

Answers Flemish Community

Rechtsstaatrapport 2026: Landenbezoek COM 3 maart 2026

1. Last year's concerns relating to political interference in view of editorial independence of the media are still present today. On 13 January 2026, for instance, the Media Minister of the French Community was accused of making offensive remarks about public broadcaster RTBF, expressing a wish for a political shift in its leadership and criticising the new generation of journalists as largely left-leaning.

a. Would you consider this to be an increasing trend?

b. If so, is this also the case outside of the French Community?

c. Is the government addressing any concerns about external interference in view of editorial independence?

b. *In the Flemish Community, no political statements are made about the editorial line or about the leadership of the public broadcaster VRT. In parliamentary questions about VRT, the competent minister has repeatedly said that it is not her task to assess VRT's reporting or programming. VRT's editorial autonomy remains the starting point, which is a very important principle. It is not up to the minister to comment on the editorial policy of the public broadcaster. The minister fully supports the freedom of the press and has always acted that way. In a [speech to top politicians and decision-makers from the business world](#), the minister recently stated: "We as policymakers should not say how an editorial board should work or what it should write".*

c. *The editorial independence of the public broadcaster and of the private television and radio broadcasters is guaranteed by the media decree. This means that the editorial staff can work independently of political or commercial pressure. All news media work editorially autonomously and independently. That is one of the basic principles of our constitutional state. The Flemish Media Regulator (VRM) is responsible for supervising compliance with the media decree. So far, there have been no complaints to the VRM about external interference in editorial boards.*

2. Following the recommendation in last year's Rule of Law Report, have there been relevant developments regarding the procedure for access to documents? More in particular, what is the current status of the legislative proposal seeking to amend the Act of 11 April 1994 concerning public access to administrative documents?

3. Over the last years, there has been an increasing concentration of media ownership by a limited number of actors. The Flemish media regulator's annual media concentration report indicates that for the aggregation of traditional media products, between 80 and 100% of the Flemish market

remains in the hands of only five media groups. In line with this, several media stakeholders have expressed concerns in view of media concentration in Belgium.

a. How do you assess the increasing concentration of media ownership, and what implications does this have for media pluralism and democratic debate?

b. Have any measures addressing these concerns been implemented?

a.

- *Of course, we share the Commission's concern about the importance of diversity, pluralism and quality news in the media sector. Those principles are fundamental.*
- *Nevertheless, we would like to qualify the assertion that there is currently a 'critical level' of media concentration in Flanders or that 'mergers lead to less plurality and a decline in the quality of news coverage'.*
- *The recent reports of the Flemish Media Regulator show that although the Flemish market is relatively concentrated (which is not exceptional in smaller language areas), the diversity of titles, brands and editorial perspectives is still considerable. This concentration in the Flemish media market is not new, the Flemish media landscape has been like this for years.*
- *Concentration is not always a bad thing, especially in a small market such as Flanders, as long as there are sufficient guarantees for editorial independence, journalistic pluralism and public access to a wide range of news. Without a takeover, there could sometimes also be a negative impact due to the disappearance of titles*
- *A [recent study by Mediapunt](#) shows this once again: although media concentration increased, in general news diversity has increased in Flanders. On average, there is less overlap between the different newspapers and their range of news stories has therefore been broadened.*
- *Conclusion: even in a relatively highly concentrated media environment such as in Flanders, a newspaper can retain its individuality. The clear differences between the media groups indicate that this depends on editorial choices.*
- *However, this does not mean that we are not monitoring the situation closely, because only in a pluralistic media landscape can citizens obtain accurate information. Concentration movements are always monitored by the Belgian and European competition authorities..*
- *Pursuant to Article 218, §2, 8° of the Media Decree, the VRM does monitor concentrations in the media sector, and reports annually to the Flemish Government and the Flemish Parliament. The [new media concentration report](#) of the Flemish Media Regulator was published on 9 December 2025.*

b.

- *In the coming months, the role of the VRM in assessing media concentrations will be strengthened, in view of the preliminary draft decree that partly implements the European regulation on media freedom. The EMFA is a European guarantee that journalism is not jeopardized by ownership concentration.*

- *Article 22 of the EMFA requires Member States to introduce rules for the assessment of media concentrations that could have a significant impact on media pluralism and editorial independence. The same provision states that the media regulators must be responsible for that assessment, or must be substantially involved in it.*
- *We are currently incorporating the advice of the Council of State into the draft decree and we are in talks with the federal government about the concrete implementation of the VRM's new task. The specific modalities of cooperation between the Belgian Competition Authority and the media regulators will be regulated in a cooperation agreement.*

4. Concerns remain regarding increased physical and online violence against journalists, how do you assess recent developments regarding the scale of such incidents, and how have public authorities responded in practice?

5. Could you share any additional media-related insights, including relevant legislative or regulatory initiatives, policy developments, or cases at the federal or regional level?

The Flemish government is working on the following legislative initiatives on media:

1. *A preliminary draft decree transposing Regulation (EU) 2024/900 on transparency and targeted political advertising, Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 (European Media Freedom Act) and Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 (Artificial Intelligence Act)*
 - *This preliminary draft has already received advice from the Strategic Advisory Council for Culture, Youth, Sport and Media (SARC) and from the Council of State.*
 - *The comments of the Council of State are currently being processed*
 - *The text will then be submitted to the Flemish government for final approval*
 - *The draft decree will then be discussed and approved in the Flemish Parliament.*
2. *A preliminary draft decree and a draft decision of the Flemish government on appropriate prominence by providers of a user interface.*
 - *This regulation should help ensure that media users have access to media services of general interest: a broad, local, high-quality and original media offering.*
 - *If these services of general interest are not made visible and findable, they will not be accessible to the media user, and broadcasters will no longer be able to fulfil their important democratic role, with all the possible consequences for society*
 - *Article 7a of the AVMSD allows Member States to take the necessary measures in this regard.*
 - *That is why the Flemish government has developed a regulatory framework around appropriate prominence of audiovisual media services of general interest.*
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the framework of the TRIS procedure. The detailed opinion and the comments of the European Commission are currently being processed.

- *The texts can then be submitted to the Council of State, after which the draft decree will be discussed and approved in the Flemish Parliament.*

In addition, the Flemish Government has recently approved an ["Action Plan Safe Online"](#).

- *This Action Plan forms the foundation for a coordinated approach to digital resilience and media literacy in Flanders*
- *This ambitious plan runs from 2026 to 2029 and aims to make every Flemish person digitally resilient and media literate.*
- *In doing so, Flanders is opting for an integrated approach that focuses on protection and strengthening: clear rules for platforms, and investments in knowledge and skills for citizens.*
- *What are the pillars of this action plan?*
 1. *Strict enforcement and responsibility of platforms*
 2. *Tackling harmful online practices*
 3. *Making everyone digitally resilient and media-literate*
 4. *Providing reliable information*
 5. *Supporting parents, teachers and educators*
 6. *Collaboration as key*