

Abstract

The 21 of May 1998 Indonesia's president Suharto was forced to leave his position after more than 30 years in power. From that day Indonesia started its path to democracy, and thereby to a freedom of the press that did not exist before. A work with a new press law began, and in September 1999 the new Press Law number 40 was a reality.

In this thesis the content of the new Press Law number 40 is studied, as well as the process to implement the new law in practise. Which are the obstacles for the application of the press law? And how do journalists deal with these obstacles? In other words, what stops them from working freely and independent? These are some of the questions.

The analysis of the law is done from a political science perspective. Theories about democracy, civil society and the role of media in a democracy are used. United Nations article 19, which guarantees freedom of expression, is the basis of the content analysis of the law, which is done in one of the two main chapters. The other main chapter deals with the implementation of the press law.

In its main parts this thesis is a study carried out in Jakarta, Indonesia from August to October 2001. At that time 19 persons working with media – journalists, chief editors and others – were interviewed about the new press law and how the law has affected their daily work.

The results show that in general journalists know about the Press Law, which is a law that guarantees freedom of the press as stipulated in the Article 19 of the United Nations Human Rights Declaration. And the law is implemented in practise. It sure has contributed to a bigger freedom of the press in Indonesia. For example the government can not interfere in the work of the media anymore, by banning publications, and the journalists are protected by the law and can not be forced to reveal their sources.

But there are still some problems for the press in Indonesia. Violence against journalists is one of the problems. It comes from groups that can not accept what media reports. There is also a lack of and a need for education among the journalists. But above all, this study shows that the press have advanced faster than other important institutions in the society. The lack of working institutions is still a big problem. For example the legal system and the judiciary are still too weak. However, there is no doubt that the freedom of the press, with the implementation of the new Press Law, is one big step forward in the process of democratisation in Indonesia.