

LANDMARKS IN FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN EUROPE

1766 Freedom of the press brings freedom of expression

The first freedom of the press legislation in the world abolishes strict censorship in Sweden and lays the foundations for freedom of expression and open democracy.



1789 The French Revolution spreads the notion of freedom of expression as a human right

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen drawn up by the French revolutionaries creates a modern notion of democracy and emphasises freedom of expression as a human right: "Every citizen may speak, write and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law."



1950 Freedom of expression is protected by legislation

By signing the European Convention on Human Rights several European countries commit themselves to guaranteeing human rights and freedom of expression for all in their legislation. The convention gives everyone the freedom to hold opinions and receive information, but this freedom may be restricted in the interest of national security or to protect the rights of others.



1948 The UN declares freedom of expression to be a universal right

The UN member states sign the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to prevent the horrors of World War II against humanity from being repeated. The right to free speech is included in human rights.



The Internet expands freedom of expression in the 1990s

The growth of the Internet increases transparency and inclusion. People can now compete with the media when it comes to producing content. Not everyone, however, has the ability to browse or understand online content, which is why public websites are nowadays required to be accessible.



Hate speech is highlighted in the 2000s

Hate speech on the Internet becomes a topic of public debate in the 2000s. The fear of hate speech especially affects the willingness of people of certain professions and minorities to express their views in public and to participate in society.



2001 Freedom of expression is monitored by surveillance technology

In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the use of surveillance technology expands significantly across the world. Tighter controls are intended to prevent information warfare, cybercrime and fake news but are also feared to curtail civil rights.

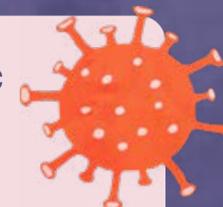


What will happen to freedom of expression in the future?

Some of the world's leading countries in terms of freedom of expression can be found in the European Union as can some in which the level of freedom of expression is declining. Hungary and Poland are examples of countries where the freedom of the press and the rights of minorities and women have been restricted.

The Covid pandemic impacts freedom of expression in 2021

Authoritarian states in particular have used the Covid pandemic as an excuse to restrict freedom of expression, the right to access information and journalists' ability to do their jobs. There is a risk that the exceptional measures will end up being permanent.



Social media strengthens freedom of expression in the 2010s

Although hate speech and harassment undermine freedom of expression on social media, these platforms have helped many minority people and young people to connect with a community and to have a voice.



Did you know that

the words "isegoria" (the equal right of citizens to participate in public debate in the democratic assembly) and "parrhesia" (speaking frankly), related to the notion of freedom of expression in Ancient Greece, were an integral part of Athenian democracy in 400 BCE?