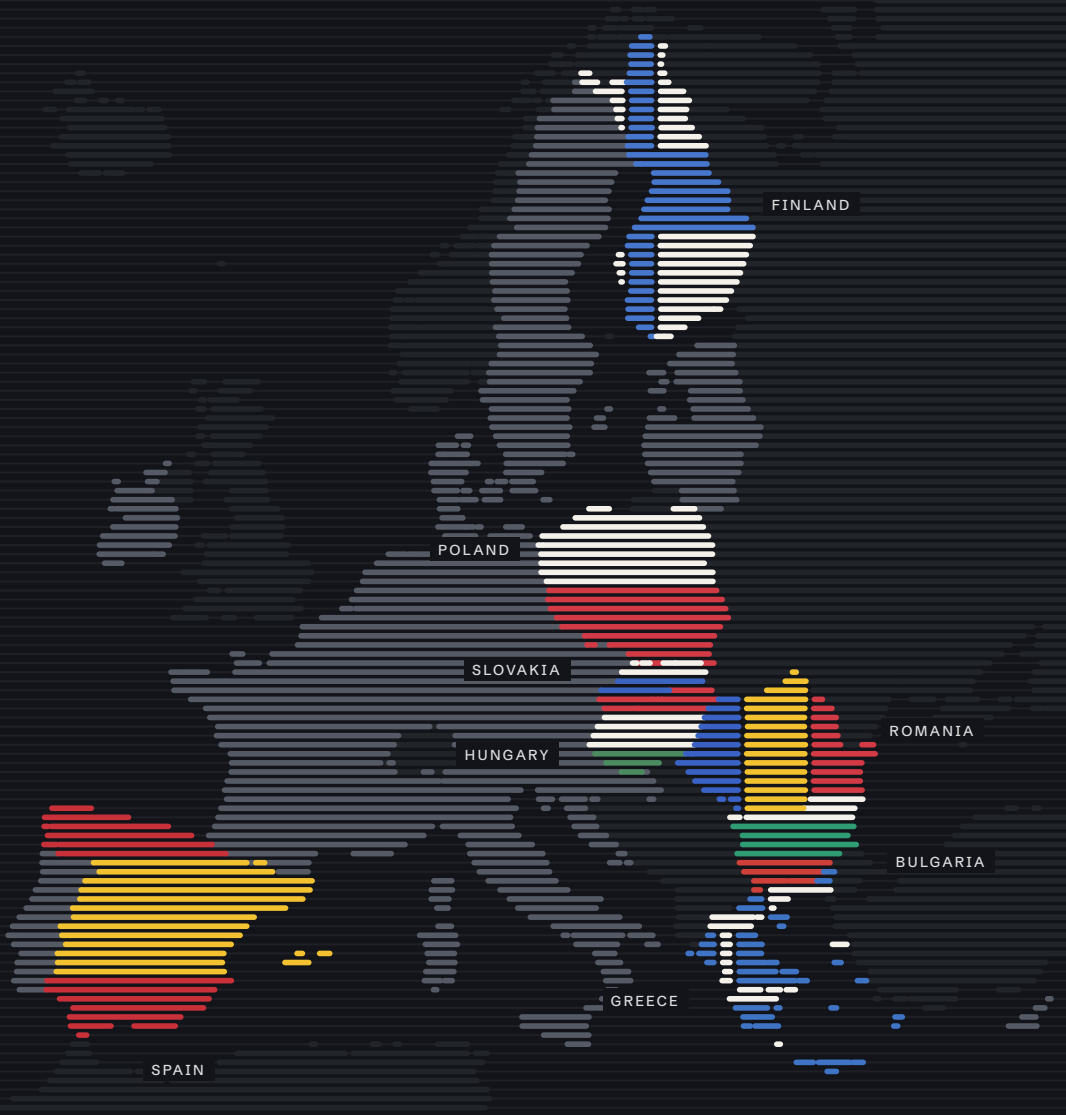
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MEDIA CAPTURE MONITORING REPORT · OVERVIEW 2026

Mind the Gap



Overview of Key Findings of the 2026 Media Capture Monitoring Reports Measuring EMFA Compliance

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MEDIA FREEDOM RAPID RESPONSE

ABOUT THIS REPORT

An annual measure of media capture in the EU, and of how far Member States meet the standards the European Media Freedom Act sets against it.

The **Media Capture Monitoring Report** (MCMR) is produced by the International Press Institute (IPI) and the Media and Journalism Research Center (MJRC). Each country report assesses the four safeguards in the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) that bear most directly on media capture: the independence of public service media, the independence of media regulators, protection against the misuse of state funds to influence the media, and transparency of media ownership and safeguards for media pluralism.

The 2026 edition follows the EMFA's first year of full application, from 8 August 2025. Written by national experts and edited by MJRC and IPI, the reports are deliberately short: they track what has changed since the 2025 baseline assessment and identify the problems that remain.

This overview compares the findings of the 2026 reports on the eight countries covered: Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Spain.

The project is 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. It is co-funded by the European Commission.

The country reports cover developments up to September or October 2026.

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Media Capture Monitoring Report: 2025 Overview

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MEDIA FREEDOM RAPID RESPONSE

The 2026 Media Capture Monitoring Reports reveal a highly uneven picture across the eight countries covered by this overview. More than a year after the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) became fully applicable, Finland is the only country in the sample where the national framework needed to apply the EMFA's core provisions is fully in place and functioning. Following the change in government, Hungary adopted substantial amendments in June 2026 addressing public service media governance and regulatory independence, but their practical effectiveness remains untested and important gaps remain on state funding and media pluralism. Greece enacted two laws strengthening the transparency of both media ownership and state advertising, but implementation is incomplete while concerns persist regarding the independence of the media regulator and public service media. In Poland, Spain and Bulgaria, reform has advanced mainly on paper: governments have prepared draft legislation or announced reforms, but the relevant measures have not yet entered into force. Romania made no progress towards national implementation. Finally, Slovakia presents a different and more troubling pattern: although national rules and institutions exist, the year was marked by a deterioration in the practical independence of both public service media and the regulator, making the country the EU Member State in the sample that has been experiencing the most rapidly deteriorating media capture climate.

This uneven implementation means that the effectiveness of the EMFA itself still cannot be assessed consistently across the sample states. In most countries, the principal findings concern the absence, delay or incompleteness of national measures rather than the performance of a fully operational EMFA framework. Moreover, some of the most significant changes in 2026 were the result of domestic political developments rather than of the Regulation. This is particularly evident in Hungary, where a landslide election result and change of government triggered substantial media law reform and a reorganisation of public media governance.

Political influence remains a common structural concern across almost all countries in the sample. It appears through different mechanisms: politicised appointments to regulators and public service media bodies, public broadcasters' dependence on annual public funding, discretionary state advertising practices, state or politically connected media ownership, and weak safeguards against concentration. The reports therefore point to a persistent gap between formal legal safeguards and effective independence. Slovakia shows this most starkly: formal institutions can coexist with deepening political capture. Finland shows that putting the EMFA rules into practice can improve transparency, but it does not necessarily address existing problems such as media ownership concentration or insufficient resources for regulatory authorities.

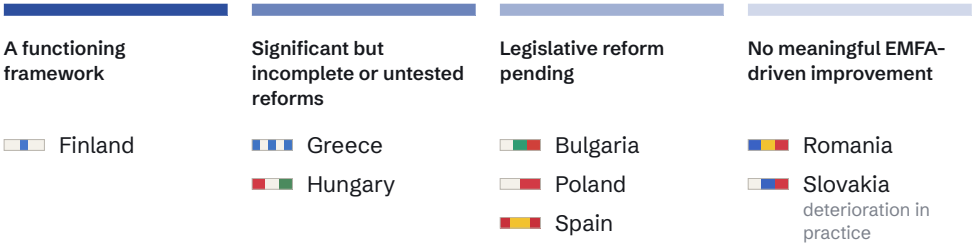
Across the remaining countries, the central question for the next monitoring period will be whether legislative commitments become actual safeguards, capable of functioning independently of changes in political power.

01 What changed since the last report?

The most important comparative development since the 2025 monitoring period is the growing divergence between countries that have put the EMFA framework into practice and those where reform remains pending. The eight countries can broadly be divided into four groups distinguished by how far EMFA reforms have progressed: Finland, with a functioning framework; Hungary and Greece, with significant but incomplete or untested reforms; Poland, Spain and Bulgaria, where legislative reform is pending; and Romania and Slovakia, where the monitoring period brought no meaningful EMFA-driven improvement, with Slovakia showing deterioration in practice.

FIGURE 1

Four groups, by how far EMFA reforms have progressed



Although some countries, such as Hungary and Greece, made certain EMFA-related reforms during this time, the picture for media capture in these countries remains serious. Progress on some EMFA reforms has not yet translated into success in weakening media capture dynamics, especially ownership of media by politically connected business interests.

TABLE 1

Are the national legal and institutional measures in place to make the relevant EMFA requirements operational?

COUNTRY	REGULATORY AUTHORITY	PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA	STATE FUNDING / ADVERTISING	MEDIA PLURALISM / OWNERSHIP
Finland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Greece	Partially	Partially	Partially	Partially
Hungary	Partially	Partially	No	No
Bulgaria	No	No	No	No
Poland	No	No	No	No
Spain	No	No	No	No
Romania	No	No	No	No
Slovakia	No	No	No	No

Countries are listed by the four groups in Figure 1, and alphabetically within each group.

FINLAND

2026 report

Finland remains the clearest example of implementation moving from legislation to practice. The Act on the Supervision of Media Markets and amendments to the Act on Yleisradio entered into force in August 2025, the same month in which the EMFA became fully applicable. During 2026, the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency (Liikenne- ja viestintävirasto, Traficom) began exercising its new responsibilities: it published a media ownership database, took on annual reporting on state advertising and completed the first EMFA-related assessment of media concentration, concerning Otava's acquisition of effective control over Alma Media. These steps have led to a clear improvement in transparency. At the same time, Finland chose a minimalist model of implementation. Traficom received no additional funding for its new tasks and cannot prohibit a media merger; a negative assessment has only a guiding effect. The first assessment showed what that power looks like in practice: Traficom agreed with the key arguments in Otava's own submission, treated an incremental increase in control as no change because Otava already held a stake, and issued a positive assessment while noting that media ownership concentration itself poses risks to pluralism. Traficom also takes part in the European Board for Media Services only as its resources allow, largely in a monitoring role and almost entirely remotely. The principal structural concern in Finland therefore remains unchanged: concentration in a small media market continues to pose a problem.

HUNGARY

2026 report

Hungary saw the most substantial change, but this change was driven primarily by domestic political developments rather than dedicated EMFA-focused reforms. Following the 2026 election, amendments adopted in June reorganised the institutional and governance structures of public service media and the Media Council. The government dismantled the previous centralised public media system, abolishing the Public Service Foundation, creating the new Hungarian Radio and Television (Magyar Rádió és Televízió, MRTV), overseen by a new Independent Public Media Board, and firing senior management who oversaw years of state propaganda. It also re-established an institutionally independent Hungarian News Agency (Magyar Távirati Iroda, MTI), and replaced the nine-year Media Council mandates with four-year terms for party-nominated members under a new, more representative appointment model. State advertising, previously funnelled to pro-government media allies, was suspended, exposing the extent of their financial dependence, while a new Press Fund was created to help support local, community and investigative media and bolster media pluralism. While these immediate changes have ended political propaganda and significantly improved professional standards in public media, the new institutional arrangements remain in a transitional phase and have yet to show their full results. Professional organisations criticised the nomination procedure for the new Independent Public Media Board. Separately, the appointments of a news editor and an anchor at the public broadcaster were withdrawn after the Prime Minister commented on them. The reforms also left key issues around ownership transparency and concentration largely untouched, though the Media Council has begun work on reforms. The two new bodies were constituted with seats empty after Parliament rejected opposition nominees due to their political connections, including the Media Council candidates of Fidesz and its ally, the Christian Democrats. A Christian Democrat nominee has since been elected to the Media Council, which has now filled six of its seven seats; the Independent Public Media

Board has filled six of nine. The European Commission's first infringement action under the EMFA, opened against Hungary in December 2025, also remains in place; Hungary is still the only Member State the Commission has pursued under the Regulation. However, Hungary has withdrawn its challenge against the EMFA before the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

POLAND

2026 report

Poland moved slightly further towards reform compared to 2025, but only at the level of proposals. The UC130 draft media law would modify the composition and appointment of the regulator, the National Broadcasting Council (Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji, KRRiT), reform public service media governance, dissolve the National Media Council and return powers to KRRiT. It would also replace the public media licence fee model with direct state budget financing. By October 2026, however, the draft bill had undergone a wide public consultation but had still not reached the Sejm, held up by a dispute between the finance and culture ministries over the cost of public media funding. Public broadcasters remain in liquidation, a status introduced in December 2023, under liquidators appointed by the Minister of Culture. Safeguards concerning state advertising and ownership transparency remain inadequate, while Polska Press, one of the country's largest regional newspaper groups, remains controlled by state-owned Orlen, a change driven by the previous government. KRRiT, where appointees of the previous ruling camp still hold a majority despite the removal of the controversial chairperson, opposes parts of the reform, arguing that some changes could weaken rather than strengthen its independence, and treats the liquidation as a "legal fiction" it has referred to prosecutors. Replacing the licence fee with budget financing would also create a new need for safeguards against annual political bargaining. The only media reform actually adopted in the period fell outside the four areas analysed in this research project: the President signed a law to curb strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) in June 2026. While there are hints the government's draft bill could be broken into different parts and passed in a phased approach, no tangible progress has been made, meaning Poland remains in a state of press freedom and media capture limbo.

SPAIN

2026 report

Spain similarly only made progress in the development of EMFA-related draft bills, rather than actual legislative reform. However, the financing law for the public broadcaster was amended in June 2026. Two major bills would, if passed, close most of the gaps identified in the previous report. Draft Law 121/000068 would extend ownership transparency beyond audiovisual media, establish a state register of media service providers and create a pluralism-focused procedure for assessing media concentration. A separate Draft Law on Public Sector Advertising, replacing Law 29/2005, would cap the share of an outlet's revenue that can come from public advertising and require reporting on the beneficial owners of recipients. Neither had been adopted by the report's cut-off date. Consequently, the National Commission for Markets and Competition (Comisión Nacional de los Mercados y la Competencia, CNMC) still lacks the enabling national framework for its additional EMFA functions, the governance of the Spanish Radio and Television Corporation (Corporación de Radio y Televisión Española, RTVE) remains unchanged, and institutional advertising continues to be allocated under Law 29/2005. Draft Law 121/000068 would also divide enforcement between levels of government, with the CNMC assessing concentration in cases of national

or multi-regional scope and regional authorities assessing those confined to their own territories, an arrangement without parallel elsewhere in the sample. A new framework mandate for RTVE, whose previous one expired in 2017, is being drafted by a parliamentary committee controlled by the opposition.

BULGARIA

2026 report

In Bulgaria, the main change is increased political commitment rather than actual legal reform. The new government included media reform and EMFA alignment in its programme, and a Ministry of Culture working group prepared a consolidated bill. The government also acknowledged shortcomings concerning the regulator, public service media, state advertising, ownership transparency and media concentration. No relevant amendments had been adopted, however. Outside the four areas, Parliament adopted an anti-SLAPP law in September 2026, two months after the Commission opened an infringement procedure over the EU anti-SLAPP directive. A new director was appointed at the Bulgarian National Television (Balgarska natsionalna televiziya, BNT) after years of disputed leadership, but the appointment framework and funding model remain unchanged, while developments at BNT, the Bulgarian National Radio (Balgarsko natsionalno radio, BNR) and the private broadcaster bTV continue to raise concerns about political pressure impacting editorial independence.

GREECE

2026 report

Greece made clear legislative progress, although EMFA reforms were only partial, their practical effects remain limited, and media capture remains a serious challenge. Law 5253/2025 reformed the governance of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (Elliniki Radiofonia Tileorasi, ERT) and introduced disclosure duties for beneficial ownership and state advertising. Law 5308/2026 established regional television licensing and a national media ownership database, and provided for additional posts at the National Council for Radio and Television (Ethniko Symvoulio Radiotileorasis, NCRTV). However, the database was not yet publicly available, the first NCRTV state advertising report had not been published, and new posts remained largely unfilled. ERT leadership is shortlisted through an independent civil service selection process, but the final appointment decision remains with a minister, posing serious questions over EMFA alignment. The laws improve advertising transparency without introducing objective allocation criteria, a serious oversight, while media mergers continue to be assessed solely under competition law. The ownership database is also run by the government's General Secretariat for Communication and Information rather than by NCRTV. Outside the four areas, a July 2026 anti-SLAPP law was a separate positive development for press freedom. While Greece made legislative progress in 2026, the effectiveness of the reforms is yet to be seen, and multiple media capture challenges remain.

ROMANIA

2026 report

Romania made no progress towards implementing the EMFA. Consultations initiated in 2025 were not followed up by legislation, and political instability further reduced the prospect of reform. The National Audiovisual Council (Consiliul Național al Audiovizualului, CNA) became more assertive in enforcement, though its new rules for video-sharing channels have been criticised as overreach, and it still operates without an elected president and remains understaffed. Public service media continue to depend on parliamentary

appointment structures and annual state-budget funding. The Constitutional Court annulled the board appointments at the Romanian Television Company (Societatea Română de Televiziune, TVR) and at the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Company (Societatea Română de Radiodifuziune, SRR) in April 2026. In September, Parliament's leadership installed interim heads at both broadcasters, including a nominee of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor, AUR) at the public television. Some partial transparency improvements resulted from EU political advertising rules or voluntary action by media organisations, rather than from national EMFA implementation. Media consolidation also continued.

SLOVAKIA

2026 report

Slovakia stands apart as the sole country with a deterioration in the overall climate for media capture. The governance structure of Slovak Television and Radio (Slovenská televízia a rozhlas, STVR) remained politically dependent, and monitoring documented dismissals of critical journalists, discontinued programmes and pro-government bias. The Council for Media Services was reshaped through coalition appointments and showed limited willingness to act on complaints concerning STVR. The Constitutional Court referred questions on the EMFA's requirement of functional independence for public service media to the CJEU. Rather than demonstrating the effectiveness of existing safeguards, the Slovak case illustrates how formal institutions can coexist with deepening political capture.

TABLE 2

From law to practice: implementation and change since 2025

COUNTRY	LEGISLATIVE PROGRESS	IMPLEMENTATION IN PRACTICE	DIRECTION SINCE 2025	MAIN REMAINING GAP
Finland	Completed	Operational	Improved	Resources / concentration
Greece	Partly completed	Partial / untested	Improved	Independence / allocation
Hungary	Partly completed	Partial / untested	Improved	Implementation in practice / pluralism
Bulgaria	Pending	Not operational	Progress on paper	Adoption
Poland	Pending	Not operational	Progress on paper	Political deadlock
Spain	Pending	Mostly not operational	Progress on paper	Enabling framework
Romania	No reform	Not operational	Unchanged	Political inaction
Slovakia	No reform	Deteriorating practice	Worsened	Institutional capture

Countries are listed by the four groups in Figure 1, and alphabetically within each group.

02 Outstanding structural problems

MEDIA REGULATORS

AVMSD ART. 30

Four recurring problems cut across the eight reports. First, regulatory independence remains fragile. Finland is the principal exception, although Traficom faces resource constraints. In Poland, the composition and independence of KRRiT remain politically contested even as a draft reform would give it additional regulatory responsibilities. Bulgaria's Council for Electronic Media (Savet za elektronni medii, CEM) continues to face concerns over appointments, resources and powers; Romania's CNA still has no elected president and remains understaffed; Greece's NCRTV has additional duties and posts, but staffing and operational independence are still unresolved; Spain's CNMC still awaits the national framework needed to exercise additional functions and has limited autonomy over its budget and staff. In Hungary, the redesigned appointment system has yet to demonstrate its independence in practice, though the appointments themselves have been welcomed by media freedom groups. In Slovakia, the regulator itself has become part of the problem as a captured institution. In some of these countries, EMFA rules aimed at strengthening regulatory independence face challenges due to a decades-long culture of politicised appointment practices. The availability of resources is another thread running through these cases: Traficom took on its new duties without additional funding, the CNMC has twice told the government that it lacks the staff, Greece's new NCRTV posts are largely unfilled, and Romania's CNA filled 113 of 151 approved posts while a 126 per cent budget increase was driven by an EU-funded digitalisation project. Romania also showed a different risk: its regulator was criticised for overreach in regulating online content.

PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

EMFA ART. 5

Second, public service media remain particularly exposed to political influence and pressure. While Finland's public broadcaster, Yle, is structurally independent, funding challenges continue to impact it. Elsewhere, governance and financing arrangements frequently leave public broadcasters dependent on parliamentary or government decisions. Poland's broadcasters remain in liquidation; Romania's public broadcasters are run by interim heads after the Constitutional Court annulled the board appointments; Bulgaria has not changed the rules for appointing public media heads; and Spain has not reformed RTVE governance. Greece introduced competitive selection for ERT leadership, but ministers retain decisive appointment powers, leaving space for government interference. Hungary strengthened formal safeguards, with positive initial changes, but controversies over the first appointments showed that political influence remains possible. A long and complex process of reform after more than a decade of political capture now lies ahead. Slovakia presents the most serious case, with a merged public media system, government-linked appointments accompanied by dismissals, programme interventions and documented bias. Funding models are also in motion. Poland would replace the licence fee with direct budget financing, which the Polish report identifies as a potential new risk; in a welcome step, Hungary moved to three-year budgets in place of annual appropriations; and Spain wrote off €940 million of RTVE debt to the Treasury.

MISUSE OF STATE FUNDS

EMFA ART. 25

Third, state funding and state advertising practices without clear allocation criteria and safeguards continue to create capture risks. Transparent, objective and non-discriminatory allocation rules remain absent or incomplete in Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Spain and Slovakia. Hungary has suspended all state advertising to media under the new government, leading to the implosion of much of the previous propaganda system, which was reliant on this informal state aid. New rules for state advertising transparency are due to be developed, but it is unclear how and when state advertising will return. The new Press Fund being developed by the Media Council will need transparent allocation criteria and independent administration. Greece introduced advertising disclosure and reporting duties, but has not established objective allocation criteria or published its first NCRTV report. Finland has established a reporting framework, although its first annual report is not due until 2027 and state advertising is not considered a systemic risk there. The new instruments themselves reveal a pattern: several of them are placed under bodies whose own independence is unresolved. Hungary's Press Fund is administered by the Media Council, Greece's ownership database by a government secretariat, and Poland's proposed database would sit with a regulator that opposes its own reform. In Spain, the CNMC warned that the cap in the advertising bill could leave small regional outlets wholly dependent on public money. Romania shows a different gap: state subsidies to political parties, cut by 20 per cent but still able to pay for favourable coverage, fall outside EMFA Article 25, which binds public authorities rather than parties.

OWNERSHIP TRANSPARENCY AND PLURALISM

EMFA ART. 6 & 22

Finally, ownership transparency and concentration remain the least resolved structural issues. Finland has improved ownership transparency and introduced pluralism assessment, but the regulator cannot block mergers and acquisitions that lead to high levels of concentration. Greece passed legislation establishing an ownership database, which is not yet operational, but introduced no media pluralism test for mergers. Spain's proposed register and pluralism test remain pending. Poland continues to face opaque financial and ownership relations and the state ownership of Polska Press remains unresolved. Bulgaria and Romania have made no effective progress on the relevant EMFA safeguards, while media concentration remains a serious concern. Hungary's 2026 reforms did not substantially address ownership transparency or the consolidation created through the Central European Press and Media Foundation (Közép-európai Sajtó és Média Alapítvány, KESMA). Slovakia combines high ownership concentration with political and oligarchic links in private media.

The common challenge is therefore no longer simply formal compliance, but the creation of institutions, funding systems and pluralism safeguards that remain effective regardless of which political actors control government or parliament.

03 Has the situation improved? Overall assessment

Taken together, the eight reports suggest that the first full year of the EMFA has produced a change of direction in media governance, but not yet an overall improvement in the resilience of media systems against capture. The clearest effect of the Regulation at this stage is agenda-setting. Across very different national contexts, the same issues, namely regulatory independence, public service media governance, allocation of public resources, ownership transparency and media concentration, are now framed against a common set of European standards. This has made gaps more visible and, in several countries, has generated legislative proposals. The EMFA could not, however, ensure that proposals are adopted or that formal safeguards operate independently in practice.

Courts and EU scrutiny

Hungary December 2025
The Commission opens its first EMFA infringement action

Slovakia February 2026
The Constitutional Court refers EMFA questions to the CJEU

Romania April 2026
The Constitutional Court annuls public media board appointments

The comparison also shows why formal compliance and effective protection against media capture need to be assessed separately. The existence of legislation says relatively little about whether appointments are insulated from party control, whether public service media can withstand political pressure, or whether public funding is distributed without favour. On the other hand, a lack of new national legislation does not mean that the EMFA is irrelevant: as a directly applicable EU regulation, it already provides standards against which national institutions and practices can be tested. The growing role of courts and EU-level scrutiny is therefore significant, particularly where domestic political institutions do not provide effective checks. During the monitoring period, that role was visible in three countries: the Commission opened its first infringement action under the EMFA, against Hungary; Slovakia's Constitutional Court referred questions on the EMFA's requirement of functional independence to the CJEU; and Romania's Constitutional Court annulled the public broadcasters' board appointments, although on grounds of party proportionality rather than independence.

A second general finding is that domestic political change remains a stronger short-term driver of media system reform than European regulation. While media reforms in Hungary had significant initial success in rupturing the politically captured media ecosystem, the EMFA was not a driving factor, even if the changes were aligned with EMFA rules. However, a second wave of media reforms in 2027 could exhibit direct EU alignment, providing a positive example of democratic media reform within the EMFA framework. Political turnover can open a window for reform, but it can also reveal the fragility of institutions whose independence depends on the preferences of the governing majority. The central question is therefore not whether one political camp replaces another, but whether reforms create arrangements capable of surviving future changes of government. This is especially important for appointment rules, funding mechanisms and regulatory powers, where formally neutral structures can still be used for political purposes.

Finally, the reports suggest that the EMFA's impact will become measurable only over a longer period. More than a year after the Regulation became fully applicable, a full assessment of its impact remains premature. While there have been a number of positive reforms, pressures on independent media and media capture developments in countries such as Slovakia highlight the serious challenges that remain. In 2026, implementation across the sample ranges from

functioning mechanisms to partially implemented reforms, pending bills, political commitments, institutional stagnation and even deterioration in practice. It is therefore too early to draw a general conclusion about the Regulation's effectiveness. The more meaningful benchmark for the next monitoring cycle will be whether implementation narrows the gap between law and practice: whether regulators exercise new powers independently, public service media governance becomes less politically contingent, public funding becomes verifiably objective, and ownership and concentration safeguards produce genuine pluralism. On that test, the 2026 picture is best described as an uneven transition rather than a general improvement in protection against media capture.

04 Next phase of EMFA and media capture assessment

From 2027

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EU MEMBER STATES

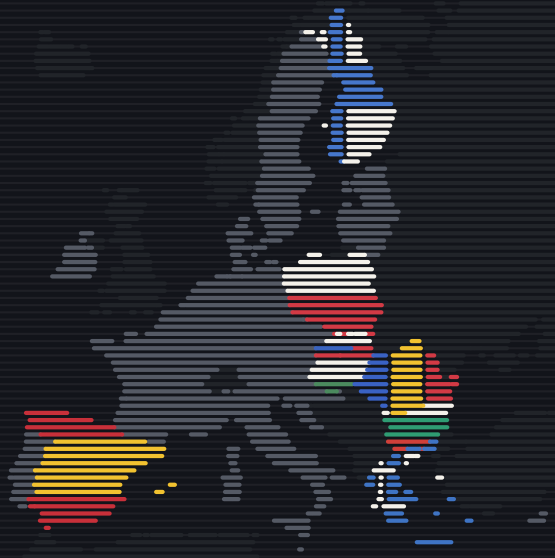
to be covered by the series, up from eight in 2026. The first reports of the new cycle are due in autumn 2027.

To ensure this assessment of the EMFA's impact on media freedom and media pluralism can be conducted across the entire EU bloc, the International Press Institute (IPI) and the Media and Journalism Research Center (MJRC) will be expanding[1] the current report series from eight countries to all 27 EU Member States from 2027. The research will examine developments through the lens of the EMFA and will also cover the influence of tech platforms and other EU instruments, such as the Digital Services Act (DSA). The country-level reports will identify key risks, emerging trends and reform priorities. Comparative regional analyses highlighting common patterns, national differences, and examples of effective safeguards will accompany the reports. The first cycle of these new reports will be published in autumn 2027.

1. International Press Institute (IPI). ipi.media/monitor-media-capture-eu-jan-kuciak-center-active-watch-mjrc/

MEDIA CAPTURE MONITORING REPORT 2026

An annual measure of how far EU Member States have fallen under media capture, and of how well they meet the standards set by the European Media Freedom Act to combat it.



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INTEGRITY NOTE

This report is independent. Its analysis and writing are the work of the named authors, drawing on the eight 2026 country reports, in which every factual claim is sourced in the notes, and it was reviewed by its editor. The funders had no role in the report's content or conclusions. Digital tools, including AI-assisted software, were used for design and layout only.

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