

## **Summary of the targeted stakeholder consultation for the 2025 Rule of Law Report.**

With the 2025 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 – Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, 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 2024 Rule of Law Report, including new challenges at national level.

In the preparation of the 2025 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. Through input received from the Member States and enlargement countries, country visits and stakeholder contributions, 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 29 November 2024 to 24 January 2025. Around 270 stakeholders<sup>1</sup> 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).

The rule of law is an essential precondition for a stable and predictable economic environment, giving the EU and its Member States a global competitive edge. Therefore, and in line with the announcement in the President's Political Guidelines, the 2025 Rule of Law Report gives particular emphasis to the Single Market dimension of the rule of law. An additional questionnaire was shared for this purpose in a dedicated consultation cycle from 20 December 2024 to 24 January 2025. More than 20 business-related stakeholders from various Member States responded to this specific questionnaire, sharing their expertise and insights.

Those contributions once again proved to be a very 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,

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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.

Apart from 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 were also consulted as part of the virtual country visits, which facilitated further discussions on their written contributions<sup>2</sup>.

The contributions by stakeholders are summarised below and listed in the Annex<sup>3</sup>. Concrete references to individual contributions below are made based on the consent of the stakeholders<sup>4</sup>.

### **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 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 2025 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.

As regards the justice system, stakeholders note several Member States' efforts to improve justice systems for enhanced effectiveness, including through comprehensive reforms. They highlight the dangers emerging from undue political interference in the appointment and promotion of judges and prosecutors as well as in the work of the judiciary. They put further emphasis on the link between lengthy procedures and a lack of resources, as well as the lack of implementation of court judgments. They note positive developments with regards to digitalisation.

As regards the anti-corruption framework, several stakeholders indicate that laws to ensure integrity and prevent conflicts of interest continue to be insufficient in many Member States.

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<sup>2</sup> Information on organisations consulted during the virtual country visits can be found in Annex II of each Country Chapter.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

Regulations on lobbying, revolving-door policies, and whistleblower protection are also considered insufficient in many Member States. Stakeholders identify structural weaknesses in the legal framework of criminalisation of corruption and in guaranteeing effective investigation and enforcement, especially in high-level corruption cases.

As regards media freedom and media pluralism, stakeholders express threats to the independence of national media regulators and public service media through undue political influence, including the excessive use of state advertising. They underline increasing challenges regarding the protection of journalists which are subject to physical and verbal attacks, as well as Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPP).

As regards other institutional issues related to checks and balances, stakeholders highlight the increased use of fast-track procedures, executive decrees and emergency measures which sidelines formalised stakeholder participation. Stakeholders voice further deteriorations regarding the freedom of assembly. They particularly note a shrinking civic space in several Member States, as civil society organisations face attacks, administrative burdens or undue limitations for alleged foreign interference. Independent authorities, notably accredited National Human Rights Institutions, call for further safeguards of their independence in line with European standards to effectively fulfil their tasks.

Regarding the Single Market dimension within these pillars, stakeholders highlight the importance of clarity and predictability of laws for a business environment conducive to economic growth. They emphasise the importance of well-functioning justice systems that enable effective legal remedies, including through specialised courts and efficient procedures, and welcomed corresponding innovations in various Member States. Furthermore, they call for additional safeguards against undue government interference, notably in the field of anti-corruption and state advertising.

#### **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.

- Access to Public Information Programme
- Active Watch Romania
- Aditus foundation
- Amnesty International Bulgaria
- Amnesty International Hungary
- Amnesty International Italy
- Anticorruption Fund Foundation
- APADOR-CH
- APIF Asociación
- Arcom (Autorité de régulation de la communication audiovisuelle et numérique)
- Articolo 21

- Artistic Freedom Initiative
- Asociación de Fiscales
- Asociación de Mujeres Juezas de España (AMJE)
- Asociación Impulso Ciudadano
- Asociación Judicial Francisco de Vitoria
- Association Center for Public Innovation
- Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen
- Association of European Journalists
- Association of German Administrative Judges, Bund Deutscher Verwaltungsrichter und Verwaltungsrichterrinnen (BDVR)
- Association of Judges of Slovakia
- Austrian Association of Independent Performing Arts
- Austrian Chamber of Civil Law Notaries
- Austrian Federal Economic Chamber
- Austrian Ombudsman Board
- Austrian Supreme Court
- Bar of Ireland
- Basel Institute on Governance
- Batory Foundation
- Bulgarian Center for Not-for-profit Law
- Bulgarian Donors Forum
- Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives
- Bundesrechtsanwaltskammer
- Center for the Study of Democracy
- Center Science and Innovation for Development (SCiDEV)
- Centre for Democracy and Law Miko Tripalo
- Christos Panayiotides
- Citizens Network Watchdog Poland
- Civic Alliance - Latvia
- Civic Development Forum
- Civil Society Europe
- Collège des cours et tribunaux belges - College van de hoven en rechtbanken
- Conseil de déontologie journalistique (Press Council)
- Consejo General de la Abogacía Española
- Consiglio di Stato
- Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia
- COSPE - cooperazione per lo sviluppo dei paesi emergenti - ONLUS
- Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe
- CRTA - Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability
- Culture Action Europe

- Danish Bar and Law Society
- Danish Press Council
- Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation
- Deutsche Industrie- und Handelskammer (DIHK)
- Deutscher Richterbund
- Deystvie
- DIGNITY - Danish Institute against Torture
- Dutch Whistleblowers Authority
- ELIA (globally connected European network for higher arts education)
- EMERGENCY ONG Onlus
- ENNHRI
- Estonian Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner
- European Civic Forum
- European Festivals Association
- European Movement International
- European Music Council
- European Network of Councils for the Judiciary
- European Partnership for Democracy
- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
- Expert Forum Association
- Federal Institute for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights (FIRM-IFDH)
- Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF)
- FNSI - Federazione nazionale Stampa italiana
- Foro Judicial Independiente
- Free Courts
- Free Press Unlimited (FPU) Greece
- Fundación Hay Derecho
- Fundación Internacional Baltasar Garzón –FIBGAR–
- Fundatia pentru Dezvoltarea Societatii Civile (Civil Society Development Foundation)
- General Council of Spanish Judiciary (CGPJ)
- General prosecutor's office of the kingdom of Spain
- German Bar Association - Deutscher Anwaltverein (DAV)
- German Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- GLAS Foundation
- Global Focus
- Glopolis
- Goede Doelen Nederland
- Gong
- Good Lobby Italy
- Greek Council for Refugees (GCR)
- Háttér Society

- Hellenic League for Human Rights
- Helsinki Committee Bulgaria
- Helsinki Committee Hungary
- Helsinki Committee Netherlands
- Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights
- HIAS Greece
- Homo Digitalis
- Hrvatsko novinarsko društvo
- Hub Culturel Européen
- Human Rights Watch
- Hungarian Atheist Association
- Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU)
- Hungarian National Judicial Council
- Independent farmers of Ireland
- Institute for Market Economics
- Institute for Public Environment Development
- Institute of Public Affairs Poland
- International Commission of Jurists - European Institutions (ICJ-EI)
- International Press Institute
- Justitia Denmark
- K-Monitor Public Benefit Association
- Konrad Adenauer Foundation
- Kunsten '92, vereniging voor kunst, cultuur, erfgoed en de creatieve sector in Nederland
- Latvian Association of Judges
- Lawyers Circle - National Professional Association of Lawyers Hungary
- Luxembourg Press Council
- Luxemburg's Consultative Human Rights Commission
- MEDEL (Magistrats Européens pour la Démocratie et les Libertés)
- Medienrat (Media Council) of the German-speaking Community
- Meijers Committee
- Mertek Media Monitor
- National Association of Judges of the Republic of Poland
- National Federation of Polish NGOs
- National Judicial Council of Hungary
- Network of the Presidents of the Supreme Judicial Courts of the European Union
- Nyt Europa
- Office of the Chancellor of Justice of Estonia
- Office of the Malta Parliamentary Ombudsman
- OHCHR
- Ökotárs - Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation
- Òmnium Cultural - Omium Civil Rights Europe

- Open Dialogue Foundation
- Ordem dos Advogados
- Ordre des Barreaux Francophones et Germanophone de Belgique – AVOCATS.BE
- Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT)
- Ossigeno per l'Informazione
- Österreichischer Rechtsanwaltskammertag (ÖRAK)
- Oxygen for Democracy
- Partners Albania for Change and Development
- Più Democrazia in Trentino
- Political Capital
- Raad voor de Journalistiek (Media Council)
- Rai Radiotelevisione Italiana
- Rechtsanwälte für Grundrechte - Anwälte für Aufklärung
- Recommon
- Refugee Support Aegean (RSA)
- RENATE Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation
- Reporters United
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
- Repubblica
- Res Iudicata Judges for Social Awareness Association
- Resource Center for Public Participation & Coalition NGOs for Citizens
- Service d'appui du Ministère public belge
- Slovak Bar Association
- Solomon
- STEM Institute for Empirical Research - Network for the Protection of Democracy
- Supreme Court of Cyprus
- Supreme Court of Estonia
- Supreme Court of Poland
- Supreme Court of Spain
- Supreme Court of the Netherlands
- Supreme Court of the Republic of Slovenia
- Transparency International Czech Republic
- Transparency International France
- Transparency International Hungary
- Transparency International Ireland
- Vereinigung der österreichischen Richterinnen und Richter
- Vocal-Fedataria de Plataforma Cívica por la Independ (español)
- Vouliwatch
- World Justice Project
- Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen

