

Summary of the targeted stakeholder consultation for the 2026 Rule of Law Report.

With the 2026 Rule of Law Report, the Commission continues its annual monitoring cycle on the rule of law situation in the European Union and its Member States initiated in 2020. The Report contains 27 Member State chapters and, since 2024, four chapters on certain enlargement countries – Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania and Serbia. The chapters contain detailed country specific assessments of the four pillars of the report: the justice system, the anti-corruption framework, media pluralism and media freedom, and other institutional issues related to checks and balances. The Commission thereby aims to promote dialogue on the rule of law and to prevent problems from emerging or deepening. The Report provides an assessment of the developments since the 2025 Rule of Law Report, including new challenges at national level.

In the preparation of the 2026 Rule of Law Report, the Commission has continued a close dialogue with the Member States, the enlargement countries and with stakeholders in order to ensure a transparent process with an objective and impartial assessment as well as mutual understanding of the issues raised. Thanks to the input received from the Member States and enlargement countries, country visits and stakeholder contributions, as well as its own data gathering, the Commission was once again able to rely on a diversity of relevant sources.

As in previous years, the Commission has invited stakeholders to contribute and provide information on the rule of law situation across the European Union in a targeted stakeholder consultation, carried out from 4 December 2025 to 23 January 2026. Around 280 stakeholders¹ including international organisations, national independent authorities, interest representatives and civil society organisations provided information on:

- a) horizontal developments relating to the rule of law, meaning trends common to several or all Member States and
- b) developments at national level relating to justice systems, anti-corruption framework, media pluralism, and other institutional issues related to checks and balances (i.e. the four pillars of the Report).

Those contributions once again proved to be a valuable source of information for the Commission's work especially to identify and assess recent developments related to the national legal and institutional framework and its implementation in practice. In this context, the Report reflects the information provided by stakeholders where relevant, and contributions are cited in the country chapters as appropriate, in line with the Report's methodology. Due consideration is given to the contributions received, taking into account their factual correctness, comprehensiveness, quality, reliability and relevance.

In addition to the targeted stakeholder consultation, the Commission has consulted with stakeholders during the country visits to each of the 27 Member States and four enlargement countries. Some of the stakeholders that contributed to the targeted stakeholder contribution

¹ For the purposes of determining the number of stakeholders that contributed, stakeholders that did not include any information in the targeted consultation were not taken into account. Each separate stakeholder was counted only once regardless of the number of contributions they sent.

were also consulted as part of the virtual country visits, which facilitated further discussions based on their written contributions². The contributions by stakeholders are summarised below and listed in the Annex of this summary³. Concrete references to individual contributions below are made based on the consent of the stakeholders⁴.

Horizontal developments

Several stakeholders provided information on horizontal developments and general trends related to the rule of law. These contributions were mainly received from European networks, EU agencies and other international organisations and civil society umbrella organisations, including from the Fundamental Rights Agency, the Council of Europe, the UN Human Rights Regional Office for Europe, the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary, the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions, the European Implementation Network, Civil Liberties Union for Europe, the European Civic Forum and Civil Society Europe. The contributions elaborate on positive and negative general horizontal developments or trends, pertaining to the rule of law across the EU Member States as well as often bringing country-specific information covering all 27 Member States and certain developments in enlargement countries. In particular, these contributions cover the four pillars of the 2026 Rule of Law Report mentioned above: the justice system, the anti-corruption framework, media pluralism and media freedom and other institutional issues related to checks and balances, including on aspects relevant to the functioning of the Single Market under each of the four pillars.

As regards the justice system, stakeholders note several cross-cutting concerns, which relate to insufficient consultation of the judiciary on reforms, and lack of capacity and funding, resulting in backlogs and reduced attractiveness of the profession. At the same time, some Member States are taking steps to improve capacity, efficiency, specialisation, and digitalisation. Stakeholders also describe institutional and political pressure, including wider tensions around judicial councils and reforms affecting independence. As a positive development, a number of Member States have introduced procedural simplification and organisational reforms. Additionally, some Member States have introduced procedural measures to reduce the length of civil proceedings through reforms under the Recovery and Resilience Plans, as well as increased use of mediation and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, which can help create a more predictable and reliable legal environment for cross-border economic activity and support the functioning of the Single Market.

² Information on organisations consulted during the virtual country visits can be found in Annex II of each country chapter.

³ The contributions received, as well as the summary of the contributions, represent opinions of the stakeholders and cannot be regarded as the official position of the European Commission and its services and are therefore not binding.

⁴ Participants to the consultation could choose to have their contribution published either with their personal details included, or published in an anonymized version, or not to have their contribution published at all.

As regards the anti-corruption framework, stakeholders describe efforts as structurally uneven and note a lack of a consistent track record of final judgments in complex or high-level corruption cases, while the length of judicial proceedings remains excessive. They also highlight that transparency and accountability mechanisms in corruption prevention remain limited in practice and that shortcomings persist in key preventive tools such as lobbying rules, asset declarations, and oversight systems. More broadly, formal legislative processes often don't translate into effective results, like investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of corruption cases, including those involving high-level officials. Stakeholders also note advancements, such as efforts to improve efficiency, including through electronic systems for public interest disclosures.

As regards media freedom and media pluralism, stakeholders describe a generally fragile environment. The main patterns highlighted include undue political influence and legal pressure on journalists and media outlets, which can lead to pre-emptive self-censorship. There are also concerns over structural funding or governance measures that may weaken editorial independence and pluralism. On the other hand, stakeholders also note a number of positive reforms, such as stronger rules for access to information for journalists and support mechanisms against Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs).

As regards other institutional issues related to checks and balances, stakeholders note a shrinking civic space, limited transparency, and growing obstacles to public scrutiny and participation. An excessive use of emergency decrees was also observed, as well as an increased reliance on discretionary or ad hoc practices rather than predictable procedures. Limited consultation with civil society risks concentrating power and reducing government accountability, as do concerns about political pressure on oversight bodies. Stakeholders also mention a number of positive developments, including reforms to improve access to information and transparency and clarify protections for fundamental rights.

Annex: list of contributors*

* When filling out the targeted stakeholder consultation, stakeholders could choose between public or anonymous contributions as well as having the option to not have their contribution published. Those that chose the option to remain anonymous or not have their contributions published are not included in this list.

- AMJE Asociación de Mujeres Juezas de España
- Amnesty International
- Arcom (Autorité de régulation de la communication audiovisuelle et numérique)
- Artistic Freedom Initiative
- Asociacion de Fiscales
- Asociación Impulso Ciudadano
- Asociación Judicial Francisco de Vitoria
- Asociación Profesional de la Magistratura
- Assemblea Nacional Catalana (Catalan National Assembly)
- Association of Greek Administrative Judges
- Association of Slovak Radio Stations
- Austrian Chamber of Civil-Law Notaries
- Austrian League for Human Rights
- Bund Deutscher Verwaltungsrichter und Verwaltungsrichterrinnen (Association of German Administrative Judges)
- Bundesrechtsanwaltskammer (BRAK, The German Federal Bar)
- Car Rental Council of Ireland
- CAT Global
- Centre for Democracy and Law Miko Tripalo
- Centre for European Constitutional Law - Themistocles and Dimitris Tsatsos Foundation
- Centre for Public Innovation
- Centre for the Study of Democracy
- Centro per la Cooperazione Internazionale/ Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (CCI/OBCT)
- CFE Tax Advisers Europe
- Citizen Network - Watchdog Poland
- City of Amsterdam
- Civil Platform for Judicial Independence
- Civil Society Europe
- Confindustria
- Consejo General de la Abogacía Española
- CONSIGLIO NAZIONALE DELL'ORDINE DEI GORNALISTI - ITALIA
- Constitutional Court of the Czech Republic
- COSPE - cooperazione per lo sviluppo dei paesi emergenti ETS
- Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE)

- Council of Europe
- Croatian Journalists' Association (HND)
- Dainius Žalimas, Member of the European Parliament (from Lithuania)
- Danish Bar and Law Society
- Délégation des Barreaux de France
- Democrazia, etica pubblica, trasparenza
- Deutscher Anwaltverein (DAV) German Bar Association
- Deutscher Richterbund
- EMERGENCY ONG ETS
- Environmental Law Ireland Initiative hosted at An Taisce the National Trust for Ireland
- Estonian Bar Association
- European Broadcasting Union (EBU)
- European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)
- European Civic Forum
- European Federation of Journalists
- European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ)
- European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI)
- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)
- Expert Forum Association (EFOR)
- Federal Institute for the protection and promotion of Human Rights (FIRM-IFDH)
- Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF)
- FEDERAZIONE NAZIONALE DELLA STAMPA ITALIANA - FNSI
- FORO JUDICIAL INDEPENDIENTE
- Free Courts Foundation
- Free Press Unlimited (FPU)
- Fundació Catalunya Fons
- Fundación Hay Derecho
- Fundatia pentru Dezvoltarea Societatii Civile (FDSC)
- GENERAL PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE OF THE KINGDOM OF SPAIN
- General Prosecutors Office
- Glopolis, o.p.s.
- Goede Doelen Nederland
- Gong
- Green Circle / Zeleny kruh
- Groupement des Magistrats Luxembourgeois
- HABLAMOS ESPAÑOL
- Háttér Society
- Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights
- HIAS Greece
- High Council for the Judiciary
- Homo Digitalis

- Hungarian Helsinki Committee
- Impresa DE MASI
- Institut českého znakového jazyka - Pevnost
- Institute of Public Affairs
- International Press Institute (IPI)
- Investigative centre of Jan Kuciak
- Italian Coalition for civil liberties and rights (CILD)
- Italian High School for the Judiciary
- Justitia
- K-Monitor
- KONRAD ADENAUER FOUNDATION
- LIBERA associazioni nomi e numeri contro le mafie
- Liberties
- Liga lidských práv
- Lithuanian Bar Association (Lietuvos Advokatūra)
- MEDEL(Magistrats Européens pour la Démocratie et les Libertés)
- Medienrat
- Mertek Media Monitor
- Myndigheten för ungdoms- och civilsamhällesfrågor (MUCF) (Agency for Youth and Civil Society)
- National Federation of Polish NGOs
- National Judicial Council of Hungary
- Nederlands Helsinki Comité
- Nederlands Juristen Comité voor de Mensenrechten (NJCM)
- Network of Presidents of Supreme Courts
- NPO (Dutch National Public Broadcast Organization)
- Nyt Europa
- Office of the Commissioner for Standards in Public Life
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- Ökotárs-Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation
- Ombudsman for Children and Adolescents
- Ordre des Barreaux Francophones et Germanophone de Belgique – AVOCATS.BE
- Ossigeno per l'Informazione
- Österreichischer Rechtsanwaltskammertag
- Oxygen for Democracy
- Philea
- RAI-Radiotelevisione italiana S.p.A
- Refugee Support Aegean (RSA)
- Reporters United and Solomon
- Reporters Without Borders / Reporters sans frontières (RSF)
- Representation of Budapest to the EU

- Repubblica
- Resource Center for Public Participation & Coalition NGOs for Citizens
- Responsible Politics Foundation
- RNW Media
- Slovak Bar Association / Slovenská advokátska komora
- Slovak Television Broadcasters Association
- Sofia Bar Association
- Stefan Batory Foundation
- Supreme Court of Poland
- Supreme Court of Slovenia
- Társaság a Szabadságjogokért - TASZ (Hungarian Civil Liberties Union - HCLU)
- The Bar of Ireland
- The Federal Migration Centre - Myria
- The Hellenic League for Human Rights (HLHR)
- The Office of the Chancellor of Justice
- Transparency International
- Tribunal Supremo de España
- Union of Journalists in Finland
- UNIONE FORENSE PER LA TUTELA DEI DIRITTI UMANI
- Vereinigung der österreichischen Richterinnen und Richter
- VIA IURIS
- Vouliwatch, the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR)
- World Justice Project
- Združenie sudcov Slovenska - Association of judges of Slovakia

|