



RULE of LAW

Report 2026

COUNTRY CHAPTER
ABSTRACTS and
RECOMMENDATIONS

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ABSTRACT – BELGIUM

Justice system

The Government maintains the intention to transfer budgetary management powers for the administration of the justice system from the executive to the judiciary. Lawyers continue to call for additional safeguards to protect their independence and legal professional privilege. Some further steps have been taken to address structural resource deficiencies in the justice system, including a plan for additional financial resources. The Government invested in advancing the digitalisation of the justice system, despite challenges. Limited efforts have been made to improve the efficiency of justice, particularly to reduce the length of proceedings based on comprehensive statistical data.

Anti-corruption framework

A legislative proposal to create a new section with earmarked resources within the federal prosecution service for investigating serious financial and economic crimes was tabled in Parliament. Investigations continue in good cooperation between police and prosecution service. Police integrity measures are under consideration to address challenges in preventing corruption within the police. There is still a lack of monitoring and enforcement of existing integrity policies. Shortcomings in the system of asset and interest declarations as regards verification and transparency remain unaddressed. No steps have been taken on completing the reform of lobbying legislation as there is no political consensus on further measures. The Parliament is considering a limited update to their deontological code as regards gifts and benefits, while no steps have been made to address the gaps in rules on “revolving doors”. Whistleblower protection rules are being evaluated. Addressing high risks of corruption related to public procurement, risks at the local level and risks linked to organised crime remains a priority.

Media freedom and pluralism

Despite challenges, media regulatory authorities have made progress in adapting their strategies, while maintaining a strong legal foundation for their independence. Public service media in Belgium continue to experience various challenges across the three communities including governance structures and budgetary pressures. No further steps have been made to improve access to public documents. Further steps are being taken to strengthen legal protections for journalists, in particular against SLAPPs.

Institutional checks and balances

Overall, stakeholders continue to have opportunities to engage with policy-making. The Government continues to work towards an A-status for a national human rights institution in Belgium. Limited further steps have been taken on ensuring compliance by public authorities with final rulings of national courts while supervision by the Council of Europe on structural issues identified by the European Court of Human Rights continues. Notwithstanding a high level of protection under the law, stakeholders continue to raise concerns regarding measures affecting civic space.

Recommendations



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on the recommendation to address the structural resource deficiencies in the justice system, including a plan for additional financial resources. At the same time limited progress has been made to improve the efficiency of justice, in particular with a view to reducing the length of proceedings. As further work remains to be done it is recommended to Belgium to *continue ongoing efforts to address the **structural resource deficiencies in the justice system** and to step up ongoing efforts to **improve the efficiency and digitalisation of justice**, particularly with a view to reducing the length of proceedings, based on comprehensive statistical data.*
- ▶ **No progress** has been made on completing the legislative reform on lobbying, establishing a framework including a transparency register and a legislative footprint, covering both members of Parliament and Government. Since no steps have been taken to take this forward, it is recommended to Belgium to *resume work on a legislative reform to increase the **transparency of lobbying** for both members of Parliament and Government.*
- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made on strengthening the integrity framework by adopting rules on gifts and benefits for members of Parliament as there remains a lack of concrete guidance to members of Parliament on what type of gifts would be acceptable and no progress was made on adopting rules on revolving doors for members of Government and their private offices. As these gaps in integrity rules remain unaddressed, it is recommended to Belgium to ***strengthen the integrity framework**, including by adopting **rules on gifts and benefits** for members of Parliament and **rules on revolving doors** for members of Government and their private offices.*
- ▶ **No further progress** has been made on strengthening the framework for access to official documents, in particular by improving request and appeal processes, with relevant draft legislation still pending adoption and part of the existing legislative framework still awaiting implementation. It is thus recommended to Belgium to *continue efforts to strengthen the **framework for access to official documents**, in particular by improving request and appeal processes, by completing the legislative reform on this matter, taking into account European standards on access to official documents.*
- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made on ensuring compliance by public authorities with final rulings of national courts and the European Court of Human Rights. While Belgium continues to engage in the execution process, there are judgments remaining unimplemented and therefore, it is recommended to Belgium to *step up efforts to ensure **compliance by public authorities with final rulings** of national courts and the European Court of Human Rights.*



ABSTRACT – BULGARIA

Justice system

In Bulgaria, a new *ad hoc* prosecutor for the investigation of possible crimes committed by the Prosecutor General was appointed, while a new law has been adopted to address procedural issues affecting the full operationalisation of the mechanism for the effective accountability and criminal liability of the Prosecutor General. Parliament adopted amendments to introduce automatic judicial review for prosecutorial decisions in case of termination and suspension of investigations for corruption-related crimes. The process to reform the Supreme Judicial Council has not been re-initiated. The continued exercise of functions following the expiry of mandates at high magisterial level raised concerns, including where this has an effect on some investigations. The reform of the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council has been adopted. There has been an increasing number of long-term secondments of judges to fill in vacant positions. Digitalisation of administrative justice improved and amendments to the legal aid rules increased the remuneration for lawyers. The year-on-year data shows that courts perform efficiently when dealing with civil and commercial proceedings.

Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Countering of Corruption 2021-2027 and the related Roadmap has continued unevenly. A new anti-corruption law re-established the Anti-Corruption Commission and provided for stronger guarantees for its independence through a new procedure for the appointment of its leadership. A robust track-record of high-level corruption cases is yet to be established. Cooperation between national authorities competent for the fight against corruption has been further strengthened. Measures to strengthen integrity in the police and the judiciary continue, while the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council no longer exercises its full powers due to the expiry of its mandate. Efforts are underway to strengthen the integrity of persons with top executive functions. Doubts remain over the effectiveness of rules on asset and interest disclosure for public officials, and the impact of the temporary transfer of related functions to the National Audit Office remains to be assessed. The newly adopted legislation on transparency of lobbying exempts important categories of interest representatives from the registration requirements. The implementation of the whistleblowing framework requires further action. Public procurement remains a vulnerable area along with increased corruption risks identified in the energy, road infrastructure and waste management sectors.

Media freedom and pluralism

Actions taken by the previous chairperson of the Council for Electronic Media are viewed positively, while concerns were raised about internal conflicts on decision-making. After years of delay, a new Director-General has been appointed to the Bulgarian National Television (BNT), and legislative reforms are underway to improve the independence of public service media. Legislative reforms are ongoing to address remaining shortcomings regarding the enforcement of media ownership disclosure obligations and on transparency of state advertising. Indications regarding political and economic influence over the media remain. Several legislative initiatives with possible adverse impact on public access to information have been undertaken. There has been a decrease in physical attacks against journalists in the past year, but verbal attacks and online harassment have increased, and legal pressure on journalists persists.

Institutional checks and balances

The mandates of most independent and regulatory authorities have been renewed while no steps have been taken to improve their independence. The Constitutional Court did not reach a majority to decide on the constitutionality of the reform limiting the powers of the President. Problems regarding the quality of the law-making process for legislative initiatives by Parliament persist. The Council for Civil Society Development resumed work until the Government fell. A draft law banning foreign funding for NGOs and an *ad hoc* parliamentary committee tasked with investigating certain foreign foundations lapsed following the election of a new Parliament.

Recommendations

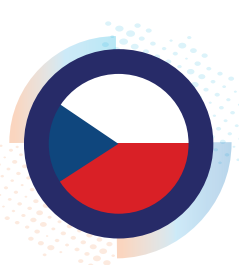


Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the country-specific recommendation under the European Semester on the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures including the independence and effective functioning of the Supreme Judicial Council, and the independence and functioning of regulators, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **No progress** has been made to adapt the legislative framework with a view to avoid long-term secondment of judges to fill in vacant positions, as the widespread use of secondments continues to raise concerns. Therefore, it is recommended to Bulgaria to *take steps to adapt the relevant **legislative framework to avoid long-term secondment of judges** to fill in vacant positions, taking into account European standards on secondment of judges.*
- ▶ **No progress** has been made to re-initiate the process to reform the Supreme Judicial Council. As the composition remains the same and no draft law has been tabled, it is recommended to Bulgaria to ***reform the Supreme Judicial Council**, in particular its composition, to ensure its independence and effectiveness, taking into account European standards on Councils for the Judiciary.*
- ▶ **No progress**, has been made on ensuring a robust track record of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments in high-level corruption cases. Therefore, it is recommended to Bulgaria to *take measures to ensure a **robust track record** of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments in high-level corruption cases.*
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on ensuring the effective performance of the Anti-Corruption Commission through the adoption of a new law which re-establishes it and introduces a new procedure for the appointment of its leadership. It is thus recommended to Bulgaria to *ensure the **full operationalisation of the Anti-Corruption Commission** in order to enable the fulfilment of its preventive and investigative functions.*
- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made on improving the integrity of top executive functions, as a draft code of conduct has been prepared. As the related legislative amendments remain pending, it is recommended to Bulgaria to *continue efforts to **strengthen the integrity of top executive functions**, taking into account European standards, in particular by ensuring that clear integrity standards for the Government as well as an appropriate sanctioning mechanism are in place.*
- ▶ **No progress** has been made to improve the quality of the legislative process, as the practical implementation of the parliamentary rules for lawmaking continues to raise some concerns. Therefore, it is recommended to Bulgaria to *strengthen the **quality of the legislative process** by ensuring the use of public consultations and impact assessments for legislative initiatives by Parliament.*

As regards the other **2025 recommendations**, the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ Parliament adopted the legislative reform aiming at **improving the functioning of the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council and avoiding the risk of political influence**. The pre-existing safeguard of a two-thirds majority, and the newly added role of the judges, prosecutors and investigative magistrates in the appointment of the ISJC members addresses the concerns linked to the risk of political influence in the ISJC. Therefore, the recommendation is **fully implemented**.
- ▶ **Some progress** has been made on completing the work aimed at **improving transparency in the allocation of state advertising**, in particular with regard to state advertising contracted through intermediaries, such as media agencies, as the legislative process has advanced. Given that **the topics of this recommendation are covered by provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA.



ABSTRACT – CZECHIA

Justice system

In Czechia, the new two-instance disciplinary procedure for judges, prosecutors and bailiffs is reported to function well. As of 1 January 2026, establishing judges' salaries reverted to a previous method, and debate is ongoing on the salaries of non-judicial staff. Amendments to the judicial map, aiming at reducing the number of district courts, are under preparation. Efforts to digitalise the justice system continued to face delays, particularly the rollout of the e-file system. Amendments to the Code of Administrative Justice aiming to improve efficiency of proceedings have given rise to discussion of their impact on procedural rights. The justice system continues to perform efficiently.

Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the 2023-2026 Anti-Corruption Strategy is being finalised as preparations for a future Strategy begin. The number of corruption investigations, prosecutions and convictions remains stable, with good cooperation between relevant institutions. While the average length of proceedings continues to be an issue, some further steps were taken to improve procedural aspects and investigations and prosecutions continue, including in high-level corruption cases. No steps were taken to reinstate the revision of legislation on conflicts of interest, including as regards beneficial ownership. An Ethics Code for government members was adopted and technical work continues on assessing the rules on asset declarations and revolving doors. Implementation of the new legislation on lobbying is on track. The integrity framework for the Parliament was not taken further. New legislation on political party financing entered into force, while an expansion of the Supreme Audit Office's powers is being considered. Whistleblower protection system continues to operate, but its effectiveness is questioned by stakeholders. Corruption risks in public procurement remain an important point of attention for the authorities.

Media freedom and pluralism

Draft legislation which would confer new powers on the media regulator and provide media companies with additional rights and responsibilities remains pending. A draft law presented by the government which aims to abolish license fees for public service media has raised concerns. No further steps have been taken on reforms relating to transparency of media ownership. Journalists continue to face serious verbal threats and harassment.

Institutional checks and balances

The electronic platform for drafting, commenting on and promulgating legislation is progressively becoming operational. 'Legislative riders' and other ways of limiting public consultation continue to impact the quality of legislative process. Implementation of the amendments to the Ombudsman Act establishing a National Human Rights Institution is ongoing. While civic space remains favourable, civil society organisations reported funding cuts and a change in the narrative regarding their role.

Recommendations



Overall, [based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report](#), considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ As efforts to further **digitalise the justice system continued to face delays**, it is recommended to Czechia to **advance the digitalisation of the justice system**, in particular by putting into operation the electronic file system.
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on taking further measures to reduce the length of proceedings and ensure independence of investigation and prosecution in high-level corruption cases as steps were taken to improve procedural aspects and investigations and prosecutions continue, including in high-level corruption cases. However, as the average length of such proceedings continues to be an issue, it is recommended to Czechia to **take further measures to reduce the length of proceedings and ensure independence of investigation and prosecution in high-level corruption cases**, including by reforming the criminal procedure.
- ▶ **No progress** has been made on taking further measures to strengthen the integrity framework for all members of Parliament, as the integrity framework of Parliament was not taken further. As gaps in the rules on revolving doors remain for most public officials, it is recommended to Czechia to **take further measures to strengthen the integrity framework**, in particular by complementing the existing rules as regards **revolving doors**.
- ▶ **No progress** has been made on reinitiating the revision of legislation on conflicts of interest, including as regards beneficial ownership as no steps were taken. Therefore, it is recommended to Czechia to **reinitiate the revision of legislation on conflicts of interest**, including as regards beneficial ownership.
- ▶ As the use of **legislative procedures circumventing public and stakeholder engagement**, inter-departmental review and impact assessment has become more frequent, it is recommended to Czechia to **take measures to improve transparency of the legislative process and meaningful consultation of stakeholders**, including by addressing the frequent use of fast-track procedure and the practice of legislative riders.

As regards the other [2025 recommendations](#), the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **No progress** has been made on further reforms relating to **transparency of information on media ownership** given that draft legislation remains pending in parliament and no fully functional transparency register has been formally established. Given that **the topics of this recommendation are covered by provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA.



ABSTRACT – DENMARK

Justice system

The level of perceived judicial independence in Denmark continues to be very high among both the general public and companies. Human and financial resources allocated to the justice system continue to increase progressively in line with the 2024-2027 multi-year financial agreement. The review of the legal aid system is still pending, with the Judicial Council expected to complete it by summer 2026. The inquiry committee appointed to report on the organisation, structure and tasks of the courts continues its work, with a view to submitting its report by the beginning of 2027. The level of digitalisation of the justice system remains overall good, and the multi-year IT project for processing criminal and probate cases continues to advance. While the average case handling time has decreased overall, challenges remain for certain categories of cases.

Anti-corruption framework

The perception among experts, citizens and business executives is that Denmark is one of the least corrupt countries in the world. The authorities are preparing a strategy to improve the prevention and prosecution of foreign bribery which is expected to be adopted in 2027. The new four-year budget framework for the Danish Police provides new resources and prioritises the fight against economic crime. There are no plans to introduce rules on 'revolving doors' for ministers and on lobbying, and to ensure the adequate control of asset declarations submitted by persons entrusted with top executive functions. New rules have been adopted to ban donations from abroad to political parties, while a broader reform of the rules on private funding of political parties has not yet been completed. The authorities consider that the implementation of the rules on whistleblowing is accomplished and there are no further actions planned in this regard. While there is no overarching process in place to identify sectors with a high risk of corruption, the authorities continue to implement measures concerning foreign bribery.

Media freedom and pluralism

The mandate and responsibilities of the media regulatory authorities have expanded. The establishment of a new Media Ombudsman was agreed following the recommendations of the Media Liability Committee. Recent reforms introduce a new competence-based model for appointing Denmark's Radio's board, alongside the adoption of a new corporate strategy through 2030. Denmark has taken steps to modernise its media policy framework ahead of the negotiations of the new multi-year media agreement. Work on proposals for a revised Access to Public Administration Files Act is still ongoing. The safety of journalists remains high in Denmark.

Institutional checks and balances

The legislative process remains inclusive overall. The Danish Institute for Human Rights continues to carry out its mandate independently and highlights the importance of providing adequate resources to effectively fulfil its tasks. A new funding model for civil society has been agreed at the political level in 2025.



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made on the recommendation to finalise the review of the legal aid system, as the Judicial Council continues its work. It is therefore recommended to Denmark to *step up **efforts to complete this review**, taking into account European standards on legal aid.*
- ▶ **No progress** has been made to introduce rules on ‘revolving doors’ for ministers and on lobbying and ensure adequate control of asset declarations submitted by persons entrusted with top executive functions, with no plans to introduce such rules nor to improve control of asset declarations. Therefore, it is recommended to Denmark to *introduce **rules on ‘revolving doors’ for ministers and on lobbying and ensure adequate control of asset declarations** submitted by persons entrusted with top executive functions.*
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on the recommendation to advance with the reform of the Access to Public Administrative Documents Act as the expert committee continued its work with a view to such a reform, but no legislative proposal has been presented yet. Therefore, it is recommended to Denmark to *step up efforts to move forward with the **reform of the Access to Public Administrative Documents Act**, taking into account European standards on access to official documents.*



ABSTRACT – GERMANY

Justice system

The level of perceived judicial independence is now very high among both the general public and companies in Germany. Reflections regarding reforms to further strengthen the resilience of the justice system continue at the Federal and *Länder* level. With the new Pact for the Rule of Law and a joint campaign to attract qualified personnel, significant steps have been taken to increase resources of the judiciary and address recruitment challenges. Further efforts to improve digitalisation of justice are on-going, while in practice regional divergences as regards the maturity of digitalisation persist. Specialised commercial courts and chambers have been created in over half of the *Länder* and have become operational. Certain challenges have been identified regarding restrictions to the right to legal assistance in specific circumstances. The justice system overall continues to perform efficiently in civil and commercial cases, with changes to criminal and administrative procedural rules under consideration.

Anti-corruption framework

The planned revision of the strategic anti-corruption framework and gift policy for the federal administration remains pending. Germany will strengthen sanctions of legal persons, including for corruption crimes. High-level corruption is addressed, and no systemic weaknesses have been identified. Work to establish a fully-fledged legislative footprint is still to be advanced to further enhance transparency in an environment of strong industry interest representation. The federal Lobbying Register is effectively enforced. Some shortcomings remain in the enforcement of conflicts of interest and asset declaration rules for parliamentarians and Government officials as well as for whistleblower protection and political party and campaign finance. Linking the fully electronic Competition Register to the Company Data Register could facilitate investigations of data of companies involved in public procurements, as recommended by the evaluation of the Company Register law.

Media freedom and pluralism

The independently functioning media regulators assumed new enforcement responsibilities regarding youth protection. Reprimands issued by the self-regulatory body reached a very high level. Reforms to further strengthen the independent functioning of the public service broadcasters entered into force, and future funding remains under discussion. The business environment for media service providers remained overall stable, while plans to adopt new measures to support media pluralism are progressing. There have been no further steps to establish a codified right of the press to information from federal authorities. The overall protection framework for journalists has remained stable, but reports of physical and online attacks raise concern. Work is ongoing with the aim to establish anti-SLAPP safeguards in legislation.

Institutional checks and balances

The length of stakeholder consultations and use of impact assessments continues to vary in practice among Ministries. No steps were taken to adapt the tax-exempt status of non-profit organisations, which still creates obstacles for civil society in practice. Civil society organisations continue to face some challenges to their operations and funding schemes for organisations in the area of democracy promotion are currently under review.



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report** and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Significant further progress** has been made on increasing the resources of the judiciary and addressing recruitment challenges, through the new Pact for the Rule of Law and a joint campaign to attract qualified personnel. In view of addressing remaining challenges, it is recommended to Germany *to take forward the implementation of the Pact for the Rule of Law as regards both **human resources and digitalisation** and continue measures to **address recruitment challenges**, taking into account European standards on resources for the justice system.*
- ▶ **No progress** has been made to step up efforts to strengthen the ‘legislative footprint’ to provide a comprehensive public record to register lobbying input and to extend the scope to the parliamentary phase of the legislative procedure. As gaps remain, it is recommended to Germany *to step-up efforts **to provide a comprehensive public record of lobbying input** in the legislative process.*
- ▶ **No further progress** has been made on advancing with creating a legal basis for a right to information of the press as regards federal authorities, as internal preparations have not been pursued further. Therefore, it is recommended to Germany *to advance with creating a **legal basis for a right to information of the press** as regards federal authorities, taking into account European standards on access to official documents.*
- ▶ **No progress** has been made to adapt the tax-exempt status for non-profit organisations, which still affects civil society in practice. Therefore, it is recommended to Germany *to take steps to adapt the **tax-exempt status for non-profit organisations** with a view to addressing the challenges which the currently applicable rules present for the organisations’ operation in practice, taking into account European standards on funding for civil society organisations.*



ABSTRACT – ESTONIA

Justice system

Estonia continues innovating as regards the digitalisation of its justice system, including by introducing a virtual AI assistant in the court's digital case file. The reform of the Council for the Administration of Courts was adopted maintaining the same structure for the Council as reported in the previous year, which does not take account of European standards. The proposed reform to merge all courts of the same instance has been withdrawn. The indexation for judges' salaries remains frozen, while court cases contesting the measure are still pending. The high workload within the judiciary remains a challenge. Courts continue to perform efficiently, while a trend of increasing disposition time can be observed. Draft laws aiming to further improve efficiency of justice have been tabled at Parliament. A new draft law further increases the court fees in certain civil proceedings.

Anti-corruption framework

The new strategic framework on anti-corruption is expected to be completed by the end of 2026. A comprehensive revision of the Anti-Corruption Act is planned to be completed in the next four years. With additional resources allocated to the Ministry of Justice and Digital Affairs, new initiatives to prevent corruption are planned. Corruption cases continue to be handled efficiently. Challenges remain in the detection and enforcement of foreign bribery cases. Introduction of legal rules on lobbying for both government officials and for Parliament is being considered in the framework of the revision of the Anti-Corruption Act. The Advisory Centre is expected to support the implementation of the whistleblowing rules. The amendments to the Political Parties Act have been approved by Parliament. The high-risk areas for corruption are being monitored by the authorities and the first assessment of anti-corruption efforts at the local level delivered positive results.

Media freedom and pluralism

The regulator for audiovisual media services continues to operate independently. The budget of the Estonian public service media broadcaster has again been affected by procedures to constrain public spending. Estonia provides a high level of transparency regarding media ownership structures but still does not have a law on media market concentration, while market plurality remains the biggest challenge. There have been positive developments to improve the implementation of the right of access to information. The safety of journalists continues to be high and SLAPP threats towards journalists decreased, although the online threat environment is deteriorating.

Institutional checks and balances

The Government is preparing concrete steps to improve the public consultation process. Some independent authorities have received more tasks, while additional resources have not been allocated. The Strategic partnership funding programme for civil society organisations entered into force.

Recommendations



Overall, [based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report](#), and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made to continue the efforts to reform the Council for the Administration of Courts. Therefore, it is recommended to Estonia to *take steps to **adapt the composition of the Council for the Administration of Courts**, taking into account European standards on Councils for the Judiciary.*

As regards the other [2025 recommendations](#), the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ The recommendation to further advance with efforts to **ensure consistent and effective implementation of the right of access to information** taking into account European standards on access to official documents has been **fully implemented**, as the reform of the Public Information Act will enhance access to and the reuse of open data.



ABSTRACT – IRELAND

Justice system

Reforms to improve the quality of Ireland's justice system continued, and both the general public and companies perceive its independence as very high. Some further progress has been made in reducing litigation costs, with the drafting of the Civil Reform Bill underway. A review of the Civil Legal Aid scheme has been published, and reforms to the Criminal Legal Aid system are ongoing, with the intention to improve access to justice. Ireland remains the Member State with the lowest number of judges per capita, and while work is ongoing on recruitment of judges, concerns persist regarding the adequacy of existing safeguards for the employment conditions of the judiciary. Further measures to enhance digitalisation of justice are being implemented, such as improving e-litigation. A decision on the next steps regarding the reports on the Offences Against the State Acts, including the operation of the Special Criminal Court, remains pending. Concerns remain about the length of proceedings and about the data gathering on the overall efficiency of justice, with the Courts Service pursuing initiatives to improve data availability. An independent assessment process to implement the right established by the 2024 Act on delays in court proceedings is still under preparation.

Anti-corruption framework

The perception among experts, citizens and business executives is that the level of corruption in the public sector remains relatively low. The Multi-Annual Strategy to combat Economic Crime and Corruption has been approved. Cooperation among the competent authorities functions well. Challenges in staffing levels remain for investigation and prosecution of corruption offences. There has been limited progress in the strengthening of the ethics framework and in the strengthening and digitalisation of asset declarations. The Lobbying Regulation continues to be implemented. The statutory review of the Protected Disclosures Act is starting this year, with a public consultation scheduled to gather further evidence on whistleblower experience. The government aims to create a system for identifying bid-rigging, in order to address the high risk of corruption in public procurement.

Media freedom and pluralism

The media regulator functions independently with increasing staff numbers in view of its growing regulatory competences. The reform of governance and funding framework of the public service media has continued, with the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill that aims to increase governance independence and reform the assessment of funding published in May 2026. The Government also published new legislation to address media market concentrations, transparency of media ownership and state advertising. The Media Regulation Bill transfers to the media regulator responsibility for media merger assessments, as well as monitoring and reporting on the state advertising allocation. Ireland has finalised the reform of the Defamation (Amendment) Bill, introducing safeguards that counter strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). The General Scheme of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation Bill was published in February 2026, completing the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive transposition by mirroring provisions in the Defamation Bill with regards to all other civil and commercial proceedings outside of defamation. The safety of journalists remains stable, nevertheless some challenges affecting their professional environment were reported.

Institutional checks and balances

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission continued its activities, noting a lack of sufficient resources. Ireland's civic space remains open. Different initiatives have been launched to promote a rule of law culture. The Electoral Commission continues conducting its comprehensive review of the 1997 Electoral Act, which includes a focus on addressing the legal obstacles that restrict access to funding for civil society organisations.

Recommendations



Overall, [based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report](#), and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on reducing litigation costs, as the General Scheme of the Civil Reform Bill has been presented which introduces several key reforms aimed at reducing litigation costs. Since the reform remains to be adopted, it is recommended to Ireland to *finalise the legislative work aimed at **reducing litigation costs** to ensure effective access to justice, taking into account European standards on disproportionate costs of litigation and their impact on access to courts.*
- ▶ **Limited further progress** has been made to strengthen the existing ethics framework and to strengthen and digitalise the asset declarations system, with efforts to initiate the digitalisation of asset declarations being considered within the current framework. Since the 'Ethics Reform Bill' is still under preparation and the digitalisation of asset declarations under the current framework still needs to be implemented, it is recommended to Ireland to *continue efforts to **strengthen the existing ethics framework**, including the monitoring and enforcement capacity of the Standards in Public Office Commission, and to strengthen and digitalise the asset declarations system.*
- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made on addressing legal obstacles related to access to funding for civil society organisations, as the Electoral Commission continues to conduct a comprehensive review of the 1997 Electoral Act. It is recommended to Ireland to *continue ongoing efforts to tackle legal **challenges regarding access to funding for civil society organisations**, as part of the broader Electoral Act reform.*

As regards the other [2025 recommendations](#), the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Significant progress** has been made on completing the reform to provide funding for public service media that is appropriate for the realisation of its public service remit while guaranteeing its independence, in light of the adoption of the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill. Given that **the topics of this recommendation are covered by provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA.
- ▶ The recommendation on **finalising the reform of the Defamation Act** to improve the professional environment for journalists taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists has been **fully implemented**, in light of adoption of the necessary legislation.



ABSTRACT – GREECE

Justice system

In Greece, appointments to the highest positions in the court system were made with the involvement of the judiciary. Initiatives to restore trust in the justice system, including a post-retirement cooling-off period for judges, continue to be discussed. Major projects to improve the level of digitalisation are advancing well and efforts to promote the use of alternative dispute resolution continue. Recruitments of prosecutors and court staff alongside improvements in building infrastructure aim to address shortcomings. Reforms show promising results in judicial efficiency, as the length of proceedings has slightly decreased but still remains a serious challenge. Efforts to decongest civil courts and reduce delays include transferring non-litigious cases to lawyers and notaries, the digital publication of wills and revisions to the Code of Civil Procedure.

Anti-corruption framework

The National Anti-Corruption Action Plan (NACAP) 2022-2025 was successfully implemented and a new NACAP is being finalised. While the number of prosecutions and final judgments, including high-level corruption, remains limited, the legal framework is in place and implementing rules are being finalised for a digital registry that allows a comprehensive monitoring of corruption cases. The police stepped up efforts to combat corruption. The submission of asset declarations continues, including through the new electronic system 'e-pothen', though some delays in submissions and publications remain. While implementation measures and awareness-raising activities are ongoing, no legislative changes have been introduced regarding the definition of lobbyists and the number of registered lobbyists remains low. Most political parties complied with funding rules, while concerns remain regarding transparency and implementation. Recent reforms aim to address structural inefficiencies, enhance centralisation and transparency in public procurement to reduce corruption risks.

Media freedom and pluralism

The strengthening of the media regulator's supervisory role, its funding and staff continues, including through the adoption of new legislation and in order to ensure adaptation to its new competences. For the first time, a self-regulatory body for the media sector is provided for by law. A new law modernises and strengthens public service media's governance, although concerns regarding the latter's political independence remain. A new law for the licensing of regional television has been adopted. Transparency of state advertising is further improved with the adoption of legislation and funding measures to support the media sector are planned or have been adopted. New requirements relating to the legal framework on access to information start being applied. As provided by law, a national action plan is in preparation to address threats to the safety of journalists. Additional measures have been taken and further work is ongoing on adopting legislative and non-legislative safeguards to improve the protection of journalists, in particular as regards abusive lawsuits.

Institutional checks and balances

The constitutional revision process started, touching upon a range of rule of law issues, including judicial independence, ministerial immunities, protection of journalists and better regulation. The quality of the legislative process shows improvements, yet challenges persist, including frequent legislative changes. Reforms seek to target the administration's delays in enforcing final judgments. The immunity regime for members of Government remains debated, with broad agreement on the need for reform. Judicial scrutiny of certain aspects of the use of spyware continues. New staff positions have been approved for the Constitutional Independent Authorities, while their request for autonomous staff recruitment has yet to be addressed. While the registration framework remains fragmented, further steps have been taken and the basis for a structured dialogue with civil society has been laid. The Council of State is engaging in awareness campaigns to instil a rule of law culture among young people.



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, and the country-specific recommendation under the European Semester on the efficiency of the justice system, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made in establishing a robust track record of prosecutions and final judgments in corruption cases, as the legal framework for a digital register of corruption cases has been set up and the register is expected to be operational on 1 January 2027; however, as the number of prosecutions and final judgments in corruption cases, including high-level corruption, remains low, it is recommended to Greece *to continue efforts to **establish a robust track record** of prosecutions and final judgments in **corruption cases, including high-level corruption***.
- ▶ There has been **only limited progress** in improving the lobbying framework, as no legislation expanding the definition of a lobbyist has been adopted while implementation measures and awareness raising activities are ongoing. Therefore, it is recommended to Greece *to **improve the lobbying framework**, including by reviewing the definition of a lobbyist and ensuring effective implementation*.
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on strengthening legislative and non-legislative safeguards to improve the safety and protection of journalists, in particular as regards abusive lawsuits, as additional measures have been taken and draft anti-SLAPP legislation is being finalised. Therefore, it is recommended to Greece *to complete the work on strengthening legislative and non-legislative safeguards to improve the safety and protection of journalists, in particular as regards abusive lawsuits, in line with the adopted Memorandum of Understanding and taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists*.
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made in developing a structured dialogue with civil society organisations (CSOs), and in simplifying registration requirements in view of maintaining an open framework for them to operate, given that the framework for a structured dialogue with CSOs has been laid and some steps have been taken to reduce documentation requirements and streamlining procedures. Since the structured dialogue is yet to become regular and sustained and the registration framework remains fragmented, it is recommended to Greece *to intensify efforts to **consolidate a regular and sustained structured dialogue with CSOs**, and to **simplify registration requirements** in view of maintaining an open framework for them to operate*.



ABSTRACT – SPAIN

Justice system

In Spain, steps were taken to take forward the process of adapting the appointment procedure for the Council for the Judiciary's judges-members, with the adoption of an opinion of the Venice Commission on two alternative models, although no consensus has been found on finalising the process. The Council for the Judiciary continues to fulfil its functions in the justice system following its renewal, including by proceeding with appointments to top judicial positions. A draft law to strengthen the statute of the Prosecutor-General is under discussion in Parliament. Efforts are being made to increase the resources of the justice system, including the creation of 700 positions for judges and prosecutors and the launch of the recruitment process. Work to further improve the already high level of digitalisation of justice continued, while the limited interoperability between national and regional case management systems remains a challenge. The implementation of the new law on the efficiency of justice is already showing positive results, though there are challenges linked to resources and consistency of implementation across regions. The duration of court proceedings remains a challenge.

Anti-corruption framework

The Government has adopted a State Anti-Corruption Plan, as well as several key draft laws and strategic documents. To address challenges related to the length of investigations and prosecutions of high-level corruption cases, the Government has made reform and staffing efforts. Initiatives continue to address gaps in the legislative framework and in enforcement of foreign bribery. A draft law has been prepared with the view of reinforcing the Council for Transparency and Good Governance. The draft Open Administration Law seeks to establish a comprehensive regime for the prevention of conflicts of interest in the public sector. With the preliminary draft Organic Law on Public Integrity pending adoption, the rules on conflicts of interest and asset declarations of persons in top executive functions have not yet been strengthened. The draft Law on the Transparency and Integrity of the Activities of Interest Groups has not yet been adopted by Parliament. Shortcomings remain regarding compliance with transparency obligations related to political party financing. The Independent Authority for Whistleblower Protection started operating with some budgetary and staffing constraints. Public procurement remains an area vulnerable to corruption risks.

Media freedom and pluralism

Reforms continue to strengthen the regulatory framework, including enhanced resources for the national regulator to carry out its supervisory functions effectively. Risks related to editorial independence and political interference in publicly owned radio and television broadcasters are flagged by stakeholders. As the adoption of new legislation is still pending, concerns regarding ownership transparency of media other than audiovisual media services, video sharing platforms and influencers remain. The reform of the legal framework for state advertising is advancing, although challenges remain. The Government's approval of the draft Laws on Classified Information and Open Administration aims to strengthen the framework for access to information. Work on related legislative proposals continues, while challenges regarding working conditions and safety of journalists persist, including online.

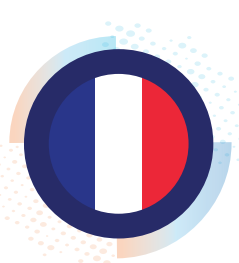
Institutional checks and balances

Requests for a preliminary ruling on the Amnesty Law are pending before the Court of Justice. Steps have been taken in promoting public participation in policymaking and a culture that fosters rule of law. The two draft laws aimed at respectively amending the Code of Criminal Procedure, including as regards popular action in criminal investigations, and reforming the Citizen Security Law, are still pending in Parliament.



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the country-specific recommendation under the European Semester on the efficiency of the justice system, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Some further progress** was made on adapting the procedure for appointing the Council for the Judiciary's judges-members, as the Council obtained guidance from the Venice Commission, but no consensus has been found on finalising the process. Since a reform remains to be adopted, it is recommended to Spain to *take forward the process of **adapting the appointment procedure of the Council for the Judiciary's judges-members**, taking into account European standards on Councils for the Judiciary, including the guidance of the Venice Commission on how to improve the current system.*
- ▶ **Significant progress** was made to strengthen the statute of the Prosecutor General, as a reform of the Code of Criminal Procedure is under discussion in Parliament. Since the reform remains to be adopted, it is recommended to Spain to *continue ongoing efforts to **strengthen the statute of the Prosecutor General**, in particular regarding the separation of the terms of office of the Prosecutor General from that of the Government, taking into account European standards on independence and autonomy of the prosecution.*
- ▶ **Some progress** was made to address the length of investigations and prosecutions of high-level corruption cases due to efforts to increase staffing and due to the tabled reform of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Since challenges remain and the draft legislation to increase efficiency is still under discussion in Parliament, it is recommended to Spain to *take forward the legislative process to **revise the Code of Criminal Procedure to strengthen the framework for investigations and prosecutions in high-level corruption cases**, with a view to reducing delays.*
- ▶ **Limited progress** was made to strengthen the rules on conflicts of interest and asset declarations of persons in top executive functions. Given that the draft Organic Law on Public Integrity has been tabled and the State Anti-Corruption Plan has been adopted, but practical implementation of the existing rules has not improved, it is recommended to Spain to *take forward the legislative process to **strengthen rules on conflicts of interest and asset declarations** of persons with top executive functions, and ensure independence and effective detection and sanctioning powers of the competent supervisory body.*
- ▶ **Limited progress** was made on lobbying, as the draft Law on the Transparency and Integrity of the Activities of Interest Groups has not yet been adopted by Parliament. It is recommended to Spain to *continue the ongoing procedure to **adopt legislation on lobbying**, including the establishment of a mandatory public register of lobbyists.*
- ▶ **Significant progress** was made on strengthening access to information, in particular via the revision of the Law on Official Secrets. Therefore, it is recommended to Spain to *complete the work on **strengthening access to information**, in particular via the adoption of the Law on Official Secrets and the Law on Open Administration, taking into account European standards on access to official documents.*



ABSTRACT – FRANCE

Justice system

In France, the implementation of the reform of the status of magistrates continued and there were renewed calls to further strengthen the autonomy of prosecutors. The High Council for the Judiciary continued defending judicial independence in response to concerns raised by an increasing number of attacks on magistrates related to judicial decisions. Budgetary efforts have been sustained in 2025 and 2026 to increase further the number of magistrates. Some further steps were taken to implement tools to digitalise court procedures. Small court fees were reintroduced for access to courts and alternative dispute resolutions methods are increasingly encouraged. Reforms are being considered to improve the efficiency of the justice system, in particular through streamlining appeal and criminal procedures.

Anti-corruption framework

The 2025-2029 National Plan Against Corruption, setting the priorities for the next five years, was adopted in November 2025. Further efforts are being made in the prosecution of corruption cases. The High Authority for the Transparency in Public Life has been entrusted with new tasks. Some further steps have been taken in strengthening the rules on lobbying with the start of operation of the Registry on Foreign Influence, while other draft laws remain under discussion and the obligation to report lobbying has not been extended to officials at top-executive level. Measures continue to be implemented to reinforce the ethics culture within the Government and the Parliament and their staff. The integrity frameworks for police officers and magistrates are being further reinforced. The framework for the protection of whistleblowers remains robust, while the increase of reports represents a challenge in terms of resources needed to ensure their follow-up. The law on Anti-Narcotics and Organised Crime that introduced several measures aimed at reinforcing the fight against corruption when linked to organised crime is being implemented.

Media freedom and pluralism

France's media regulator, ARCOM, is continuing to expand its regulatory scope and activities in response to new obligations and mandates. Recourse to media self-regulation has increased in recent years, indicating growing engagement with journalistic ethics. While public service media are restructuring their activities due to budget constraints, pressure on them has intensified in the public debate. Further steps were taken to improve the transparency of media ownership with the development of a preliminary transparency database, while media concentration is an increasing concern. The Committee on access to administrative documents (CADA) received a record number of referrals in recent years, while requests from journalists were in minority. As regards the working conditions for journalists, new positive developments include case law strengthening the protection of sources, alongside continued challenges related to safety and broader working environment.

Institutional checks and balances

Stakeholder engagement in law making is stable, while the reduction of legislative and administrative burdens remains an important priority for the Government. Public authorities continue to support civil society organisations, including through substantial public funding, while some organisations continue to face challenges to their operations.

Recommendations



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on the digitalisation of judicial procedures. As this process has faced some delays, it is recommended to France to *step up efforts to complete ongoing projects aimed at **digitalisation of civil and criminal court proceedings***.
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made regarding the recommendation on lobbying, in particular through the strengthening of the transparency framework on foreign influence activities. As the obligation to disclose lobbying activities only applies to interests' representatives, it is recommended to France to *continue efforts to ensure the **transparency of lobbying activities** by extending the scope of the disclosure obligation, in particular to officials at top executive level*.

As regards the other **2025 recommendations**, the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made to improve the transparency of media ownership, including through the development of a preliminary transparency database by the media regulator. Its full deployment remains dependent on the adoption of the necessary legislative measures. Given that ***the topics of this recommendation are covered by the provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)***, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA.



ABSTRACT – CROATIA

Justice system

In Croatia, the process for appointing the new Supreme Court President was concluded. Judicial authorities maintained their efforts to ensure the integrity of judges and state attorneys. The use of electronic communication between courts and users has further increased and amendments would close the gap in the digitalisation of misdemeanour cases. Proposed amendments aim to address the challenges regarding the recruitment of new judges and deputy state attorneys. Some steps have been made to further improve the efficiency of justice, particularly as regards the length of proceedings in litigious commercial and civil cases. Reforms were passed to adapt the system of 'registrations judges' to make it compatible with EU law requirements, and to transfer the power to prescribe the implementation of the training for judges from the Ministry of Justice to the President of the Supreme Court.

Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the second Action Plan under the Anti-Corruption Strategy 2021-2030 is ongoing. Significant steps were made as several laws were revised, including the Law on the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organised Crime, and institutional changes were introduced to achieve greater efficiency in corruption investigations and prosecutions. Croatia continues to experience a large number of reported corruption crimes, while also the number of initiated investigations has risen, including against several high-level officials. Croatia digitalised the submission of asset declarations by public officials and several sanctions for non-compliance were imposed, although verification remains non-systematic. The Government has increased the resources of the Commission for the Resolution of Conflicts of Interest for lobbying oversight, while several challenges remain, including certain limitations of the information included in the lobbying register. The Ministry of Justice has published the first report on the application of the Code of Ethics for civil servants and employees at State level. Amendments to improve the whistleblower protection law entered into force. While authorities are carrying out systematic verifications, the timely reporting of party and campaign finance continues to present challenges. A comprehensive public procurement reform entered into force to enhance transparency, efficiency and digitalisation.

Media freedom and pluralism

Amendments to the media law enlarged the regulatory mandate of the independent media regulator to also cover press, and expanded the database of media ownership and financing to include print media, while stakeholders' concerns persist regarding the oversight of indirect ownership. The same law revised the relevant framework for state advertising and entered into force. There are ongoing concerns regarding the availability of stable financing for public service media. Efforts to improve the safety of journalists continued, as journalists called for measures to strengthen and protect their profession. The financial and governance dependence of local radio and media publishers on local government is linked to concerns about their editorial independence. Meanwhile, a law to address the issue of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP) targeting journalists has entered into force and a new law on access to information is in preparation.

Institutional checks and balances

Local and regional authorities started publishing draft regulations on the public consultations portal, and the impact assessments and evaluations of laws increased. Government authorities further improved the implementation of the recommendations of the People's Ombudsperson. The opportunities for multiannual funding of the civil society organisations expanded.

Recommendations



Overall, [based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report](#), considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, and the country-specific recommendation under the European Semester on the efficiency of the justice system, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Some progress** has been made on the recommendation to improve the efficiency of justice, particularly as regards the length of proceedings in litigious commercial and civil cases as the total backlog further decreased, while the length of proceedings continues to be a serious concern. Therefore, it is recommended to Croatia to *continue efforts to **improve efficiency of justice**, including by introducing case management reforms in litigious commercial and civil cases.*
- ▶ **Significant progress** has been made with a view to further increase the efficiency of investigations and prosecution of corruption offences, as the Criminal Procedure Code, the Law on the State Attorney's Office, and the Law on the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organised Crime entered into force. As the effects in practice still need to materialise, it is recommended to Croatia to *take measures to further **develop a track record** of effective investigations, prosecutions and final judgments in corruption cases, including high-level corruption, including by further improving specialised technical capacities.*
- ▶ As **control rates of asset declarations remain low** due to inconsistent, incomparable data structures preventing machine-analysis, it is recommended to Croatia to *step up **digitalisation efforts** to ensure effective and systematic **verification of asset declarations**.*
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made to address the issue of strategic lawsuits against public participation targeted at journalists, in light of the entry into force of the law on the Protection of Persons Involved in Public Activities, while challenges remain. Therefore, it is recommended to Croatia to ***broaden the range of available safeguards to improve the protection of journalists**, including by reviewing the legal provisions on defamation and encouraging wider use of procedural rules that allow dismissing groundless lawsuits, taking into account the European standards on the protection of journalists.*

As regards the other [2025 recommendations](#), the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Some progress** has been made to strengthen the legal framework and oversight mechanisms to ensure a fair and transparent allocation of state advertising at national, regional and local level, including the public tender procedure, as the legislation was amended, while the operational guidance to be adopted by the media regulator remains outstanding. Given that **the topics of this recommendation are covered by provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA.



ABSTRACT – ITALY

Justice system

The recruitment of magistrates and administrative court staff continues at a good pace, with the aim of closing the persistent shortages. The Government has launched competitions for the permanent recruitment of most court clerks. Sustainability of the workload of professional tax judges and justices of the peace is a challenge. The government tabled in Parliament a draft law on the legal profession, prepared in cooperation with lawyers' associations. Further steps have been taken to complete the digital case management system for criminal courts and prosecutors' offices, following concrete cooperation between executive and judiciary in addressing gaps and initial delays. While a few elements remain pending, the first-instance criminal trial workflow is now fully digitalised. The positive trend in reduction of the disposition time continued, while the length of judicial proceedings remains a serious issue. Backlog reduction continued, particularly for the older cases. In the absence of majority support in a referendum, the envisaged constitutional reform separating careers of judges and prosecutors did not materialise.

Anti-corruption framework

A new national anti-corruption strategy was adopted for the years 2026-2028. The criminal law framework to combat corruption has been stabilised, with the Constitutional Court ruling that the law restricting the scope of the offence of trading in influence is not in breach of the Constitution. The pace of convictions in corruption cases was maintained. While a draft law on conflicts of interest remains pending in Parliament, existing rules on post-employment restrictions for local public officials were removed in August 2025. A draft law on lobbying was adopted in the Chamber and is being assessed in the Senate. The draft laws on political party and campaign financing addressing the issue of private party donations being channelled via political foundations remain pending in Parliament. The National Anti-Corruption Authority (ANAC) issued additional whistleblowing guidelines. The launch of the Single Transparency Portal increases transparency of public procurement, which remains a high-risk area.

Media freedom and pluralism

The media regulator exercises its functions independently and legislative changes were introduced to strengthen its financial autonomy. Parliamentary work is ongoing on a reform of the public service media's governance and funding rules. A system of public funding is in place for the allocation of resources and the financing of policies and initiatives in support of the media sector. New legislative initiatives on the protection of journalists are under development, while physical attacks and other forms of intimidations remain a source of concern. There were no developments on the pending press defamation reform.

Institutional checks and balances

The draft constitutional reform to introduce the direct election of the Prime Minister remains on the agenda of Parliament. Stakeholders continued to express concerns about the excessive use of emergency decrees and of motions of confidence, while the Chamber of Deputies took steps to limit their use in the future. Initial steps were taken towards establishing a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI). The 2025 'security law' is being implemented and a new emergency decree in the field of internal security was converted into law, with some stakeholders raising concern about their possible impact on civic space and the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms.

Recommendations



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the country-specific recommendation under the European Semester on the efficiency of the justice system, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on completing the digital case management system for criminal courts and prosecutors' offices, as the first-instance criminal trial workflow is now fully digitalised. Since some procedures remain to be digitalised, it is recommended to Italy to ***complete the digital case management system in all instances***.
- ▶ There has been **no further progress** on the pending legislative proposal on conflicts of interest while limited progress has been made in adopting comprehensive rules on lobbying to establish an operational lobbying register as a draft law on lobbying was adopted in the Chamber of Deputies and is being assessed by the Senate. Therefore, it is recommended to Italy to ***take forward legislative efforts to systematically regulate conflicts of interests and adopt comprehensive rules on lobbying and establish an operational lobbying register***.
- ▶ There has been **no progress** to address the practice of channelling donations through political foundations and associations and introduce a single electronic register for party and campaign finance information, as the draft laws tabled in Parliament have not been discussed yet. Therefore, it is recommended to Italy to ***accelerate efforts to address the practice of channelling donations through political foundations and associations and introduce a single electronic register for party and campaign finance information***.
- ▶ There has been **no progress** in the legislative process on the draft reform on defamation, the protection of professional secrecy and journalistic sources. Therefore, it is recommended to Italy to ***take forward the reform on defamation while guaranteeing press freedom, taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists***.
- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made to establish a National Human Rights Institution, as initial steps were taken to relaunch the initiative while various draft laws remain pending in Parliament. Therefore, it is recommended to Italy to ***establish a National Human Rights Institution taking into account the UN Paris Principles***.

As regards the other **2025 recommendations**, the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Some further progress** was made to ensure that rules or mechanisms are in place to provide funding for public service media that is appropriate for the realisation of its public service remit and to guarantee its independence, as parliamentary work on a reform bill has advanced. Given that **the topics of this recommendation are covered by the provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA.



ABSTRACT – CYPRUS

Justice system

In Cyprus, the ongoing reform of the Law Office, which plans to establish the Office of the Public Prosecutor General and the introduction of an effective review of decisions not to prosecute or to discontinue proceedings, remains pending before Parliament. A distinct branch of administrative justice was established. Measures to reinforce trust in the judiciary have been taken, including new guidelines on recusal of judges. The Supreme Constitutional Judicial Council held that probationary appointments of judges rely on a long-standing practice. The digital transformation of the justice system remains limited with key projects progressing slowly, while efforts to strengthen the alternative dispute resolution framework continue. Challenges regarding judicial recruitments and infrastructure persist. While the clearance of backlog cases is progressing, and new procedural rules aim to enhance efficiency, the duration of judicial proceedings and the delays in making the Commercial Court operational continue to raise serious concerns, including among the business community. The establishment of an independent Court Service, that seeks to streamline court administration and alleviate the burden on the judiciary, faces persistent delays.

Anti-corruption framework

The Independent Authority against Corruption (IAAC) has been strengthened with the adoption of new legislation on recruitments. Efforts continue to investigate high-level corruption with further new convictions, new police structures are being created and there are calls for specific trainings for judges and prosecutors. The new legislation on asset declarations for elected and appointed officials started to apply. As regards post-employment, a new law has enhanced restrictions while initiatives are underway to expand the categories of persons subject to oversight. The monitoring of the law on lobbying is being strengthened. Integrity rules were strengthened and a comprehensive strategy for the integrity of persons entrusted with top executive functions is in preparation. Plans to revise the law on political party financing aim to address previously identified shortcomings. Measures continue to be deployed to tackle risks in public procurement.

Media freedom and pluralism

Measures are being taken to ensure the adequacy of the resources of Cyprus's regulator for audiovisual media services. Reforms to improve the legal framework relating to transparency of media ownership are at an advanced stage. Reforms are also underway to improve transparency in the field of state advertising and to strengthen the rules and mechanisms to enhance the independent governance of public service media. The Office of the Information Commissioner continues to raise awareness on the law regulating public access to information, while further measures are needed to improve it. The overall situation as regards the safety of journalists remains stable, however they continue to experience precarious working conditions.

Institutional checks and balances

Substantial steps have been taken to enhance public participation in decision-making. Businesses continue to see challenges in the quality of law-making and the need to streamline legislation. The Audit Office gained financial autonomy and safeguards were introduced to the appointment procedure for the Auditor General and the Deputy Auditor General to enhance their independence. The Audit Office is seeking ways to improve access to information necessary for the performance of its tasks. Reforms to improve the framework for Civil Society Organisations are advancing. Parliament's regular stakeholder discussions foster public debate on the rule of law.

Recommendations

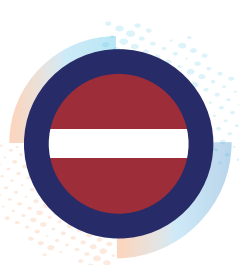


Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, and the country-specific recommendation under the European Semester on the efficiency of the justice system, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on the reform of the Law Office and on establishing an effective review of decisions not to prosecute or discontinue proceedings. Since relevant draft legislation remains pending before Parliament, it is recommended to Cyprus *to finalise the ongoing reform of the Law Office and the establishment of the Office of the Public Prosecutor General and to establish an effective review of decisions not to prosecute or to discontinue proceedings, including for victimless offences, taking into account European standards on independence and autonomy of the prosecution.*
- ▶ The **duration of court proceedings remains a serious concern** and the establishment of an independent Court Service to streamline court administration faces delays. It is recommended to Cyprus *to take forward plans to establish an independent Court Service with a view to improving the efficiency of justice.*
- ▶ **Significant progress** has been made on the legislative reform to strengthen the Independent Authority against Corruption (IAAC) and to ensure it has the human and technical resources to effectively perform its task, as new legislation was adopted on recruitments. To ensure a fully effective IAAC, further measures remain necessary. To address this, it is recommended to Cyprus *to enhance the operational effectiveness of the IAAC.*

As regards the other **2025 recommendations**, the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Some progress** has been made to (i) **ensure fair and transparent distribution of advertising expenditure** by the state and state-owned companies and (ii) to strengthen the rules and mechanisms to **enhance the independent governance of public service media**, as draft legislation has been tabled. Given that **the topics of these two recommendations are covered by provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA.
- ▶ **Significant progress** has been made in introducing **safeguards in the appointment procedure for the Auditor General and the Deputy Auditor General** to enhance their independence, with establishing a fixed, non-renewable eight-year term and stricter qualification criteria for their appointment. Monitoring of further developments in this area will continue in the Rule of Law Report.



ABSTRACT – LATVIA

Justice system

Latvia is taking further steps to strengthen the independence of the justice system through plans to introduce safeguards to protect the appointment procedure for judges of the Supreme Court from undue influence. In addition, the Government proposed amendments to the Law on Judicial Powers to increase the role of the Judicial Council regarding the administration of courts. The Judicial Academy started operating and conducting trainings for judges and prosecutors. Resources were redirected to the development of a court support staff system. Access to legal aid in proceedings before the Constitutional Court was expanded. The jurisdiction of the Economic Court is under revision, while courts generally continue to perform efficiently.

Anti-corruption framework

The Corruption Prevention and Combating Action Plan 2026-2027 was adopted. Investigation and prosecution of corruption cases continue to be effective, and the overall number of corruption cases remains stable. While there have been efforts to improve the implementation of conflicts of interest rules, the post-employment framework has not been strengthened yet. The electronic system for asset declarations with an automatic checking tool continues to work effectively. Steps have been taken towards adopting ethical rules for Cabinet Members and the tasks of the Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee in the Parliament have been expanded. While a voluntary list of interest representatives has been established, only limited steps in the implementation of the legislation on lobbying have been taken. The competences of the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau in risk analysis have been strengthened, while the Bureau continues reviewing declarations on parties' finances efficiently and was designated as the new contact point for whistleblowing. Public procurement remains a high-risk area, despite efforts to strengthen mitigation measures and to provide safeguards.

Media freedom and pluralism

The audiovisual media regulator continues to operate independently, with additional staff strengthening its monitoring capacity. The merger of public television and radio into Latvian Public Media has been completed. Amendments to the law on the Press and Other Mass Media were adopted to introduce mandatory registration of media service providers and disclosure of beneficial ownership information, including data on state advertising. The legal framework guaranteeing access to information remains stable. The professional environment for journalists remains overall safe, although online safety has reportedly deteriorated. An Action Plan on the safety of journalists has been approved, including the transposition of the Anti-SLAPP Directive.

Institutional checks and balances

The Parliament is discussing amendments to the Ombudsperson nomination process aimed at expanding the right to nominate candidates to include the Latvian President alongside the existing nominating authority of Parliament. Considerations are also ongoing regarding possible amendments to the Law on the Constitutional Court, including measures to further safeguard the independence of judges of the Constitutional Court. The civic space remains open, while civil society organisations report an increase in negative narratives and funding challenges.

Recommendations



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Some progress** has been made to ensure adequate safeguards against undue political influence in the appointment procedure for Supreme Court judges, as a draft law allowing challenges to parliamentary decisions rejecting a candidate was published and submitted to Parliament for consideration. Since the reform remains to be adopted, it is recommended to Latvia to *take forward the legislative process to ensure adequate safeguards against undue political influence in the **appointment procedure for Supreme Court judges**, taking into account European standards on judicial appointments.*
- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made to ensure the effective implementation of the legislation on lobbying, as a temporary voluntary list of interest representatives was set-up. Since the establishment of the dedicated Register for Interest Representation has been delayed and the publicly available information remains limited, it is recommended to Latvia to *ensure the **effective implementation of the legislation on lobbying**, including as regards the special interim lobby register.*



ABSTRACT – LITHUANIA

Justice system

Efforts are underway to improve the transparency of the system of appointments to judicial positions, as the working group tasked with proposing possible changes to the system has presented its conclusions and proposed amendments are being prepared. Changes to the requirements for appointing Constitutional Court judges are under discussion in Parliament. Lawyers continue to raise concerns regarding respect for lawyer-client confidentiality while legislative changes to strengthen the safeguards on disciplinary proceedings of lawyers are under discussion. The human and financial resources allocated to the justice system are considered insufficient by the judiciary, including in light of the preliminary ruling of the Court of Justice on the remuneration of judges in Lithuania. Discussions on the level of remuneration of legal aid providers were suspended in 2026 and the envisaged new features of the Legal Aid Information System to reduce the administrative burden for legal aid providers are planned for this year. The justice system continues to perform efficiently, and the level of digitalisation remains high, while further efforts are being made to promote the automation of tasks and improve interoperability.

Anti-corruption framework

The second implementation plan 2026-2029 for the National Anti-Corruption Agenda was approved by the Government in April 2026. The authorities continue to address corruption cases efficiently while the acquittal rate decreased. The offence of abuse of office was amended. Significant efforts continue to be carried out in view of addressing shortcomings in the fight against foreign bribery. While the current framework remains unchanged, efforts are being made in view of the implementation of the rules on declarations of private interests. The current lobbying framework is being used with success, and a working group was established to reflect on further improvement of the current rules. The number of reports on whistleblowing is on the rise, while numerous activities implementing the current rules are ongoing. Efforts continue in monitoring and addressing the high-risk areas of corruption.

Media freedom and pluralism

The regulator for audiovisual media services (LRTK) operates independently. Legislative initiatives concerning the governance and leadership of the public broadcaster Lithuanian Radio and Television (LRT) raised concerns about risks to its independence and generated public protests. Changes to the funding model of LRT will be assessed by the Constitutional Court. The budget for the Media Support Fund has initially decreased slightly, while the Government has allocated extra resources to keep the previous level of financing. The situation regarding access to documents remains stable and the scope of information provided in public databases is expanding. Amendments to the legislation to combat SLAPPs were adopted in December 2025 and the possibility of state-guaranteed legal aid was maintained.

Institutional checks and balances

The increasing use of fast-track procedures has raised concerns about the possibility of public participation in key legislative procedures, with stakeholders, including businesses, warning about the inclusiveness of the legislative procedure. Changes to the law on the Parliamentary Ombudspersons increased the number of Ombudspersons to three, and amendments to the appointment procedure of Ombudspersons were rejected in Parliament. The civic space remains open, and efforts are made to improve effective civil society participation in decision-making, while legislative changes to the Law on Charity and Sponsorship raise concerns of civil society organisations regarding their access to financing.

Recommendations



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made to advance the reform of the legal aid systems, as discussions on the level of remuneration of legal aid providers were suspended and the envisaged changes to reduce the administrative burden for legal aid providers are planned to be launched in 2026. Therefore, it is recommended to Lithuania to ***finalise the reform of the legal aid system***, in particular by ensuring adequate conditions for the participation of legal aid providers, taking into account European standards on legal aid.
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made in stepping up efforts to improve the transparency of the system of appointments to judicial positions, notably to the Supreme Court, as the working group tasked with proposing possible changes to the system has presented its conclusions and proposed amendments are being prepared. Therefore, it is recommended to Lithuania to ***step up efforts to improve the transparency of the system of appointments to judicial positions*** taking into account European standards on judicial appointments, in particular by following up on the proposals put forward by the working group created for this purpose.



ABSTRACT – LUXEMBOURG

Justice system

In Luxembourg, the level of perceived judicial independence continues to be very high among both the general public and companies. The National Council for Justice continues to fulfil its functions in the justice system. Steps have been taken on the digitalisation of the judicial system, with projects in civil, criminal and administrative jurisdictions. The reform of the criminal justice system as regards minors remains pending, awaiting the opinion of the Council of State. Initiatives are underway to support recruitment needs in the judiciary, and there are plans to establish a new tribunal to increase the efficiency in administrative proceedings. While the justice system continues to perform efficiently overall, disposition times have increased across all instances.

Anti-corruption framework

A national evaluation of corruption risks and the existing anti-corruption framework was launched to support the development of a national anti-corruption strategy. The number of convictions in corruption cases slightly increased, while the number of reported cases remain relatively stable compared to last year. Human resources in services working on anti-corruption have significantly increased. The changes related to the Parliament's transparency register are now fully implemented. New rules have been adopted to strengthen the control over the use of financial resources by the political groups and independent Members of the Parliament. Discussions on draft laws introducing codes of conduct for elected representatives at municipal level are continuing. The Deontology Committee continued monitoring the respect of the Ethics rules by the Members of the Government. The number of reported alerts from whistleblowers continued to increase in 2025. The identification of sectors at high risks of corruption is part of the on-going national evaluation of corruption risks.

Media freedom and pluralism

The ongoing reform of the media regulatory framework aims to substantially strengthen the role, mandate and functioning of the national media regulator. The media reform also strengthens the role of the Press Council, while public support for journalism continues to be ensured through the existing public aid scheme. Radio 100,7, Luxembourg's public service broadcaster, continues to operate independently. Work continued on the reform of the legal framework for the disclosure of official documents, taking into account European standards on access to official documents. The Government has taken steps to strengthen the protection of journalists, notably through the National Action Plan on the Safety of Journalists (2025–2028).

Institutional checks and balances

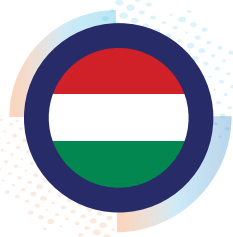
Stakeholder consultations are generally considered effective in practice. The reform to make the Consultative Commission for Human Rights (CCDH) more independent remains pending in the Parliament. The civic space is open and supported by available public funding.

Recommendations



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on the digitalisation of civil, criminal and administrative proceedings, as a management committee to coordinate digitalisation initiatives was established and milestones for civil, criminal, and administrative court proceedings were set and are being implemented. Since additional steps are needed to advance the digitalisation the justice system, it is recommended to Luxembourg to step up efforts to *further develop the **digitalisation of civil, criminal and administrative proceedings***.
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made to complete the reform of the legal framework for the disclosure of official documents, in light of further legislative work on the relevant reform. Therefore, it is recommended to Luxembourg to step up efforts to *finalise the reform of the legal framework on **access to official documents**, taking into account European standards*.



ABSTRACT – HUNGARY

The new Government has engaged in intense reform efforts to restore the rule of law. Following continued dialogue with the Commission under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the general regime of conditionality, several legislative reforms were advanced. Further constitutional amendments are being considered regarding the justice system, the anti-corruption framework and institutional issues related to checks and balances.

Justice system

The National Judicial Council continued to exercise the powers it acquired through the 2023 judicial reform. A number of judges continued to face undue pressure, particularly in relation to debates concerning judicial independence and their freedom of expression. The *Kúria* continued to enforce uniformity of case law through its uniformity panel. The transparency of case allocation in lower-instance courts has not been improved. The election procedure for the Prosecutor General, combined with the hierarchical structure of the prosecution service, gives rise to a risk of undue political interference in individual cases. Salaries in the justice system have been increased further, while no measures have been taken to ensure that such increases are carried out in a structured way. The justice system performs efficiently overall.

Anti-corruption framework

New legislation adopted in June 2026 aims to tackle obstacles to the effective functioning of the Integrity Authority and the Anti-Corruption Task Force. The number of indictments for corruption-related crimes has generally increased but there has so far been no progress to establish a robust track record in cases of high-level corruption. The Commission has confirmed Hungary's participation in the EPPO. Newly adopted legislation strengthens the Integrity Authority and improves the system of asset declarations, providing for effective oversight and enforcement. No steps have been taken yet to adopt comprehensive legislation on lobbying and revolving doors, and shortcomings related to the transparency of the financing of political parties remain. New legislation addresses corruption risks in public procurement procedures and increases the transparency of private equity funds.

Media freedom and pluralism

Legislation adopted in June 2026 amending the Media Act introduces reforms to both the rules governing the national media regulator, as well rules on the governance and funding of public service broadcasting. No measures have yet been adopted to enhance the transparency of state advertising. Although the processing of court cases relating to access to information has been accelerated, the scope of access remains limited, particularly with regard to the use of public funding. Several journalists and other media professionals encountered serious challenges to their work during a large part of the reporting period.

Institutional checks and balances

The former Government used its emergency powers extensively, undermining legal certainty and affecting businesses' ability to operate in the single market. Upon expiry of the 'state of danger' on 13 May 2026, the new government did not extend it further. The law-making process remained a cause for concern during the reporting period. Foreign companies operating in strategic sectors continue to face intensified regulatory pressure from state action. The legal framework that allows the selective application of competition rules further weakens legal certainty for businesses. The absence of procedural safeguards and effective oversight in the event of secret surveillance measures remains a concern. The Sovereignty Protection Office has been abolished, whilst obstacles hindering the work of independent civil society organisations are yet to be removed. Under the new legislation, public interest trusts will be phased out.

Recommendations



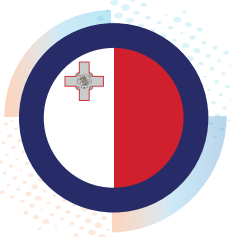
Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, and in addition to recalling the obligation to comply with the rule of law-related rulings of the CJEU and the rule of law-related infringement procedures referred to in the country chapter, the Commission's assessment under the general regime of conditionality, the relevant concerns raised in the Article 7(1) TEU procedure initiated by the European Parliament, the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, and the country-specific recommendations under the European Semester on reinforcing the anti-corruption framework and the quality and transparency of the decision-making process, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **No progress** has been made on the transparency of case allocation systems in lower-instance courts, as the previous government limited itself to addressing deficiencies in the rules on case allocation at the level of the *Kúria*. Therefore, it is recommended to Hungary to *improve the **transparency of case allocation systems** in lower-instance courts, taking into account European standards on case allocation*.
- ▶ **No further progress** has been made yet to ensure that the ongoing increase in the remuneration of judges, prosecutors and judicial and prosecutorial staff is carried out in a structured manner. Therefore, it is recommended to Hungary to *take measures to ensure that the ongoing **increase in the remuneration of judges, prosecutors and judicial and prosecutorial staff** is carried out in a structured manner, taking into account European standards on remuneration for the justice system*.
- ▶ As new **legislation was adopted that further develops the system of asset declarations**, the recommendation to further improve the system of asset declarations and provide for effective oversight and enforcement has been **fully implemented**. **No progress** has been made **yet** on putting forward comprehensive legislative reforms on lobbying and revolving doors. As these gaps in integrity rules remain unaddressed, it is recommended to Hungary to ***strengthen the integrity framework** by adopting comprehensive legislative reforms on lobbying and revolving doors*.
- ▶ **No progress** has been made on establishing a robust track record of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments for high-level corruption cases, given that the positive changes recently initiated in the anti-corruption framework have not yet come into effect. Therefore, it is recommended to Hungary to *take further measures to ensure a **track record** of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments for **high-level corruption cases***.
- ▶ **Some progress** has been made to ensure that there are no obstacles hindering the work of civil society organisations and foster a safe and enabling civic space, given measures such as the abolition of the Sovereignty Protection Office were taken, while legislation hampering their capacity of working has not been repealed. Therefore, it is recommended to Hungary to *further ensure that there are **no obstacles hindering the work of civil society organisations**, including by repealing legislation that hampers their capacity of working, and to further foster a safe and enabling civic space*.

As regards the other **2025 recommendations**, the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Some progress** has been made on introducing mechanisms to enhance the functional independence of the media regulatory authority taking into account European standards on the independence of media regulators, in the light of recent legislation which has introduced reforms in this area.
- ▶ **No progress** has been made yet to ensure fair and transparent distribution of advertising expenditure by the state and state-owned companies, as no legislative or other measures have been proposed.
- ▶ **Some progress** has been made on strengthening the rules and mechanisms to enhance the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media taking into account European standards on public service media, in the light of recent legislation which has introduced reforms in this area.

Given that **the topics of the three recommendations above are covered by provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA.



ABSTRACT – MALTA

Justice system

In Malta, a new Commissioner for Standards of the Judiciary has taken office. While political debate continued on the appointment of the Chief Justice, reforms to involve the judiciary in the process are still pending. Reforms to strengthen the independence of specialised tribunals are advancing. Notwithstanding the ongoing recruitment of staff and expansion of court premises, the need for an increase in resources for the judiciary remains. Recruitment of prosecutors continued, with the number of prosecutions increasing. A reform of the Lawyers' Act remains pending. The framework for judicial training could be improved. Investments in the digitalisation of justice are advancing at a limited pace, and a number of systems are still to be implemented. Reforms have been adopted to improve the specialisation of courts, including the establishment of a Commercial Court and a reform of the Family Court. Initiatives to expedite court procedures are pending. The length of proceedings remains a concern.

Anti-corruption framework

Most actions under the National Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy have been completed, and the authorities are preparing a new strategy. The Police and the Attorney General continued to increase their resources and launched new investigations and prosecutions into corruption cases, while a robust track record of final judgments remains to be achieved. The capacity of the Permanent Commission against Corruption to effectively contribute to the investigation and prosecution of corruption cases remains limited. Integrity training for the public service continued to be delivered and the police adopted a corporate strategy for the years 2025 to 2030. Action remains to be taken to improve the overall ethics framework of the public administration. A reform of asset and interest declarations for Members of Parliament and Ministers remains outstanding. A digital portal to process whistleblowing reports has become operational. Malta has adopted legislative amendments on the granting of citizenship, following the judgment of the Court of Justice of the EU. Resources for audit institutions further increased and officials in charge of tenders are now required to declare any conflict of interest, while action remains to be taken to effectively mitigate corruption in high-risk sectors such as public procurement.

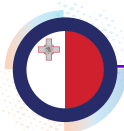
Media freedom and pluralism

Legislation was adopted providing the media regulator with new competences and enhancing certain aspects of the independent governance of public service media, while challenges persist. An integrated e-management system, designed to enhance the processing, accessibility and transparency of access to documents requests, became operational. While certain safeguards have been introduced in relation to protection of sources and confidential communications, protection against surveillance and a ban on intrusive surveillance software, legislative reforms remain pending to improve the protection of media freedom and the working environment of journalists.

Institutional checks and balances

Limited steps were taken towards establishing a formal framework for public participation in the legislative process. A National Human Rights Institution, as well as a regulatory framework for civil society, remain to be established; the Government announced both reforms would be treated as a policy priority in the new Legislature.

Recommendations



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, and the country-specific recommendation under the European Semester on the efficiency of the justice system, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ There has been **no further progress** on the tabled reform to involve the judiciary in the procedure for the appointment of the Chief Justice, as the political debate continued. As the reform is still pending, it is recommended to Malta to *take forward reforms with a view to **involve the judiciary in the procedure for the appointment of the Chief Justice**, taking into account European standards on judicial appointments*
- ▶ **No further progress** has been made on stepping up efforts to improve the efficiency of justice, particularly to reduce the length of proceedings, which remains a concern. Therefore, it is recommended to Malta to *take forward initiatives to **increase resources, reform court procedures, and advance digitalisation** with a view to improve the efficiency of justice.*
- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made to address challenges related to the length of investigations of high-level corruption cases, as the Police and the Attorney General continued to increase their resources and launched new investigations and prosecutions. No progress has been made on establishing a robust track record of final judgments given the high backlog of pending court cases, judges' workload and the limited team of four magistrates handling preliminary inquiries. Therefore, it is recommended to Malta to step up efforts to *address challenges related to the **length of investigations of high-level corruption cases**, and to establish a **robust track record of final judgments**.*
- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made on adopting further legislative and other safeguards to improve the working environment of journalists, including on access to official documents, in light of a public consultation having been carried out and an e-management system having become operational. Since challenges persist, it is recommended to Malta to *adopt **legislative safeguards** to improve the **working environment of journalists and access to documents**, taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists and on access to official documents.*
- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made on introducing a formal framework for public participation in the legislative process, as the Government established a Department of Public Consultation. Since legislative reforms remain pending, it is recommended to Malta to *introduce a formal **framework for public participation in the legislative process**.*
- ▶ **No progress** has been made on taking forward measures to establish a National Human Rights Institution taking into account the UN Paris Principles, as a bill remains under preparation. Therefore, it is recommended to Malta to *establish a **National Human Rights Institution** taking into account the UN Paris Principles.*

As regards the other **2025 recommendations**, the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Some progress** has been made on strengthening the rules and mechanisms to enhance the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media taking into account European standards on public service media, in light of the enactment of legislation addressing certain aspects of this issue. Given that **the topics of this recommendation are covered by the provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA.



ABSTRACT – NETHERLANDS

Justice system

In the Netherlands, the perception of the level of judicial independence is very high, and national authorities are working on introducing additional rule of law safeguards in legislation. A proposal to remove the power of the Minister of Justice and Security to give instructions to the prosecution service in individual cases is pending in the Senate. Proposals to allow judges to review legislation against “classic” fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution, to give the judiciary its own budget and to remove the role of the executive in the appointment of members of the Council for the Judiciary are under discussion. Changes were made to the regime of visual supervision of lawyer-client conversations in high-security prisons, amid concerns by lawyers. Significant steps have been taken to improve working conditions and address staff shortages in the judiciary. The funding for legal aid was structurally increased. The level of digitalisation has further improved and the efficiency of the justice system continues to be high.

Anti-corruption framework

The investigation and prosecution of corruption offences remains effective and the first national anti-corruption policy is being implemented with plans to further refine it in the near future. Changes to the criminal anti-corruption legislation and the criminal procedure for prosecuting ministers and Members of Parliament are under discussion. Efforts continue to address corruption linked to organised crime and infiltration of organised crime in state institutions. The Codes of Conduct for civil servants are being revised, and, in a step forward, the Government intends to establish a transparency register on lobbying. Scrutiny over the enforcement of Parliament’s system of asset and interest declaration continues, while updated guidance on the asset and interest declaration regime of ministers and State secretaries clarifies rules on interests and side activities, while maintaining the principle of self-responsibility. Rules on revolving doors entered into force. A national risk assessment on corruption and a risk assessment on corruption risks linked to subversive organised crime were published in March 2026.

Media freedom and pluralism

The media regulator continues to operate efficiently and independently. Steps have been taken to address certain concerns about the adequacy of the Press Council, the self-regulatory body for the press sector, such as clarifying its role, and streamlining its complaint-handling procedures. Preparatory work for the legislative proposal on the reform of public service media is advancing. Challenges related to a high level of media market concentration, and limited media ownership transparency remain. Efforts to improve transparency and access to information continue. The safety of journalists has improved; however, concerns remain in view of threats in the context of demonstrations and digital threats.

Institutional checks and balances

Further steps have been taken to bring forward the proposals of the State Commission on Rule of Law. The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights and the Ombudsman continue to carry out their mandates effectively. Civil society organisations (CSOs) remain concerned about initiatives that risk affecting civic space and welcomed the Senate’s rejection of the law on transparency of CSOs.

Recommendations



Overall, [based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report](#), and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made to establish stricter transparency rules on lobbying for members of the Government and Parliament, as the Government announced its intention to introduce a transparency register. It is recommended to the Netherlands to *put in place legislative provisions to **establish stricter transparency rules on lobbying** for members of the Government and Parliament.*
- ▶ **Some progress** has been made on taking forward the planned reform of public service media to enhance its governance and its ability to uphold journalistic standards, with preparatory work ongoing for the reform of public service media and with a draft law on local public broadcasters currently before Parliament. Given that **parts of this recommendation are covered by provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA. In light of this, it is recommended to the Netherlands to *take forward its work in relation to the **upholding of journalistic standards by public service media.***

As regards the other [2025 recommendations](#), the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Significant progress** has been made on improving **working conditions in the justice system** and addressing staff shortages as additional funds were made available and workload reduction measures started to bear fruit. **Monitoring of further developments in this area will continue in the Rule of Law Report.**
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on taking forward the proposals of the State Commission on Rule of Law to **strengthen a rule of law culture** due to the availability of additional funds and a willingness to continue the dialogue between state powers. **Monitoring of further developments in this area will continue in the Rule of Law Report.**



ABSTRACT – AUSTRIA

Justice system

In Austria, the level of perceived judicial independence is now very high among both the general public and companies. Concerns persist as regards the system of appointments of administrative court presidents and vice-presidents by the executive without consistent involvement of the judiciary. A draft reform to establish a Federal Prosecution Service has been presented in June 2026 and submitted to public consultation. The Minister of Justice continues to make use of the right to instruct prosecutors in individual cases. Resources for the judiciary remain stable, but no additional posts could be allocated due to the overall context of budgetary consolidation. Discussions on the reform of the evaluation of judges are progressing, with a test phase of new feedback tools planned in spring 2026. The court fee system at ordinary courts continues to present challenges for access to justice, notably due to the absence of a cap on court fees. The justice system continues to operate efficiently, and overall, digitalisation continues to progress well at ordinary courts.

Anti-corruption framework

With the National Anti-Corruption Action Plans 2023-2025 concluded, the preparation for the next action plans 2026-2028 has started. High-level corruption cases are effectively prosecuted, while reporting obligations and the new rules on seizure of electronic devices are seen as a burden on prosecution services. There have been no further steps to introduce rules on the disclosure of assets and interests for Members of Parliament. A code of conduct for Ministers has been drafted at technical level and the preparation of an asset declaration system for Ministers is ongoing. There have been no steps to strengthen the lobbying framework. Shortcomings in the framework on secondary employment and outside activities of civil servants have been identified. The new competence of the Court of Audit in auditing political party financial statements have increased transparency and accountability of party financing. The web-based reporting channels for whistleblowers continue to function well. Mitigating measures continue to be taken to strengthen integrity in public procurement, which is still seen as an area at high risk of corruption.

Media freedom and pluralism

The media regulator continues to operate independently, with its administrative body maintaining adequate resources. Continued financial pressure of the Austrian Press Council was mitigated sufficiently to allow some increase in staffing. Amendments to the rules on the appointments of the public service broadcaster supervisory body strengthened its independence. The economic situation of private media operators continues to deteriorate. Further steps have been taken to improve the transparency and fair distribution of state advertising. The Freedom of Information Act, now in force, is considered as an important step for transparency. Some steps are being taken to address challenges regarding the working environment for journalists.

Institutional checks and balances

Efforts to increase participatory policymaking are ongoing, while stakeholders report growing challenges as regards the length of pre-parliamentary consultation procedures. The new Ombudsman Board was appointed in May 2025, but so far there has been no follow-up yet to the announcement to strengthen the appointment procedure and introduce hearings. Civil society organisations continue to operate in an open environment, while facing additional scrutiny as regards their funding against a background of overall budgetary restrictions.

Recommendations



Overall, [based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report](#), and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **No progress** has been made to address the need for involvement of the judiciary in the appointment of administrative court (vice-)presidents. Therefore, and in view of persisting concerns, it is recommended to Austria to *step up efforts to address the need for **involvement of the judiciary in the procedures for appointment of court presidents of administrative courts**, taking into account European standards on judicial appointments and the selection of court presidents.*
- ▶ **Some progress** has been made on establishing an independent Federal Prosecution Office, as a draft reform has been presented and submitted to public consultation. Therefore, it is recommended to Austria to *take forward the reform to **establish an independent Federal Prosecution Office**, taking into account European standards on the independence and autonomy of the prosecution, including to ensure the independent operation of the specialised anti-corruption prosecution.*
- ▶ **No further progress** has been made to introduce rules on the disclosure of assets and interests for Members of Parliament as no steps were taken under the new legislative period to advance the matter since the last discussion of parliamentary groups on the introduction of such rules in May 2025. Therefore, it is recommended to Austria to *introduce **effective rules on assets and interests' declaration** for Members of Parliament, including effective monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms.*
- ▶ **No progress** has been made to strengthen the lobbying framework as no steps have been taken to extend the scope of application of the lobbying legislation and the obligations to share information publicly in the transparency register. Therefore, it is recommended to Austria to *adopt a legislative proposal to **strengthen the framework on lobbying**, including the transparency register.*

As regards the other [2025 recommendations](#), the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Significant progress** has been made to take steps to ensure proper implementation and enforcement as regards the fair distribution of state advertising, in light of the adoption of legislation and government guidelines regulating the matter. Given that **the topics of this recommendation are covered by provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA.



ABSTRACT – POLAND

Justice system

In Poland, some further steps have been taken to advance on the implementation of the Action Plan on the Rule of Law, while legislation aimed at strengthening the independence of the National Council for the Judiciary was vetoed by the President of the Republic. Meanwhile, attempts are being made to strengthen the role of judges in the election of the Council's judges-members, under the existing rules. A revised draft of the law on addressing the situation of judges appointed at the request of the National Council for the Judiciary in its post-2017 composition is under discussion in Parliament. Judges continue to be protected from unjustified disciplinary proceedings and rules on case allocation have been adjusted. Plans for amending the structure of the Supreme Court to further strengthen its independence remain to be finalised, while the appointment of a new First President is being contested. The serious concerns related to the Constitutional Tribunal and its case law have been confirmed by the EU Court of Justice. Limited further steps have been taken to separate the office of the Minister of Justice from that of the Prosecutor General and to ensure functional independence of the prosecution service from the Government. The Government continues its efforts to improve the digitalisation of ordinary courts. The overall performance of ordinary and administrative courts is showing a slight decrease.

Anti-corruption framework

Work on a strategy to combat foreign bribery is ongoing. The Government is strengthening the legislative framework against corruption to increase the independence and coordination of anti-corruption entities. Further efforts have been made to ensure independent and effective investigation of high-level corruption cases. There have been no further steps to address the broad immunities of top executives and impunity clauses or to introduce lobbying rules. Limited steps have been taken towards establishing an electronic asset declaration and verification system. Some challenges exist in practice for the effective disclosures and protection of whistleblowers and in the area of political party financing. Public procurement remains an area vulnerable to corruption with efforts ongoing to mitigate the risks.

Media freedom and pluralism

Legislative reforms are underway to address ongoing concerns over the impartiality and independence of the media regulator. Some further steps have been taken to ensure adherence to fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory procedures in the granting of operating licences to media, as well as to ensure an effective legislative framework for the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media. Concerns have emerged regarding the ongoing liquidation proceedings of major public service media. In parallel, the Government is reforming their funding framework. Certain challenges persist in safeguarding media pluralism, especially at the local press level. The legal framework for access to public information remains stable, though stakeholders report certain challenges with its implementation. While the legislation aimed to transpose the Anti-SLAPP Directive is under discussion in Parliament, certain challenges related to the safety of journalists persist.

Institutional checks and balances

The new rules governing consultations to improve the quality of legislation started to produce effects. The Ombudsperson continues to fulfil a key role in the system of checks and balances. Some further steps have been taken to improve the framework in which civil society operates. National authorities have engaged in initiatives to foster a rule of law culture.

Recommendations

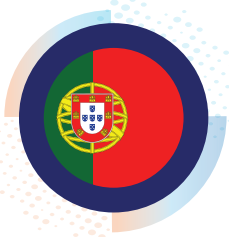


Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the obligation to comply with the rule of law-related rulings of the Court of Justice of the EU and the rule of law related infringement procedure referred to in the country chapter as well as recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on the implementation of the Action Plan on the Rule of Law, including as regards the National Council for the Judiciary and the Constitutional Tribunal, as the Government continued its work on draft laws aimed at strengthening judicial independence, and as judges-members of the National Council for the Judiciary have been appointed, including in majority from among judges pre-selected by their peers. Therefore, it is recommended to Poland to *continue **the process of the Action Plan's implementation***.
- ▶ **Limited further progress** has been made on the recommendation to take forward the reform to separate the office of the Minister of Justice from that of the Prosecutor General and to ensure functional independence of the prosecution service from the Government as further progress now depends on legislative work that is ongoing as regards sub-statutory provisions that would adjust the functioning of prosecutorial units within the envisaged new system. Therefore, it is recommended to Poland to *take forward the reform to **separate the function of the Minister of Justice from that of the Prosecutor-General** and to ensure functional independence of the prosecution service from the Government*.
- ▶ **No progress** has been made to introduce rules on lobbying, and limited progress has been made on a standardised online system for asset declarations of public officials and members of Parliament, as the government has announced its intention to reform the system. Therefore, it is recommended to Poland to *introduce rules on lobbying and a standardised **online system for asset declarations** of public officials and members of Parliament while ensuring **effective verification***.
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made in ensuring independent and effective corruption investigations and prosecutions, while no progress has been made on addressing the broad scope of immunities for top executives and remove impunity clauses. Therefore, it is recommended to Poland to *continue efforts to ensure **independent and effective corruption investigations and prosecutions**, address the **broad scope of immunities** for top executives and **remove impunity clauses** to enable a robust track record of high-level corruption cases*.
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made to ensure that fair, transparent and non-discriminatory procedures are adhered to for the granting of operating licences to media outlets, as a draft bill has been presented and undergone the public consultation. Therefore, it is recommended to Poland to *continue progress on these legislative efforts to finalise reforms to ensure that **fair, transparent and non-discriminatory procedures** are adhered to for the **granting of operating licences to media outlets***.

As regards the other **2025 recommendations**, the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on taking forward reforms to ensure an effective legislative framework for the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media, as a draft bill has been presented and undergone the public consultation. Given that **the topics of this recommendation are covered by provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA.
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made to **improve the framework in which civil society operates**, taking into account European standards on civil society organisations, as legislative work is ongoing to amend the law governing public benefit activities and volunteering. **Monitoring of further developments in this area will continue in the Rule of Law Report.**



ABSTRACT – PORTUGAL

Justice system

In Portugal, the High Council for the Judiciary has adopted a Code of Conduct for its members, aiming at safeguarding its impartiality and independence, while no legislative changes have been adopted. Parliament proceeded with the appointment of new judges to the Constitutional Court, following delays which had had an impact on the court's regular functioning. Targeted changes to make the case allocation system more operational have been implemented. While recruitments for judicial and prosecutorial posts are underway, concerns remain regarding the shortage of judicial clerks and the deteriorating conditions and security in court and prosecution premises. Steps are being taken to address the limited online access to judgments, while there are concerns regarding the case management system used in courts. While new measures to improve efficiency in complex criminal procedures are under discussion in Parliament, the efficiency of Administrative and Tax Courts has further deteriorated, with increasing disposition time and backlogs, which continues to raise concerns among businesses.

Anti-corruption framework

Work on a new National Anti-Corruption Strategy is ongoing, while the 2020-2024 Strategy remains to be evaluated. Following the changes to its structure and functioning and increase in staffing, the Anti-corruption Mechanism is now expected to extend its activities. Corruption cases remain a priority, while challenges persist in ensuring their timely investigation, prosecution and adjudication, in particular for high-level cases. Although the Transparency Entity is fully operational and has been reinforced, it is facing a backlog in verifying asset declarations following a surge of submissions after recent elections. Shortcomings related to human and financial resources negatively affect the performance of the Entity for Accounts and Political Financing. While a new law on lobbying was adopted, a lobbying registry still needs to be set up. The Government is strengthening its integrity framework, including through amendment of its Code of Conduct. The scope of the identified high-risk areas for corruption was broadened in 2025, while a proposed reform of the Court of Auditors is subject to debate as regards its impact on preventing irregularities, including those related to corruption.

Media freedom and pluralism

Although the concern related to the immediate availability of financial resources for the Media Regulatory Authority has been resolved, difficulties are reported with regard to the uncertainty and continued decrease of the yearly amount provided. A few measures of the Government's Media Action Plan have started being implemented, notably those relating to combatting "news deserts". There are challenges regarding the funding of public service media while the restructuring of its staff continues. The LUSA News Agency is now fully owned by the state and its capital increased, but the revision of its statutes has been widely criticised. A public consultation regarding the Media Transparency Law has been launched. At the same time, the timeline for its amendment is unclear. Work based on the National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists is ongoing, while some concerns about attacks against journalists and online harassment have emerged.

Institutional checks and balances

Steps are being taken to improve the transparency of law-making, as new measures are being implemented by Parliament and the Government's work on a 'legislative footprint' system continues. The post of Ombudsperson has remained vacant since June 2025, following delays in the appointment procedure in the Parliament. The civic space remains open, while stakeholders report increasing cases of physical and verbal attacks against members of civil society organisations.

Recommendations



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the country-specific recommendations under the European Semester on the efficiency of administrative and tax courts, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ There has been **no further progress** to improve the efficiency of the justice system, in particular of Administrative and Tax Courts, as the efficiency of these courts has further deteriorated. Therefore, also in view of concerns that the deteriorating conditions and security in court and prosecution premises are affecting the functioning of courts, it is recommended to Portugal to *step up efforts to **improve the efficiency of the justice system**, including by ensuring **adequate infrastructure and equipment** in court and prosecution buildings.*
- ▶ As **challenges** persist in ensuring a **comprehensive level of digitalisation**, it is recommended to Portugal to *take further steps to **improve the digitalisation of justice**, including by improving the online publication and digital accessibility of judgments and addressing the problems affecting the case management system.*
- ▶ **Some progress** has been made on the regulation of lobbying, as a law on lobbying was adopted. As further implementation steps are needed and a lobbying register remains to be set up, it is recommended to Portugal to *ensure the **creation and swift operationalisation of the public lobbying registry**, including by providing the necessary resources for its effective functioning.*
- ▶ **Some progress** has been made towards finalising the reforms to improve the transparency of law-making, particularly on the implementation of impact assessment tools, as new measures are being implemented by Parliament, while steps are still pending for the implementation of the 'legislative footprint' system, and stakeholder engagement in Government legislative initiatives and ex post impact assessments remains limited. Therefore, it is recommended to Portugal to *improve the **transparency of law-making at Government level**, particularly on the implementation of impact assessment tools.*

As regards the other **2025 recommendations**, the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Significant progress** has been made in taking forward measures to ensure the adequacy of the general criminal procedure legislation to **efficiently deal with complex criminal proceedings**, as new measures to improve efficiency in complex criminal procedures are under discussion in Parliament. **Monitoring of further developments in this area will continue in the Rule of Law Report.**



ABSTRACT – ROMANIA

Justice system

In Romania, the Justice Laws continued to be implemented and contributed to improving the legislative framework for the independence and functioning of the judiciary, while a reflection on various concerns related to the judiciary in public debates has been put on hold following a decision of the High Court of Cassation and Justice. A selection procedure resulted in the appointments of several high-ranking prosecutors. However, no legislative steps have been taken yet to strengthen safeguards to ensure the independence of high-ranking prosecutors and for the organisation and functioning of the judicial police. Some magistrates continue to feel undue pressure from inside the judiciary and judges were recused for intending to refer cases to European Courts. The occupancy rate of positions in the magistracy increased in 2025, and measures have been taken to tackle current shortages and to improve the legal aid system, which remains underfunded. The digitalisation of the justice system is one of the priorities of the Government. The estimated time needed to resolve civil, commercial, administrative cases significantly decreased while the clearance rate improved.

Anti-corruption framework

The evaluation of the 2021-2025 National Anti-Corruption Strategy has been finalised and the next strategy for 2026-2030 is under preparation. The track record in prosecuting both petty and high-level corruption has been maintained compared to the previous year. Lower courts have continued to close corruption cases and annul convictions, including in high level ones, following rulings by the High Court of Cassation and Justice on the statute of limitations. While the backlog of pending cases has been significantly reduced, there have been no further measures taken to ensure the effective investigation and prosecution of corruption offenses in the judiciary. New legislation on revolving doors was adopted, including pre- and post-employment restrictions on a wide range of public officials, and a new Code of Ethics for the government is being implemented, including a prohibition on gifts. A broad legislative proposal on asset declarations, submitted by the National Integrity Agency (ANI), is currently under discussion. New rules on lobbying for Members of Parliament have been introduced. ANI is developing an IT system for whistleblower reports.

Media freedom and pluralism

The media regulator has fewer human resources despite an increase in tasks, with digitalisation efforts initiated in 2025 progressing slowly. Self-regulation has still not been completely agreed upon by media actors. Initial steps have been taken on the reform to enhance independent governance and editorial independence of public service media. Transparency of media ownership continues to present limitations, and issues with access to information remain, pending discussions on a new Code of Administrative Procedures. The new Audiovisual Code legislates the financing of private media by political parties and state authorities and has led to a better marking of the type of content than in the past, but certain related practices remain an issue. An anti-SLAPP law is in preparation, as some further cases of threats and instances of harassment of journalists have been reported.

Institutional checks and balances

Less government emergency ordinances were adopted in 2025 than in 2024 and steps have been taken for effective public consultations, while a number of shortcomings remain in practice. Legislative unpredictability driven by frequent amendments to legislation and a large number of draft laws pending in Parliament remain primary concerns for businesses and CSOs. A final decision is pending regarding the accreditation of National Human Rights Institutions. Actions planned in the framework of the Strategy for Open Government in Romania 2025-2030 remain to be implemented and CSOs report increasing restrictions to their work.

Recommendations



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the country-specific recommendation under the European Semester on the predictability and quality of decision-making, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ The **Justice Laws continue to be implemented** and have contributed to improving the legislative framework for the independence and functioning of the judiciary, while a **reflection on various aspects related to the judiciary** has been **put on hold** following a decision of the High Court of Cassation and Justice. It is therefore recommended to Romania to *take forward the **evaluation of the implementation of the Justice Laws** in close consultation with relevant stakeholders, including as regards measures to further improve the effectiveness and governance of the judiciary.*
- ▶ There has been **no progress yet** to strengthen safeguards to ensure the independence of high-ranking prosecutors and for the organisation and functioning of the judicial police, as the reflection on various aspects related to the judiciary has been put on hold. It is therefore recommended to Romania to *step up the legislative work to **strengthen safeguards to ensure the independence of high-ranking prosecutors** and for the organisation and functioning of the judicial police.*
- ▶ There has been **no further progress** to ensure the effective investigation and prosecution of corruption offenses in the judiciary, as no measures were taken to address remaining shortcomings. It is recommended to Romania to *take measures to ensure **effective investigation and prosecution of criminal offences in the judiciary**, including as regards corruption offences.*
- ▶ The recommendation to **introduce rules on lobbying** for members of Parliament has been **fully implemented** as a new law was adopted in November 2025 which obliges deputies and senators to register meetings with third parties on legislative initiatives. **Some progress** has been made to ensure the effectiveness of the asset declaration system, with a draft law which aims to update the existing integrity legal framework. Therefore, it is recommended to Romania to *complete the legislative process to ensure the **effectiveness of the asset declaration system**.*
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made on the frequent use of government emergency ordinances and effective public consultations, while a number of shortcomings remain in practice. It is therefore recommended to Romania to *step up efforts to address the **frequent use of government emergency ordinances** and to ensure **effective public consultations** before the adoption of legislation.*
- ▶ There has been **no progress** on the accreditation of National Human Rights Institutions, as a decision remains pending, and the Government has not solved compliance issues with the Paris Principles of two organisations it proposed as National Human Rights Institutions. It is therefore recommended to Romania to *take forward the process for **obtaining accreditation for the National Human Rights Institutions**, taking into account the UN Paris Principles.*

As regards the other **2025 recommendations**, the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made strengthening the rules and mechanisms to enhance the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media, in light of the establishment of an interministerial working group on the matter. Given that **the topics of this recommendation are covered by the provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA. into account the UN Paris Principles.



ABSTRACT – SLOVENIA

Justice system

In Slovenia, the justice system saw extensive reform, with the new Judges Act transferring the power to appoint Supreme Court judges from Parliament to the Judicial Council which, along with amendments to the Judicial Council Act, refined safeguards on judicial independence. Additionally, the amendments to the Judicial Council Act and the new Judges Act overhauled the disciplinary framework for judges, and the new Courts Act introduced a reform of the judicial map. Efforts continued to strengthen protection measures for judges and state prosecutors. Digitalisation of the workflow in courts continued, including by introducing new electronic communication tools. While the number of resolved cases remained broadly stable, the overall backlog further increased. The length of trials remains a challenge, particularly in money laundering and corruption cases. The measures to address the Constitutional Court's considerable caseload have contributed to a significant reduction in backlog.

Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the Resolution on the Prevention of Corruption, the national anti-corruption strategy, and its 2025-2030 Action Plan is ongoing. While some efforts are ongoing to strengthen capacities of state prosecution offices, limited further steps were made to ensure a track record of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments in corruption offences. While its resources remained stable, the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (CPC) reported attempts to undermine its credibility. The new Public Employees Act of July 2025 unified the regulation of conflicts of interest for all public officials. The CPC continued to underline the low reporting levels of lobbying contacts. The CPC issued recommendations to tackle risks related to the transfer of state officials to publicly owned companies. The number of whistleblowers who have been granted a protection status increased in 2025, indicating increased awareness of the law and the protection it provides. Large infrastructure projects and the health sector are among the high-risk areas.

Media freedom and pluralism

The media regulator generally remains independent, while concerns persist regarding its human and financial resources. The financial challenges of the Slovenian Press Agency were addressed, while some limited steps were taken to improve the financial situation of public broadcaster. While the media market remains concentrated, reforms were introduced to improve its transparency and functioning. The framework for accessing official information remained favourable, but journalists report some obstacles in practice. Journalists highlighted persistent difficult working conditions, while efforts to strengthen their profession and introduce self-regulation continued. Some further steps were made to improve the protection of journalists, while challenges remain pending the practical application of new laws.

Institutional checks and balances

The Ombudsperson continued responding to an important number of complaints. The environment for civil society organisations remained favourable and the former Government adopted two framework strategies in this area.

Recommendations



Overall, [based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report](#), considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ There has been **limited further progress** on ensuring a track record of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments in corruption offences, as results remain modest in investigating and moderate in prosecuting and reaching final judgments, including as regards high-level corruption, although some efforts to strengthen capacities of state prosecution offices are ongoing. Therefore, it is recommended to Slovenia to *take further measures to **ensure a track record** of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments **in corruption offences, including in high-level cases***.
- ▶ **Some further progress** has been made to further advance with the process of adopting legislative and non-legislative safeguards to improve the protection of journalists, as the Act on Protective Measures against Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation and the Media Act have been adopted, while challenges remain. Therefore, it is recommended to Slovenia to ***broaden the range of available safeguards to improve the protection of journalists**, taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists*.

As regards the other [2025 recommendations](#), the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Limited further progress** has been made on completing reforms to ensure that the rules or mechanisms are in place to provide funding for public service media that is appropriate for the realisation of its public service remit while guaranteeing its independence, as the financial challenges of the STA have been addressed, while those of the RTV improved to a limited extent. Given that **the topic of this recommendation is covered by provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA.



ABSTRACT – SLOVAKIA

Justice system

Slovakia has continued engaging in an intensive dialogue with the Commission to resolve the issues identified in previous reports, including in the context of the Recovery and Resilience Plan revision. Amendments to the judges' laws introduced changes to the system of evaluation of judges and temporary assignment of judges to a higher court, broadening the discretionary power of the Judicial Council and court presidents over judges' careers. The adopted amendments to the disciplinary proceedings for judges, prosecutors, bailiffs and notaries are subject to constitutional review. A draft amendment of the Constitution and the Judicial Council Act limiting the reasons for the dismissal of members of the Judicial Council is in the legislative process. The Government obtained an opinion of the Venice Commission on draft amendments to ensure sufficient safeguards when subjecting judges to criminal liability for their decisions. A proposal abolishing the abuse of law offence was submitted to the legislative process. The legal framework concerning the power of the Prosecutor General to annul final decisions of lower-ranking prosecutors remained unchanged. Data collection on the effects of the 2023 judicial map reform is ongoing. Efforts to increase the level of digitalisation of the justice system continue, while the justice system still faces some challenges as regards its efficiency, notably in administrative cases.

Anti-corruption framework

Concerns over the anti-corruption framework persist, as the capacity to detect, investigate and prosecute high-level corruption has further deteriorated. The criminal law and institutional reforms of 2024 still raise specific anti-corruption concerns and previously identified risks continue to materialise, with the numbers of corruption cases detected and prosecuted showing a sharp decline. No new cases of high-level corruption were detected in 2025. Continued amendments to the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code risk to further undermine the anti-corruption framework. Political commitments to introduce legislative initiatives on lobbying or asset declarations are still to be translated into concrete proposals.

Media freedom and pluralism

While draft amendments to the Act on Media Services have expanded the competences of the national media regulator, concerns have been raised about some of the provisions' impact on the regulator's independence. Public service media remains an area of concern. A Constitutional Court ruling has quashed restrictive amendments to the Freedom of Information Act. No legislative or other measures have been adopted to enhance the safety of journalists, while cases of intimidation and harassment remain common.

Institutional checks and balances

The lawmaking process continues to raise concerns, in particular regarding insufficient public consultation and stakeholder involvement, including frequent use of fast-track procedures, even for high-impact legislation. Certain amendments to the Constitution adopted in September 2025 are raising concerns related to the principle of primacy of EU law. While amendments to the NGO law which were deemed to create additional administrative burden on civil society organisations were declared unconstitutional, the civil society environment continues to face pressure.

Recommendations



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the rule of law-related infringement procedure referred to in the country chapter, relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the country-specific recommendation under the European Semester on the judicial system, including its independence, and the effectiveness of the anti-corruption framework, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Some progress** was made on measures to ensure sufficient guarantees of independence as regards the dismissal of Judicial Council's members, as draft amendments were prepared to address the issue of their premature dismissal. As the legislative process is ongoing, it is recommended to Slovakia to *advance with reforms to ensure **sufficient guarantees of independence for the Judicial Council**, including as regards the **dismissal of its members**, taking into account European standards on independence of Judicial Councils.*
- ▶ **Significant progress** was made on ensuring that sufficient safeguards are in place and observed when subjecting judges to criminal liability for "abuse of law" in their judicial decisions, as the government requested a Venice Commission opinion on this matter. Following this Opinion and approved changes to the Slovak Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Ministry of Justice proposed a draft law abolishing this offence. In view of the adjustments made to Slovakia's Recovery and Resilience Plan, it is recommended to Slovakia to **take the necessary steps to repeal the crime of "abuse of law"**.
- ▶ **No progress** was made on effectively investigating and prosecuting high-level corruption to establish a robust track record, as concerns over the anti-corruption framework persist and the capacity to detect, investigate and prosecute high-level corruption has further deteriorated. Given a significant decline in the number of charges, indictments and convictions in corruption cases and the Prosecutor General's continued practice to annul final police and prosecutor decisions, it is recommended to Slovakia to **establish a robust track record in corruption offenses**, in particular in **high-level cases**, including by preventing any undue interference and restricting the use of the Prosecutor-General's powers to annul final investigatory and prosecutorial decisions.
- ▶ **Limited progress** was made on regulating lobbying activities, as initial steps were taken in preparing a draft law and some further progress was made to reform conflicts of interest rules as a non-binding code of conduct for persons with top executive functions and a code of conduct for members of parliament were adopted. However, no progress was made to strengthen the asset declaration system. It is therefore recommended to Slovakia to **introduce proposals to regulate lobbying**, strengthen the **asset declaration** and verification system, and continue ongoing efforts to **reform conflicts of interest rules**.
- ▶ **Limited progress** was made on advancing with establishing legislative and other safeguards to improve the journalists' physical safety and working environment, including the reform of the defamation law. Therefore, it is recommended to Slovakia to *advance with the process to establish **legislative and other safeguards to improve the physical safety and working environment of journalists**, including the reform of the defamation law, taking into account the European standards on the protection of journalists.*
- ▶ **No progress** has been made to ensure effective public consultation and stakeholders' involvement in the law-making process, which continues to raise concerns. Therefore, it is recommended to Slovakia to *ensure an **inclusive and transparent legislative process**, including by ensuring **effective public consultation** and stakeholder involvement in the law-making process and by addressing the **frequent use of the fast-track procedure**.*

As regards the other **2025 recommendations**, the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **No progress** has been made on strengthening the rules and mechanisms to restore and further safeguard the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media taking into account European standards on public service media. Given that **the topics of this recommendation are covered by provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)**, while the Rule of Law Report will continue to monitor significant developments and report on their impact, further follow-up will be ensured as part of the Commission's support to Member States and enforcement of the EMFA.



ABSTRACT – FINLAND

Justice system

The level of perceived judicial independence in Finland continues to be very high among both the general public and companies. The working group aiming to strengthen the justice system continued its work. Constitutional amendments are being prepared to further safeguard the independence of the judiciary. Limited steps were taken on the issue of the appointment of lay judges. The remuneration system for lower court judges is being reviewed. The process of digitalisation of the justice system continues, while gaps remain. Reforms to the legal aid system are under consideration. The length of proceedings increased, despite streamlining efforts and temporary additional funding for the judiciary which will come to an end.

Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the 2025-2027 Anti-Corruption Strategy and Action Plan is ongoing. Cooperation between the competent institutions has been strengthened further, with a focus on prevention. Steps have been taken to prepare legislative proposals to criminalise trading in influence and revise the provisions on foreign bribery. Post-employment rules for members of the Government were adopted and key anti-corruption and integrity promotion guidelines for ministers are planned to be compiled into a code of conduct in the course of 2026. Financial information on lobbying activities will be reported to the Finnish Transparency Register for the first time in July–August 2026. The election and party funding legislation was amended and training on whistleblower protection in the public administration has continued. Work continues to develop legislative and policy measures to address corruption risks in public procurement and to strengthen corruption risk assessment in other vulnerable sectors.

Media freedom and pluralism

The national regulatory authority (Traficom) has been assigned new tasks with the entry into force of a new act for monitoring the media market, leading to concrete structural changes. The Council of Mass Media's funding was reduced as part of a series of austerity measures by the Government, while facing an increasing number of complaints. The amendments to the Act on the Finnish Broadcasting Company entered into force, aiming to strengthen the public service media's independence. However, the broadcaster's funding was reduced in 2024-2027, which led to the implementation of a savings programme. Two studies were commissioned by the Government following the review of changes to the Act on the Openness of Government activities and a new working group will be set up to prepare a new proposal for the next Government term. Overall, the framework for the protection of journalists has remained stable in Finland.

Institutional checks and balances

The law-making process is overall inclusive, though areas for improvement remain. Civic space continues to be considered open, while some stakeholders still highlight challenges with funding.



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made on the recommendation related to the appointment of lay judges, as the working group on Rule of Law Guarantees and Development of the Judicial System continues to examine the issue and is expected to publish a memorandum of its work by end of 2026. It is therefore recommended to Finland to *advance the **reform of the system of lay judges**, taking into account European standards on judicial independence.*
- ▶ As **gaps remain in the digitalisation of judicial proceedings**, it is recommended to Finland to *take further steps to **improve the digitalisation of justice**, including by improving the availability of digital tools to initiate and follow proceedings online.*
- ▶ **Some progress** has been made on strengthening the integrity and accountability framework applicable to ministers and other persons entrusted with top executive functions, as post-employment rules for members of the Government were adopted and the Anti-Corruption Strategy and Action Plan envisage compiling the key anti-corruption and integrity promotion guidelines for ministers into a dedicated single document in 2026. Since the adoption of the code of conduct is still pending, it is recommended to Finland to ***strengthen the integrity and accountability framework** applicable to ministers and other persons entrusted with top executive functions by **adopting a code of conduct** for them.*
- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made on advancing with the reform of the Act on the Openness of Government Activities, as two studies are being commissioned and a working group is expected to be set up to prepare a legislative proposal. Since the reform remains under review, it is recommended to Finland to *advance with the reform of the Act on the Openness of Government Activities to **ensure effective access to documents** taking into account the European standards on access to official documents.*

As regards the other **2025 recommendations**, the Commission concludes that:

- ▶ **Limited progress** has been made on the recommendation to take forward the **revision of the criminal offence of foreign bribery**, as a working group was set up to draft the relevant legislation in the context of transposing the EU Anti-Corruption Directive. **Monitoring of further developments in this area will continue in the Rule of Law Report.**



ABSTRACT – SWEDEN

Justice system

In Sweden, the level of perceived judicial independence continues to be very high among the general public and is now very high among companies. Work on legislative amendments to the Constitution, aimed in part at strengthening judicial independence, is progressing. While there are no plans to change the nomination system for lay judges, measures are examined by the Lay Judges Association to strengthen their functioning in the courts. Increased financial resources have been allocated to courts for 2026-2028 to address a rising caseload and strengthen court security, while recruitment remains a challenge. A new collective agreement between the National Courts Administration and the judges' trade union clarifies existing safeguards and introduces new measures to ensure that the judges' salary system support judicial independence. The Government is reflecting on further measures to strengthen the right to an effective remedy, while stakeholders continue to highlight key challenges in practice. The justice system continued to function effectively despite a sustained high level of incoming cases, and the digitalisation of justice remained at a very good overall level.

Anti-corruption framework

The 2024-2027 Action plan against corruption and undue influence continues to be implemented, with the next strategic document expected to be a comprehensive anti-corruption strategy. The Government proposed further legislative reforms to strengthen the criminal justice framework and improve accountability for corruption in line with international recommendations. While the draft bill does not expand the definition of foreign bribery or introduce a corporate liability for bribery offences, prosecution of such offences has yet to improve. The investigation and prosecution of corruption are overall effective, with certain risks being monitored. While there are no plans to revise the asset declaration regime for public officials, the Government is reviewing relevant guidelines documents and reflects on a reform of the conflicts of interest rules. There is no proposal to change the rules on revolving doors. New legislation strengthens the rules on political party financing and introduces a mandatory lobbying register. The 2021 Whistleblowers Act continues to be implemented and inspections of reporting channels in the private sector have been carried out. Measures are being taken to address the risk of undue influence in public administration and of corruption in public procurement, including through more transparent and reliable procurement data and greater scrutiny of bidders and suppliers.

Media freedom and pluralism

The independent national regulatory authority, the Swedish Agency for the Media, is taking on an increasing number of responsibilities. Sweden's new Public Service Act came into force in December 2025, updating rules and funding for public service media until 2033. The amended framework for commercial radio channels is now applicable, harmonising regime for analogue and digital commercial radio licenses. Changes to Sweden's public access laws, aimed at addressing privacy and security needs, prompt reactions regarding their impact on transparency. Sweden continues to provide a supportive environment for journalists, with high levels of public trust despite challenges in the evolving media landscape.

Institutional checks and balances

Some stakeholders continue to express concerns that the accelerated pace of legislative preparatory work poses challenges to public participation and may in certain cases adversely affect the quality of legislation. Work on legislative amendments to the Constitution, aimed at providing a framework to better deal with serious crises, is progressing. On 1 January 2026, Sweden had no leading judgment of the European Court of Human Rights pending implementation, a decrease of one as compared to the previous year. Civic space remains open, although stakeholders have identified certain challenges in the practical implementation of the recently enacted legal framework for the funding and operation of civil society organisations. The National Human Rights Institution and the Parliamentary Ombudsman continue to discharge their mandates effectively.

Recommendations



Overall, **based on the recommendations in the 2025 Rule of Law Report**, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, the Commission concludes the following:

- ▶ **No progress** has been made on ensuring that the nomination system of lay judges safeguards their independence, as no measures have been introduced. As a national debate over political parties' role in nominations and its impact on lay judges' independence continues, it is recommended to Sweden to *take measures to **safeguard the independence of lay judges** as regards their nomination and functioning, taking into account European stands on judicial independence.*
- ▶ **Some progress** has been made on the fight against foreign bribery, as draft legislation introduces some relevant provisions. Since its adoption is pending and prosecution of these offences has not improved, it is recommended to Sweden to *strengthen the **fight against foreign bribery**, including by improving enforcement.*
- ▶ **No progress** has been made to follow up on the inquiry on rules on revolving doors. As no measures are planned in this regard, it is recommended to Sweden to *ensure an appropriate follow-up to the **evaluation of the rules on revolving doors.***



ABSTRACT – MONTENEGRO

Justice system

In Montenegro, work on the implementation of the 2024-2027 Judicial Reform Strategy is ongoing and a new Action Plan was adopted. The constitutional amendments aimed at strengthening the independence of the Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils have been adopted by the Government. A temporary increase of judges' and prosecutors' salaries has been adopted for 2025 and 2026 while a dedicated law on labour rights is being prepared. The regulatory framework to promote and enforce ethics and professional standards among judges and prosecutors was further improved and continues to be implemented. The Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils are effectively implementing the improved rules for the evaluation of judges and prosecutors, while the quality of the evaluation of judges can be further improved. While the Councils have an established reporting mechanism for instances of undue influence, criticisms and attacks against prosecutorial authorities and their decisions have continued, thereby raising concerns. While there have been some improvements on infrastructure of specialised prosecution services and the attractiveness of the judicial profession, the human resources situation and infrastructure remains a challenge. Some improvements have been achieved on efficiency, while challenges with civil and commercial cases remain.

Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the 2024-2028 strategy for the fight against corruption and its 2026-2027 action plan is ongoing in addition to a quarter of previously planned activities that remain to be fully implemented. The effectiveness and coordination of law enforcement institutions in the area of corruption and the number of final rulings and convictions in cases of high-level corruption has increased. The human resources and capacities in the fight against corruption have increased but further resources are needed for the Special State Prosecution Office. A new full-term Director of the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption was appointed, ensuring the improved functioning of the Agency and strengthening its independence, while its administrative capacities remain to be improved further. The legal framework regulating political parties' funding remains to be aligned with OSCE/ODIHR and GRECO recommendations. Measures addressing risk areas in public procurement have been enhanced through the introduction of e-procurement tools, while the monitoring of measures addressing corruption in high-risk areas is hampered by lack of relevant data.

Media freedom and pluralism

With new appointments the Councils of the Agency for Audiovisual Media Services and the Radio Television of Montenegro were restored to full composition. The appointment of the Director-General of the Council of the Radio Television of Montenegro continues to face legal challenges. Transparency of media ownership for audiovisual media services has improved but gaps remain for online media alongside increasing concerns about the influence of Serbian-owned media outlets. Transparency in the allocation of public funding for media has also improved, but the enforcement of obligations remains an issue. New amendments to the Law on Free Access to Information were adopted in December 2025, however challenges persist in its enforcement. The authorities continue to apply a zero-tolerance policy to violence against journalists, while isolated incidents of attacks occur.

Institutional checks and balances

While acknowledging the authorities' commitment to align national legislation with the EU *acquis* within the established framework for inclusive legislative processes, challenges persist in terms of legislative planning and effectiveness of public consultations. Two judges were appointed to the Constitutional Court, improving its functioning and efficiency, while full composition remains to be achieved. The Government is finalising a new law on the Ombudsperson's Office aiming to fully align with the Paris Principles and ultimately achieve 'A' status accreditation. Civil society organisations continue to function within a largely enabling environment, while stakeholders report inadequate transparency and lack of meaningful, inclusive consultation in legislative processes.



ABSTRACT – NORTH MACEDONIA

Justice system

North Macedonia continued to implement the 2024–2028 Strategy for Judicial Reform, although challenges persist, notably inadequate cooperation between institutions. Interference and pressure from other State branches continue to raise serious concerns about respect for judicial independence. The independence of the judiciary and autonomy of prosecution are undermined by insufficient budgetary allocation. The dismissal procedure against the Chief Prosecutor exposed a risk of politicisation and shortcomings in the dismissal rules. The Government proposed amendments to the laws on the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Parliament adopted new amendments to the Law on the Council of Public Prosecutors to strengthen the autonomy of the prosecution service, but further revisions are needed. Parliament adopted a new Law on the Judicial Council with a view to align with European standards. The shortage of staff in the judiciary has worsened with no new candidates for judges and prosecutors undergoing initial training, and insufficient funding for supporting staff.

Anti-corruption framework

A new Strategy for the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest is envisaged to be adopted, while the implementation of the 2021–2025 Strategy continued to be low. Amendments to the Criminal Code were adopted, which presented several shortcomings compared with the previous framework, while a comprehensive reform is in preparation. Despite recent efforts to investigate and prosecute corruption, delays in court proceedings, infrequent final convictions and limited resources continue to impede the development of a strong track-record of high-level corruption cases. The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption took steps to rebuild public trust in the institution while, the Law on the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest is currently under revision. The effective oversight of campaigns and political party financing continues to be affected by inadequate legislation and a lack of resources in the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption. Whistleblower protection remains insufficient as the revision of the Whistleblowers Protection Law has not advanced. Corruption in public procurement and healthcare continues to be identified as risk areas.

Media freedom and pluralism

Appointments of the new members of the Council of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services were made, while concerns regarding the financial independence of the Agency persist. Efforts are ongoing to modernise the Public Service Broadcaster, although challenges persist due to limited administrative autonomy and irregular funding. The implementation of the legal framework on access to public information remains inconsistent and there are ongoing efforts to revise it. Journalists face pressure from political actors, increased online violence and SLAPP threats, while their working conditions have not improved.

Institutional checks and balances

Parliament made several appointments to independent institutions, although concerns remain about merit-based selection procedures. There was no improvement in the financial and human resource situation of the Ombudsman's Office or the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. The Constitutional Court continued to improve its capacity to protect constitutionality and legality. The Government continued its efforts to strengthen cooperation with civil society organisations, while challenges related to funding for CSOs remain. Efforts were made to address shortcomings concerning evidence-based policy planning.



ABSTRACT – ALBANIA

Justice system

Albania continued implementing the judicial reform, as well as the Cross-Sector Justice Strategy. The vetting process of all judges and prosecutors was fully completed following the finalisation of the appeal phase, further strengthening judicial independence, accountability and integrity across the justice sector. Some progress has been made to embed the high standards of the vetting process in the ordinary justice system, including through the revision of the rules on the appointments of non-magistrate members to the High Judicial Council and the High Prosecutorial Council. The High Justice Inspector remains operational but consistently faces a high number of magistrate-inspector vacancies. Although the judiciary remains resilient, attempts of undue influence on justice institutions, and personal attacks on magistrates continued. Previously identified challenges remain in conducting timely and qualitative evaluations of judges. The overall quality of judicial training has improved, and the backlog of cases has been partly reduced, while the full operability of a modern integrated electronic case management system remains to be achieved, including maintenance plan and trainings.

Anti-corruption framework

The Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2024-2030 and its action plan for 2024-2026 are being implemented. The legal framework for fighting corruption is largely in place, and significant steps have been taken to further align with EU acquis and European standards. The Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK) has continued to deliver positive results in fighting high-level corruption and building a solid track record of investigations, prosecutions and convictions. The institutional framework for corruption prevention has improved, but coordination with law enforcement remains weak. Corruption risks continue to be prevalent in the State Police, public procurement and in high-risk sectors, for which Albania is currently rolling out risk assessments. While the effectiveness and transparency of verifications of declarations of assets and interests by the High Inspectorate for the Declaration and Audit of Assets and Conflicts of Interest (HIDAACI) have improved, shortcomings persist.

Media freedom and pluralism

Concerns persist regarding the independence of the media regulatory authority, stemming from the nomination procedure for board members and their political affiliation. The limited independence of the public broadcaster also is a concern. While steps were taken to address media ownership transparency, media concentration and market penetration by business groups with political links remain a serious concern. While some steps have been taken towards establishing an audience measurement system, fair allocation of state advertising and other state resources is still not ensured. Shortcomings persist with respect to the right to access to information. Cases of verbal and physical threats, smear campaign and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP) targeting journalists continued, while partial decriminalisation of defamation was introduced for registered journalists.

Institutional checks and balances

Concerns remain regarding the quality of the legislative process, including the consistent application of evidence-based policymaking and the effectiveness of public consultations. Political polarisation continues to negatively impact parliamentary work. The Constitutional Court continued to be effective in upholding institutional checks and balances. A new Ombudsperson and a new Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) were appointed. Overall, civil society organisations (CSOs) continue to operate freely, but continue to face challenges, such as discreditation, limited transparency in policy making, uneven consultation practices, and financial sustainability constraints.



ABSTRACT – SERBIA

Justice system

In Serbia, legal amendments removed some of the existing safeguards to protect prosecutorial autonomy and judicial independence, hampering the implementation of the constitutional reform of 2023; following subsequently legislative and non-legislative measures, the Venice Commission confirmed that Serbia addressed a considerable part of its recommendations on these amendments. Concerns regarding prosecutorial autonomy remain. Political pressure on the judiciary and the prosecution increased significantly, with limited follow-up from the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils, the Government or Parliament. New magistrate members were elected to the High Judicial Council and to the High Prosecutorial Council, while the selection process for the latter encountered delays and procedural challenges. Challenges remain in filling the considerable number of vacant magistrate positions. The implementation of the IT solution for the new prosecutorial case management system is ongoing, while no steps were taken towards introducing a new uniform, centralised case management system for the courts. A new Judicial Development Strategy is being prepared. Efficiency in civil and commercial cases remains stable, but there is a negative trend in criminal cases; serious challenges in handling administrative cases and constitutional complaints have not been addressed.

Anti-corruption framework

A majority of the activities of the previous Anti-Corruption Action Plan have not been achieved, with most of them carried over to the new Action Plan. There are concerns about the obstacles and attempts of undue influence to the effective functioning of the Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime. The investigations into the deadly collapse of part of the newly renovated Novi Sad railway station remain ongoing. Challenges remain in establishing a robust track record of investigations, indictments and final convictions in high-level corruption. Weaknesses persist in law and in practice regarding the verification and enforcement of asset declarations and conflicts of interest. A draft law is in preparation aiming to address concerns about the limited in scope and low transparency requirements in the Law on lobbying while amendments to the Law on financing of political activities were adopted and have yet to be assessed against OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. Whistleblowers exposing corruption continue to face challenges. Exemptions to the Law on public procurement continue to be widely used, circumventing anti-corruption safeguards.

Media freedom and pluralism

Serbia's audiovisual market continued to face serious challenges in the absence of a functioning decision-making body of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media. In early July 2026, the process was relaunched by the National Assembly through the adoption of an authentic interpretation of the Law on electronic media, addressing legal concerns raised by the four REM Council members who had previously resigned and paving the way for their return. Although the Press Council effectively monitored print media's compliance with the Journalists' Code of Ethics, this did not have an impact on the fairness of the allocation of co-funding by public authorities. Concerns regarding editorial autonomy and the pluralism of public service broadcasters persisted. Against a backdrop of further media market concentration, political and economic influence over the media is a serious concern. Media legislation and strategy, particularly with regard to the fairness of public funding and transparency of ownership structures, are not being enforced adequately. Journalists frequently encounter either refusals by public bodies to disclose information or no response at all. The safety of journalists has further deteriorated, with increased physical attacks and threats.

Institutional checks and balances

The effectiveness of Parliament and its oversight function continued to be hindered by a lack of genuine political debate, as well as by the limited ability of members of Parliament to scrutinise legislative proposals properly and contribute to the parliamentary and legislative agenda. Recent progress on electoral reform and the launch of the voter register audit still need to be fully implemented. The exercise of presidential powers remains a subject of intense public debate. The legal framework for public consultations and its enforcement has deteriorated. Ten new judges were appointed to the Constitutional Court, while three positions remained vacant. Most independent bodies working in the area of fundamental rights continue to face resource constraints, and the follow-up on their recommendations remains inconsistent. Civil society organisations have been subjected to increasing pressure and attacks.

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