# [FI] Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media

**IRIS 2004-1:1/22**

*Marina Österlund-Karinkanta*
*Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE, EU and Media Unit*

On 13 June 2003 the Laki sananvapauden käyttämisestä joukkoviestinnässä ( Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media) was ratified. The Act repeals the Painovapauslaki (Freedom of the Press Act, 1/1919) and the Radiovastuulaki (Broadcasting Liability Act, 219/1971). The Act entered into force on 1 January 2004.

The new Act brings the press, broadcasting and on-line media within the same framework with respect to responsibility and the exercise of freedom of expression, thus implementing technology-neutrality.

The new Act contains more detailed provisions on the exercise, in the media, of the freedom of expression enshrined in the Constitution (731/1999). The Constitution states that everyone has the right to freedom of expression. Freedom of expression entails the right to express, disseminate and receive information, opinions and other communications without prevention by anyone. The main principle in the application of the Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression is that interference with the activities of the media shall be legitimate only in so far as it is unavoidable, taking due note of the importance of the freedom of expression in a democracy subject to the rule of law.

According to the new Act a responsible editor shall be designated for a periodical, a network publication and a programme. A network publication means a set of network messages, arranged into a coherent whole comparable to a periodical, from material produced or processed by the publisher, and intended to be issued regularly. Thus there is no obligation to name a responsible editor for portals and chat groups and only the Penal Code applies to these. All programmes and network publications shall be recorded and retained for at least 21 days.

The most important change that directly affects the audiovisual sector is that the right to reply now also applies to network publications and broadcast programmes that are broadcast on a repeated basis (previously the right to reply did not apply to radio and television programmes and there were no rules concerning network publications). A private individual, who has a justifiable reason for considering a message offensive, has the right to have a reply published in the same publication or programme. The procedure for handling demands for reply or

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

correction has become more bureaucratic.

The grounds for the imposition of a fine for editorial misconduct is that the responsible editor intentionally or negligently fails in an essential manner in his or her duty to manage and supervise editorial work.

A court can give an order to release the information required for the identification of the sender of a network message and to cease the distribution of a network message. A court may also order that a notice of the judgement concerning a violation of honour and privacy must be published free of charge and reasonably extensively in the media in question.

***Laki sananvapauden käyttämisestä joukkoviestinnässä 460/2003, 13.06.2003***

*Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media No. 460/2003 of 13 June 2003*

http://www.finlex.fi/english/laws/index.php

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026