

Group Ranks Russia on Par With Zimbabwe for Press Freedom

May 02, 2012

The  **Moscow Times**

The media in Russia is "not free," due to the government keeping overall control of the sphere and clamping down on certain news outlets, organization Freedom House said Wednesday in its annual press freedom rankings.

The group ranked Russia 172 out of 197 countries, with the same rating as southern neighbor Azerbaijan and as African pariah state Zimbabwe. Russia moved up one spot from last year, when it was ranked 173, on par with Congo, Gambia, and again Zimbabwe.

In explaining Russia's rating, the group compared the country to Iran and Venezuela, both also ruled by powerful executive branches.

"Other authoritarian powers—such as Russia, Iran, and Venezuela—resorted to a variety of techniques to maintain a tight grip on the media, detaining some press critics, closing down media outlets and blogs, and bringing libel or defa-mation suits against journalists," the group said in the introduction to its rankings.

The top three nations in the rankings, all tied for the first spot, were Finland, Norway and Sweden, which also made up the top three last year.

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