

MEDIA CAPTURE MONITORING REPORT: **SLOVAKIA**

MEASURING EMFA
COMPLIANCE

November 2025



MEDIA CAPTURE MONITORING REPORT: SLOVAKIA

The International Press Institute (IPI) and the Media and Journalism Research Center (MJRC) have partnered up to produce the Media Capture Monitoring Report on Slovakia, an annual report to measure media capture in the country and the degree to which the Member State meets the new EU regulation to combat the problem.

In August 2025, the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) came into full force and Member States are required to enact reforms to align with the new regulation.

The Slovak report focuses on EMFA elements directly addressing media capture, namely, the independence of public service media and of media regulators, the misuse of state funds to influence media, and ensuring ownership transparency and media pluralism.

The report examines the standards prescribed by law and how they are currently implemented in practice. It also sets out the areas of reform needed to bring the country into line with EMFA while also making recommendations for where reform can go further.

The report is intended an important tool for journalist and media rights groups and national policy makers to guide reform and monitor the degree to which Slovakia is meeting its obligations.

The Media Capture project is a part of the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR), a Europe-wide mechanism which tracks, monitors and responds to violations of press and media freedom in EU Member States and Candidate Countries. The project is co-funded by the European Commission.

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Changes in 2024/25

The European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) has been only partially implemented in Slovakia. Legislation adopted in 2025¹ addressed some areas of the EMFA but not all. In particular, the legislation failed to incorporate the EMFA's provisions regarding the independence of the public broadcaster. On the contrary, the governing coalition in Slovakia passed a 2024 law that constitutes a clear breach of the EMFA. With the explicit political aim of capturing public service broadcasting, the government dissolved the public broadcaster RTVS and established a new entity, STVR, which is controlled exclusively by pro-government appointees. By 2025, these appointees had already implemented measures demonstrating that the direction of reform was toward a less independent and more politically captured broadcaster, in clear violation of the EMFA. Thus, the problem lies not only in practice, where political interference is evident, but also in law, as the legislation governing the public broadcaster remains unaligned with the EMFA's requirements.

Independence of media regulators

Media services in Slovakia are overseen by an independent regulatory authority. Its members are elected by Parliament, and the current composition includes nominees from several political parties, including the opposition. However, the governing coalition has in the past year altered the balance within the regulator by appointing six new members to its board, five of whom are controversial figures previously associated with media capture or linked to a government-aligned oligarch or a coalition politician. After these changes, the six out of nine members are nominees of the current coalition, which means the institution is partially captured.

Legislation in line with EMFA provisions: Partially
Effective independence: Partially

Independence of public service media

Slovakia is in direct violation of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) regarding the independence of its public broadcaster. In 2024, the government dissolved the relatively independent RTVS and replaced it with a new institution, STVR, whose governance structure is fully dependent on the ruling coalition composed of the SMER, Hlas, and SNS parties.

This restructuring enabled the government to replace the management, board of directors, and all oversight bodies with new politically aligned appointees. The nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS), which controls the Ministry of Culture and is responsible for media legislation, played a central role in designing and executing this reform. SNS leader Andrej Danko openly stated his desire for a “state television” rather than a public

¹ Specifically, the amendments to the 264/2022 Z. z. Media Services Act and the 265/2022 Publications Act (hereafter 2025 EMFA Implementation Act).

service broadcaster, clearly signalling the coalition's intention to dismantle its institutional independence.

The STVR Board, comprising nine members, is entirely appointed by political authorities, four by the Ministry of Culture and five by Parliament, through a majority vote which ensures no opposition or independent representatives are elected. This has resulted in a board dominated by government-aligned nominees, including several controversial figures. Among them are David Lindtner, an advisor to Prime Minister Robert Fico and former judge who resigned after corruption charges; Igor Gallo, linked to an oligarch close to SMER; and Eva Koprena, a former government spokesperson. The board is led by Lukáš Machala, known for extreme views, including calls for public television to feature advocates of the Flat Earth theory.² Moreover, during board meetings, he has reportedly urged the management to make news coverage less critical.

In 2025, the board appointed Martina Flašíková as Director General of STVR. Flašíková, the daughter of Fedor Flašík, a co-founder of SMER and a key strategist for former Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, inherited her father's pro-government website E-report in 2024. One of her first actions was to cancel several independent and critical programmes, including a discussion show by journalist Michal Havran and broadcasts debunking conspiracy theories.

These developments represent a systemic political capture of Slovakia's public broadcasting, both legally and institutionally. The STVR reform violates EMFA principles on editorial independence and governance safeguards, marking a clear regression in media freedom and pluralism in Slovakia.

Legislation in line with EMFA provisions: No
Effective independence: No

Misuse of state funds to influence media output

There is currently no legislation in Slovakia that specifically regulates the distribution of state advertising or other forms of state expenditure on the media. In the absence of specific legislation, the general rules of public procurement apply. Each public entity is responsible for determining its own advertising channels.

There is currently no database that provides a user-friendly overview of where state advertising funds have been allocated. Information can be found in general registries, but the amount of analytical work needed to collate the data is significant, resulting in a lack of comprehensive information.

Investigative journalists or NGOs have produced ad hoc reports claiming that state advertising is distributed unevenly and not according to standard measures (such as audience reach). It is standard practice for independent media outlets without an oligarchic background, particularly those identified by the government as adversaries, to

¹ See <https://spravy.stvr.sk/2024/04/patri-aj-nazor-ze-zem-je-plocha-do-vysielania-podla-l-machalu-ano/> and <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/komentare-komentar-uzasna-slovenska-zemeplocha-alex-svamberk-40470110>

receive minimal or no funding from state advertising. This also applies to the majority of state-owned enterprises or organisations that are among the largest advertisers, including the state-owned betting company Tipos, postal and traffic services, and others.

Some improvements were introduced in 2025 including greater transparency and enhanced regulatory oversight of state advertising. However, these measures remain largely on paper for now, and it remains to be seen how they will be implemented in practice.

Legislation in line with EMFA provisions: Partially

Fair and transparent allocation of state funds to media: No

Media pluralism and political/state influence over news media

While some EMFA requirements are enshrined in Slovak media law, there is currently a lack of monitoring and enforcement of compliance. The Slovak media market is relatively small, which makes it vulnerable to oligarchization. The vast majority of the TV market is under the control of wealthy businesses or other politically influential entities, with ongoing challenges at TV Markíza. A significant portion of the press market is under the control of the oligarchic group Penta, whose media outlets appear to be promoting the narratives of the current governing coalition. However, there are still many popular independent print and digital media that help to provide a diversity of news and sources of information.

Legislation in line with EMFA provisions: Partially

Effective media pluralism: Yes

Analysis

Independence of media regulators

This section discusses how Article 30 of the AVMSD (Directive 2010/13/EU) is implemented.

Summary

The Council for Media Services of the Slovak Republic serves as the national regulator responsible for broadcast licensing and ensuring objectivity and impartiality in news content. Legally, the Council operates as an independent body; however, its institutional independence from political influence remains weak. All members are elected by Parliament, which in practice means that appointments typically reflect the preferences of the governing coalition.

The Council's Board consists of nine members. In 2025, the current parliamentary majority has elected six new members to fill vacant seats. There are serious concerns about the lack of political neutrality and prior affiliations of these new members. The current composition still includes three members nominated by the previous coalition

(now opposition). The risk of full political capture is significant.

Legal and operational independence

The Council for Media Services (RpMS) is legally independent from the government, as its board members are elected by parliament. However, since the parliamentary majority supports the ruling coalition, in practice it is the government parties that determine most appointments to the Council.

Owing to Slovakia's history of complex and frequently changing coalition governments, the Council currently includes nominees from several political backgrounds, including members appointed under previous administration. As a result, the regulator had shown some degree of political independence. However, since the balance changed in October 2025 by appointing more government-affiliated members the board is now dominated by pro-governmental actors. The political capture of the institution, and therefore its loss of operational independence, is almost complete.

Composition of the regulator's board

The Council has nine members. They are elected and can be dismissed by the Slovak parliament following a public hearing of the candidates. Proposals for candidates for council members may be submitted to the relevant parliament committee by professional institutions and civil associations active in the area of media, culture, science, education or sport, registered churches and religious societies as well as civil associations of citizens with disabilities. The Council elects its Chairman and Vice-Chairman from among its members.

To date, the Council has been fulfilling the requisite function. The current governing majority in parliament has elected six new members for seats that became vacant in 2024 and 2025. The Board already has a majority of coalition nominees. Together with an obvious lack of independence of these nominees, there is an opportunity for a total capture of this institution.

Independence of the regulator's members

The independence of Slovakia's media regulatory authority and its members is partially safeguarded by national legislation. The Media Services Act³ stipulates that board members may not hold positions in political parties or public office, and must not have any conflicts of interest with, or receive payments from, broadcasters or publishers.⁴ These provisions provide a basic legal framework for independence; however, their effectiveness in practice has been increasingly questioned due to politically sensitive appointments.

³ Law no. 264/2022 on media services, hereafter Media Services Act, see (in Slovak) <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2022/264/20230101>.

⁴ Media Services Act, Para 115.

One such appointment is Juraj Rybanský, who previously served as a member of the communication teams of two ministries under SMER-led governments. Between 2017 and 2018, he was also implicated in the political capture of the public service broadcaster RTVS, where he briefly served as Director of News under General Director Jaroslav Rezník, an SNS nominee. Rybanský's tenure ended after widespread protests by RTVS journalists, who accused him of editorial interference.

In October 2025, another member who was involved in the above-mentioned capture was appointed, Michal Dzurjanin, who served as the head of radio programming at RTVS from 2017 under Rezník. Previously, he worked as a member of the press team for the minister of economy under two Smer-led governments.

Another former spokesperson for Smer politicians, Pavel Chovanec, was appointed in October 2025. He worked for Pavol Paška, one of the most prominent figures of Smer who⁵ served as Chair of the National Council (Slovak Parliament) between 2012 and 2015, and as Vice-Chair of the Smer Party.

Another controversial nomination is Adam Valček, formerly an investigative journalist at daily SME. After leaving the newsroom to start his own media project, it was later revealed that two-thirds of his start-up funding came from the oligarchic conglomerate Penta, a company that appears to share many common interests with the Slovak government.⁶ Penta holds significant stakes across the Slovak media market and is widely perceived as instrumentalising media outlets to serve its political and business interests. While past payments from Penta to Valček do not constitute a formal legal violation, they raise serious questions about compliance with the law's prohibition on board members receiving payments from publishers.

Another politically sensitive nomination is Ondrej Krivuš, whose independence remains unclear. His CV lists experience as a media advisor to the minister of education, without specifying which minister. However, available evidence suggests that this role was held under a minister from the SNS party during a SMER-led government, raising further doubts about his political neutrality.⁷

The sixth appointee, Rebeka Riabová, is a young disinfo-influencer with no previous work experience in media other than her Youtube channel. She was a candidate in the 2023 Parliamentary elections for the Slovak National Party (SNS), though was not elected. She has publicly praised the far-right conspiracist, Daniel Bombic known for his hate speech and smearing of journalists;. She also claimed several media are anti-state, and is known

⁵ Mr. Paška was forced to leave his post after a serious allegation from corruption in healthcare, where he was considered to be the grey eminence for the business interests of Smer party. He was also known for his disrespect towards liberal democracy (and its limits on power), after he famously addressed the National Council with a phrase: "If you win the election, you can do everything." Source: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/20797332/video-pavol-paska-zname-momenty-politickej-kariery.html>

⁶ Peter Hanák, Media Capture in Slovakia: A Story of Fragile Pluralism, Media Resilience, and the Struggle Against Corruption, Vienna: International Press Institute, 2023, available online at <https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/media-capture-in-slovakia-final.pdf>.

⁷ He claims to have served as an advisor to a female Minister of Education. However, since 1998, there has been only one woman in that position, Martina Lubyová, a nominee of the Slovak National Party (SNS), who held the post in the governments of Robert Fico and Peter Pellegrini between 2017 and 2020. See more at <https://rpms.sk/zlozenie-rady/mgr-ondrej-krivus>.

⁸ Official CV of Rebeka Riabová, Council for Media Services. <https://rpms.sk/zlozenie-rady/bc-rebeka-riabova>

for her pro-Russian views.⁹ She has previously campaigned with Mr. Andrej Danko, SNS chairman, who announced his intentions to change the Council of Media Services into a more state-controlled National media bureau.¹⁰ Ms. Riabová can be seen as his representative in the Council.

To sum up, six out of nine members have clear past affiliations with governmental politicians or parties, which can be judged as a situation of political capture.

Financial autonomy

The media regulatory authority in Slovakia lacks sufficient financial and human resources, despite formal guarantees under national law. The RpMS is financed through the state budget, which is approved annually by Parliament. However, the level of funding is not fixed or protected by law and remains vulnerable to arbitrary political decisions by the government. The Ministry of Finance frequently introduces adjustments to the Council's annual allocations, expenditures, and revenues. Several such cases are documented in the Council's own annual reports.¹¹ The regulator's budget is publicly available.

In the draft legislation for EMFA implementation, the RpMS estimated that it would require an additional €200,000 annually to hire staff dedicated to EMFA-related monitoring and compliance activities.¹² In 2025, during the legislative review process, the European Commission observed¹³ that the Slovak state budget did not include provisions for these new positions. As a result, the Council postponed recruitment to 2026.

Whether this expansion will take place remains uncertain, as the government has announced a 10 percent budget reduction across all public institutions as part of its fiscal consolidation plan.¹⁴

Tasks and accountability

The competencies and powers of the RpMS are clearly defined in the Media Services Act, which also includes provisions to ensure the authority's accountability. The regulator's responsibilities cover a broad range of decision-making areas, including authorisations, registrations, and licensing procedures. It is tasked with monitoring compliance with media-related obligations and imposing sanctions in line with the applicable legislation. The RpMS also oversees the promotion of European works and independent productions, ensuring transparency in information and personnel relations.

⁹ <https://domov.sme.sk/c/23561847/media-bude-strazit-dezinfluencerka-sefka-policie-si-pletie-hoaxy-s-podvodmi-dezinfomajak-51.html>

¹⁰ <https://dennikn.sk/4926972/koalicia-zvolila-do-medialnej-rady-youtuberku-riabovu-kandidovala-za-sns-obhajuje-dannyho-kollara-a-utocila-na-kuciakov-pamatnik/>

¹¹ See the RpMS 2023 Annual Report, p. 13, available (in Slovak) at https://rpms.sk/sites/default/files/2024-04/Vyrocná_správa_za_rok_2023_1.pdf.

¹² See more in the 2025 EMFA Implementation Act, page 12, available at <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Dynamic/DocumentPreview.aspx?DocID=565119>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Vladimír Amrich, "Minister Kamenický chce škrtý za miliardy: v hre sú nižšie dávky či prepúšťanie." Aktuality.sk, 6 March 2025, available online at <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/seAOTYQ/minister-kamenicky-chce-skrty-za-miliardy-v-hre-su-nizsie-davky-ci-prepušťanie/>.

In addition, the authority issues binding legal regulations, monitors compliance, and supervises the activities of self-regulatory bodies. It is responsible for dispute resolution, cooperation with relevant ministries, and the collection of statistics on broadcasting and audiovisual content. The regulator also contributes to the formulation of media legislation and conducts research on the media environment. By law, it must submit an annual report on broadcasting activities to Parliament within 90 days of the end of each year.¹⁵

The 2025 EMFA implementation act adopted by the Slovak Parliament expanded the Council's mandate in line with new EU requirements. The RpMS is now responsible for overseeing the independence of the public broadcaster, monitoring state advertising, and supervising media metrics providers. Additional obligations include publishing more detailed data in its annual report and, crucially, monitoring and analysing media pluralism in the Slovak market. The regulator is also required to protect media pluralism during the licensing process. To fully operationalise these new responsibilities, the RpMS must adopt a new implementing regulation, which has not yet been issued.

Although the RpMS enjoys legal autonomy, its members remain accountable to Parliament, meaning that their independence from political influence is not absolute.

Appeal mechanisms

Decisions and procedures of the Council for Media Services (RpMS) are generally subject to an administrative appeal mechanism, and may be further appealed before a court. However, the Media Services Act specifies certain exceptions, such as particular licence withdrawal procedures, for which no appeal is permitted.¹⁶

Judicial oversight of the Council's decisions falls under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Administrative Court¹⁷, a newly established institution that began operations in August 2021. While the public registry of court decisions is not easily searchable without specific case identifiers, the judicial review process itself appears to be functioning effectively, with both appeals and rulings forming a regular part of regulatory oversight.

According to the RpMS Annual Report 2024, there were 10 active court cases challenging the Council's decisions during that year. Courts upheld the Council's decision in one case, reversed its decisions in four cases, and terminated one case. There are six cases still pending at the time of reporting.¹⁸

Power to request information

In accordance with the Media Services Act No. 264/2022, the RpMS is authorised to require natural or legal persons to provide, within a reasonable timeframe, any

¹⁵ Media Services Act, Para 110.

¹⁶ Media Services Act, Para 201, Para 211.

¹⁷ See the court's website at <https://www.nssud.sk/en/>.

¹⁸ See Council for Media Services Annual Report 2024 at https://rpms.sk/sites/default/files/2025-05/VS_2024.pdf.

information or data that are proportionate and necessary for the performance of its statutory functions. For example, service providers must grant the Council access to their services to enable effective assessment of whether they are offering illegal or non-compliant services.¹⁹

The 2025 EMFA implementation act further expanded the RpMS's powers to request information. The regulator may now obtain data concerning state advertising, the operations of the public broadcaster, to monitor its editorial neutrality, and information from media audience measurement providers. These new provisions strengthen the Council's supervisory role and align national law more closely with EMFA transparency and accountability requirements.

Independent monitoring of the regulator's activity

The RpMS publishes its decisions online²⁰, ensuring a basic level of transparency in its regulatory activity. In line with legal requirements, the Council is also obliged to issue an annual self-monitoring report, which is made publicly available on its official website.²¹

Beyond the judicial oversight and these formal transparency measures, however, external oversight remains limited. Only a small number of journalists and independent NGOs monitor the Council's activities, and such monitoring occurs irregularly and without a systematic framework.

Independence of public service media

This section discusses how Article 5 of the EMFA is implemented.

Summary

Since Slovakia abolished the public service broadcaster RTVS in 2024 and replaced it with a new institution, STVR, no substantive reforms have been implemented to align the sector with the EMFA. The 2025 EMFA implementation act merely refers to the oversight role of the Council for Media Services (RpMS) over public service broadcasting, without introducing any changes to the broadcaster's governance or safeguards for editorial independence.

The STVR Board consists of nine members, four nominated by the government and five by Parliament, all elected by the current parliamentary majority. There is no representation of opposition parties or independent actors, resulting in full political control by the ruling coalition. The STVR budget is also entirely dependent on political decisions, further compromising institutional independence.

These arrangements constitute a direct violation of Article 5 of the EMFA, in multiple

¹⁹ Media Services Act, Para 152, Sec 8.

²⁰ See them (in Slovak) on the regulator's website at <https://rpms.sk/o-nas/zasadnutia/zasadnutia-rady>.

²¹ See the RpMS website: <https://rpms.sk/en/node/551>.

respects, including the requirements for transparent, pluralistic, and politically independent governance of public service media. The personal nominations to the STVR Board, as well as the appointment and early actions of the new Director General, clearly demonstrate the practical and systemic political capture of Slovakia's public service broadcaster.

Editorial and operational independence

Under the relevant legislation, employees of the Slovak Television and Radio (STVR) are formally guaranteed independence in the performance of their duties.²² However, in practice, this guarantee is undermined by structural dependencies. The potential for political influence from the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Finance, and Parliament—combined with STVR's complete financial reliance on the state budget—means that the broadcaster lacks the institutional safeguards necessary to ensure functional independence from the government and the ruling parliamentary majority.

Legal provisions guaranteeing plurality of information

In accordance with the law, the Council for Media Services is responsible for ensuring plurality and impartiality in the media including the STVR. The public media services are provided free of charge. Transmission providers are required to carry the public service providers' content.²³ DAB providers must also allow public broadcasting in their multiplexes.

In practice, STVR was established by revoking the previous, more autonomous RTVS, and abolishing the national legislation on the public media. The new Slovak Television and Radio Act of 2024 introduced a system of influence by the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Finance, and Parliament over the election of the STVR Board, which elects the broadcaster's General Director and the STVR Ethics Committee.

There were indications that censorship had already occurred under the interim director in 2024. Several STVR journalists resigned, and there were concerns raised about the suitability of some of the nominees, who have histories of involvement in media capture. For example, in August 2024, Peter Nittnaus was appointed as head of STVR's all-news channel :24. He previously held a management role under Jaroslav Rezník, who was RTVS general director under the previous Smer/SNS coalition government in 2017-2018. Nittnaus was known for creating an atmosphere of political pressure on his subordinates.²⁴

In 2025, Martina Flašíková, daughter of a SMER party founder, was elected Director General of STVR. Flašíková previously managed a pro-government disinformation

²² Slovak Television and Radio Act, Para 4.

²³ Media Services Act, Para 30.

²⁴ "Čistky v STVR: Končí riaditeľka spravodajstva, šéf :24-ky aj šéfka predaja reklamy" (Purges in STVR: The director of news, the head of :24 and the head of advertising sales are ending), O Mediach, 8 August 2024, available at <https://www.omediach.com/tv/26945-cistky-v-stvr-konci-riaditelka-spravodajstva-sef-24-ky-aj-sefka-predaja-reklamy>.

website eReport, founded by her late father, where opinion-based and partisan content consistently overshadowed factual reporting.²⁵ Her appointment is widely viewed as an overtly political nomination, illustrating that the governing coalition made no attempt to conceal its intent to capture the public broadcaster. This outcome was facilitated by the STVR Board, composed entirely of pro-government nominees.

Given the broadcaster's history, both under STVR and its predecessor RTVS, of journalists resigning in protest over political interference and censorship, few new departures were expected this time. Nonetheless, one of Flašíková's first actions was to cancel a discussion programme hosted by the respected journalist Michal Havran, an opinion writer for Daily SME.²⁶ Meanwhile, she retained a parallel discussion programme moderated by Jaroslav Daniška, originally introduced to provide ideological balance. Daniška, considered a staunch conservative, operated a website Standard.sk previously labelled as disinformational²⁷, thereby reinforcing a clear editorial asymmetry under the new management.

Flašíková subsequently announced the hiring of a journalist who had been dismissed from a private news channel after airing an uncritical, pro-Russian interview, and who has since focused almost exclusively on pro-government politicians. She also expressed interest in hiring another journalist previously forced to leave an Austrian newspaper. Additionally, she cancelled a programme dedicated to debunking disinformation, further narrowing editorial diversity.

Taken together, these actions indicate not an effort to maintain balance but rather a deliberate reinforcement of right-wing, conservative, and pro-Russian narratives, reflecting the ideological profile of the ruling coalition.

Although Slovak law formally requires public service broadcasting to uphold balance and impartiality, it is the STVR Board, itself politically aligned, that interprets and enforces this principle. The Board recently established an Ethics Commission, whose composition mirrors its own political bias: among its members are Eduard Chmelár, a former advisor to Prime Minister Robert Fico, and Maroš Smolec, a nationalist activist who ran as a candidate for the SMER–SNS coalition in regional elections.

The only legal measure theoretically strengthening pluralism is the 2025 EMFA implementation act, which enhances the oversight powers of the RpMS over STVR. However, such oversight already existed in practice, as the RpMS previously handled complaints and occasionally sanctioned RTVS for bias. The expanded oversight remains purely formal for now, and its practical enforcement remains to be seen.

²⁵ Filip Struhárik, "MediaBrífing: Flašíkov web eReport funguje ako internetová televízia Smeru a Hlasu", Denník N, 22 April 2022, available online at <https://dennikn.sk/2818362/mediabrifing-flasikov-web-ereport-funguje-ako-internetova-televizia-smeru-a-hlasu/>.

²⁶ See more here: https://www.aktuality.sk/nazivo/oUV0WpcB5hN1cyG_cQjS/.

²⁷ An independent project that flags conspiracy sources, Konšpirátori.sk, labelled Standard as a "problematic website," based on an analysis prepared by political scientist and expert on conspiracy theories Pavol Harďoš. Standard subsequently sued both Konšpirátori.sk and Harďoš in court but lost the case. The analysis is available here: <https://konspiratori.sk/stranka/1250>. A report on the court case is available here: <https://dennikn.sk/blog/4531272/sud-zamietol-zalobu-standardu-voci-projektu-konspiratori-sk/>.

Composition of the governing bodies

There are currently no legal guarantees in place to ensure that the procedures for the appointment and dismissal of the head of management or members of the management board of STVR ensure the independence of the public service media provider.

The General Director is elected by the STVR Board.²⁹ The Board is made up of nine members. Three members are nominated by the Ministry of Culture and one by the Ministry of Finance. The remaining five members are elected by Parliament.³⁰ This means that the current governing majority has the ability to influence the appointment of all nine members of the Board at any given time.

Consequently, the governing coalition parties have the option of indirectly selecting the General Director of their choice or preference through their nominees. The system was introduced in 2024 with the intention of capturing and politicising the institution. Moreover, the law regulating the conflict of interest of the Board members has changed - after the abolishment of RTVS and creation of STVR, the new STVR Act no longer bans high officials of government ministries from holding a seat on the STVR board. This change was used for the appointment of Lukáš Machala, the chief of staff at the Ministry of Culture onto the STVR Board.³¹

Some coalition officials have publicly expressed their desire to see the current model replaced with a state broadcasting approach rather than a public service one. This was stated on numerous occasions by Andrej Danko, the chairman of the coalition party SNS (the far-right Slovak National Party).³² The Ministry of Culture, which is under the control of this party, has already appointed individuals with ties to the SNS party to the STVR Board, including Mr. Machala.³³

Governance bodies: appointment

Under Slovak law, the appointment of governance bodies at public service media providers is required to be conducted through transparent and open procedures. In practice, however, the current system does not meet the standards of transparency, openness, and non-discrimination prescribed by Article 5 of the EMFA.

As noted, four members of the STVR Board are appointed directly by government ministries. The Ministry of Culture announced only that a special commission had recommended four names, which were subsequently approved by the minister. There was

²⁹ Slovak Television and Radio Act, Art. I(17).

³⁰ Slovak Television and Radio Act, Art. I(11).

³¹ <https://dennikn.sk/4548855/rada-plna-politickych-nominantov-rozhodne-o-buducnosti-verejnopravnej-stvr-hlas-vylucuje-ze-ju-povedie-machala/>

³² "I am against public service television. I want a state TV." said Andrej Danko in a TV debate in February 2024, see <https://www.sme.sk/minuta/23281412/danko-ja-som-proti-verejnopravnej-televizii>

³³ "Šimkovičová vybrala nových kontrolórov STVR: Plochozemcu Machalu, bývalého hovorcu Mečiara a bývalého hovorcu nebankovky" (Šimkovičová chose new STVR controllers: Flatlander Machala, former spokesman Mečiar and former spokesman of a non-bank company), Omediach, 2 August 2024, available online at <https://www.omediach.com/tv/26941-simkovicova-vybrala-novych-kontrolorov-stvr-plochozemcu-machalu-byvaleho-hovorcu-meciara-a-byvaleho-hovorcu-nebankovky>.

no public hearing, no transparent selection process, and no opportunity for candidates without political backing to compete fairly. These appointments took place in 2024, before full EMFA implementation, and no amendments were introduced to the Slovak law on this procedure after 8 August 2025.

The parliamentary procedure for appointing the remaining five board members is somewhat more transparent, yet equally restrictive. Every candidate must secure a majority vote in Parliament, which, under current political conditions, effectively limits eligibility to nominees of the ruling coalition. The decision-making process is initiated within the governing parties and merely formalised through parliamentary approval. Although the formal eligibility criteria are publicly available, in practice only politically loyal individuals stand a realistic chance of election. This raises serious concerns as to whether political loyalty can be considered a transparent, objective, non-discriminatory, or proportionate criterion, as required by EMFA.

The STVR Board currently comprises nine members, all nominated by the governing coalition, with no opposition or independent representatives. Several of these appointments are particularly controversial. The four members appointed directly by the government are all affiliated with the governing SNS party, Lukáš Machala, vice-chair of the Board (the position of chairperson remains vacant), also serves as Chief of Staff at the Ministry of Culture. Although not formally affiliated with the SNS, he frequently represents the party in political matters.³⁴ More problematically, he has reportedly interfered in HR issues, demanding access to all staff salaries and criticized the news for being too critical which he views as ‘political activism’.^{35 36}

Peter Benčurík is a former spokesperson for Slavia Capital, an oligarchic group closely associated with SNS, whose co-owner faces serious corruption charges. David Lindtner, appointed by Parliament, is a former judge and current legal advisor to Prime Minister Robert Fico. He also works for a law firm linked to Defence Minister Robert Kaliňák, represents multiple SMER party affiliates charged with corruption, and acts as defence counsel for right-wing extremist Daniel Bombic, accused of harassing journalists. Lindtner accompanied SMER vice-chair and MEP Ľuboš Blaha on an official trip to Moscow, further underscoring his political alignment.

Igor Gallo, another board member, was previously chairman of the RTVS Board during an earlier period of political capture. Investigative journalists have connected him to oligarch Jozef Brhel, a figure closely associated with SMER, though Gallo has refused to clarify

³⁴ Machala is the head of staff at the Ministry of Culture, but he makes political comments also on policies of the Ministry of Education, for example. See <https://dennikn.sk/minuta/4142023/>.

³⁵ <https://domov.sme.sk/c/23563415/personalna-politika-v-stvr-je-katastrofalna-kritizoval-machala-na-zasadnuti-rady-telerozhlasu.html>

³⁶ Machala has also stated that the extremist Daniel Bombic, currently in police custody facing multiple charges, should not be described as extremist in the STVR news <https://dennikn.sk/4941626/pohar-trpezlivosti-pretiekol-odkazal-machala-vedeniu-stvr-kritizuje-spravodajstvo-za-politicky-aktivizmus/>

³⁷ Szabolcs, Panyi, Nikita Hava and Tomáš Madleňák. “Ficovho poradcu Lindtnera pozvala do Moskvy prokremelská nadácia. Jej šéf je napojený na tajné služby.” Investigatívne Centrum Jána Kuciaka (ICJK) / VSquare.org, 25 June 2025, available online at <https://www.icjk.sk/400/Ficovho-poradcu-Lindtnera-pozvala-do-Moskvy-prokremelska-nadacia-Jej-sef-je-napojeny-na-tajne-sluzby>.

their relationship.³⁸ He also held lucrative positions in state-owned energy companies during SMER-led governments, to which he returned once the party regained power.³⁹ Another member, Eva Koprena served as spokesperson for a minister under a previous SMER-led government.

Although some other members have no publicly documented political ties, the partisan nomination process ensures that all have secured ruling coalition approval.

Governance bodies: term

The term of office for members of the STVR Board is six years, as stipulated by national legislation.⁴⁰

Governance bodies: dismissal conditions

The dismissal of members of the STVR Board is a complex procedure. Under the law, members may only be removed if they breach legal obligations or repeatedly fail to attend board meetings.⁴¹ Any such dismissal decision is subject to judicial review.

However, the current ruling coalition effectively circumvented this safeguard by dissolving the former public broadcaster RTVS in 2024, formally in accordance with new legislation, and replacing it with the newly established STVR, whose governance bodies were entirely reappointed by the ruling parliamentary majority.⁴²

Funding

The funding mechanism for public service media providers in Slovakia is not based on transparent or objective criteria clearly defined in advance. Direct public funding through the licence fee was abolished in 2023, leaving STVR almost entirely dependent on allocations from the state budget⁴³, which are subject to political discretion.

Historically, under its predecessor RTVS, funding was frequently used as a tool of political pressure. When the government was dissatisfied with the Director General's willingness to compromise, the broadcaster's budget was cut by one-third at the end of 2023, causing

³⁸ Martin Turček, "Šéf Rady RTVS dostal novú funkciu vo firme, kde kraloval Brhel; odmieta povedať, aký má s oligarchom vzťah." (Chief of the RTVS Council has a job in a company owned by Brhel. He refuses to explain their relationship. Aktuality, 4 April 4 2024. <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/tD7NXDu/sef-rady-rtvs-dostal-novu-funkciu-vo-firme-kde-kraloval-brhel-odmieta-povedat-aky-ma-s-oligarchom-vztah/>.

³⁹ Martin Turček, "Šefovi Rady RTVS zostane len jedna stolička. O funkciu v štátnej firme prišiel." Aktuality, 16 February 2021. <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/865831/sefovi-rady-rtvs-zostane-len-jedna-stolicka-o-funkciu-v-statnej-firme-prisiel/>

⁴⁰ Slovak Television and Radio Act, Art. I(13).

⁴¹ Slovak Television and Radio Act, Art. I(14).

⁴² The Ministry of Culture has already appointed their nominees to the STVR Board, some of them close the SNS party: "Martina Šimkovičová vymenovala nových členov Rady STVR. Aj vlastného tajomníka Lukáša Machalu" (Martina Šimkovičová appointed new members of the STVR Council. Even her own secretary Lukáš Machala), Aktuality.sk, 2 August 2024, <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/o0BA8ay/martina-simkovicova-vymenovala-novych-clenov-rady-stvr-aj-vlastneho-tajomnika-lukasa-machalu/>.

⁴³ Slovak Television and Radio Act, Art. I(26).

significant financial strain.⁴⁴

Irregular and ad hoc state support for public media has also been a common practice. In previous years, the Ministry of Culture directly financed selected programmes, while the government routinely supplemented RTVS's annual budget through a so-called "contract with the state"⁴⁵, compensating for chronic underfunding. In 2024, this arrangement was replaced by a new law that guarantees STVR 0.12% of the annual GDP⁴⁶, a figure widely criticised as insufficient. This rate represents a reduction from the previous level of 0.17% of GDP, following the government's 2023 budget cut.

STVR is legally permitted to broadcast advertising⁴⁷, and the new legislation allows for a higher volume of advertisements than under RTVS. In principle, any entity may purchase advertising space, and rate lists are publicly available. However, both the published pricing and the regulatory framework appear to mirror those of RTVS, and it remains unclear how these provisions will be implemented under the new broadcaster. It is also uncertain whether a public list of advertisers exists. While such data could theoretically appear in a public contracts registry, a preliminary review of Slovakia's main public procurement databases revealed no available information on advertisers or purchasers of airtime in STVR.

Independent monitoring mechanisms

There is no independent authority, body, or mechanism free from political influence currently in place to monitor the editorial and functional independence of Slovakia's public service media. Under the relevant legislation, this responsibility formally rests with the RpMS, the STVR Board, and the STVR Ethics Committee. However, none of these entities can be considered politically independent.

Similarly, there is no independent mechanism to oversee the funding process of Slovakia's public service media. Budgetary decisions remain fully within the control of government and parliamentary majorities, exposing the broadcaster to systemic political pressure.

In recent years, several complaints regarding violations of objectivity and impartiality have been lodged with the Council for Media Services. As STVR was only established in July 2024, all such cases refer to RTVS. Most of these complaints were dismissed on the grounds that breaches were not substantiated, and only minor corrective actions were issued in isolated cases. The relevant decisions are publicly available.⁴⁸

The 2025 EMFA implementation act formally strengthened the oversight powers of RpMS, granting the regulator the authority to request information necessary to monitor and analyse STVR's impartiality. The Council is now obliged to publish the results of such

⁴⁴ Peter Hanák, "NA ROVINU s Ľubošom Machajom: Možno budeme musieť zrušiť jeden televízny kanál" (STRAIGHT TALK with Ľuboš Machaj: We may have to cancel one TV channel), Aktuality.sk, 20 December 2023, <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/xrT3IRd/na-rovinu-s-lubosom-machajom-mozno-budeme-musiet-zrusit-jeden-televizny-kanal/>.

⁴⁵ Zmluva so štátom (Contract with the state), see <https://www.rtvs.org/o-stvr/dolezite-dokumenty-stvr/zmluva-so-statom>.

⁴⁶ Slovak Television and Radio Act, Art. I(27).

⁴⁷ Slovak Television and Radio Act, Art. I(26).

⁴⁸ See more at <https://rpms.sk/obsahove-rozhodnutia>.

monitoring in its annual report. The first report including these findings is expected in 2026.

Misuse of state funds to influence media output

This section discusses how Article 25 of the EMFA is implemented.

Summary

Article 25 of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) requires that state advertising be allocated to media based on transparent, objective, proportionate, and non-discriminatory criteria, made publicly available in advance through open, electronic, and user-friendly means. This provision has not yet been implemented in Slovak legislation. On the contrary, Slovakia lacks any systematic framework for the management or oversight of state advertising. The misuse of public resources channelled to media outlets—with the exception of public service media—remains one of the most visible and problematic areas in need of reform.

State funding spending: legal provisions, criteria for distribution and tender procedures

There is no specific regulation governing state advertising in terms of transparency, fairness, accountability, pluralistic distribution, or free competition. Only the general rules of public procurement apply⁴⁹, which are insufficient for ensuring equal treatment of the media. As a result, each public body is free to decide independently how and where to allocate advertising funds. There is no system allowing media organisations to apply or compete for funding based on objective criteria such as audience reach or public interest value.

The absence of transparency and coordination was clearly illustrated in August 2025, when Prime Minister Robert Fico sent a letter to all ministries requesting detailed information on advertising expenditures, disaggregated by recipient media outlet.⁵⁰ The fact that the Prime Minister had to collect such data manually demonstrates that no centralised information system or unified database of state advertising exists in Slovakia.

These systemic flaws are routinely exploited for political gain. Advertising funds are directed preferentially toward government-friendly or oligarch-owned media, while independent and critical outlets are deliberately excluded. Prime Minister Fico has even publicly threatened⁵¹ certain media outlets with the withdrawal of state advertising in videos posted on social media⁵², resulting in editorial interference and internal protests, most notably at TV Markíza, where journalists resigned citing internal censorship.

⁴⁹ Law No. 343/2015, see online (in Slovak) at <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2015/343/>.

⁵⁰ See more here: <https://dennikn.sk/minuta/4807077/>.

⁵¹ Dušan Mikušovič, Zoltán Szalay and Tomáš Vasilko. "Fico začína vojnu proti médiám, útokom na Markízu naznačuje škrtanie štátnej reklamy, inšpirovať sa môže v Poľsku." Denník N, 14 November 2023, available online at <https://dennikn.sk/3676375/fico-zacina-vojnu-proti-mediam-utokom-na-markizu-naznacuje-skrtnie-statnej-reklamy-inspirovat-sa-moze-v-polsku/>

⁵² See a video sample here: <https://www.facebook.com/robertficosk/videos/1265501200782313/>.

Furthermore, the Office of the Government has approved financial subsidies for at least two disinformation websites that spread pro-Russian and pro-government propaganda while undermining the credibility of independent media.⁵³ Such allocations were not based on any pre-defined or transparent criteria and were not open to public competition.

The 2025 EMFA implementation act formally empowered the RpMS to monitor state advertising practices. Public institutions and recipients of state advertising are now obliged to report annually on their advertising expenditures and to publish this data on their websites. The RpMS must incorporate these findings into its annual report, starting in 2026, and is authorised to sanction non-compliance.

Transparency of state media contracts

The criteria for distributing state funding to media outlets are not publicly available in advance, nor are they published in an electronic and user-friendly format. Tender procedures for state-funded contracts with media organisations are neither transparent, impartial, nor free from discrimination. In practice, advertising contracts are often fragmented to circumvent public procurement rules. Rather than allowing the media to compete fairly for public advertising, public institutions arbitrarily decide where to allocate funds.

State institutions that spend on advertising, such as ministries and other public bodies, both set the criteria and decide on the allocation of resources. Public funds are typically directed toward media outlets perceived as “friendly” or “non-hostile” to the government. Reliable and comprehensive data on this issue are scarce, as the relevant contracts are scattered across various public contract registries.

Nevertheless, an analysis of past contracts and testimonies from media outlets labelled “hostile” by the government⁵⁴ reveals a consistent pattern of discrimination. These outlets, perceived as critical of government policies, receive little or no state advertising, even when audience reach or market share would justify it. This pattern extends to state-controlled entities, including the postal service and the state-owned gambling company, which are among the country’s largest advertisers.⁵⁵

Information on public spending for state advertising is technically accessible through the public contracts registry.⁵⁶ However, identifying relevant data requires extensive analytical work to extract individual amounts from numerous, dispersed contracts. The information is presented in a fragmented and non-standardised manner, making the registry difficult to navigate and not user-friendly.

⁵³ Martin Hodás, “Úrad vlády chce dezinfowebom priklepnut’ desattisíce eur z Ficovej rezervy”, SME, 25 March 2025, available at: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/23468489/urad-vlady-chce-dezinfowebom-priklepnut-desattisice-eur-z-ficovej-rezervy.html>

⁵⁴ “Fico: Markíza, Denník N, SME a Aktuality sú nepriateľské médiá. V tomto duchu vydám pokyny na úrade vlády” (Fico: Markíza, Denník N, SME and Aktuality are hostile media. In this spirit, I will issue instructions to the Government Office), Standard, 12 November 2023, <https://standard.sk/492307/fico-markiza-dennik-n-sme-a-aktuality-su-nepriatelске-media-v-tomto-duchu-vydam-pokyny-na-urade-vlady>.

⁵⁵ Information obtained by the author from government insiders.

⁵⁶ See <https://www.crz.gov.sk/>.

The new monitoring and analytical powers granted to the RpMS under the 2025 EMFA implementation act could eventually improve transparency. However, as the first public report is not expected until 2026, it is too early to assess whether these changes will lead to greater accountability or systemic reform.

Monitoring state advertising spending

Prior to the EMFA, neither the national regulatory authority nor any other relevant public body had the competence to oversee the distribution of state advertising budgets to media service providers. This formally changed on 8 August 2025, when the 2025 EMFA Implementation Act granted the RpMS the authority to monitor and analyse state advertising.

However, no comprehensive public register exists that lists all media service providers according to the allocation of state advertising. Information of this kind is only available on an ad hoc basis, typically through investigative articles in the press or reports from media freedom NGOs. Under the new legislation, public authorities and recipients of state advertising are now required to report this data annually to RpMS and to publish it on their own websites, with the first reporting cycle due in January 2026. Only after the publication of this first dataset will it be possible to evaluate whether the monitoring system functions effectively in practice.

Until then, monitoring state spending in the media remains an extremely time-consuming process, requiring significant analytical capacity. Existing data sources are fragmented, incomplete, and unreliable. The historical nature of most available data means that information quickly becomes outdated, and as a result, no comprehensive or systematic analysis of the distribution of state advertising currently exists.

State advertising in Slovakia remains a source of political contention, as government authorities have repeatedly used these funds to promote their own agendas or to favour politically aligned media outlets.

A related challenge concerns political advertising oversight. Ahead of the September 2023 general election, a digital advertising campaign was launched in Slovak online media with financial backing from an organisation closely linked to the Hungarian government. According to the Ján Kuciak Investigative Centre, this campaign may have had a significant impact on the election outcome.⁵⁷

During the same period, an outdoor advertising campaign was conducted by a group of unidentified political activists, including a former minister for Smer party, currently

⁵⁷ Szabolcs Panyi, Karin Kőváry Sólymos, Daniel Flis, "Orbán zaplavlil strednú Európu miliónmi online reklam. Mohli ovplyvniť aj výsledky parlamentných volieb na Slovensku" (Orbán flooded Central Europe with millions of online ads. They may have also influenced the results of the Slovak parliamentary elections), Ján Kuciak Investigative Centre, 6 March 2024, <https://icjk.sk/311/Orban-zaplavlil-strednu-Europu-milionmi-online-reklam-Mohli-ovplyvnit-aj-vysledky-parlamentnych-volieb-na-Slovensku>.

unaffiliated with any political party but known to act in support of the current ruling coalition.⁵⁸

Although the identities of vendors and contractors involved in such campaigns are often publicly available, the ultimate sources of financing frequently remain opaque. For instance, the presidential campaign of Peter Pellegrini, the newly elected President and former leader of Hlas-SD, has never been fully transparent.⁵⁹ In 2025, his former party Hlas-SD was sanctioned for failing to ensure transparency in campaign financing. The party paid the fine, yet Pellegrini continues to serve as President of Slovakia.

Some national institutions do possess powers, yet limited, to request information on the allocation of state funds to the media. Among them is the Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic⁶⁰, which has thus far maintained a relatively high degree of independence. However, in the absence of explicit legislation mandating transparency, non-discrimination, and pluralistic distribution of state advertising, it remains unclear how this body could effectively identify or sanction irregularities within the current opaque framework.

Media pluralism and political/state influence over news media

This section discusses how Articles 6 and 22 of the EMFA are implemented.

Summary

Significant portions of the Slovak press market, including both of the country's tabloid dailies, are controlled by the oligarchic Penta Group. The merger of these two tabloids, which effectively consolidated the tabloid press under Penta's ownership, was reviewed by the Slovak Antimonopoly Office (PMÚ) for an extended period. Ultimately, the PMÚ concluded that it lacked jurisdiction to assess the merger, on the grounds that it did not meet the statutory turnover threshold required for formal merger review—a combined annual turnover of at least €46 million, or €14 million per company. According to several sources, there is speculation that turnover figures were deliberately adjusted to remain just below the legal threshold, thereby avoiding regulatory scrutiny. The PMÚ itself acknowledged the systemic risks of such “roll-up” acquisitions, where a dominant player expands incrementally through a series of small takeovers that individually fall below the notification threshold.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Martin Suchý, Ľubomír Daňko, “Antikampaň proti Korčokovi tesne pred moratóriom zasiahla milión používateľov. Platia ju ľudia blízki Pellegrinimu” (The anti-campaign against Korčok reached a million users just before the moratorium. It is paid by people close to Pellegrini), Zastavmekorupciu.sk, 26 March 2024, <https://zastavmekorupciu.sk/kauzy/antikampan-proti-korcokovi-tesne-pred-moratorium-zasiahla-milion-pouzivatelov-platia-ju-ludia-blizki-pellegrinimu/>

⁵⁹ “Najmenej transparentnú kampaň vedie Peter Pellegrini” (The least transparent campaign is led by Peter Pellegrini), Transparency International Slovensko, 14 March 2024, <https://transparency.sk/sk/najmenej-transparentnu-kampan-vedie-peter-pellegrini/>.

⁶⁰ See <https://www.nku.gov.sk>.

⁶¹ For a detailed analysis of all these aspects, see <https://www.antimon.gov.sk/pmu-pri-presetrovani-kupy-noveho-casu-narazil-na-nedostatok-kompetencii/?csrt=1182003169244254399>.

In response, the PMÚ publicly called for amendments to the competition law, warning that these cumulative acquisitions could distort market competition and media pluralism. Despite this explicit warning, no legislative action has been taken.

Penta has a history of corruption allegations and political contacts.⁶² Most recently, it printed and distributed the campaign newspaper of the Hlas party, which became a key coalition partner in Robert Fico's government. Hlas leader Peter Pellegrini was elected president of Slovakia in 2024. The Hlas party controls the Ministry of Health, which is Penta's core business.

Several independent media remain in the printed newspaper and online news market, including the dailies SME and Dennik N, both of which have a significant online presence, and Aktuality.sk. The government has no influence on these media. On the contrary, Prime Minister Fico often refers to them as “enemies”.

The TV market has experienced a notable deterioration in its overall situation during the course of 2023. The market is dominated by three major players. The public service RTVS was abolished, captured and transformed into STVR. The most popular commercial TV channel Markíza, which is owned by the Czech oligarchic group PPF, was subjected to pressure from Fico. He publicly stated that he would investigate the matter of state advertising received by Markíza, if they do not change their critical coverage of the government. Subsequently, the chief of news at Markíza was replaced. Several months later, approximately 100 employees of Markíza protested against censorship and a number of them left the station. The third major player is TV JOJ, which is owned by the oligarchic group J&T. JOJ cancelled its political debate show, which resulted in the show's creators leaving the company.

In summary, the media in Slovakia are formally independent, but their owners frequently pursue objectives other than those of independent watchdog journalism. It is typical for them to prioritise maintaining close relations with the state in order to protect their other businesses. For instance, PPF has additional business agreements with the government (it operates a toll system for highways and supplied the state rail with their train production), while Penta and J&T operate in sectors with stringent regulatory oversight.

According to the Media Services Act and the Publications Act, broadcasters, publishers and audiovisual services providers are required to disclose their ownership structures. It was not mandatory for them to publish the amount of state advertising received, whether from the Slovak Republic or from any other third-state agency. This formally changed with the adoption of the 2025 EMFA Implementation Act, which introduced a disclosure obligation, with the first reports scheduled for publication in 2026.

With regard to the assessment of media ownership, including mergers and acquisitions, it appears that the Slovak authorities focus solely on economic criteria, with little

⁶² <https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/media-capture-in-slovakia-final.pdf>

consideration given to media pluralism. The assessment process is often lengthy, with the merger already complete by the time the relevant authority issues a ruling. However, no authority has yet taken the step of banning or reversing any of the mergers.

Transparency: legal requirements

Media ownership

In line with the Media Services Act, broadcasters, on-demand audiovisual service providers, video-sharing platforms, and individuals or entities that provide financial support for content services, are obliged to make information readily available pertaining to their legal name and contact details. According to the Publications Act⁶³ publishers of periodicals are also obliged to comply with the same requirements.

According to legislation, the names of individuals or entities with a direct or indirect ownership interest in printed publications must be reported to the Ministry of Culture.⁶⁴ Subsequently, the information is published on the relevant ministerial webpage. It is a legal requirement for all owners with a holding of over 20% to report this information.⁶⁵ The same requirement applies to broadcasters, who must report any change of ownership affecting more than 10% of shares to the RpMS.⁶⁶

However, the register of media outlets, which should contain all of this information, is currently not functional.

All relations between the state and the media are recorded in the state registry of partners of the public sector.⁶⁷ The state does not own media in Slovakia although it has a significant role in the STVR. In the event that a state entity owns a stake exceeding 20% in a media outlet, it is obliged to report this fact in the registry of the Ministry of Culture.

It is a legal obligation for all audiovisual media services providers with economic activity to register with the Registry of the partners of the public sector. Only community media with revenue generated from advertising below €10,000 per year⁶⁸ (with higher thresholds for television) are exempted, and so not required to register.

State funding

The legislation in Slovakia did not require media companies to publicly disclose the total annual amount of state advertising allocated to them or the amount of financing received from third-country public authorities or entities. The 2025 EMFA Implementation Act has now introduced this obligation, requiring media companies to publish information on state

⁶³ Law 265/2022 on publishers of publications and on the register in the field of media and audiovisual and on amendments and additions to certain laws, hereafter Publications Act, available (in Slovak) at <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2022/265/>.

⁶⁴ Publications Act, para 21.

⁶⁵ Publications Act, para 21.

⁶⁶ Media Services Act, para 52.

⁶⁷ See <https://rpvs.gov.sk>.

⁶⁸ Publications Act, para 13.

advertising annually, starting in 2026.

However, the governing coalition has previously referred to media outlets as “foreign agents” and has indicated that it may introduce legislation to this effect⁷⁰ in the event that any of these outlets receive funding from abroad.⁷¹ It is notable that the focus of this debate has not been on sources of funding from countries with which Slovakia has a contentious relationship, such as Russia, but rather on funding from Western democracies. Media outlets, NGOs, and the former president Zuzana Čaputová have on occasion been labelled as “American agents” by Prime Minister Fico and his allies.⁷²

National media ownership databases

The Media Services Council, the regulatory authority for the media industry, monitors media outlets as part of the licensing process. However, the Council is not required to develop a national media ownership database. The register of media is an internal database, and while the law requires the creation of a register, there is no public registry in place apart from the annual report of the Media Services Council. The annual report issued by the regulator provides only a cursory analysis, quantifying the number of broadcasters on the market.⁷³ The Council does not undertake a detailed examination of ownership structures and relations between different media owners.

Assessment of media market concentrations

According to the provisions set forth in the Media Services Act, a single beneficial owner is prohibited from exercising control over an aggregate share of more than 60% of the advertising market in Slovakia.⁷⁴ The Antimonopoly Office of Slovakia and the Media Services Council are entitled to request this kind of information as part of the administrative process.

The regulator has yet to issue a regulation that specifies the procedure for the provision of this information. In their annual report, the Media Services Council claims that a regulation was in preparation⁷⁵, but the date of adoption is not yet known.

⁷⁰ “R. Fico chce niektoré mimovládky označovať ako zahraničných agentov. Odvoláva sa na americký zákon” (R. Fico wants to label some non-governmental organizations as foreign agents. It refers to US law), RTVS, 18 October 2023, <https://spravy.rtvs.sk/2023/10/r-fico-chce-niektore-mimovladky-oznacovat-ako-zahranicnych-agentov-odvolava-sa-na-americky-zakon>

⁷¹ The legislation was already approved in the first of three stages in Parliament. However, following deliberations with the European Commission, the legislative process did not continue as scheduled, with the reasons for this being unclear at this stage. Meanwhile, reports indicate that the European Commission may withhold European funds from Slovakia. It is conceivable that the Slovak government was keen to avoid providing the EC with further justification for such a decision.

⁷² Michal Hudec, “Slovak President Čaputová to sue former PM Fico”, Euractiv.sk, 12 May 2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/slovak-president-caputova-to-sue-former-pm-fico/>.

⁷³ See RpMS 2023 Annual Report, cit., p. 41.

⁷⁴ Media Services Act, para 100.

⁷⁵ See RpMS 2023 Annual Report, cit., p. 42.

Notification of media market concentrations

It is a legal requirement for audiovisual media services providers to provide information in the event of any changes that may result in a dominant position in the market. Media providers are required to report any proposed mergers, which must be approved by the Antimonopoly Office of Slovakia (PMÚ). Furthermore, the Media Services Council must be informed in the event that the changes affect existing broadcasting licensing conditions. These requirements are applied in a non-discriminatory and proportionate manner. Failure to report such changes will result in financial penalties for the media companies concerned.

The Antimonopoly Office of Slovakia does not have a defined framework for issuing decisions in media merger cases. Consequently, the antitrust watchdog may require a significant amount of time, particularly in the case of large mergers, to issue a decision, which can often span years. Moreover, as previously noted in this report, the PMÚ has itself acknowledged a lack of competence in certain cases.

Impact of media market concentration on media pluralism

There are currently no legal provisions that require the assessment of media market concentration to take into account the impact of concentration on media pluralism. The Antimonopoly Office of Slovakia is responsible for assessing economic criteria related to market dominance. The Media Services Council (RpMS) is tasked with evaluating the media market⁷⁶, including the plurality of information and the advertising market, but this provision of law is very general, and in practice, we do not see any detailed analysis.

Over the past few years, the antitrust regulator in Slovakia has endorsed several major deals that have arguably influenced both media pluralism and editorial independence. In all these cases, as required by law, the Antimonopoly Office of Slovakia limited its assessment to the economic criteria, without considering the broader context of the owners, who were often influential oligarchs.

One of the most significant mergers in recent years was the acquisition of the most popular daily newspaper, Nový Čas, by News and Media Holding, a company under the control of the oligarch-owned financial group Penta. As noted earlier, Penta may have circumvented the economic threshold for regulatory scrutiny, thereby preventing the PMÚ from intervening in the transaction.

Penta is the largest Slovak publisher of printed press, with a significant presence in the print media market, including the most popular weekly magazine Plus7Dní, the only Slovak economic weekly Trend, and many popular monthlies. Additionally, Penta publishes the only remaining Slovak tabloid daily, Plus1Deň.⁷⁷ This effectively gives Penta a monopoly over the tabloid press market following the merger.

⁷⁶ Media Services Act, para 110, section j.

⁷⁷ Filip Struhárik, "Vydavateľstvo Penty kupuje denník Nový Čas a web čas.sk" (Penta publishing house buys Nový Čas daily and čas.sk website), DennikN, 10 October 2023, <https://e.dennikn.sk/3617959/vydavatelstvo-penty-kupuje-dennik-novy-cas/>.

To date, no M&A case in the media market has been prohibited by antitrust or media regulators. The Supreme Administrative Court of Slovakia has the authority to oversee M&A proceedings. However, the court is relatively new and there are no documented instances of it overturning decisions based on such supervision.

The press and websites have historically been subject to more flexible merger regulations than broadcasters, given that they are not required to obtain broadcast licences.

Impact of media market concentration on editorial independence

There are currently no legal provisions that require the assessment of media market concentration by the PMÚ to take into account the impact of concentration on editorial independence.

Over the past few years, the antitrust regulator in Slovakia has endorsed several major deals that have arguably influenced both media pluralism and editorial independence (*see more details above under Impact of media market concentration on media pluralism*).

RECOMMENDATIONS: WHAT IS NEEDED TO 28 CAPTURE-PROOF THE SLOVAK MEDIA

The recommendations are structured as follows:

- a) *Recommendations aimed at aligning national legislation with the EMFA's general provisions; and*
- b) *Recommendations aimed at enhancing the media environment regardless of EMFA.*

Each category of a review contains a brief overview of how the recommendations from the last year's report were followed or not. To sum it up, most of them were not implemented and therefore stay as recommended steps for the future.

Independence of media regulators

Brief overview of EMFA provisions

The 2018 amendment of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) already set out the requirements for independent media regulators. These include functional independence from governments, impartiality and transparency, operation without instructions, clearly defined competencies and powers, an effective appeal mechanism, a proper mechanism to appoint and dismiss the head and the body of the authority, and also adequate financial and human resources and enforcement powers. In light of the above, EMFA essentially reiterates the stipulations set forth in Article 30 of the AVMSD, with the notable addition of provisions pertaining to the requisite resources, specifically technical resources, and the authority to request information and data. Consequently, prior to the implementation of EMFA, Member States are obliged to adhere to the majority of the requirements pertaining to independent media regulators as outlined in Article 30 of the AVMSD.

Aligning with EMFA's general provisions: what is needed?

The recommendations were first published in November 2024. Since then, the recommendations have not been implemented. As a result, they remain relevant as of October 2025.

- The selection process of the RpMS members should be conducted in a transparent and impartial manner that prevents nominations made on the basis of their political affiliation. The incorporation of nominees from all political parties would also help ensure a plurality of voices on the board and reduce the likelihood that one political group dominates.
- Staggered terms for the RpMS members should be introduced to ensure that the election of the majority members would not occur within the same election cycle, which lasts four years..
- Other centres of political power such as the President of Slovakia (who is elected by a separate direct election for a longer term of five years) should be included in the selection process for RpMS members to ensure greater plurality of RpMS membership.

Further enhancing the media environment: what is needed?

- The regulations on conflicts of interest should be reinforced, thereby guaranteeing the genuine independence of RpMS members from political or other undue influence. Legislation could, for example, extend the ban on political affiliations to include past associations, preventing former politicians or their aides from joining the RpMS after they quit politics.

Independence of public service media

Brief overview of EMFA provisions

Article 5 of EMFA requires that governments guarantee the independent functioning of public media, including ensuring their editorial and functional independence, that procedures for appointing the management guarantee the independence of public media, that those appointed are done so on the basis of transparent, open, effective and non-discriminatory procedures and criteria, that funding is transparent, adequate, sustainable and predictable and can guarantee the editorial independence of the public media, and that an independent body is designated to monitor the application of these principles.

Aligning with EMFA's general provisions: what is needed?

The recommendations were first published in November 2024. Since then, the recommendations have not been implemented. As a result, they remain relevant as of September 2025.

- The influence of the Ministry of Culture over the STVR Council should be removed or reduced by creating a mechanism for apolitical appointment of the STVR governance body members.
- It is recommended that the influence of Parliament over the STVR Council be removed or reduced by including other democratically elected actors in the formation of the STVR Council, such as the President of Slovakia, municipalities and regions, as well as organisations representing journalists, unions of STVR employees, or academic organisations involved in the training of future journalists. The composition of the STVR Council should be diversified and depoliticised, while maintaining a mechanism of its democratic accountability.
- It is recommended that the rules regarding conflicts of interest be reformed. Specifically, individuals with political connections or a political past should be prohibited from serving on the STVR Council. Additionally, a rule should be reinstated that an employee of the government cannot serve on the STVR Council.

Further enhancing the media environment: what is needed?

- A funding mechanism consisting of direct payments from the public to the STVR budget should be reintroduced to create an environment where the STVR is not financially dependent on political decisions.

Misuse of state funds to influence media output

Brief overview of EMFA provisions

Article 25 of the EMFA states that, while public procurement rules remain unchanged, state advertising must be awarded in accordance with transparent, objective, proportionate and non-discriminatory criteria.

Aligning with EMFA's general provisions: what is needed?

The recommendations were first published in November 2024. Since then, the recommendations have not been implemented. As a result, they remain relevant as of September 2025.

- Legal provisions should be introduced to require any public entity to distribute advertising funds in accordance with transparent, proportional, objective and non-discriminatory rules. For instance, the objective measurement of cost per viewer could be used as a criterion for media outlets to compete for public advertising.
- An independent oversight mechanism, free from any government or governmental appointee influence, should be designated, to monitor and ensure the transparent application of the rules on state spending in the media. Its decisions should be subject to judicial review to ensure they are fair.

Further enhancing the media environment: what is needed?

- The appropriate regulatory authority should also publish all contracts obtained through public tender by companies in the same business grouping as the media.

Media pluralism and political/state influence over news media

Brief overview of EMFA provisions

Article 6 of the EMFA requires news media organisations to provide information about their owners, including potential conflicts of interest, and to implement measures to ensure editorial independence. Article 22 of the EMFA requires governments to implement a system for the assessment of concentrations that could have a significant impact on media pluralism and editorial independence.

Aligning with EMFA's general provisions: what is needed?

The recommendations were first published in November 2024. Since then, the following recommendation was followed:

- The RpMS should have the resources and expertise to develop and apply a consistent methodology to assess media pluralism and editorial independence in the media market.

The following recommendation remains relevant as of September 2025:

- The Antimonopoly Authority of Slovakia should be required to implement a distinct process for evaluating media mergers, with more rigorous standards for news media that would consider the plurality of information, in addition to the general economic criteria for mergers and acquisitions. This should be done by asking RpMS to provide an assessment of any merger on media pluralism and editorial independence.

Further enhancing the media environment: what is needed?

The recommendations were first published in November 2024. Since then, the following recommendation was followed:

- The RpMS should be required to publish annual reports and analysis of media pluralism, including media ownership structures to help assess and preclude media mergers that would jeopardise the plurality of information on individual markets, most notably the TV market.

The following recommendation remains relevant as of September 2025:

- Conflict of interest regulations should be introduced to prohibit oligarchs with a clear financial interest in regulated industries from owning media outlets that disseminate political content. This will result in the dissolution of the alliances between the politicians in power and the oligarchic media.

MEDIA CAPTURE MONITORING REPORT: SLOVAKIA

NOVEMBER 2025

This report by IPI is part of the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR), which tracks, monitors and responds to violations of press and media freedom in EU Member States and Candidate Countries. This project provides legal and practical support, public advocacy and information to protect journalists and media workers.

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