Rule of Law Report 2024, including media freedom and pluralism

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On 24 July 2024, the European Commission published its 2024 Rule of Law Report, which is the fifth annual report as part of the European Rule of Law Mechanism (see, for example, IRIS 2023-8/18). The purpose of the Rule of Law Report is to examine developments across all EU member states, both positive and negative, in four key areas for the rule of law: the justice system, the anti-corruption framework, media pluralism and freedom, and other institutional issues related to checks and balances. The report includes country chapters for all 27 member states and, for the first time, the 2024 report also includes country chapters on four enlargement countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia). Of particular interest is the 2024 report's findings in relation to the pillar of media pluralism and freedom.

In this regard, the report's chapter on media pluralism and media freedom first details issues around strengthening the independent functioning of media regulators. The report noted that there were "continued concerns" about the independence or impartiality of regulators in several member states, including "insufficient safeguards" against undue political influence over the nomination process or in the functioning of regulators, including in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. Second, on increasing the transparency of media ownership, the 2024 report stated that there had been "positive developments" in Greece, Ireland and Spain, each having established or extended online ownership registries. However, previously highlighted "challenges" regarding transparency of media ownership "persist" in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, France and the Netherlands. Third, in relation to the issue of safeguarding media from political pressure and undue influence, the report highlighted that in some member states (Austria, Bulgaria and Slovenia), "positive steps" had been taken; however, "no steps" had been taken to increase the transparency and fairness in the allocation of state advertising in Croatia, Hungary, Malta and Spain. Further, previously voiced concerns with regard to the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media have not yet been addressed in Hungary, Malta and Romania. Indeed, the report noted that in Slovakia, a law was adopted in 2024 which dissolved the public broadcaster and established a new one, "leading to concerns on the future independence of the broadcaster". Fourth, in relation to improving access to information, the report mentioned how "limited progress" had been seen in several member states where problems had

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previously been identified, such as Germany, Greece, Malta, Poland, Romania and Spain. Finally, on improving the safety and protection of journalists and addressing legal threats and abusive court proceedings against public participation (SLAPP), the report noted that journalists "continue to face physical and legal threats", with online smear campaigns and censorship both also compromising their safety. Specifically on the threat of SLAPPs, the report highlighted how Greece and Ireland had progressed with legislative work to introduce specific procedural safeguards and/or revise their defamation laws.

In terms of next steps, the Commission also published a list of concrete recommendations for each member state. The Commission stated that the recommendations aim to "further assist the Member States in their efforts to take forward ongoing reforms" and help them "identify where improvements are needed".

European Commission, 2024 Rule of Law Report: The rule of law situation in the European Union, COM(2024) 800 final, 24 July 2024

https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2024-rule-law-report-communication-and-country-chapters_en

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