ties with Moscow, effectively quashing all dissent under martial law powers.

While Zelensky's power-grabs throughout the 11-month conflict have largely gone unnoticed in the American mainstream press – which has devoted ample coverage to [similar wartime repression in Russia](#) – the New York Times highlighted [calls from human rights groups](#) to rescind the law over fears that it will crush the free press.

"Ukraine will demonstrate its European commitment by promoting a free and independent media, not by establishing state control of information," said Ricardo

Gutiérrez, the general secretary for the European Federation of Journalists.

The Committee to Protect Journalists and other civil rights orgs also slammed the legislation while it was being debated by lawmakers in December. While Ukraine's legislature agreed to strip away some of the bill's more extreme measures, the final draft still hands the federal government near total control over Ukraine's news media.

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Kyle Anzalone and Will Porter host Conflicts of Interest along with Connor Freeman.

Featured image: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky delivers an address in Kiev, Ukraine, April 15, 2022. (Credit: Ukrainian Presidency)

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