

2026 Rule of Law Report - targeted stakeholder consultation

Fields marked with * are mandatory.

Introduction

The annual Rule of Law Report lies at the centre of the Annual Rule of Law Cycle, which acts as a preventive tool, deepening multilateral dialogue and joint awareness of rule of law issues. So far, six editions of the Rule of Law Report have been published since 2020.

As every year, the Commission would like to invite the stakeholders to provide contributions to the 2026 Rule of Law Report. On the basis of these contributions and on-going developments, further targeted questions may be shared at a later stage of preparation of the 2026 Rule of Law Report, in particular in the context of country visits, or bilateral contacts.

The Commission invites stakeholders to provide contributions which include:

**(1) developments and measures taken in relation to the recommendations in the 2025 report,
(2) developments related to topics covered in the 2025 country chapters, as well as any other new developments related to the rule of law.**

The input should consist of a short summary, if possible in English, covering the areas referred to below. Legislation or other documents may be referenced with a link. Contributions should focus on significant developments since the last Rule of Law Report both as regards the legal framework and its implementation in practice.

This questionnaire also integrates the separate questionnaire on the single market from last year. In addition to these specific questions, respondents to the questionnaire are invited to consider the Single Market dimension, including any relevant cross-border issues, in all their answers.

Where questions of particular relevance under the single market dimension, this is indicated before the relevant question.

[1] Unless the information was already submitted in the input for the previous Rule of Law Reports.

Type of information to be included:

Under each of the four pillars, the replies should include references to the following types of information:

A) Legislative developments

- Newly adopted legislation
- legislative drafts currently discussed in Parliament
- legislative plans envisaged by the Government

B) Policy developments

- Implementation and enforcement of legislation
- evaluations, impact assessment, surveys
- white papers/strategies/actions plans/consultation processes
- follow-up to reports/recommendations of Council of Europe bodies or other international organisations
- important administrative measures
- generalised practices

C) Developments related to the judiciary / independent authorities

- important case law by national courts
- important decision/opinions from independent bodies/authorities
- state of play on terms, nominations and expired mandates for high-level positions (e.g. Supreme Court, Constitutional Court, Council for the Judiciary, Prosecutor General, heads of independent authorities included in the scope of the request for input[2])

D) Any other relevant developments

- National authorities are free to add any further information, which they deem relevant; however, this should be short and to the point.

Where relevant, please also indicate whether the developments reported are linked to the implementation of reforms and investments under the national Recovery Resilience Plan. To simplify your answers to the questionnaire, if there are no developments, it is sufficient to indicate this and the information covered in the contributions for the previous Rule of Law Reports does not need not be repeated.

[2] Such as: media regulatory authorities and bodies, national human rights institutions, equality bodies, ombudsman institutions, supreme audit institutions and, where they exist, transparency authorities.

* I am giving my contribution as

- ☐ Academic/research institution
- ☐ Business association
- ☒ Civil society organisation/NGO
- ☐ International organisation
- ☐ Judicial association or network
- ☐ Media organisation or association
- ☐ Public authority or network of public authorities
- ☐ Other

* Organisation name

250 character(s) maximum

International Press Institute (IPI)

Main Areas of Work

- ☐ Justice System
- ☐ Anti-corruption
- ☒ Media Pluralism and Freedom
- ☐ Checks and Balances
- ☐ Other

Please insert an URL towards your organisation's main online presence or describe your organisation briefly:

500 character(s) maximum

<https://ipi.media/>

IPI is a global network of journalists defending media freedom and independent journalism wherever they are threatened.

Transparency register number

Check if your organisation is in the transparency register. It's a voluntary database for organisations seeking to influence EU decision-making

370877536078-58

* Country of origin

Please indicate the country of origin of your organisation

- ☒ Austria
- ☐ Belgium
- ☐ Bulgaria
- ☐ Croatia
- ☐ Cyprus
- ☐ Czechia
- ☐ Denmark
- ☐ Estonia
- ☐ Finland
- ☐ France
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Greece
- ☐ Hungary
- ☐ Ireland
- ☐ Italy
- ☐ Latvia
- ☐ Lithuania
- ☐ Luxembourg
- ☐ Malta
- ☐ Netherlands
- ☐ Poland
- ☐ Portugal
- ☐ Romania
- ☐ Slovak Republic
- ☐ Slovenia
- ☐ Spain
- ☐ Sweden
- ☐ Other - please specify

First name

Jamie

Surname

Wiseman

Email Address of the organisation

jwiseman@ipi.media

* Publication of your contribution and privacy settings

You can choose whether you wish for your contribution to be published and whether you wish your details to be made public or to remain anonymous.

- ☐ Anonymous - Only your type of respondent, country of origin and contribution will be published. Organisation name, URL, transparency register number, first name and surname given above will not be published. **To maintain anonymity, please refrain from mentioning the name of your organisation and any details from which your organisation can be identified in the rest of your contribution as we will not be able to guarantee anonymisation of these elements.**
- ☒ Public - Your personal details (name, organisation name, transparency register number, country of origin will be published with your contribution).
- ☐ No publication - Your contribution will not be published. Elements of your contribution may be referred to anonymously in documents produced by the Commission based on this consultation.

☒ I agree with the personal data protection provisions.

[Specific privacy statement targeted stakeholder consultation 2026 rule of law report.pdf](#)

Questions on horizontal developments

In this section, you are invited to provide information on general horizontal developments or trends, both positive and negative, covering all or several Member States. In particular, you could mention issues that are common to several Member States, as well as best practices identified in one Member State that could be replicated. Moreover, you could refer to your activities in the area of the four pillars and sub-topics (an overview of all sub-topics can be found below), and, if you represent a Network of national organisations, to the support you might have provided to one of your national members.

Overview topics for contribution

[List of topics for contribution.docx](#)

Please provide any relevant information on horizontal developments here

5000 character(s) maximum

Questions for contribution

Under each pillar, you are invited to provide information on measures taken to implement the recommendations addressed to the Member State in the 2025 Rule of Law report, as well as developments with regard to the points raised in the respective country chapter of the 2025 Rule of Law Report and any other significant developments since January 2025 and up to the date of submission[3]. Please always include a link to and reference relevant legislation/documents (in the national language and/or where available, in English). **Significant developments** can include challenges, positive developments and best practices, covering both legislative developments or implementation and practices.

Information provided in reply to the first question under each pillar, related to the follow-up to the recommendations, does not need to be repeated in subsequent parts of the questionnaire, but can be cross-referenced in the subsequent questions, where relevant. All other questions are not limited to the recommendations, but as in previous years, cover the entire scope of the Report.

[3] Unless already covered in the input for the previous Rule of Law Reports.

Member State/enlargement country covered in contribution [only one choice possible]

If you wish to submit information concerning several Member States/enlargement countries, please fill in the questionnaire separately for each country. There is no limit to the number of contributions submitted by a single participant.

- ☐ Albania
- ☐ Austria
- ☐ Belgium
- ☒ Bulgaria
- ☐ Croatia
- ☐ Cyprus
- ☐ Czechia
- ☐ Denmark
- ☐ Estonia
- ☐ Finland

- ☐ France
- ☐ Germany
- ☐ Greece
- ☐ Hungary
- ☐ Ireland
- ☐ Italy
- ☐ Latvia
- ☐ Lithuania
- ☐ Luxembourg
- ☐ Malta
- ☐ Montenegro
- ☐ Netherlands
- ☐ North Macedonia
- ☐ Poland
- ☐ Portugal
- ☐ Romania
- ☐ Serbia
- ☐ Slovakia
- ☐ Slovenia
- ☐ Spain
- ☐ Sweden

I. Justice System

Please provide information on measures taken to follow-up on the recommendations received in the 2025 Report regarding the justice system (if applicable)

5000 character(s) maximum

A. Independence

Appointment and selection of judges, prosecutors and court presidents (incl. judicial review)

(The reference to 'judges' concerns judges at all level and types of courts as well as judges at constitutional courts)

5000 character(s) maximum

Irremovability of judges, including transfers, (incl. as part of judicial map reform), dismissal and retirement regime of judges, court presidents and prosecutors (incl. judicial review)

5000 character(s) maximum

Promotion of judges and prosecutors (incl. judicial review)

5000 character(s) maximum

Allocation of cases in courts

5000 character(s) maximum

Independence (including composition and nomination and dismissal of its members), and powers of the body tasked with safeguarding the independence of the judiciary (e. g. Council for the Judiciary)

5000 character(s) maximum

Accountability of judges and prosecutors, including disciplinary regime and bodies and ethical rules, judicial immunity and criminal/civil (where applicable) liability of judges (incl. judicial review)

5000 character(s) maximum

Independence/autonomy of the prosecution service

5000 character(s) maximum

Independence of the Bar (chamber/association of lawyers) and of lawyers

5000 character(s) maximum

Significant developments capable of affecting the perception that the general public has of the independence of the judiciary

5000 character(s) maximum

B. Quality of justice

(Under this topic, you are not required to give statistical information but should provide input on the type of information outlined in the introduction)

[single market relevance] Accessibility of courts (e.g. court/legal fees, legal aid, language)

5000 character(s) maximum

Resources of the judiciary (human/financial/material), remuneration/bonuses/rewards for judges and prosecutors, including observed changes (significant and targeted increase or decrease over the past year)

(Material resources refer e.g. to court buildings and other facilities. Financial resources include salaries of staff in courts and prosecution offices.)

5000 character(s) maximum

[single market relevance] Training of justice professionals (including judges, prosecutors, lawyers, court staff, clerks/trainees)

5000 character(s) maximum

Digitalisation (e.g. use of digital technology, including electronic communication and AI tools, within the justice system and with court users, procedural rules, access to judgments online)

5000 character(s) maximum

Use of assessment tools and standards (e.g. ICT systems, including AI-based systems, for case management, court statistics and their transparency, monitoring, evaluation, surveys among court users or legal professionals)

5000 character(s) maximum

Geographical distribution and number of courts/jurisdictions (“judicial map”) and their specialisation, in particular specific courts or chambers within courts to deal with fraud and corruption cases.

5000 character(s) maximum

[single market relevance] Specialisation (of judges/specific courts/chambers within courts) and training for the judiciary to deal with commercial cases, as well as alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and mediation as regards commercial cases.

5000 character(s) maximum

C. Efficiency of the justice system

(Under this topic, you are not required to give statistical information but should provide input on the type of information outlined in the introduction)

[single market relevance] Developments related to efforts to improve the efficiency of the justice system (e.g. as regards length of proceedings, to address backlogs)

5000 character(s) maximum

Any other developments related to the justice system - please specify

5000 character(s) maximum

II. Anti-Corruption Framework

Where previous specific reports, published in the framework of the review under the UN Convention against Corruption, of GRECO, and of the OECD address the issues below, please make a reference to the points you wish to bring to the Commission's attention in these documents, indicating any relevant updates, changes or measures introduced that have occurred since these documents were published.

Please provide information on measures taken to follow-up on the recommendations received in the 2025 Report regarding the anti-corruption framework (if applicable):

5000 character(s) maximum

A. The institutional framework capacity to fight against corruption (prevention and investigation / prosecution)

List any **changes** as regards relevant authorities (e.g. national agencies, bodies) in charge of prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of corruption and the resources allocated to each of these authorities (the human, financial, legal, and technical/specialised resources as relevant), including the cooperation among domestic and with foreign authorities. Indicate any relevant measures taken to effectively and timely cooperate with OLAF and EPPO

5000 character(s) maximum

Safeguards for the functional independence of the authorities tasked with the prevention and detection of corruption

5000 character(s) maximum

Information on the implementation of measures foreseen in the strategic anti-corruption framework (if applicable). If available, please provide relevant objectives and indicators

5000 character(s) maximum

B. Prevention

Measures to enhance integrity in the public sector in particular as regards high-level officials (including as regards incompatibility rules, revolving doors, codes of conduct, ethics)

5000 character(s) maximum

Measures to enhance general transparency of public decision-making (including rules on lobbying, asset and interest disclosure rules, gifts policy, transparency of political party, financing)

5000 character(s) maximum

Measures to prevent conflicts of interest in the public sector. Please specify the features and scope of their application (e.g. categories of officials concerned, types of checks and corrective measures depending on the category of officials concerned)

5000 character(s) maximum

--> For the three previous points, **please also provide information and figures on their application/enforcement if available to you**, such as number of detected breaches/irregularities of the various rules in place and the follow-up given (investigations, sanctions, etc.)

Measures to ensure whistleblower protection and encourage reporting of corruption, including their application (i.e. number of reports received, and the follow-up given)

5000 character(s) maximum

[single market relevance] Specific measures to enhance transparency, integrity and accountability in sectors with high risks of corruption, with a view to monitor and prevent corruption and conflict of interests, and where applicable measures to prevent and address corruption committed by organised crime groups.

- *Such high-risk sectors could include: public procurement, including construction, transport/infrastructure, defence, cohesion, agriculture, environment, healthcare, investor residence schemes, large-scale investments of national interest and the spending of EU funds, urban planning.*
- *In particular, measures to mitigate high risks of corruption in the area of public procurement, such as enhancing transparency and oversight (for example through digital technologies) and promoting fair competition and accountability in public procurement (e.g. targeted actions to address the high share of single bids) and measures to guarantee the effective and independent functioning of the public procurement review bodies.*

5000 character(s) maximum

[single market relevance] Measures for the prevention of corruption in relation to the issuing of official permits (e.g. related to environment, energy, service provision and various types of construction)

5000 character(s) maximum

C. Repression

The legal framework on the criminalisation and sanctions for corruption and related offences, including foreign bribery

5000 character(s) maximum

Official data on the number of investigations, prosecutions, final judgments and the application of sanctions for corruption offences (differentiated by offence if possible). Please indicate whether the cases: involve legal persons; are related to the implementation of EU or national funds; involve high level corruption. Please indicate which data is publicly available and how policy-making is informed by the data

5000 character(s) maximum

Potential obstacles identified in law or in practice to the investigation and prosecution of high-level and complex corruption cases (e.g. political immunity regulation, procedural rules, statute of limitations, cross-border cooperation, pardoning)

5000 character(s) maximum

Information on effectiveness of criminal and non-criminal measures and of sanctions (e.g. recovery measures and administrative sanctions) on both public and private offenders

5000 character(s) maximum

Any other developments related to the anti-corruption framework - please specify

5000 character(s) maximum

III. Media pluralism and media freedom

Please provide information on measures taken to follow-up on the recommendations received in the 2025 Report regarding media pluralism and media freedom (if applicable)

5000 character(s) maximum

While Bulgaria has experienced modest progress on media freedom in the last four years, the situation remains undermined by persistent structural, legal and political challenges, with urgent action needed by government and public authorities to push forward both domestic and EU-mandated reforms. Deep political polarisation continues to shape the media environment, fuelling hostility toward journalists and obstructing consensus on key developments. However, a window of opportunity exists to consolidate recent gains and implement long-overdue changes. Despite the recent progress, Bulgaria continues to suffer from one of the lowest levels of media freedom in the European Union, according to both the World Press Freedom Index and the Media Pluralism Monitor. To solidify these gains, measures are needed to prevent and prosecute attacks on journalists, resolve the ongoing dispute over the leadership of the public broadcaster, guarantee the independence of the Council for Electronic Media, pass and effectively implement anti-SLAPP legislation to curb vexatious lawsuits against journalism. Verbal attacks by politicians remain common, while trust in law enforcement is low and investigations into attacks are often slow. No system exists to track such cases. Bulgaria has not yet nominated a national focal point or engaged actively in implementing the Council of Europe's Journalists Matter campaign. Threats from organised crime persist and concerns remain over reports of the use and hosting of digital surveillance technologies in Bulgaria. The recent approval and then withdrawal of controversial amendments to the penal code to introduce fines and prison sentences of up to six years for

disseminating personal information about an individual without their consent would have, if approved, seriously undermined media freedom and risked the imprisonment of journalists carrying out public interest reporting. Overall, the country's media landscape remains characterised by the corrosive influence of political and economic interests over editorial independence and media pluralism, resulting in persistent media capture challenges. Key issues include opaque media ownership, non-transparent distribution of state advertising, and weak protections against interference and pressure on independent journalism, all of which are contributing to low levels of public trust in media. Economic pressures on Bulgarian media are exacerbated by the technological challenges posed by digital platforms and AI generative models, both of which threaten their revenues and business models. Continued uncertainty over the management of Bulgarian National Television (BNT), the repeated inability of the CEM to reach a majority vote in selecting a new Director General, as well as ongoing appeals and legal battles over the appointment process, reflect Bulgaria's broader media governance challenges, including politicised regulatory bodies and the fragile independence of public broadcasting. The ongoing deadlock and drawn out legal disputes are undermining the trust in both institutions. If effectively implemented, the EMFA, in full force since August 2025, offers potential remedies to this and many of the other structural challenges that continue to affect the Bulgarian media landscape. However, the authorities' preparedness for alignment with the EMFA remains low. While the Ministry of Culture confirmed to the mission that a new working group has been formed to implement EMFA reforms to the Radio and Television Act (RTA), no information was provided about plans for wider implementation of any other Articles of EMFA and the timeline for additional reforms remains unclear. ⁵ It remains unclear what the difference between the two working groups is and how much the previous strategies would be followed or not. To push forward reforms, media professionals must unite with journalistic associations, unions and other representative bodies to strengthen solidarity and cooperation within the journalistic profession, to monitor progress, document violations and push for better working conditions for the industry. Breaking this legislative inertia will require cross-party support and a shared understanding of the role that a free and independent media play in democracy. Any marginal advancement of reform in Bulgaria must be accompanied by a shift in political culture which views critical and watchdog journalism as a core pillar of the country's democratic fabric that requires attention and additional safeguards.

<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/MFRR-Bulgaria-Report-2025-2.pdf>

<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/BULGARIA-Media-Capture-Monitoring-Report-Overview-2.pdf>

A. Media authorities and bodies

(Cf. Article 30 of Directive 2018/1808)

Measures taken to ensure the independence, enforcement powers and adequacy of resources (financial, human and technical) of media regulatory authorities and bodies

5000 character(s) maximum

The Council for Electronic Media (CEM) is Bulgaria's media regulator and is legally required to operate independently from the state. However, the organisation has been the subject of criticism for what is perceived to be a lack of impartiality and a failure to act in the public interest. CEM members are appointed by Parliament and the President, with the law providing financial autonomy. Nevertheless, concerns persist regarding the transparency of these appointments, with a perception that political loyalty may sometimes supersede professional expertise. Ongoing controversies have further damaged CEM's fragile reputation. Insufficient funding and staffing have also undermined the independence and normal operations of the organisation, even as its mandate is due to expand. It has been reported that non-media regulatory bodies have been used to exert pressure on independent and investigative outlets that are critical of the government.

The Council for Electronic Media (CEM) is the regulatory authority responsible for overseeing the media industry. It was established in 2001 with the objective of regulating electronic media. The Radio and Television Act provides the framework for CEM's operations. 10 The media regulator is responsible for issuing licences for radio and television broadcasting, registering other media service providers, and monitoring the content of radio and television programs to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations, as well as to promote media pluralism and editorial independence and impartiality. CEM has the authority to impose sanctions on broadcasters for non-compliance with legal requirements, including fines, temporary suspension, or revocation of licences. In addition to its existing remit, since 2020 CEM has also been responsible for regulating online audiovisual platforms. In accordance with the law, the body is required to maintain legal independence from the government. However, the appointment process and some of its decisions are perceived as lacking transparency, which has led to criticism that the regulator is politicised. The current rules regarding CEM composition could potentially lead to instances where CEM members are exposed to political influence and pressure from their political backers.

As set forth in the Radio and Television Act, CEM's independence is legally enshrined. CEM and its members must not accept instructions from any other body or institution regarding the exercise of their powers. The law stipulates that the regulator must "exercise its powers impartially and transparently, and in accordance with the objectives of Directive 2010/13/EC, as amended by Directive 2010/13/EC 2018/1808." 14 15 In carrying out its duties, the regulator must act in the public interest, protect freedom of speech, ensure the independence of providers of media services, promote media pluralism, safeguard cultural and linguistic diversity, protect users, and promote fair competition. However, in reality, the regulator is highly politicised. Over the years, many of its members have maintained links with political groups or have worked for government bodies. To illustrate, Betina Zhoteva, a former chair of CEM, had a background in journalism but also served as a spokesperson and PR expert for multiple governments. This has led to questions about her political neutrality. Some of CEM's former members have also made their mark through attacks on members of the press. The former head of the regulator, Sonya Momchilova, launched an attack on freelance journalist Maria Cheresheva in late 2022 for her investigation into the abuse of migrants at the Bulgarian border. The investigation, conducted by a team of international journalists, was criticised by Momchilova, who asserted, without substantiation, that the story did not meet the "basic journalistic standards" expected of such work. Two Bulgarian organisations have called for Momchilova's dismissal. In a 2023 interview, Momchilova cited reports of Russian atrocities in Bucha as an example of anti-Kremlin propaganda. Her remarks prompted a swift and strong response from Ukraine's embassy in Bulgaria, with the incident igniting public outrage and prompting numerous journalists to call for her resignation. Despite the negative reaction from some quarters, three of the five members of the CEM, including Momchilova, voted against her resignation. A subsequent statement from CEM condemned the violence in Bucha, describing it as a "monstrous act of torture".

<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/BULGARIA-Media-Capture-Monitoring-Report-Overview-2.pdf>

Conditions and procedures for the appointment and dismissal of the head / members of the collegiate body of media regulatory authorities and bodies

5000 character(s) maximum

Existence and functions of media councils or other self-regulatory bodies

5000 character(s) maximum

B. Safeguards against government or political interference and transparency and concentration of media ownership

[single market relevance] Measures taken to ensure the fair and transparent allocation of state advertising

5000 character(s) maximum

State and private advertising remain the largest source of income for media in Bulgaria, though more media titles are experimenting with subscription-based business models. On paper, Bulgarian legislation requires that public funds be distributed to media transparently and competitively. However, the framework for the transparent distribution of state advertising remains flawed and incomplete. Bulgaria does not currently have a national regulatory body tasked with overseeing the allocation of state advertising to media, providing an opaque system which remains open to exploitation. The Ministry of Culture insufficiently enforces the existing laws on beneficial ownership, which, as a result, often goes undisclosed, hiding potential conflicts of interest and political affiliations, lowering public trust in the media's integrity. State advertising has regularly been instrumentalised by political forces to influence coverage and punish critical reporting through the withdrawal of contracts. The political turbulence at the national level and lack of stable governments has reduced the threat of advertising pressures on media in recent years. However, at the local and regional level the economic dependence of media on advertising from local authorities remains high and has exposed them to financial pressures and in many cases weakened editorial independence. The country's small advertising market continues to pose challenges for media viability and sustainability.

<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/MFRR-Bulgaria-Report-2025-2.pdf>

Bulgarian legislation provides a legal framework for the distribution of public funds, requiring that tenders be awarded in a transparent, competitive, and non-discriminatory manner. While this applies across all sectors, including the media, there are no specific legal requirements for state institutions to launch public procurement processes when allocating advertising or other funds to media outlets. While there has been some progress, public funds are often distributed through intermediaries or direct contracts with media outlets, bypassing competitive procedures. In 2023 law changes introduced some transparency when institutions allocate state advertising to broadcasters through public procurement of over 5.000 euros. The absence of more explicit regulations governing the allocation of public advertising to media allows for the potential for non-transparent practices. In Bulgaria's small and vulnerable media market, where press freedom is under constant threat, state advertising has become a means of exercising political influence, effectively purchasing favourable media coverage. This has been a matter of concern for some time, with questions being raised about the use of public funds to exert political control over the media. The situation is especially challenging for regional outlets, which are particularly vulnerable to financial and political pressures. At present, Bulgaria does not have a national regulatory authority or any other independent body responsible for overseeing the allocation of state advertising funds to media outlets. The lack of oversight makes it challenging to monitor the expenditure of state advertising, which further raises concerns about the potential misuse of public resources to influence media content.

There is currently no national regulatory authority or other body responsible for monitoring the allocation of state advertising expenditures to media service providers. Furthermore, there are no legal guarantees to ensure that national regulatory authorities or bodies may request additional information on the allocation of state advertising. To date, there is no independent body or non-profit organisation that monitors state advertising spending on a consistent and regular basis. From time to time, journalistic investigations have attempted to provide greater transparency on the allocation of state

advertising. Nevertheless, obtaining such information, particularly the total amount of funds spent, the names of the media outlets, and the specific services provided, is challenging. Many state institutions and authorities are reluctant to make the data publicly available.

<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/BULGARIA-Media-Capture-Monitoring-Report-Overview-2.pdf>

Safeguards against state / political interference, in particular:

- safeguards to ensure editorial independence of media (private and public)
- specific safeguards for the independence of heads of management and members of the governing boards of public service media (e.g. related to appointment, dismissal), safeguards for their financial and operational independence (e.g. related to reporting obligations and the allocation of resources) and safeguards for plurality of information and opinions
- **[single market relevance]** information on specific legal provisions and procedures applying to media service providers, including as regards granting /renewal/termination of licenses, company operation, capital entry requirements, concentration and corporate governance

5000 character(s) maximum

The Radio and Television Act sets out the processes for appointing and removing the members of the management boards of public media. CEM is responsible for the appointment and dismissal of the heads of public media. The selection process for these roles is aligned with the criteria used for appointing CEM members, including professional experience and qualifications in the media sector. Furthermore, the heads of BNT and BNR must have a minimum of five years' experience in television or radio, respectively. 38 39 The management boards of BNT and BNR comprise five members each, appointed by CEM following nominations from the respective heads of public broadcasters. The term of office is three years. 40 While CEM's stated intention is to ensure transparency and independence in the appointment process, concerns about politicisation within the regulator have raised similar doubts regarding the political influence over public media. Although CEM's decision-making procedures appear transparent, its actions have at times sparked controversy. For example, the appointment of a new director of BNT has been repeatedly delayed since 2022, when legal disputes undermined the outcome of the competition organised by CEM. As a result, Emil Koshlukov, the incumbent director, has remained in office despite his term having expired three years ago. Although the Supreme Administrative Court issued a final ruling in June 2025 requiring the procedure to be relaunched, the selection process has yet to conclude.

Tensions between CEM and Koshlukov escalated in September 2025, when the regulator issued a statement regarding a letter Koshlukov had sent about the legal appeal. CEM described the letter's tone as "extremely sharp, threatening, and aggressive," noting that Koshlukov threatened to involve the police, the prosecution, and even a private bailiff to enforce sanctions and fines if CEM did not comply with recent court decisions. Some media observers condemned his actions, while Koshlukov dismissed the statement as "arrogant" and labelled the regulator "obsolete, useless, and dangerous". Experts warn that the prolonged legal battle and ongoing interim leadership further undermine confidence in BNT's independence. In November 2024, the

sudden departure of Daniel Chipev, executive news producer, coupled with the lack of transparency surrounding the decision, raised concerns about potential political interference. The Association of European Journalists urged BNT's management to clarify the case, noting that the lack of transparency fuels suspicion of undue pressure. Some media reports suggested that Chipev had been dismissed after airing election-related news critical of two major parties, while dozens of BNT journalists launched a petition in his support. There are no legal provisions or established practices that require the inclusion of representatives from the political opposition or independent NGOs in the management of public service media. Appointments are typically made on the basis of professional qualifications as determined by CEM. However, there is currently no formal mechanism in place to ensure representation from a diverse range of political or civil society backgrounds. The current composition of the management boards of the two broadcasters includes representatives from outside the field of journalism and communications. The dismissal of the BNT and BNR directors is carried out in accordance with the same legal grounds as the dismissal of CEM members. This can occur for a range of reasons, including instances of "severe or systematic violations" of the law. However, the absence of comprehensive procedural safeguards may permit subjective interpretations of the law, which could potentially compromise the independence of public broadcasters.

Media pluralism in Bulgaria is undermined by high levels of market concentration in key sectors. The media market continues to be dominated by two major groups: PPF Group and United Group. Together, the two giants own a considerable portion of the media landscape, raising questions over media concentration and its effect on pluralism, particularly within the broadcast market. Acquisitions in the telecoms sector have further increased vertical concentration in the media ecosystem. Some stakeholders told the delegation that while there are ongoing concerns about political pressures on the editorial independence at BTV and Nova, overall they continue to provide pluralistic and professional reporting. Other interlocutors argued commercial imperatives had weakened their commitment to public interest journalism, while some also criticised a perceived lack of investigative journalism by the two media giants. Both groups maintain robust audience figures and relatively high levels of trust.

<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/MFRR-Bulgaria-Report-2025-2.pdf>

<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/M>

[single market relevance] Transparency of media ownership and public availability of media ownership information, including on direct, indirect and beneficial owners

5000 character(s) maximum

While under Bulgarian law media service providers must reveal their ownership structure and reforms in recent years have seen improved transparency, implementation remains patchy and many media have not disclosed their beneficial owners, contributing to perceptions that certain media are captured by private business or political interests. The influence of sanctioned oligarch Deylan Peevski, who leads the DPS-New Beginning party, is a major issue of concern regarding media ownership and interference. Although Peevski's media assets were formally sold in 2021, multiple stakeholders said the influence of the politician over elements of the media ecosystem remained disproportionately high and has a corrosive effect on editorial independence.

<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/MFRR-Bulgaria-Report-2025-2.pdf>

The current legal framework requires but does not provide comprehensive assurance that media service providers make key information about their operations readily and directly accessible to the public. All legal entities, including media outlets, are required to submit their legal names and contact information to the National Commercial Registry or the Register of Non-Profit Legal Entities databases. However, the information is not readily accessible to the public. Furthermore, the Radio and Television Act requires all media service providers, including registered radio and television providers disclose this information on their websites. However, many media outlets do not provide the necessary information. All print media are required to register with the Ministry

of Culture in accordance with the relevant legislation. While the legislation is designed to enhance transparency regarding media ownership, some publications have not provided the requisite information. Furthermore, the Ministry of Culture lacks the necessary resources and personnel to effectively oversee the implementation of the law or verify the provided information. 76 CEM also maintains a public register of ownership details for radio and television providers. In this context, it is notable that there is a close relationship between political parties and media companies. A number of television broadcasters are openly aligned with political groups, including Alfa TV, Skat TV, 7/8 TV, BSTV (which is currently not broadcasting), and Bulgaria 24. 77 In a separate development, Petar Volgin, a radio presenter at BNR, took leave to pursue a candidacy for the 2024 European Parliamentary elections when he was elected as a representative of the far-right, pro-Russian Vazrazhdane party. Volgin has been a controversial figure, frequently using his platform to echo Kremlin propaganda about the war in Ukraine and featuring pro-Russian figures, which has resulted in listener dissatisfaction and criticism from media experts who have demanded his resignation. 78 Similarly, in September 2023, the centre-right GERB party, led by former Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, announced the nomination of Anton Hekimyan, a well-known journalist and television host, as their candidate for the Sofia mayoral election. The announcement was made just two days after Mr Hekimyan resigned from his position as head of news, current affairs and sports at bTV, one of Bulgaria's leading television channels. His sudden move into politics prompted questions about his suitability as a senior news executive.

National media ownership databases Despite the Radio and Television Act and Ministry of Culture requiring the disclosure of ownership details and maintaining databases with the relevant information, as well as CEM hosting a register with ownership information of radio and television providers, there is currently no centralised database containing ownership information. Assessment of media market concentrations The legislation designates the CPC as the responsible regulator for competition assessments, without requiring substantial involvement from media-specific regulatory bodies like CEM. The media regulator's role is typically limited to content regulation and licensing, rather than directly engaging in market concentration evaluations. 83 The assessment process for mergers is still primarily concerned with economic factors, with relatively little direct attention paid to media pluralism and editorial independence. In accordance with the Protection of Competition Act, the CPC is obliged to adhere to specific time frames throughout the evaluation process. However, actual deadlines may vary depending on the specific circumstances of each case and the subject matter under assessment.

<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/BULGARIA-Media-Capture-Monitoring-Report-Overview-2.pdf>

C. Framework for journalists' protection, transparency and access to documents

Rules and practices guaranteeing journalists' independence and safety, including as regards protection of journalistic sources and communications, referring also, if applicable, to follow-up given to alerts lodged with the Council of Europe's Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists

5000 character(s) maximum

The climate for the safety of journalists in Bulgaria has seen an improvement in recent years, though concerns remain over political pressures and online harassment. Serious physical attacks on journalists and media workers remain relatively uncommon and no life-threatening attacks have been documented in recent years. Several media stakeholders informed the mission that the overall climate for the safety of journalists had improved, though others said that general hostility against the journalistic profession remains a challenge. The Council of Europe's Platform for the Safety of Journalists currently has 34 active alerts involving attacks on journalists or threats against media freedom. Physical attacks account for one third of the cases, although their

number has also dropped compared to previous years, confirming the overall downward trend in attacks on the press. The Mapping Media Freedom platform has so far documented eight press freedom violations in Bulgaria in 2025. Political pressures including intimidation and insults against journalists by different politicians and public figures remain a cause of concern. In a polarised political climate, reporting from protests has posed challenges to reporters and media crews. On 31 August 2025, journalist Blagoy Bekriev and camera operator Kaloyan Kalchev from NOVA TV were spat on, kicked and beaten by demonstrators while reporting on a protest in Sopot, during the visit of the European Commission President. Online harassment and abuse of journalists in Bulgaria on social media platforms remains an issue, particularly against women journalists. A September 2024 case involving the publication online of a deepfake image of Nova TV investigative journalist Marieta Nikolaeva was cited as a toxic example of the gender-based harassment faced by women journalists. On this occasion, action by law enforcement authorities ensured the image was removed, though it continued to be shared and circulated online on social media. Stakeholders told the mission that threats also persist from mafia and organised crime groups, though no recent cases have been recorded in Bulgaria. The arrest and 2025 imprisonment in the UK of three Bulgarian nationals for running a Russian spy ring and planning to kidnap well-known Bulgaria-born investigative journalist Christo Grozev, who lives outside the country, are a worrying reminder of the threats posed from Bulgarian crime groups. Investigative journalists reporting on corruption continue to deploy safety measures, the mission heard. To improve the institutional framework for the safety of journalists, the Bulgarian government should encourage the establishment of, and support the operation of, early-warning and rapid-response mechanisms, such as hotlines, online platforms or 24-hour emergency contact points, by journalists' organisations or civil society, to ensure that journalists and other media actors have immediate access to protective measures when they are threatened. 6 The mission notes the low levels of trust by journalists in the law enforcement authorities and prosecutors to secure justice in cases of attacks. Previous cases involving attacks on journalists by police have suffered from delayed justice, most prominently that of freelance journalist Dimitar Kenarov, who was beaten and detained by police while covering a protest in 2020. Many media stakeholders were critical of what they described as slow and ineffective investigations into attacks. Certain stakeholders raised ongoing concerns about politicised investigations by prosecutorial authorities against the media. During a meeting with a representative of the Chief Prosecutor's Office, the mission heard that no system was in place to allow the tracking of data on attacks on journalists or the number of prosecutions and convictions. Bulgaria is yet to join the Council of Europe's Journalists Matter Campaign, an initiative aiming to promote media freedom and protect journalists from violence, threats, and harassment while performing their duties. The mission welcomes the verbal support of both the Chief Prosecutor's Office and the President of the Republic for proposals to strengthen provisions within the Bulgarian criminal code to introduce higher sanctions for those convicted of attacking journalists. To date, no cases of spyware or other advanced digital surveillance tools being used to illegally surveil or monitor the private communications of journalists have been recorded in Bulgaria by media freedom or human rights organisations. However, Bulgaria has emerged as a significant player in the global spyware ecosystem, as both a host for surveillance technology companies and as a user of intrusive surveillance tools.

<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/MFRR-Bulgaria-Report-2025-2.pdf>

Law enforcement capacity, including during protests and demonstrations, to ensure journalists' safety and to investigate attacks on journalists

5000 character(s) maximum

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Access to information and public documents by public at large and journalists (incl. transparency authorities where they exist, procedures, costs/fees, timeframes, administrative/judicial review of decisions, execution of decisions by public authorities, possible obstacles related to the classification of information)

5000 character(s) maximum

Bulgaria's access to information framework remains weak, with journalists often facing administrative obstacles and limited transparency from state institutions. Requests for interviews with political leaders are routinely rejected and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests are often either ignored or partially answered. The July 2025 decision by Administrative Court in Stara Zagora against investigative journalist Venelina Popova, which ordered her to pay BGN 1,000 (€510) in legal costs to the municipality of Galabovo after she sought information about a controversial waste incinerator project, was cited by stakeholders as an example of the challenges faced while accessing public interest information. The ruling is a dangerous precedent and has a chilling effect on public interest journalism. Parliamentary reporters continue to face disproportionate limits on their movement within the new parliament building, limiting scrutiny. Attempts to interview high level politicians are often rejected or met with hostility.

<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/MFRR-Bulgaria-Report-2025-2.pdf>

Lawsuits (incl. SLAPPs - strategic lawsuits against public participation) and convictions against journalists (incl. defamation cases) and measures taken to safeguard against manifestly unfounded and abusive lawsuits

5000 character(s) maximum

The legal environment in Bulgaria creates persistent risks for journalists and media outlets. While there has been some encouraging progress in recent years, the overall lack of judicial reform means the legislative framework continues to allow for vexatious lawsuits and Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) against the press. A recent attempt to reform the penal code to introduce fines and prison sentences for the publication of private information without consent, without public interest exceptions, raised serious alarm and underscored the fragile progress made on protecting journalists in Bulgaria from abusive criminal

defamation threats. The Association of Journalists Bulgaria continues to document SLAPPs against media, which involve vexatious and unfounded claims aimed at silencing legitimate watchdog reporting. According to journalists the mission met, there are dozens of active SLAPPS targeted at media and journalists. No comprehensive monitoring of the phenomenon in Bulgaria is currently being conducted. Investigative journalists and those probing crime and corruption are among the most targeted by SLAPPs, with major businesses and insurance companies, politicians, and judges among the most common plaintiffs. Many of these cases involve extortionate demands for financial compensation. The mission welcomes the preparations by the Ministry of Justice for the transposition of the 2024 AntiSLAPP Directive. During the visit the delegation was informed of the resumption of the working group tasked with preparing the legal reform and positive progress made in this regard. Some stakeholders informed the delegation that the plans for the transposition were quite advanced. The mission organisations also express concern that the focus appears to be primarily on the implementation of the EU Directive without equal attention to the Council of Europe Recommendation on SLAPPs. Transposition of the EU Directive on SLAPPs must be combined with additional reform of the Bulgarian civil code to introduce provisions for early dismissal procedures for SLAPPs and prevention of excessive interim measures such as freezing of bank accounts and assets of journalists and newsrooms, among other measures. Days after the delegation left Sofia, on October 7 the populist There Is Such a People party, a junior coalition partner in the governing coalition, introduced a bill to parliament which proposed amendments to the penal code which would, if adopted, have introduced prison sentences of up to six years and fines for disseminating personal information about an individual without their consent. The bill defined “personal life” broadly, covering personal, family, intimate relations or health status, and criminalised their disclosure through any medium, including print and online publications. The proposal also allowed for the use of special surveillance means, such as wiretaps, for investigating such offences, which are typically reserved for serious crimes. No exemptions were made for legitimate public interest journalism and journalist associations and unions were not consulted. The following day, October 8, the bill was approved at the first reading by the parliamentary Legal Affairs Committee. It was supported by members of the governing majority and opposition parties. Representatives of the Prosecutor’s Office and judiciary were not present due to the extraordinary and accelerated scheduling of the session. The bill was met with strong criticism from Bulgarian media, 9 journalist associations and international press freedom organisations, who warned it could be used to censor legitimate public interest journalism and risked jailing journalists for doing their job. The bill was later dropped on October 13 after the international outcry. However, the initial introduction of the bill and swift passing, without proper public consultation, remains highly alarming. If ultimately passed, the bill would have shattered slow progress on criminal defamation reform in recent years. The mission partners deeply regret that the bill was not raised during the visit to Sofia and remain deeply opposed to this draft legislation, which poses a serious threat to media freedom. More widely, defamation remains a criminal offence in Bulgaria, despite repeated calls from media freedom groups and international organisations to amend the law and fully decriminalise defamation. Recent amendments to the criminal code did lower the minimum fines for insult and defamation and eliminated the automatic aggravated qualification when the person concerned is a civil servant. The reforms also introduced the possibility of waiving criminal liability and replacing it with administrative sanctions in cases concerning insult or defamation of state officials acting in their official capacity.

<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/MFRR-Bulgaria-Report-2025-2.pdf>

Any other developments related to media pluralism and freedom - please specify

5000 character(s) maximum

The media landscape in Bulgaria is lively and diverse but media pluralism remains fragile. Independent journalism faces pressures from ownership interference, self-censorship, and financial insecurity, while deep political and social polarisation shape the media environment. Close links between political and business elites allow oligarchs to retain significant influence over parts of the media sector. Repeated cycles of elections and

the subsequent disruption of government working groups have resulted in repeated delays to reforms that are badly needed to bring about a healthier media environment. Though the mission understands that some initial work was done to prepare for the implementation of the EMFA, which came into full force in August 2025, the process was previously suspended by the Ministry of Culture. Requests to the Ministry to meet during the visit to discuss the preparation for the implementation of EMFA were rejected. In its response to questions sent by the delegation after the mission, the Ministry responded: "The implementation of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) in the Bulgarian legislation is of prior importance for the Ministry of Culture." It said plans for reform of the RTA, detailed above, were underway 10 and would be developed in November 2025. However, little additional information was provided on the plan for implementation of any other Articles of EMFA beyond amendments to the RTA. The current status of additional EMFA-related working groups remains unclear. The Ministry did not respond to a question about the reason for the suspension of the previous working groups. Implementation of the EMFA is vital for addressing many of the systemic challenges facing media freedom and pluralism in Bulgaria. However, the mission concludes that Bulgaria has made no tangible progress since the EMFA came into force. While under Bulgarian law media service providers must reveal their ownership structure and reforms in recent years have seen improved transparency, implementation remains patchy and many media have not disclosed their beneficial owners, contributing to perceptions that certain media are captured by private business or political interests. The influence of sanctioned oligarch Deylan Peevski, who leads the DPS-New Beginning party, is a major issue of concern regarding media ownership and interference. Although Peevski's media assets were formally sold in 2021, multiple stakeholders said the influence of the politician over elements of the media ecosystem remained disproportionately high and has a corrosive effect on editorial independence. State and private advertising remain the largest source of income for media in Bulgaria, though more media titles are experimenting with subscription-based business models. On paper, Bulgarian legislation requires that public funds be distributed to media transparently and competitively. However, the framework for the transparent distribution of state advertising remains flawed and incomplete. Bulgaria does not currently have a national regulatory body tasked with overseeing the allocation of state advertising to media, providing an opaque system which remains open to exploitation. The Ministry of Culture insufficiently enforces the existing laws on beneficial ownership, which, as a result, often goes undisclosed, hiding potential conflicts of interest and political affiliations, lowering public trust in the media's integrity. State advertising has regularly been instrumentalised by political forces to influence coverage and punish critical reporting through the withdrawal of contracts. The political turbulence at the national level and lack of stable governments has reduced the threat of advertising pressures on media in recent years. However, at the local and regional level the economic dependence of media on advertising from local authorities remains high and has exposed them to financial pressures and in many cases weakened editorial independence. The country's small advertising market continues to pose challenges for media viability and sustainability. Media pluralism in Bulgaria is undermined by high levels of market concentration in key sectors. The media market continues to be dominated by two major groups: PPF Group and United Group. Together, the two giants own a considerable portion of the media landscape, raising questions over media concentration and its effect on pluralism, particularly within the broadcast market. Acquisitions in the telecoms sector have further increased vertical concentration in the media ecosystem.

<https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/MFRR-Bulgaria-Report-2025-2.pdf>

All media freedom alerts submitted to Mapping Media Freedom database - <https://www.mapmf.org/explorer?f.country=Bulgaria&f.year=2025&show=list&sort=timestamp%3Adesc>

IV. Other institutional issues related to checks and balances

Please provide information on measures taken to follow-up on the recommendations received in the 2025 Report regarding the system of checks and balances (if applicable)

5000 character(s) maximum

A. The process for preparing, enacting and implementing laws

[single market relevance] Framework, policy and use of impact assessments and evidence based policy-making, stakeholders'*/public consultations (including rules and practices on the transparent participation of civil society to policy development and decision-making processes), and transparency and quality of the legislative process in the preparatory, the parliamentary and implementation phase (including guidance on how to implement legislation)

** This includes also the consultation of social partners*

5000 character(s) maximum

[single market relevance] Rules and use of fast-track procedures and emergency procedures (for example, the percentage of decisions adopted through emergency /urgent procedure compared to the total number of adopted decisions)

5000 character(s) maximum

[single market relevance] Safeguards to ensure legal certainty, the stability of the legal framework and non-discrimination.

5000 character(s) maximum

Rules and application of states of emergency (or analogous regimes), including judicial review and parliamentary oversight

5000 character(s) maximum

Regime for constitutional review of laws

5000 character(s) maximum

B. Independent authorities

Independence, resources, capacity and powers (including effective access to relevant data) of national human rights institutions ('NHRIs'), of ombudsman institutions if different from NHRIs, of equality bodies if different from NHRIs and of supreme audit institutions

(Cf. the website of the European Court of Auditors: <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/SupremeAuditInstitutions.aspx#>)

5000 character(s) maximum

Statistics/reports concerning the follow-up to recommendations by National Human Rights Institutions, ombudsman institutions, equality bodies and supreme audit institutions in the past year

5000 character(s) maximum

[single market relevance] Safeguards to ensure the effective independence of supervisory and regulatory authorities with a direct impact on economic operators such as national economic oversight, enforcement and competition authorities

C. Accessibility and judicial review of administrative decisions

[single market relevance] Transparency of administrative decisions and sanctions (incl. their publication and rules on collection of related data) and respect of the good administration principle (including the obligation of the administration to give reasons for decisions)

5000 character(s) maximum

[single market relevance] Judicial review of administrative decisions: short description of the general regime (in particular competent court, scope, suspensive effect, interim measures, and any applicable specific rules or derogations from the general regime of judicial review)

5000 character(s) maximum

[single market relevance] Safeguards (other than judicial review) regarding decisions or inaction of administrative authorities, including remedies (e.g. administrative review)

5000 character(s) maximum

[single market relevance] Rules and practices related to the application by all courts, including constitutional jurisdictions, of the preliminary ruling procedure (Art. 267 TFEU)

5000 character(s) maximum

[single market relevance] Implementation of final judgments by the public administration and State institutions and follow-up given to supranational judgments, including decisions from the European Court of Human Rights, as well as available remedies in case of non-implementation

5000 character(s) maximum

Oversight, including by courts, of the use of intrusive surveillance software by national authorities

5000 character(s) maximum

D. The enabling framework for civil society

Measures regarding the framework for civil society organisations and human rights defenders (e.g. legal framework and its application in practice incl. registration, transparency and dissolution rules)

5000 character(s) maximum

Rules and practices having an impact on the effective operation and safety of civil society organisations and human rights defenders. This includes measures to protect them from attacks – verbal, physical or on-line –, intimidation, legal threats incl. SLAPPs, negative narratives or smear campaigns, measures capable of affecting the public perception of civil society organisations, etc. It also includes measures to monitor threats or attacks and dedicated support services, as well as available remedies

5000 character(s) maximum

Organisation of financial support for civil society organisations and human rights defenders (e.g. framework to ensure access to funding, and for financial viability, taxation/incentive/donation systems, measures to ensure a fair distribution of funding)

5000 character(s) maximum

E. Initiatives to foster a rule of law culture

If there have been developments related to initiatives to foster a rule of law culture, please specify, which (e.g. debates in national parliaments on the rule of law, public information campaigns on rule of law issues, contributions from civil society, education initiatives, etc.)

5000 character(s) maximum

Any other developments related to the system of checks and balances - please specify

5000 character(s) maximum

Cross-pillar elements: cross-border rule of law issues related to the Single Market

If there are any significant challenges concerning the Single Market you have been facing in a cross-border context relating to any of the four pillars of the report, including for example issues with market access and the conditions for economic activities, that you would like to highlight, please do so here.

Given the cross-cutting nature of this question, it is included as a separate section in the questionnaire. Information collected under this question will however be integrated under the relevant existing pillar(s) of the Report.

5000 character(s) maximum

Supporting document upload

If you would like to submit any supporting document(s) to your contribution, please upload your file(s) here

Contact

rule-of-law-network@ec.europa.eu