



The original Swedish Freedom of the Press Act.
Photo: Fredrik Funck/DN/TT

'Having considered the great advantages that flow to the public from a lawful freedom of writing and of the press, [...] We [the King] have graciously decided that the regulations issued previously on this matter [...] may be removed.'

King Adolphus Frederick (1710–1771)

THE WORLD'S FIRST FREEDOM OF THE PRESS ACT

On 2 December 1766 Sweden becomes the first country in the world with a constitutionally protected freedom of the press. With the passing of the Freedom of the Press Act, preventive censorship is abolished, except for religious topics, and the author is primarily responsible for any text.

'Everything that is not clearly contrary to that [the act] is to be regarded as legitimate to write and print, in whatever language or in whatever style it may be written.' (§ 5)

DOUBLE MILESTONE

The act also breaks ground for the principle of public access to information, which makes it legal to publish and read the minutes and documents from public agencies, parliament and government. Founded 200 years before any similar freedom of information legalisation in the world, this principle of public availability is still one of the cornerstones of the Swedish Constitution.

'This freedom of the press will further include all exchanges of correspondence, species facti, documents, protocols, judgments and awards, whether they were produced in the past or will be initiated, maintained, presented, conducted and issued hereafter [...].' (§ 6)

Of the political pamphlets published between 1700 and 1809, **75%** are printed the years following the Freedom of the Press Act.

1766

Between 1767 and 1772 the publication of political pamphlets increases by **769%** compared to the same period before the introduction of freedom of the press.