

# **RULE of LAW**

## REPORT 2025

COUNTRY CHAPTER  
ABSTRACTS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS



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## ABSTRACT – BELGIUM

### Justice system

The level of perceived judicial independence in Belgium continues to be high. The Government maintains the intention to transfer budgetary management powers for the administration of the justice system from the executive to the judiciary. Following the adoption of directives prohibiting the recording of meetings between lawyer and clients, lawyers called for additional procedural safeguards to protect legal professional privilege. Some further steps have been taken to address the structural resource deficiencies in the justice system, such as the publication of all open positions for magistrates and court staff, although a long-term structural approach is required. The Government is addressing criticism by the Court of Audit on the management of the digitalisation of justice. Some further steps have been taken to improve the efficiency of justice, particularly to reduce the length of proceedings based on comprehensive statistical data.

### Anti-corruption framework

New investigative and prosecutorial structures also targeting corruption will be set up. Good cooperation between the Central Office for the Repression of Corruption and the prosecution service continues, although concerns exist on the handling of prominent high-level corruption cases. Some steps are under consideration to strengthen integrity procedures in the police. Shortcomings continue in the monitoring and enforcement of existing integrity policies, and in the verification and transparency of asset and interest declarations. The new Government has not yet taken a decision on whether to proceed with draft lobbying rules. The House of Representatives slightly updated its rules on gifts and benefits, while gaps in rules on “revolving doors” remain. Increased attention is paid to addressing high risks of corruption both at local level and linked to organised crime.

### Media freedom and pluralism

Despite challenges, media regulatory authorities across Belgium have taken steps in adapting their strategies while maintaining a strong legal foundation for their independence. Public service media in Belgium face various challenges across the three communities including governance structures and budgetary pressures. Recent legislative developments led to some improvements regarding access to public documents, while further procedural improvements are needed. The Government took steps to strengthen legal protections for journalists, such as decriminalising defamation and introducing harsher penalties for crimes committed against journalists.

### Institutional checks and balances

The Federal Human Rights Institute raised concerns regarding the budget of the intergovernmental equality body. Limited steps have been taken on ensuring compliance by public authorities with final rulings of national courts while supervision by the Council of Europe on structural issues identified by the European Court of Human Rights continues. Despite a high level of protection under the law, civic space remains narrowed, and stakeholders are raising concerns regarding new obstacles to the right to demonstrate.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Belgium has made:

- ▶ **Some further progress** on efforts to **address the structural resource deficiencies in the justice system**, taking into account European standards on resources for the justice system.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on efforts to **improve the efficiency of justice**, particularly to reduce the length of proceedings based on comprehensive statistical data.
- ▶ **Some progress** on **strengthening the integrity framework** by adopting rules on gifts and benefits for members of Parliament and limited progress on rules on revolving doors for government and their private offices.
- ▶ **No further progress** on **completing the legislative reform on lobbying**, establishing a framework including a transparency register and a legislative footprint, covering both members of Parliament and Government.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on efforts to **strengthen the framework for access to official documents**, in particular by improving request and appeal processes, taking into account European standards on access to official documents.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on measures to ensure **compliance by public authorities with final rulings** of national courts and the European Court of Human Rights.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the national Recovery and Resilience Plan, **it is recommended to Belgium to:**

- ▶ **Continue** ongoing efforts to **address the structural resource deficiencies in the justice system**, taking into account European standards on resources for the justice system.
- ▶ **Continue** ongoing efforts to **improve the efficiency of justice**, particularly to reduce the length of proceedings based on comprehensive statistical data.
- ▶ **Strengthen the integrity framework**, including by adopting rules on gifts and benefits for members of Parliament and rules on revolving doors for government and their private offices.
- ▶ **Complete the legislative reform on lobbying**, establishing a framework including a transparency register and a legislative footprint, covering both members of Parliament and Government.
- ▶ **Further continue** efforts to **strengthen the framework for access to official documents**, in particular by improving request and appeal processes, taking into account European standards on access to official documents.
- ▶ Take measures to **ensure compliance by public authorities with final rulings** of national courts and the European Court of Human Rights.



## ABSTRACT – BULGARIA

### Justice system

Bulgaria has engaged in reform efforts, in dialogue with the Commission, under the Rule of Law cycle and the Recovery and Resilience Plan, and there have been several legislative developments particularly in the past six months. The Constitutional Court of Bulgaria ruled that parts of the comprehensive constitutional amendments, essential for the organisation of the State, had been adopted by a body not competent to do so, and declared most of the reform unconstitutional. As a result, previous concerns that the reform had aimed to address have reemerged. The provisions dismissed include limits on the Prosecutor General's powers, although the mechanism for the effective accountability and criminal liability of the Prosecutor General and deputies was declared constitutional. The effectiveness of this mechanism is constrained by some procedural issues. As for the Supreme Judicial Council, the Constitutional Court dismissed the overall reform but considered that a restructuring would be possible. The long-term secondment of judges and the functioning of the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council remain a concern. A draft law to extend judicial review for prosecutorial decisions for cases of termination and suspension of investigations for victimless crimes was tabled. The level of perceived judicial independence in Bulgaria continues to be very low. The law on mandatory meeting for judicial mediation has been adopted. New digital tools have been introduced to improve access to justice. Initial data show that courts perform efficiently when dealing with civil and commercial proceedings.

### Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the National Anti-corruption Strategy remains limited. Some steps have been taken to implement the reform of the Commission for Counteracting Corruption and Illegal Assets Forfeiture. Cooperation between national authorities competent in the fight against corruption is overall good, but a robust track-record of high-level corruption cases is yet to be established, as convictions remain limited in numbers and data about prosecutions is inconclusive. Work continues to strengthen integrity in the police and judiciary, but important gaps remain in the rules on the integrity of persons with top executive functions. Rules on asset and interest disclosure for public officials are implemented, although enforcement is lacking. Legislation on lobbying transparency is under preparation and further amendments to the whistleblowers legislation has entered into force. Measures to mitigate the high risks of corruption in public procurement are still insufficient.

### Media freedom and pluralism

Concerns regarding the funding and politisation of the media regulator persist. The draft law aimed at strengthening the independence of public service media was not yet adopted, and the appointment of a new Director-General of the Bulgarian national television continues to be delayed. Despite the existence of several registers, the enforcement of media ownership disclosure obligations remains limited. Improvement has been achieved regarding the transparency in the allocation of state advertising. Indications of political and economic influence over the media remain. Access to public information is improving, although still hindered by previously existing obstacles. Journalists are facing increasing challenges in their activities.

### Institutional checks and balances

The Constitutional Court was called upon to review the election results in several polling stations. Some independent and regulatory authorities continue to operate with an expired mandate and the renewal procedures have been relaunched. The constitutional amendments limiting the powers of the President in the procedure of appointing an interim government is subject to another constitutionality check. The practical implementation of rules for law-making continues to face challenges, and concerns remain regarding the quality of the legislative process. Attempts to reintroduce legislation requiring the registration of organisations receiving foreign funding were again dismissed by Parliament.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Bulgaria has made:

- ▶ **No further progress** on taking steps to adapt the relevant legislative framework to **avoid long-term secondment of judges to fill in vacant positions**, taking into account European standards on secondment of judges.
- ▶ **No further progress** on advancing with the draft legislative amendments aiming at improving the **functioning of the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council** and avoiding the risk of political influence, in particular by involving judicial bodies in the selection of its members.
- ▶ **No progress**, following the ruling that the procedure used was unconstitutional, in taking forward the plans to adopt a mechanism for introducing **safeguards in the appointment procedure of the Parliament-elected members of the Supreme Prosecutorial Council**, ensuring their independence and taking into account European standards, particularly in view of the Council's role in the appointment and dismissal of the Prosecutor General.
- ▶ **No progress yet** on ensuring an improved **effectiveness of investigations** and a robust track record of prosecution and final judgments in high-level corruption cases and some further progress on the institutional reforms of the Anti-Corruption Commission.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on improving the **integrity of top executive functions**, taking into account European standards, in particular by ensuring that clear integrity standards for the Government as well as an appropriate sanctioning mechanism are in place.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on advancing with the work aimed at **improving transparency in the allocation of state advertising**, in particular with regard to state advertising contracted through intermediaries, such as media agencies.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the relevant country-specific recommendations under the European Semester, **it is recommended to Bulgaria to:**

- ▶ **Take steps** to adapt the relevant legislative framework to **avoid long-term secondment of judges to fill in vacant positions**, taking into account European standards on secondment of judges.
- ▶ **Advance** with the draft legislative amendments aiming at improving the **functioning of the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council** and avoiding the risk of political influence, in particular by involving judicial bodies in the selection of its members.
- ▶ **Re-initiate the process to reform the Supreme Judicial Council**, in particular its composition, to ensure its independence and effectiveness, taking into account European standards on Councils for the Judiciary.
- ▶ **Ensure a robust track record of investigations**, prosecutions and final judgments in high-level corruption cases and take further steps to ensure the effective performance of the Anti-Corruption Commission.
- ▶ **Improve the integrity of top executive functions**, taking into account European standards, in particular by ensuring that clear integrity standards for the Government as well as an appropriate sanctioning mechanism are in place.
- ▶ **Complete the work** aimed at **improving transparency in the allocation of state advertising**, in particular with regard to state advertising contracted through intermediaries, such as media agencies.
- ▶ **Strengthen the quality of the legislative process** by ensuring the use of public consultations and impact assessments for legislative initiatives by Parliament.





## ABSTRACT – CZECHIA

### Justice system

The level of perceived judicial independence in Czechia is high among both the general public and companies. The implementation of the prosecution service reform is ongoing, and stakeholders view it positively. A new disciplinary procedure for judges, prosecutors and bailiffs entered into force, introducing the possibility of appeal. New rules increasing the remuneration of judges from 2026 were adopted, while the salaries of the judicial and prosecutorial staff also slightly increased. Digitalisation in the courts is generally advancing, with videoconferencing well established and further supported by recent legislative changes, though the rolling out of an 'e-file' system was further delayed. An amendment updating the rules on the use of lay judges, with a view to increase efficiency, entered into force. Amendments increasing the level of court fees in administrative matters are underway. The justice system is performing efficiently, with further improvements in case resolution times.

### Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the Anti-Corruption Strategy continues, and a new action plan was adopted. A steady flow of corruption investigations, prosecutions and convictions continues. Some measures were taken to reduce the length of proceedings and ensure the independence of investigation and prosecution in high-level corruption cases. The Constitutional Court declared legislation on conflicts of interests unconstitutional for procedural reasons and annulled the application of the revised provisions including those related to beneficial owners. A possible future revision of the rules on asset declarations and revolving doors remains under consideration at technical level. Legislation on lobbying was adopted as part of the Recovery and Resilience Plan and it also covers Members of Parliament. New legislation on the financing of electoral campaigns was adopted by Parliament, while a possible expansion of the Supreme Audit Office's powers remains under consideration. Efforts to mitigate corruption risks in public procurement continue.

### Media freedom and pluralism

Draft legislation will, if adopted, enshrine certain rights of media service providers, provide the audiovisual media regulator with further responsibilities – including in relation to scrutiny of market concentrations – and oblige public bodies to publish the amounts allocated for the purpose of state advertising. Amendments to public service media legislation have clarified the public service remit and placed the financing system on a more sustainable basis. The transparency of media ownership has, however, not registered further developments. Additional protections for journalists' sources and confidential communications have been proposed. There have been increased efforts by the police to address cases of abuse against journalists while online harassment of journalists remains an issue of concern.

### Institutional checks and balances

The Government took steps to improve the inclusiveness of the policy-making process. However, the quality of legislation is affected by the use of a procedural technique known as 'legislative riders'; these enable the introduction of amendments unrelated to the main substance of the legislative proposal, and the Constitutional Court circumscribes when this can be done. Some further measures have been adopted to improve the enabling environment for civil society. Following the entry into force of amendments to the Ombudsman Act, the National Human Rights Institution was established.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Czechia has (made):

- ▶ **Some progress** on taking measures to address the **remuneration of judges, and judicial and prosecutorial staff**, taking into account European standards on resources and remuneration for the justice system.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on taking measures to **reduce the length of proceedings** and ensure **independence of investigation and prosecution** in high-level corruption cases.
- ▶ **Fully implemented** the part of the recommendation to **complement existing rules on lobbying** in an effort to strengthen the integrity framework for all members of Parliament and no progress as regards complementing the existing rules on revolving doors.
- ▶ No further progress on progressing with further reforms relating to **transparency of information on media ownership**.
- ▶ **Fully implemented** the recommendation to ensure that rules or mechanisms are in place to provide **funding for public service media** that is appropriate for the realisation of its public service remit while guaranteeing its independence.
- ▶ **Fully implemented** the recommendation to continue to advance the legislative changes to **establish a National Human Rights Institution** taking into account the UN Paris Principles.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, **it is recommended to Czechia to:**

- ▶ **Take further measures** to reduce the **length of proceedings** and ensure **independence of investigation and prosecution in high-level corruption cases**.
- ▶ **Take further measures** to **strengthen the integrity framework for all members of Parliament**, in particular by complementing the existing rules as regards revolving doors.
- ▶ **Reinitiate the revision of legislation on conflicts of interest**, including as regards beneficial ownership.
- ▶ **Progress** with further reforms relating to **transparency of information on media ownership**.



## ABSTRACT – DENMARK

### Justice system

The level of perceived judicial independence in Denmark continues to be very high among both the general public and companies. Human and financial resources for the justice system are being progressively increased. Procedural rules aimed at improving the efficiency of the judiciary are being implemented, while it is too early to assess their impact. An inquiry committee was appointed to report on the organisation, structure and tasks of the courts. Work on the review of the legal aid system, started in 2020, will re-commence, as the pre-legislative committee did not complete its work and a new body has been tasked to present results by 2026. The trend of increasing average case handling times continues.

### Anti-corruption framework

Denmark is perceived as one of the least corrupt countries in the world. The anti-corruption programme adopted in the framework of the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan remains applicable to EU funded projects. The system used to monitor investigations and prosecutions of corruption offences allows regular reporting. The reform of the rules on private financing of political parties is pending in Parliament. There are no plans to introduce rules on revolving doors for ministers and on lobbying, and to ensure adequate control of asset declarations submitted by persons entrusted with top executive functions, or to strengthen integrity rules in Parliament. The implementation of the rules on whistleblowing is considered to be on the right track by both the authorities and civil society. While there is no specific process to identify areas with high-risk of corruption, foreign bribery is a focus for the authorities.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The human resources of the Danish Radio and Television Board and the Danish Press Council have been strengthened. New rules were adopted to strengthen the transparency regarding the appointment of the board of directors of Danmarks Radio (DR). Current rules on media liability and the existing media support mechanisms are being reviewed in light of technological developments. The work on strengthening the right of access to information continues. The safety of journalists remains high although there are calls for more transparency in reporting incidents.

### Institutional checks and balances

The legislative process is inclusive overall and rules have been amended to give Parliament more time for the consideration of legislative proposals. The Danish Institute for Human Rights was reaccredited with 'A' Status. Civic space in Denmark continues to be open while some stakeholders call for a more transparent and foreseeable approach to funding for civil society.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Denmark has made:

- ▶ **Limited progress** on completing the **review of the legal aid system**, taking into account European standards on legal aid.
- ▶ **No progress** on introducing **rules on ‘revolving doors’ for ministers and on lobbying** and ensure adequate control of asset declarations submitted by persons entrusted with top executive functions.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on advancing with the process to **reform the Access to Public Administrative Documents Act** in order to strengthen the right to access documents, in particular by limiting the grounds for rejection of disclosure requests, taking into account the European standards on access to official documents.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, **it is recommended to Denmark to:**

- ▶ **Step up efforts** to complete the **review of the legal aid system**, taking into account European standards on legal aid.
- ▶ **Introduce rules on ‘revolving doors’ for ministers and on lobbying** and ensure adequate control of asset declarations submitted by persons entrusted with top executive functions.
- ▶ **Continue** to advance with the process to **reform the Access to Public Administrative Documents Act** in order to strengthen the right to access documents, in particular by limiting the grounds for rejection of disclosure requests, taking into account the European standards on access to official documents.



## ABSTRACT – GERMANY

### Justice system

The level of perceived judicial independence in Germany continues to be high among both the general public and companies. A reform to strengthen the resilience of the Constitutional Court was adopted, enshrining certain safeguards for its functioning and independence in the Constitution. While some steps have been taken regarding the level of remuneration for judges and prosecutors, challenges related to recruitment to the judiciary persist. Digitalisation efforts in the judiciary continue, supported by a multi-annual investment programme, though their implementation in practice varies. New rules on the creation of specialised commercial courts have entered into force, aiming to provide more specialised and efficient proceedings for companies in high-value disputes. The justice system overall continues to perform efficiently and a new procedure to deal more efficiently with so-called ‘mass’ civil cases has been introduced.

### Anti-corruption framework

The planned revision of Germany’s strategic anti-corruption framework and gift policy for the federal administration remains pending. The enforcement of recent legislative reforms increasing transparency and enhancing the prevention of corruption show effective results, including with regard to the lobbying register, post-employment rules (revolving doors), and whistleblower protection. Work to establish a fully-fledged legislative footprint is still to be advanced, particularly for the Federal Parliament, to further enhance transparency in an environment of strong industry interest representation. Some shortcomings remain in the enforcement of conflicts of interest rules for parliamentarians and Government officials as well as political party and campaign finance. Germany has modernised its public procurement rules, carrying the potential to increase transparency and ensure equal level playing field for businesses. Amendments to strengthen liability and sanctions of legal persons to fight foreign bribery more effectively had advanced but were not concluded before the end of the previous legislature. High-level corruption is addressed, and no systemic weaknesses have been identified.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The independently functioning media regulators assumed new enforcement responsibilities, while the reprimands of the self-regulatory body for print and online media reached a record level. Reforms to further strengthen the independent functioning of some public service broadcasters are progressing, while a decision not to increase the license fee triggered constitutional challenges. The business environment for media service providers remained overall stable, while plans to revise the media market concentration framework are progressing. The process to establish a right to information of the press as regards federal authorities has not advanced further, as work on a draft law came to a halt due to the early dissolution of Parliament. The overall protection framework for journalists is good but reports of physical and only attacks raise concern.

### Institutional checks and balances

Consultation procedures vary in practice, with stakeholders, including from the business sector, noting instances of particularly short consultation periods. There have been no steps yet taken regarding the tax-exempt status of non-profit organisations, which continues to create obstacles in practice. Civil society organisations continue to face certain challenges in their operation, while a new strategy to better support voluntary engagement has been adopted and welcomed by civil society.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Germany has made:

- ▶ **Some further progress** on taking measures to **ensure an adequate level of remuneration for judges and prosecutors**, taking into account European standards on remuneration for the justice system.
- ▶ **No further progress** on further **strengthening the ‘legislative footprint’** by disclosing all interest representatives’ inputs to legislation and by extending the scope to the parliamentary phase of the legislative procedure.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on **strengthening the existing rules on revolving doors** by increasing the length of cooling-off periods for federal ministers and federal parliamentary state secretaries.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on advancing with the plan to create a **legal basis for a right to information of the press** as regards federal authorities, taking into account European standards on access to official documents.
- ▶ **No progress** on taking forward the plan to **adapt the tax-exempt status for non-profit organisations** with a view to address the challenges which the currently applicable rules present for their operation in practice, taking into account European standards on funding for civil society organisations.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, **it is recommended to Germany to:**

- ▶ **Take measures to increase the resources of the judiciary and address recruitment challenges**, taking into account European standards on resources for the justice system.
- ▶ **Step up efforts to strengthen the ‘legislative footprint’** to provide a comprehensive public record to register lobbying input and to extend the scope to the parliamentary phase of the legislative procedure.
- ▶ Advance with creating a **legal basis for a right to information of the press** as regards federal authorities, taking into account European standards on access to official documents.
- ▶ **Take steps to adapt the tax-exempt status for non-profit organisations** with a view to address the challenges which the currently applicable rules present for the organisations’ operation in practice, taking into account European standards on funding for civil society organisations.



## ABSTRACT – ESTONIA

### Justice system

The level of digitalisation of the justice system in Estonia remains among the highest in the EU, with further steps triggered to digitalise criminal proceedings. A reform of the Council for the Administration of Courts has been launched. A reform to merge all courts of the same instance is being prepared. The high workload of the judiciary remains a challenge and confirmed budget cuts could amplify it. A draft law envisages a new increase in court fees for certain procedures, including for business-related matters. The courts generally perform efficiently, though there have been slight increases in disposition time in civil and commercial litigious cases. Several draft laws aiming to improve the efficiency of justice in the areas of criminal, civil and commercial law are being discussed.

### Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the 2021-2025 Anti-Corruption Action Plan is on track and the next strategic framework is being prepared. Measures were introduced to foster the investigation and prosecution of financial crime, with an impact on corruption. The Government is expected to approve the reform of the political party financing framework. All political parties in Parliament agreed on a framework on lobbying in Parliament and the rules for lobbying for the Government are being assessed. Rules on revolving doors at high-level positions are also subject to a debate. New legislation on whistleblower protection and existing rules of conflicts of interests are being implemented. A number of high-risk areas for corruption are being addressed by the authorities.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The national media regulator maintains its independence and its staff has increased. The Government is working towards enhancing the long-term financial stability and independence of public service media through legislative reforms, but implementation of the overall budget cuts represents a growing challenge. Legislative reforms to strengthen media regulation and address national security concerns, while also seeking to further advance transparency, are in preparation. Efforts to ensure a consistent and effective implementation and enforcement of the right of access to information are being made. The framework for the protection of journalists remains favourable.

### Institutional checks and balances

There has been no more recourse to procedures allowing substantial delays to the legislative process, following a decision on the constitutionality of this approach. A reflection process by the Government has identified areas for further improvement in the consultation process for legislation. The financial autonomy of the Chancellor of Justice and the National Audit Office has been strengthened. An amendment to the Auditing Activities Act is easing reporting obligations for civil society organisations.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Estonia has (made):

- ▶ **Some progress** on continuing the efforts to **reform the Council for the Administration of Courts**, taking into account European Standards on councils for the judiciary.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on advancing with the efforts to **ensure** consistent and effective **implementation of the right of access to information** taking into account European standards on access to official documents.
- ▶ **Fully implemented** the recommendation to **ensure effective public consultation** in the context of the **legislative process**.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, **it is recommended to Estonia to:**

- ▶ **Continue** the ongoing efforts to **reform the Council for the Administration of Courts**, taking into account European standards on Councils for the Judiciary.
- ▶ **Further advance** with efforts to ensure consistent and effective **implementation of the right of access to information taking** into account European standards on access to official documents.





## ABSTRACT – IRELAND

### Justice system

Reforms aimed at enhancing the independence and quality of the justice system in Ireland continued and companies perceive its independence as very high. The Judicial Appointments Commission, established to reduce political influence in the appointment and promotion of judges, has started its work. Further steps have been taken to reduce the costs of litigation, with work to learn from the development of scales of fees in environmental and planning judicial review cases underway, and a Civil Reform Bill is under preparation. A general review of the civil legal aid scheme has been completed and a reform of the criminal legal aid system is being prepared. Steps are planned to ensure better access to justice, though concerns persist about the length of proceedings. There remain questions about the need for additional safeguards for employment conditions for the judiciary. A follow-up to the report on the Offences Against the State Acts as regards the operation of the Special Criminal Court remains to be decided by the Government. There are no defined indicators available to measure the length of proceedings in the different courts. The new law providing for the establishment of an independent assessment procedure to assess claims for cases of excessively long court proceedings is expected to enter into force in 2025. Further measures to improve digitalisation of justice are being implemented.

### Anti-corruption framework

Ireland continues to have an efficient framework for both the prevention of corruption and enforcement of anti-corruption regulations. The publication of the draft multiannual anti-corruption strategy is delayed. While the cooperation among responsible authorities is smooth, insufficient resources and specialisation remain a challenge for investigating and prosecuting corruption cases. Awareness-raising activities and training measures on integrity improved, and new structures and processes are being set up to strengthen integrity and to enhance accountability of the police. The reform of the existing framework for Ethics in Public Office, including the digitalisation of asset declarations, is at an advanced preparatory stage. The Lobbying register was extended to include information about lobbying activities at the level of senior officials in high-level bodies. New legislation aims to mitigate risks in the planning and development sectors.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The media regulator functions independently and relies on a self-financing system ensuring adequate resources to carry out its growing regulatory competences. The Government put forward a legislative proposal to reform the funding system for public service media and enhance their accountability and independence. The Government is developing new legislation in several areas, including media market concentrations, media ownership transparency and state advertising as well as new initiatives to financially support the media industry and public-interest content, while the media regulator adopted new rules updating the regulatory framework for services offering audiovisual content. Existing cooperation initiatives continue to ensure the overall safety of journalists although threats against reporters covering protests have increased. Work on the reform of the defamation regime is ongoing, with a draft bill currently under discussion in Parliament.

### Institutional checks and balances

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission has new tasks but is concerned that extra resources have not followed. The civic space in Ireland remains open. The Electoral Commission is committed to a review of the Electoral Act 1997 which will encompass consideration of the issues around funding for civil society organisations. Different initiatives to promote a rule of law culture have been brought forward.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Ireland has made:

- ▶ **Some further progress** on taking forward the necessary legislative work aimed at **reducing litigation costs** to ensure effective access to justice, taking into account European standards on disproportionate costs of litigation and their impact on access to courts.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on **strengthening** the existing **ethics framework**, including the monitoring and enforcement capacity of the Standards in Public Office Commission, and limited progress on strengthening and digitalising the asset declarations system.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on completing the **reform of the Defamation Act** to improve the professional environment for journalists taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists.
- ▶ **Some progress** on ensuring that rules or mechanisms are in place to provide **funding for public service media** that is appropriate for the realisation of its public service remit while guaranteeing its independence.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on **addressing legal obstacles related to access to funding for civil society organisations**, as part of the reform of the Electoral Act.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, **it is recommended to Ireland to:**

- ▶ **Take forward** the legislative work aimed at **reducing litigation costs to ensure effective access to justice**, taking into account European standards on disproportionate costs of litigation and their impact on access to courts.
- ▶ **Continue** efforts to **strengthen** the existing **ethics framework**, including the monitoring and enforcement capacity of the Standards in Public Office Commission, and to strengthen and digitalise the asset declarations system.
- ▶ **Complete** the **reform** to **provide funding for public service media** that is appropriate for the realisation of its public service remit while guaranteeing its independence.
- ▶ **Finalise** the **reform of the Defamation Act** to improve the professional environment for journalists taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists.
- ▶ **Continue** ongoing efforts to **address legal obstacles related to access to funding for civil society organisations**, as part of the reform of the Electoral Act.



## ABSTRACT – GREECE

### Justice system

In Greece, following a recent reform, the judiciary is being involved in appointments to the highest positions in the court system. Initiatives to restore public trust in the justice system are put forward by the judiciary. The decision to launch disciplinary proceedings against judges on grounds resulting from the content of their decisions gave rise to a debate within the magistracy. Major reforms related to rule of law are being undertaken in dialogue with the Commission and financed under the Recovery and Resilience Facility and supported by the Technical Support instrument. The implementation of the new judicial map in civil and criminal justice, and projects to improve the level of digitalisation are advancing well. Efforts to promote the use of alternative dispute resolution, including plans to revise existing legislation, are welcomed by businesses. The length of court proceedings still raises serious challenges and, although initial signals from the implementation of recent reforms are encouraging, it is still early to assess results.

### Anti-corruption framework

A new National Anti-Corruption Action Plan is being developed, and the National Transparency Authority has a new Management Board. Organisational changes in the police force were made to better combat organised crime and improve disciplinary procedures. An interoperable common case management system is in preparation as efforts to improve the track record of prosecutions and final judgments in corruption cases, including in high-level cases continue. A reorganisation of the police aims to strengthen integrity. The law on asset declarations was revised to facilitate the process of submission and verification of interest declarations. Amendments to the rules on political party funding provide clearer grounds for reimbursement or suspension of state funding. The effective implementation and enforcement of the rules on lobbying has improved but further measures are needed. Efforts to mitigate corruption risks in public procurement and improve licensing procedures are seen as positive developments by businesses.

### Media freedom and pluralism

Resources of the media regulator have been strengthened as the number of employees has increased but concerns remain regarding its independence, and funding. The new appointment procedures of administrative bodies introduce positive changes, while concerns about the legislative framework and political independence of the public service media persist. Transparency of media ownership is strengthened by the continued operation of the Registry for Print Media and the Registry for Electronic Press. A new law strengthening publicity and transparency in the printed and electronic press, reinforcing editorial independence and institutional safeguards regarding state advertising, byline journalism and copyright protection was adopted in June 2025. The legal framework concerning the right of access to documents has been improved significantly, while challenges remain in its implementation. There have been several positive developments in the landscape for journalist safety, although challenges remain on the ground. Efforts building on measures taken in previous years amount to important steps concerning legislative and non-legislative safeguards to improve the protection of journalists, in particular as regards abusive lawsuits.

### Institutional checks and balances

The positive trend of avoiding expedited legislative procedures continues and the statutory timeframe for public consultations is being observed, while participation and transparency in the law-making process could be further improved. Efforts are under way to ensure that the judiciary is more involved in overseeing the immunity regime for members of the Government. Previously identified challenges regarding the appointment of members of independent authorities established by the Constitution remain. Progress with the judicial investigation following the Pylos shipwreck is a positive development to start addressing deficiencies in investigating incidents of alleged misconduct involving law enforcement officers. Engagement with civil society organisations is not yet placed on a regular and sustained basis.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Greece has made:

- ▶ **Some further progress** on continuing efforts to establish a robust **track record of prosecutions and final judgments in corruption cases**, including high-level corruption.
- ▶ **Significant progress** on further advancing with the process of adopting legislative and non-legislative safeguards to **improve the protection of journalists, in particular as regards abusive lawsuits against journalists and their safety**, in line with the adopted Memorandum of Understanding and taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on stepping up the efforts to ensure the **effective and timely consultation** in practice of stakeholders on draft legislation, including by observing the statutory timeframe for public consultation.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on the evaluation of the existing legal framework for the **registration of civil society organisations and the establishment of a structured dialogue**.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, and the relevant country-specific recommendations under the European Semester, **it is recommended to Greece to:**

- ▶ **Continue** efforts to establish a robust **track record of prosecutions and final judgments in corruption cases**, including high-level corruption.
- ▶ **Improve the lobbying framework**, including by reviewing the definition of a lobbyist and ensuring effective implementation.
- ▶ **Continue** ongoing efforts to strengthen legislative and non-legislative safeguards **to improve the safety and protection of journalists**, in particular as regards abusive lawsuits, in line with the adopted Memorandum of Understanding and taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists.
- ▶ **Develop a regular and sustained structured dialogue with civil society organisations**, and simplify registration requirements for civil society organisations in view of maintaining an open framework for them to operate.



## ABSTRACT – SPAIN

### Justice system

In Spain, the Council for the Judiciary was renewed following a structured dialogue held in 2024 with the European Commission, and certain steps were taken to advance with the process to adapt the appointment procedure of its judges-members. The new Council for the Judiciary is proceeding with appointments to top judicial positions. Some measures have been taken and others are under way to modify the statute of the Prosecutor General, with some stakeholders expressing critical views of the reform. New measures have also been adopted in relation to the incompatibilities regime for judges and prosecutors. A law on the right of defence was adopted and the legal aid framework has been reinforced. Further measures are being implemented to improve the digitalisation of justice and to address challenges regarding the resources of the justice system. There are currently protest actions by judges and prosecutors reflecting tensions around the proposed reforms on the judiciary. The length of proceedings, in particular in the Supreme Court, remains a challenge and new measures have been adopted to improve the situation.

### Anti-corruption framework

The Government is required by law to adopt a comprehensive strategy to prevent and fight corruption but work on it is yet to start. Work on the revision of the Code of Criminal Procedure is ongoing and more resources have been provided to reduce the length of investigations and prosecutions of high-level corruption, while the level of enforcement on foreign bribery remains low. Cooperation between different authorities in the fight against corruption remains good and the efficiency of the work of the Council of Transparency and Good Governance has improved despite resource constraints. Some initial steps were also taken to strengthen the rules on conflict of interest for persons in top executive functions. A draft law was submitted to Parliament to regulate lobbying and to strengthen the independence and powers of the Office for Conflicts of Interest. However, no further steps have been taken to improve rules on conflicts of interest for public employees in the different administrations.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The audiovisual regulator is preparing for the new supervisory functions. The Law on state-owned radio and television was amended to change the composition of the management board and its election system, giving more powers to its chairperson. Ownership transparency of media other than audiovisual media services, video sharing platforms and influencers remains an area of concern, pending the adoption of the draft Law on Digital Services and Media which envisages the creation of a public registry of media supervised by the National Commission for Markets and Competition (CNMC), while the legal framework for institutional advertising remains unchanged, despite an increased number of campaigns. There has been no further progress on the recommendation to strengthen access to information, pending adoption of new legislation. Despite steps foreseen through ongoing legislative proposals, journalists continue facing increasing challenges regarding working conditions and safety.

### Institutional checks and balances

The Spanish Constitutional Court declared the Amnesty Law to be compatible with the Constitution. Requests for preliminary rulings in relation to the Amnesty Law have been submitted to the European Court of Justice. Initiatives to promote a rule of law culture are being taken, a new equality body has been set up and several appointments to independent authorities and bodies have been made. A draft law to reform the Citizen Security Law has been put forward so as to address concerns that had been previously raised by stakeholders.

## Recommendations

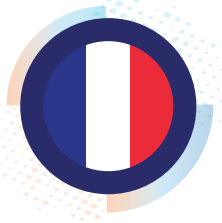


Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Spain has made:

- ▶ **Some further progress** on **strengthening the statute of the Prosecutor General**, in particular regarding the separation of the terms of office of the Prosecutor General from that of the Government, taking into account European standards on independence and autonomy of the prosecution.
- ▶ **Significant progress** on **renewing the Council for the Judiciary** and taking forward the process in view of adapting the **appointment procedure of its judges-members**, taking into account European standards on Councils for the Judiciary.
- ▶ **Some progress** on proceeding to **adopt legislation on lobbying**, including the establishment of a mandatory public register of lobbyists.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on stepping up efforts to address the challenges related to the **length of investigations and prosecutions** to increase the efficiency in handling high-level corruption cases, including by finalising the reform of the Code of Criminal Procedure.
- ▶ **Some progress** on **strengthening the rules on conflicts of interest** and asset declarations of persons with top executive functions, including by reinforcing the independence and sanctioning power of the Office for Conflicts of Interest.
- ▶ No further progress on advancing with **strengthening access to information**, in particular via revision of the Law on Official Secrets, taking into account European standards on access to official documents.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the relevant country-specific recommendations under the European Semester, **it is recommended to Spain to:**

- ▶ **Continue** ongoing efforts to **strengthen the statute of the Prosecutor General**, in particular regarding the separation of the terms of office of the Prosecutor General from that of the Government, taking into account European standards on independence and autonomy of the prosecution.
- ▶ **Take forward** the process in view of adapting the **appointment procedure of the Council for the Judiciary's judges-members**, taking into account European standards on Councils for the Judiciary.
- ▶ **Continue** the ongoing procedure to **adopt legislation on lobbying**, including the establishment of a mandatory public register of lobbyists.
- ▶ Strengthen efforts to **address the challenges related to the length of investigations and prosecutions** to increase the efficiency in handling high-level corruption cases, including by finalising the reform of the Code of Criminal Procedure.
- ▶ **Take forward** the legislative process to **strengthen rules on conflicts of interest** and asset declarations of persons with top executive functions, including by further reinforcing the independence and sanctioning power of the Office for Conflicts of Interest.
- ▶ **Advance** with **strengthening access to information**, in particular via revision of the Law on Official Secrets, taking into account European standards on access to official document.



## ABSTRACT – FRANCE

### Justice system

In France, the law of 20 November 2023 reforming the status of magistrates is being implemented. The Superior Council of Magistracy defended judicial independence in response to concerns raised by attacks on magistrates related to judicial decisions. Budgetary efforts are being made to allow for an increase the number of magistrates. The digitalisation projects of judicial procedures were further rolled out. Online access to court decisions improved further. A reflection is ongoing about possible solutions to address some challenges with regard to the efficiency of the justice system.

### Anti-corruption framework

The 2024-2029 national anti-corruption plan is expected to be adopted by summer 2025. Efforts to prosecute corruption increased, including as regards high-level cases, with additional human resources allocated to investigation authorities, and new legislative tools in place. The Anti-Corruption Agency (AFA) was reorganised to improve its effectiveness while the High Authority for the Transparency in Public Life (HATVP) increased its human resources to address an increased workload. The 2023 guidelines on the lobby register are being implemented, but disclosure requirements continue to apply to lobbyists only and not to officials at top-executive level. Integrity measures for police officers are applied, and new ethics measures for Members of Parliament, officials at top-executive level and magistrates were adopted. The number of whistleblower reports received by the various authorities continued to increase. Initiatives are in preparation to combat corruption linked to organised drug trafficking and affecting ports.

### Media freedom and pluralism

France's media regulator, ARCOM, has undergone significant developments, expanding its regulatory scope and activities in anticipation of new obligations and mandates. The proposed reform of public broadcasting governance and the creation of a holding company is the subject of debate and practical avenues to strengthen coordination among public broadcasters are being sought. Steps have been taken to improve media ownership transparency, with the preparation of a national ownership database. Despite strong legal guarantees on the right to access documents, journalists report challenges about its practical implementation. A legislative proposal, based on the outcome of a broad national consultation, is being prepared to better safeguard the right to information.

### Institutional checks and balances

Legislative simplification efforts are welcomed by businesses while stakeholders raise concerns regarding the consultation of citizens. Discussions are ongoing on the safeguards to be put in place when using artificial intelligence in the justice system. The financial environment of civil society organisations remains favourable despite budgetary restrictions.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, France has made:

- ▶ **Some further progress** on completing ongoing projects aimed at **full digitalisation of civil and criminal court proceedings**.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on ensuring that **rules on lobbying activities** are consistently applied to all relevant actors, including at top executive level.
- ▶ **Significant progress** on improving the **transparency of media ownership**, in particular, complex shareholding structures, building on the existing legal safeguards.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, **it is recommended to France to:**

- ▶ Step up efforts to complete ongoing projects aimed at **full digitalisation of civil and criminal court proceedings**.
- ▶ **Continue** ongoing efforts to **ensure** that **rules on lobbying activities** are consistently applied to all relevant actors, including at top-executive level, and take forward the legislative process on the draft laws on lobbying.
- ▶ **Complete** ongoing reforms to **improve the transparency of media ownership**, in particular, complex shareholding structures, building on the existing legal safeguards.





## ABSTRACT – CROATIA

### Justice system

In Croatia, following structural efforts to address remuneration, legislative amendments introduced objective criteria for adjusting salaries of judges and state attorneys. Efforts continue to maintain and improve the integrity of judges and state attorneys. The amendments to the Law on the State Attorney's Office were finalised in Government to remove the legal basis for periodic security checks on all state attorneys. Legal changes are envisaged to ensure that the system of registration judges is compatible with EU law in line with the requirements set by the Court of Justice. The State Judicial Council called on Court Presidents to respect the rules on random allocation when selecting court cases to be assigned to new judges. Electronic communication systems between courts and users saw increased use, further closing the digitalisation gap. The level of perceived judicial independence has continued to increase, although it remains very low. The total backlog decreased, while the length of trials in most cases increased.

### Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the first Action Plan for 2022–2024 under the Anti-Corruption Strategy ended and the evaluation is ongoing. Authorities are developing a track record of investigations, prosecutions and convictions of corruption, including in high-level cases, and the revision of the Criminal Procedure Code and the Law on the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organised Crime for the efficiency of investigation and prosecution of corruption offences is expected in the first quarter of 2026. The Commission for the Resolution of Conflict of Interest continues to face difficulties verifying asset declarations, as its resources are scarce and advanced digital tools are not yet fully operational. Codes of ethics are in place at all levels of the administration and Government. The implementation of the new law on lobbying is on track, while the public is not directly informed about meetings between lobbyists and officials. The State Audit Office reported no substantial violations of the rules on political party financing. The Government is raising awareness on the harmfulness of corruption and the importance of whistleblower legislation. Measures were taken to address corruption in public procurement which remains a high-risk area of corruption.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The independently financed Agency for Electronic Media (AEM) remains important for media oversight and promoting pluralism. The Government plans to update the Law on Croatian Radio-Television and the Law on Electronic Media. Croatia's public broadcaster is undertaking significant reforms to address financial and governance challenges. No steps have been taken yet to strengthen the legal framework and oversight mechanisms to ensure a fair and transparent allocation of state advertising at national, regional and local level. A new centralised media ownership and financing database was launched on AEM's website. While journalists primarily rely on the Law on Media to access public information due to its simplified procedure and shorter deadlines, the law lacks a clearly defined response timeframe, without oversight by an independent monitoring body. Journalists still face a number of challenges although efforts to improve their safety are ongoing. SLAPPs continue to be an area of concern and so far, some steps are being taken to address them.

### Institutional checks and balances

Impact assessments and evaluations of laws expanded, and the portal for public consultations was introduced to local and regional levels. Significant steps were made to improve follow-up to the People's Ombudsperson's recommendations and on access to information. The shift toward multiannual funding of civil society organisations continued, while the new National Plan for Creating an Enabling Environment is under preparation.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Croatia has made:

- ▶ **Some progress** on revising the **Criminal Procedure Code and the Law on the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organised Crime**, in line with the Anti-Corruption Strategy, so as to further increase the efficiency of investigations and prosecution of corruption offences.
- ▶ **No progress** yet on stepping up efforts to strengthen the legal framework and oversight mechanisms to **ensure a fair and transparent allocation of state advertising** at national, regional and local level, including the public tender procedure.
- ▶ **Some progress** on the recommendation to continue efforts to **address** the issue of **strategic lawsuits against public participation targeted at journalists**, including by reviewing the legal provisions on defamation and encouraging wider use of procedural rules that allow dismissing groundless lawsuits, taking into account the European standards on the protection of journalists.
- ▶ **Significant progress** on further **improving the follow-up** to **recommendations and ensuring a more systematic response** to information requests of the Ombudsperson.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, **it is recommended to Croatia to:**

- ▶ **Take measures to further improve the efficiency of justice**, particularly as regards the length of proceedings in litigious commercial and civil cases.
- ▶ **Take forward plans to revise the Criminal Procedure Code and the Law on the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organised Crime**, in line with the Anti-Corruption Strategy, so as to further increase the efficiency of investigations and prosecution of corruption offences.
- ▶ Step up efforts to **strengthen** the legal framework and oversight mechanisms to **ensure a fair and transparent allocation of state advertising** at national, regional and local level, including the public tender procedure.
- ▶ Continue efforts to **address the issue of strategic lawsuits against public participation targeted at journalists**, including by reviewing the legal provisions on defamation and encouraging wider use of procedural rules that allow dismissing groundless lawsuits, taking into account the European standards on the protection of journalists.



## ABSTRACT – ITALY

### Justice system

With a comprehensive reform of the justice system now in place in Italy, and the adoption of the implementing legislation necessary for it to take full effect, the High Council for the Judiciary took forward the tasks entrusted to it under the implementing legislation. The draft constitutional reform separating careers of judges and prosecutors is currently subject to parliamentary scrutiny, while reservations expressed by the judiciary remain. The Constitutional Court considered that the comprehensive reform of tax courts represents adequate progress towards a fairer system that complies with constitutional principles. The recruitment of magistrates and administrative staff continues at a good pace, although persistent shortages remain. While some further steps have been taken towards the full digitalisation of criminal courts and prosecutors' offices, technical challenges continue to delay its effective rollout. The length of proceedings remains a serious issue, despite some improvement in the disposition time and a positive trend regarding the handling of backlog.

### Anti-corruption framework

The National Anti-Corruption Plan was updated, and the newly adopted action plan for open government includes integrity actions. The law abrogating the offence of abuse of public office was declared in compliance with the Constitution. ANAC and some of the law enforcement authorities strengthened their human resources. ANAC issued guidelines on revolving doors and those on whistleblowing are under preparation. Actions to improve the integrity of police forces and training for judges were launched. Some rules on incompatibilities of interests were introduced, while further legislation is pending. While some expert hearings took place on the draft laws on lobbying, the legislation has not advanced, and the draft laws on political party and campaign financing addressing the issue of private party donations being channelled via political foundations have not yet been discussed. Measures were taken to mitigate corruption in public procurement, which remains a high risk.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The media regulator functions independently and is financially equipped to exercise its growing tasks in an effective manner. The decision not to confirm the reduction of the licence fee allowed the public service broadcaster to rely on more financial resources in 2025 and legislation to reform its governance and funding system is under discussion in the Senate. New rules on media market concentrations were introduced. Stakeholders consider the relevant regulatory framework for the media sector to be effective, although calling for some rules to be streamlined and for more public initiatives to support the industry. The rules regulating the flow of certain judicial information remain a source of concern for stakeholders. Although there are specific rules and initiatives for their protection, journalists continue to face challenges in the exercise of their profession. The reform of the defamation law, certain elements of which raise concerns among journalists and media stakeholders, has not moved forward.

### Institutional checks and balances

Parliamentary scrutiny of the draft constitutional reform – aimed at enhancing governmental stability and introducing the direct election of the Prime Minister – is advancing. Stakeholders reiterated concerns over the frequent resort to urgency decrees by the Government. The Constitutional Affairs Committee of the Senate is discussing a draft law to amend the accounting justice code and reform the Court of Auditors. No concrete measures have been undertaken to establish a National Human Rights Institution. A new Security Law seeking to combat terrorism and organised crime and improve internal security raised stakeholder concerns over a possible impact on civic space and the exercise of fundamental freedoms.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Italy has made:

- ▶ **Some further progress** on continuing efforts to further improve the level of **digitalisation for criminal courts and prosecutors' offices**.
- ▶ **Some progress** on adopting the pending **legislative proposal on conflicts of interest** and limited progress on adopting comprehensive rules on lobbying to establish an operational lobbying register, including a legislative footprint.
- ▶ **No progress** yet in effectively and swiftly addressing the **practice of channelling donations through political foundations and associations** and introduce single electronic register for party and campaign finance information.
- ▶ **Some progress** in ensuring that rules or mechanisms are in place to **provide funding for public service media** that is appropriate for the realisation of its public service remit and to guarantee its independence.
- ▶ **No further progress** on continuing the legislative process on the **draft reform on defamation, the protection of professional secrecy and journalistic sources** while avoiding any risk of negative impacts on press freedom and ensure it takes into account European standards on the protection of journalists.
- ▶ **No further progress** in stepping up efforts to **establish a National Human Rights Institution** taking into account the UN Paris Principles.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the relevant country-specific recommendations under the European Semester, **it is recommended to Italy to:**

- ▶ **Complete** the **digital case management system for criminal courts and prosecution offices**.
- ▶ **Adopt** the pending **legislative proposal on conflicts of interest** and step up efforts to adopt comprehensive rules on lobbying to establish an operational lobbying register, including a legislative footprint.
- ▶ Step up efforts to effectively and swiftly **address the practice of channelling donations through political foundations and associations** and introduce single electronic register for party and campaign finance information.
- ▶ **Advance** with the ongoing legislative work to ensure that rules or mechanisms are in place to **provide funding for public service media** that is appropriate for the realisation of its public service remit and to guarantee its independence.
- ▶ **Continue** the ongoing legislative process on the **draft reform on defamation, the protection of professional secrecy and journalistic sources** while avoiding any risk of negative impacts on press freedom and ensure it takes into account European standards on the protection of journalists.
- ▶ Step up efforts to **establish a National Human Rights Institution** taking into account the UN Paris Principles.



## ABSTRACT – CYPRUS

### Justice system

In Cyprus, the reform of the Law Office is advancing, with the goal of providing a clearer distinction between the advisory and the prosecutorial functions of the Attorney General. With the reform, the Attorney General maintains its role as legal adviser of the state and head of the Law Office, while the powers relating to the prosecution are transferred to the new institution of General Public Prosecutor. The Attorney General has requested the opinion of the Supreme Court in relation to the review of its decisions not to prosecute or to discontinue proceedings. The recently introduced judicial review of the decisions of the Supreme Council of the Judicature reinforces transparency and accountability. Efforts to promote the use of alternative dispute resolution, including the modernisation of arbitration law, are supported by businesses. The level of digitalisation remains low and there is not a fully functional integrated electronic case management system. Challenges regarding resources and infrastructure continue to affect the work of first instance judges. The length of proceedings and backlogs remain a serious concern, in particular for civil and commercial cases, despite some improvements. Businesses consider the operationalisation of the Commercial and Admiralty Courts to be necessary to avoid delays in the administration of justice.

### Anti-corruption framework

The resources of the Independent Authority against Corruption are being increased and there are ongoing discussions in Parliament to strengthen the functional independence of this authority. A lot of work is being put into investigating high-level corruption cases and more investigations have been initiated. Important efforts are being made to step up capabilities through recruitment and training to address corruption. New legislation on asset declarations for both elected and appointed officials have entered into force. Compliance with and enforcement of the law on lobbying is improving. Implementation of integrity rules was strengthened through the appointment of a Special Ethics Adviser and a revision of the Code of Conduct for Civil Servants. Efforts are being made to improve the efficiency, transparency and accountability in public procurement.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The Cyprus Radio and Television Authority operates in an independent manner. The legal framework relating to transparency of media ownership has not been improved. The lack of legislation and transparency in the field of state advertising, as well as the need to enhance the independent governance of public service media still need to be addressed. The situation as regards safety of journalists has improved; however, they continue to experience precarious working conditions.

### Institutional checks and balances

The effective and timely consultation of stakeholders has significantly improved, including with the systematic use of the e-consultation platform. Businesses and investors see delays in the law-making process and in adopting implementing acts as challenges. The Government put forward plans to reform the Audit Office, while questions remain around the appointment procedure of the Auditor General and his Deputy. Challenges regarding administrative requirements for Civil Society Organisations persist, while efforts to revise the legal framework are still ongoing.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Cyprus has made:

- ▶ **Some further progress** on taking forward plans to adopt legislation aiming to **provide a clearer distinction between the advisory and the prosecutorial functions of the Attorney General** and **limited progress** on taking measures to **establish an effective review of its decisions** not to prosecute or to discontinue proceedings, taking into account European standards on independence and autonomy of the prosecution.
- ▶ **Significant progress** on continuing the efforts to **ensure** that the **Independent Authority against Corruption** has the human and technical **resources** to effectively perform its competences.
- ▶ **Significant progress** on ensuring the effective **implementation of rules on asset disclosure for elected officials** to establish regular and comprehensive filing, combined with effective, regular and full verifications.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on adopting legislation to ensure fair **and transparent distribution of advertising expenditure by the state and state-owned companies**.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on further advancing with the process aimed at **strengthening the rules and mechanisms to enhance the independent governance of public service media** taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ **Significant progress** on **ensuring** the effective and timely **consultation of stakeholders in the legislative process** and address shortcomings.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, **it is recommended to Cyprus to:**

- ▶ **Further advance** with the ongoing **reform of the Law Office** and the **establishment of the Office of the Public Prosecutor General** and establish an effective review of decisions not to prosecute or to discontinue proceedings, taking into account European standards on independence and autonomy of the prosecution.
- ▶ **Advance** with the legislative reforms to **strengthen the Independent Authority against Corruption** and continue efforts to ensure it has the human and technical resources to effectively perform its tasks.
- ▶ Adopt legislation to **ensure fair and transparent distribution of advertising expenditure by the state and state-owned companies**.
- ▶ **Strengthen** the rules and mechanisms to **enhance the independent governance of public service media** taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ Ensure that the **ongoing reform of the Audit Office introduces safeguards in the appointment procedure** to enhance the independence of the Auditor General and the Deputy Auditor General.



## ABSTRACT – LATVIA

### Justice system

The justice system in Latvia continues to perform efficiently, with the the overall length of proceedings remaining broadly stable. The need for further safeguards to protect the appointment procedure for judges of the Supreme Court from undue influence, has not been addressed. The new Judicial Academy was established and became operational. Turnover among judicial assistants remains high, and the judiciary is facing difficulties to fill all vacancies for judges. Further efforts are being made to improve workload distribution among judges. The Economic Court continues to handle cases efficiently, despite an overall increase of caseload and a temporary reduction of active judges.

### Anti-corruption framework

Work has started to prepare the anti-corruption action plans for 2026-2027. Investigations and prosecutions of corruption offences are carried out efficiently, while there are some concerns as regards high-level corruption. The electronic system for asset declarations continues to work effectively, and an automatic declaration checking tool has been developed. The framework to prevent conflicts of interests of public officials is being strengthened. Reflections are ongoing in Parliament as regard updating ethical rules for its Members and the implementation of the existing codes of ethics in the public institutions has been evaluated. Some steps were made regarding legislation on lobbying, such as the setting up of a simplified lobby register on an interim basis. Amendments to the rules on political party financing strengthen the criminal liability rules for illegal financing. The Government plans to amend implementation of the legislation on the protection of whistleblowers following an evaluation of its implementation. Reforms are being undertaken to address challenges related to public procurement, which remains an area at high risk of corruption.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The regulator for audiovisual media services (NEPLP) continues to operate independently. Self-regulation mechanisms are available, but their effective application is limited. The public service media maintains its independence through well-established safeguards. Public service media Latvian Television and Latvian Radio were merged. Amendments to the Press Law will make registration of mass media service providers and beneficial ownership information mandatory. The Freedom of Information Law guarantees the right to access information held by public institutions. The professional environment for journalists continues to be overall safe, but there has been a deterioration in the online environment.

### Institutional checks and balances

Operating conditions for civil society remain overall open and stable.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Latvia has made:

- ▶ **No progress** on taking measures to ensure adequate **safeguards against undue political influence** in the existing appointment procedure for **Supreme Court judges**, taking into account European standards on judicial appointments.
- ▶ **Some progress** on continuing work on the effective **implementation of the legislation on lobbying**, including the setting up of a special lobby register.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, **it is recommended to Latvia to:**

- ▶ **Take measures** to **ensure** the adequate **safeguards against undue political influence** in the appointment procedure for **Supreme Court judges**, taking into account European standards on judicial appointments.
- ▶ **Ensure** the effective **implementation of the legislation on lobbying**, including as regards the special interim lobby register.





## ABSTRACT – LITHUANIA

### Justice system

The level of perceived judicial independence in Lithuania is high. Judicial appointments across all instances are taking place in good time, and further steps were taken to improve the transparency of the process. Efforts to support integrity within the justice system are underway. The regulation of 'revolving doors' in the Constitutional Court appointments is being discussed in Parliament. Lawyers continue to express concerns regarding the respect of lawyer-client confidentiality. The Judicial Council has presented a proposal to amend the Constitution to secure its right of constitutional appeal concerning legislation impacting the judiciary. While further efforts are being made to allocate adequate human and financial resources to the justice system, challenges persist, especially in recruiting court staff. The judicial map reform has been completed and is expected to balance the workload among courts. Steps were taken to finalise the reform of the legal aid system, such as implementing a pilot project aimed at ensuring an even workload distribution to legal aid providers. The justice system is highly digitalised, with ongoing enhancements to the courts' information systems, contributing further to its efficient performance, including in commercial cases.

### Anti-corruption framework

The first year of the implementation plan for the National Anti-Corruption Agenda was positively evaluated. An implementation plan was launched to address shortcomings in fighting against foreign bribery. The effective investigation and prosecution of corruption offences continues, although the rate of acquittals for all corruption charges remains substantially higher than for other offences. Various initiatives are being carried out to prevent corruption and promote integrity in the public and private sector. While non-legislative initiatives are taken to reinforce the existing rules on asset declarations, shortcomings remain in the legal framework. The new whistleblower protection framework is being implemented. The authorities continue monitoring and addressing the high-risk areas of corruption, including public procurement, through tailor-made initiatives.

### Media freedom and pluralism

Changes to the funding model of the public service broadcaster (LRT) are under discussion while actions by the LRT Council raised concerns. The human resources of the regulator for audiovisual media services (LRTK) increased slightly. The budget for the Media Support Fund has increased significantly, and new application rules make more media service providers eligible for funding. The implementation of the Government action plan for the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists continues, with the overall situation regarding the safety of journalists remaining favourable. The situation regarding access to documents improved, and journalists will have a right to access a new register of members of political organisations.

### Institutional checks and balances

The Ministry of Justice is implementing measures to enhance the quality of legislation. The mandate of the Parliamentary Ombudspersons was extended, and resources have been further reinforced. Concerns remain among stakeholders regarding the involvement of civil society in decision-making processes.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Lithuania has made:

- ▶ **Some further progress** in finalising the reform of the legal aid system, in particular by reducing the administrative burden and ensuring adequate conditions for the participation of legal aid providers, taking into account European standards on legal aid.
- ▶ **Some further progress** in continuing efforts to improve the transparency of the system of appointments to judicial positions, notably to the Supreme Court, taking into account European standards on judicial appointments.
- ▶ **Some further progress** in continuing efforts to provide adequate human and financial resources for the justice system, taking into account European standards on resources for the justice system.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, **it is recommended to Lithuania to:**

- ▶ Finalise the **reform of the legal aid system**, in particular by ensuring adequate conditions for the participation of legal aid providers, taking into account European standards on legal aid.
- ▶ Step up efforts to **improve the transparency of the system of appointments to judicial positions**, notably to the Supreme Court, taking into account European standards on judicial appointments.



## ABSTRACT – LUXEMBOURG

### Justice system

The level of perceived judicial independence in Luxembourg continues to be very high among the general public and high among companies. The National Council for Justice is fully operational and functions well. Some steps have been made on the digitalisation of the judiciary, as efforts are ongoing to implement digital solutions for courts to exchange with parties and legal representatives. The reform of the criminal justice system as regards minors, which started in 2024, has not advanced further. A large-scale recruitment initiative in the judiciary is underway to address recruitment challenges and vacancies. The courts remain efficient, and the clearance rate remains stable.

### Anti-corruption framework

The perception among experts, citizens and business executives is that Luxembourg is one of the least corrupt countries in the EU and the world. The Corruption Prevention Committee continues with the implementation of its obligations under the Anti-Bribery Convention and is considering elaborating an anti-corruption plan. The Government and the Corruption Prevention Committee are looking into the reasons for the significant decrease in the number of reported corruption cases and ongoing investigations over the past year. Additional recruitments are planned in the police and prosecution services dealing with economic and financial crime, while some difficulties to attract good candidates remain. Following an adopted amendment, more extensive information on lobbying will become public and further efforts are being made to increase the transparency of interactions between members of Parliament and lobbyists. Further amendments to introduce codes of conduct for elected representatives and officials at municipal level are considered by the Government. The Deontology Committee was given additional investigation powers. The Office for Whistleblowers, set up in 2023, plans to release its first activity report. Corruption cases in the area of public procurement are effectively investigated and prosecuted.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The process of revising the regulatory framework applicable to electronic media, as well as the competences of the Luxembourg Independent Audiovisual Authority (ALIA) has been initiated. The Press Council adopted a new code of ethics, and the Government announced an increase in its public subsidy. An Audience Council was established for public broadcaster Radio 100,7 and reflections are ongoing to broaden the reach of its content. The Government introduced a draft law reforming the legal framework on access to official documents while stakeholders seek further clarity on enforceability and timelines. The Government has committed to strengthening the protection of journalists against physical violence and intimidation, with the objective of ensuring a safe environment for free expression and democratic debate.

### Institutional checks and balances

Stakeholder consultations are reported to work well in practice. The reform intended to make the Consultative Commission for Human Rights (CCDH) more independent is ongoing. The civic space is open and diverse.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Luxembourg has made:

- ▶ **Some progress** on strengthening efforts to achieve **full digitalisation of civil, criminal and administrative proceedings**.
- ▶ **Significant progress** on stepping up efforts to **increase the information contained in the transparency register**, including by covering all the information set out in the Parliament's rules of procedures.
- ▶ **Some progress** on taking forward the **reform** of the legal framework for the disclosure of official documents, taking into account European standards on access to official documents.
- ▶ **Fully implemented** the recommendation on **improving the legislative decision-making process** notably at the level of Parliament by increasing the transparency and involvement of stakeholders in the public consultations.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, **it is recommended to Luxembourg to:**

- ▶ **Step up efforts** to **achieve full digitalisation** of civil, criminal and administrative proceedings.
- ▶ **Complete** the **reform of the legal framework for the disclosure of official documents**, taking into account European standards on access to official documents.



## ABSTRACT – HUNGARY

### Justice system

In Hungary, the National Judicial Council has continued to exercise the powers acquired by means of the judicial reform of 2023. New rules have been introduced on the appointment and career of judges. In line with the legislation in force, the process did not always include the consultation of the National Judicial Council on some of the relevant legislative amendments. The transparency of case allocation in lower courts has not been improved, whereas the case allocation in the *Kúria* is being implemented well. The *Kúria* continues to enforce uniformity of case law through its uniformity complaint panel. Undue pressure on some judges continues within the judiciary, notably in relation to internal debates on key issues related to judicial independence. An increase in salaries in the justice system is being done in three steps until 2027. The efficiency of the judiciary and digitalisation of the justice system continues to be high overall.

### Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the 2024-2025 National Anti-Corruption Strategy and related Action Plan is ongoing, while important actions remain pending. The number of convictions for corruption crimes has decreased and there has been no progress to establish a robust track record on high-level corruption. Court decisions reviewing prosecutorial decisions not to investigate or prosecute corruption continue to be non-binding. There has been no progress yet to adopt new lobbying and post-employment rules, although there are plans to legislate in this area by November 2025. The Integrity Authority continues to report obstacles in fulfilling its oversight tasks effectively. Key shortcomings with regard to the transparency of the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns remain. Competition in public procurement has been improved, and different levels of control remain for national and EU-funds related procurements.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The threats to media pluralism highlighted in previous Rule of Law Reports have remained unaddressed. No measures have been adopted or are planned to regulate the channelling of state advertising to media outlets, to guarantee the functional independence of the media authority and to ensure the editorial and financial independence of public service media. Journalists continue to face numerous and serious challenges to their work. Journalists and media outlets have been investigated by the Sovereignty Protection Office for allegedly ‘serving foreign interests’, and access to public interest events and press conferences continues to be selectively denied. While the accelerated treatment of court cases related to access to information continues, the scope of access to information remains limited especially as regards public funding.

### Institutional checks and balances

The Government continues to use its emergency powers extensively, undermining legal certainty and affecting the operation of businesses in the single market. The law-making process remains a serious source of concern, with certain important legislative processes not being linked to public consultation requirements. Foreign companies, including from other EU Member States, operating in strategic sectors face intensified regulatory pressure from state action. The possibility for the Government to interfere with the application of merger control rules continues to create legal uncertainty. Concerns related to the absence of procedural safeguards and effective oversight in case of secret surveillance measures outside criminal proceedings have not been addressed. A deteriorating environment for civil society organisations and legal uncertainty further obstruct civic space.

## Recommendations

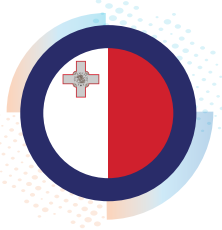


Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Hungary has made:

- ▶ **No progress** on improving the **transparency of case allocation systems in lower-instance courts**, taking into account European standards on case allocation.
- ▶ **Significant progress on increasing the remuneration of judges, prosecutors, and judicial and prosecutorial staff**, without however taking structural measures, taking into account European standards on remuneration for the justice system.
- ▶ **No progress yet** on adopting comprehensive **reforms on lobbying and revolving doors**, and further improving the system of asset declarations, providing for effective oversight and enforcement.
- ▶ **No progress** on establishing a robust **track record of investigations**, prosecutions and final judgments for high-level corruption cases.
- ▶ **No progressing** on introducing mechanisms to **enhance the functional independence of the media regulatory authority** taking into account European standards on the independence of media regulators.
- ▶ **No progress** on adopting legislation to **ensure fair and transparent distribution of advertising expenditure by the state and state-owned companies**.
- ▶ **No progress** on strengthening the rules and mechanisms to **enhance the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media** taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ **No progress on removing obstacles affecting civil society organisations** and foster a safe and enabling civic space, including by repealing legislation that hampers their capacity of working, in particular the immigration tax.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, in addition to recalling the obligation to comply with the rule of law-related rulings of the CJEU and the rule of law-related infringement procedures referred to in the country chapter, the Commission's assessment under the general regime of conditionality, the relevant concerns raised in the Article 7(1) TEU procedure initiated by the European Parliament, the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, and the relevant country-specific recommendations under the European Semester, **it is recommended to Hungary to:**

- ▶ **Improve the transparency of case allocation systems in lower-instance courts**, taking into account European standards on case allocation.
- ▶ **Take measures** to ensure that the ongoing **increase in the remuneration of judges, prosecutors and judicial and prosecutorial staff**, is carried out in a structured manner, taking into account European standards on remuneration for the justice system.
- ▶ Put forward comprehensive **legislative reforms on lobbying and revolving doors**, and further improve the system of asset declarations, providing for effective oversight and enforcement.
- ▶ **Establish** a robust **track record of investigations**, prosecutions and final judgments for **high-level corruption** cases.
- ▶ **Introduce mechanisms** to **enhance the functional independence of the media regulatory authority** taking into account European standards on the independence of media regulators.
- ▶ **Adopt measures** to **ensure fair and transparent distribution of advertising expenditure by the state and state-owned companies**.
- ▶ **Strengthen the rules and mechanisms to enhance the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media** taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ **Ensure** that there are no **obstacles hindering the work of civil society organisations**, including by repealing legislation that hampers their capacity of working, and foster a safe and enabling civic space.



## ABSTRACT – MALTA

### Justice system

The level of perceived judicial independence in Malta continues to be high among the general public and is now high among companies. Discussions are ongoing in the Parliament on a comprehensive constitutional reform relating to the justice sector which would provide for the involvement of the judiciary in the procedure for appointment of the Chief Justice. The transfer of prosecutions of non-summary cases from the Police to the Office of the Attorney General is completed. The Government is proposing to remove the involvement of the executive from the appointment of members of the specialised tribunals to address concerns over their independence. Despite substantial recruitment and proposals to expand court premises, the need to increase resources remains, with business stakeholders reiterating concerns over delays of legal proceedings. Steps have been taken to improve the level of digitalisation of justice. While length of proceedings remains a concern, certain groundwork was set in motion to enhance the efficiency of the justice system.

### Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the National Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy continues. Work remains to be done in order to ensure appropriate follow-up of the anti-corruption recommendations issued following the public inquiry into the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia. Investigative and prosecution authorities increased their human resources. New tools were developed to reduce the length of investigations of high-level corruption cases, but a robust track record of final judgments has not yet been achieved. The capacity of the Permanent Commission Against Corruption to achieve concrete results still has to be demonstrated. Integrity measures for the public service and the police force continue. Action to improve integrity measures for politicians and high-level officials remains to be taken. New tools for whistleblowing continue to be under preparation. Auditing institutions indicated weaknesses on the use of public funds and changes of public procurement procedures. On 29 April 2025, the European Court of Justice found that the Maltese investor citizenship scheme is contrary to EU Law.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The Government is preparing legislation aimed at providing the media regulator with new competences, including as regards scrutiny over mergers in the media market and the allocation of state advertising. There were no new measures to enhance the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media, and limited steps were taken to reinforce safeguards to improve access to official documents. Apart from a law on cross-border strategic lawsuits, additional legislation in the area of the protection of journalists and media freedom remains pending.

### Institutional checks and balances

There have been no further steps taken to introduce a formal framework for public participation in the legislative process, and draft legislation to set up a National Human Rights Institution has yet to be presented in Parliament. Legislation establishing a regulatory framework for civil society is under preparation. A legislative reform increasing the threshold for citizens to directly petition a magisterial inquiry has given rise to strong criticism from some stakeholders about its potential impact on the prosecution of high-level offences.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Malta has made:

- ▶ **Some further progress** on pursuing the draft **reform** endorsed by the Government to involve the **judiciary in the procedure for appointment of the Chief Justice**.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on further strengthening efforts to **improve the efficiency of justice**, particularly to reduce the length of proceedings.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on continuing efforts to **address challenges related to the length of investigations of high-level corruption cases** and no progress in stepping up efforts to establish a robust track record of final judgments.
- ▶ **No progress** in adopting legislative and other safeguards to **improve the working environment of journalists** and limited progress on **access to official documents**, taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists and on access to official documents.
- ▶ **No progress** in strengthening the rules and mechanisms to **enhance the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media** taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ **No progress** in stepping up measures to **establish a National Human Rights Institution** taking into account the UN Paris Principles.
- ▶ **Limited progress** in introducing a formal **framework for public participation in the legislative process**.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, **it is recommended to Malta to:**

- ▶ **Take forward the ongoing reform to involve the judiciary in the procedure for the appointment of the Chief Justice**, taking into account European standards on judicial appointments.
- ▶ **Step up efforts to improve the efficiency of justice**, particularly to reduce the length of proceedings.
- ▶ **Step up efforts to address challenges related to the length of investigations of high-level corruption cases**, and to establish a robust track record of final judgments.
- ▶ **Adopt further legislative and other safeguards to improve the working environment of journalists** including on access to official documents, taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists and on access to official documents.
- ▶ **Strengthen the rules and mechanisms to enhance the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media** taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ Take forward measures to **establish a National Human Rights Institution** taking into account the UN Paris Principles.
- ▶ **Introduce a formal framework for public participation in the legislative process**.





## ABSTRACT – NETHERLANDS

### Justice system

The perception of the level of judicial independence in the Netherlands is very high. Nevertheless, judicial bodies and stakeholders note that some safeguards for judicial independence rest on practice and culture alone. The procedure for appointing members of the Council for the Judiciary and the executive's power to give instructions to prosecutors in individual cases continue to be under discussion. A proposal introducing visual supervision of all lawyer-client conversations in high-security prisons was tabled as part of the measures to fight organised crime. Some steps have been taken to address staff shortages and a high workload in the judiciary. An independent review recommended increasing legal aid lawyers' fees. The level of digitalisation has further improved. The efficiency of the justice system continues to be high.

### Anti-corruption framework

A first national anti-corruption policy was adopted by the Government. The investigation and prosecution of corruption offences remains effective, and measures are taken to deal with unauthorised access to data by civil servants and police officials and fight corruption linked to organised crime. Plans were announced to improve co-ordination of integrity for civil servants to address Court of Audit recommendations, and the draft Political Parties Act is being revised, following advice from the Council of State. The Government had announced its intention to review the rules related to transparency and the asset declaration regime of ministers and state secretaries in the future. Steps taken to increase the transparency of lobbying remain insufficient. Revised rules on revolving doors for former ministers and state secretaries were adopted by the House of Representatives. Work continues on targeting bribery of government officials by organised crime groups and on the identification of other priority sectors in the fight against corruption.

### Media freedom and pluralism

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

### Institutional checks and balances

A series of initiatives were taken by state authorities to follow up on the proposals of the State Commission on the Rule of Law. Shortcomings in the consultation of stakeholders on a legislative package with important legal and social consequences have given rise to serious concerns. The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights has taken measures to address its governance issues. The space for civil society organisations has narrowed and is affected by a combination of funding cuts and a risk of new legal obstacles.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, the Netherlands has made:

- ▶ **Some progress** on efforts to **address shortages in human resources** and challenging working conditions in the justice system.
- ▶ **Significant progress** on completing the revision of **rules on revolving doors** involving former ministers and state secretaries, including a two-year cooling-off period and restrictions on paid activities.
- ▶ **Limited further progress** on establishing stricter **transparency rules on lobbying for members of the Government and Parliament**.
- ▶ **Some progress** on enhancing the **governance of public service media** and its ability to uphold journalistic standards, taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ **Some progress** on ensuring an adequate follow-up to the recommendations of the State Commission on the Rule of Law, **strengthening the legal protection of citizens**.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, **it is recommended to the Netherlands to:**

- ▶ **Continue efforts** to improve challenging working conditions in the justice system and address shortages in human resources.
- ▶ Establish **stricter transparency rules on lobbying for members of the Government and Parliament**.
- ▶ **Take forward** the planned **reform of public service media** to enhance its governance and its ability to uphold journalistic standards, taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ **Take forward** the proposal of the State Commission on Rule of Law to **strengthen a rule of law culture**, including by setting up a structured dialogue between the state powers based on a 'rule of law agenda'.



## ABSTRACT – AUSTRIA

### Justice system

In Austria, the level of perceived independence of the judiciary among the general public continues to be very high and the overall efficiency of the justice system remains high as well. There have been no steps to introduce systematic judicial involvement in the appointment of administrative court (vice-)presidents. The establishment of an independent Federal Prosecution Office has not advanced so far, though the Government programme commits to take such a reform forward and legal drafts are being prepared. Certain reporting obligations of the prosecution service remain high, and the Minister of Justice continues to make use of the right to instruct prosecutors in individual cases within the existing legal framework, further underlying the need for a reform of the system. Resources allocated to the justice system allow for posts to be filled, while needs for additional posts for judges have been identified. Digitalisation of justice continues to advance, and the compulsory online publication of judgments has been expanded to the Higher Regional Courts. A reform of the system of evaluation of judges to introduce a more feedback-based system is being discussed. Court fees in specific contexts continue to be high and the Constitutional Court found a restriction on access to legal aid in the Administrative Procedural Code to be unconstitutional.

### Anti-corruption framework

The National Anti-Corruption Strategy and the 2023-2025 Action Plans are being implemented. Investigations in high-level corruption cases continue, while prosecutors can still face intense scrutiny with regard to specific cases. Work on an asset declaration system and Code of Conduct for Ministers, as well as new rules for Members of Cabinet, is ongoing. First discussions are taking place on an asset and interests regime for Members of Parliament. The establishment of a publicly accessible register of parliamentary groups strengthened transparency, and web-based reporting channels for whistleblowers are reported to function well. The lobbying framework and rules on revolving doors remain limited in scope. The Court of Audit performed new tasks in line with its extended mandate. Measures to mitigate corruption risks in public procurement, which is seen as an area at high risk of corruption, continue.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The media regulator continues to operate independently. While funding for quality journalism is having a positive impact, the economic situation of media business operators deteriorates. There have been limited steps to address the proper implementation and enforcement of fair distribution of state advertising. Following a Constitutional Court ruling, the rules on the management bodies of the public service broadcaster were amended to increase the independence of these bodies. Measures continue to address challenges regarding the safety of journalists.

### Institutional checks and balances

The Ombudsman Board, which is the National Human Rights Institution, functions effectively and the nomination procedure for its members is set to be strengthened. The Government has committed in its programme to transparency and objectivity with respect to appointments to high-level positions at independent authorities, which remains an area susceptible to politicisation. The implementation of the recent reform of the tax framework for civil society organisations has shown positive results.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Austria has made:

- ▶ **No progress** on **addressing** the need for **involvement of the judiciary in the procedures for appointment of court presidents of administrative courts**, taking into account European standards on judicial appointments and the selection of court presidents.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on taking forward the **reform to establish an independent Federal Prosecution Office**, taking into account European standards on the independence and autonomy of the prosecution, including to ensure the independent operation of the specialised anti-corruption prosecution.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on introducing effective **rules on assets and interests' declaration for Members of Parliament**, including effective monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms.
- ▶ **No progress** on adopting a legislative proposal to **strengthen the framework on lobbying**, including the transparency register.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on taking steps to ensure proper implementation and enforcement as regards the **fair distribution of state advertising**.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, **it is recommended to Austria to:**

- ▶ **Address the need for involvement of the judiciary in the procedures for appointment of court presidents of administrative courts**, taking into account European standards on judicial appointments and the selection of court presidents.
- ▶ **Take forward the reform to establish an independent Federal Prosecution Office**, taking into account European standards on the independence and autonomy of the prosecution, including to ensure the independent operation of the specialised anti-corruption prosecution.
- ▶ **Take forward** efforts to introduce effective **rules on assets and interests' declaration for Members of Parliament**, including effective monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms.
- ▶ Adopt a legislative proposal to **strengthen the framework on lobbying**, including the transparency register.
- ▶ Take steps to ensure **proper implementation** and enforcement as regards the fair distribution of state advertising.



## ABSTRACT – POLAND

### Justice system

Significant efforts have been made in Poland towards the implementation of the Action Plan on the Rule of Law to address long-standing concerns regarding judicial independence. A law is being prepared to address the situation of judges appointed at the request of the National Council for the Judiciary in its post-2017 composition, on which the Government committed to reconsult the Venice Commission. Plans to amend the structure of the Supreme Court have been proposed to strengthen its independence, including the dismantling of the Chamber of Extraordinary Control and Public Affairs. Acts amending the Law on the National Council for the Judiciary and the Act on the Constitutional Tribunal were adopted by the Parliament to address the relevant serious concerns but have not yet entered into force due to their referral to the Constitutional Tribunal by the President of the Republic. Further significant steps have been made towards separating the office of the Minister of Justice from that of the Prosecutor General, while a law to that end is yet to be adopted. The level of perceived judicial independence in Poland continues to be very low although it has slightly increased among companies, while the efficiency of courts remains stable.

### Anti-corruption framework

The Polish Government is working to strengthen the legislative framework against corruption and to improve coordination among investigating entities. There is no comprehensive anti-corruption strategy in place. Laws combating corruption are enforced in practice, with large-scale corruption cases involving public officials and politicians being investigated. The EPPO is now fully operational to investigate and prosecute crimes affecting the financial interests of the Union. There have been no further steps to address the broad immunities of top executives and impunity clauses or to introduce lobbying rules. Weaknesses remain regarding political party financing, but the authorities are starting to address the issue. The new whistleblower protection law entered into force and limited steps have been taken towards establishing an electronic asset declaration and verification system. Significant corruption risks have been identified in public procurement, with potential impacts on investments and business activities.

### Media freedom and pluralism

A planned media law reform is to address concerns regarding the impartiality and independence of the media regulator as well as the independence and pluralism of public service media more broadly. Meanwhile, some further efforts have been made to strengthen the process of granting operating licences and to ensure the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media, though challenges remain in safeguarding media pluralism and, particularly in situations involving foreign investment in media ownership. Politically biased media content has decreased, and state advertising expenditure is more evenly distributed. The Government is working on a new state-funded model aimed at replacing the licence fee system. The legal framework for access to public information remains stable, though stakeholders report certain challenges with its implementation. The number of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) has decreased and the Government continues to address challenges affecting the safety of journalists and the protection of journalistic sources and confidential communications.

### Institutional checks and balances

Poland strengthened the rules governing consultations to improve the quality of legislation. Further steps have been taken to improve the framework in which civil society operates. Efforts are under way to address instances of abuse of power by public officials. The Ombudsperson continues to fulfil a key role in the system of checks and balances.

## Recommendations



Overall, [concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report](#), Poland has made:

- ▶ **Significant progress** on separating the office of the Minister of Justice from that of the Prosecutor General and to **ensure the functional independence of the prosecution service from the Government**.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on standardising the online system for asset declarations of public officials and Members of Parliament and no progress on introducing lobbying rules.
- ▶ **Some progress** on ensuring **independent and effective investigations and prosecutions**, address the broad scope of immunities for top executives and remove previously introduced impunity clauses in legislation in order to enable a robust track record of high-level corruption cases.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on ensuring that **fair, transparent and non-discriminatory procedures**, are adhered to for the granting of operating licences to media outlets.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on ensuring an effective **legislative framework for the independent governance** and editorial independence of public service media, taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on improving the framework in which civil society operates.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, and in addition to recalling the obligation to comply with the rule of law related rulings of the Court of Justice of the EU and the rule of law related infringement procedures referred to in the country chapter as well as recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, [it is recommended to Poland to:](#)

- ▶ **Continue to advance on the implementation of the Action Plan on the Rule of Law**, including as regards the National Council for the Judiciary and the Constitutional Tribunal.
- ▶ **Take forward the reform to separate the function of the Minister of Justice from that of the Prosecutor-General** and to ensure functional independence of the prosecution service from the Government.
- ▶ **Introduce rules on lobbying** and a standardised online system for asset declarations of public officials and members of Parliament while ensuring effective verification.
- ▶ **Continue efforts to ensure independent and effective corruption investigations and prosecutions**, address the broad scope of immunities for top executives and remove impunity clauses to enable a robust track record of high-level corruption cases.
- ▶ **Take forward reforms to ensure that fair, transparent and non-discriminatory procedures** are adhered to for the granting of operating licences to media outlets.
- ▶ **Take forward reforms to ensure an effective legislative framework for the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media**, taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ **Continue ongoing efforts to improve the framework in which civil society operates**, taking into account European standards on civil society organisations.



## ABSTRACT – PORTUGAL

### Justice system

In Portugal, significant steps have been taken to improve the human resources allocated to the justice system, thanks to new recruitments and legislative changes. The early end of the legislature had an impact on some reforms, such as those related to the system of case allocation, the efficiency of complex criminal cases, and access to judgments, which could not be finalised. The High Council for the Judiciary has called for a reflection on possible mechanisms to ensure its stability and safeguard its independence. The efficiency of Administrative and Tax Courts improved in first instance, while serious concerns remain regarding the disposition time in second instance courts, especially among businesses. The working conditions and security in court and prosecution premises affect the functioning of the courts. Changes to the legal aid system were introduced to address the low level of remuneration of legal aid providers, with the Bar Association calling for further changes.

### Anti-corruption framework

The National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2020-2024 is still to be evaluated, and a new anti-corruption strategy is expected to be developed. Steps were taken to improve the resources of the Anti-Corruption Mechanism (MENAC), and further changes were made to improve its structure and functioning. New measures were introduced to ensure sufficient resources for preventing, investigating and prosecuting corruption. While corruption cases remain a priority, investigation, prosecution and adjudication of high-level corruption cases face delays. The effective monitoring and verification of asset declarations by the Transparency Entity improved significantly. Shortcomings in the integrity framework are expected to be addressed under the new legislature. Despite efforts under the previous legislature, lobbying remains unregulated. The system of preventive audit over EU-funded projects was amended.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The Media Regulatory Authority continues to carry out its task with reinforced financial resources. The conclusion of a high-profile case concerning a merger suspension prompted new proposals and discussions regarding the legal framework on transparency of media ownership. A new Media Action Plan comprising 30 measures was presented. A concession contract for public service media has been signed and its financial resources improved following the updating of the audiovisual tax. The LUSA News Agency is now nearly fully owned by the state. Some steps were taken to improve working conditions for journalists, such as the adoption of an action plan for journalists' safety, while the number of incidents affecting journalists has decreased.

### Institutional checks and balances

Due to the early termination of the legislature, it was not possible to finalise the planned reforms to improve the transparency of law-making. The Office of the Ombudsperson continues to perform effectively, despite continuing to deal with a high number of complaints related to administrative delays. Civil society space continues to be considered as open, and there were further improvements regarding access to financing for civil society organisations.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Portugal has made:

- ▶ **Significant progress** in stepping up **efforts to ensure adequate human resources of the justice system**, in particular regarding judicial clerks, and some **further progress** in continuing efforts to improve its **efficiency**, in particular of Administrative and Tax Courts.
- ▶ **Some progress** in ensuring the **adequacy of the general criminal procedure legislation** to efficiently deal with complex criminal proceedings.
- ▶ Significant progress in continuing efforts made to ensure sufficient resources for preventing, investigating and prosecuting corruption, and **some further progress** in ensuring sufficient resources for the new **Anti-Corruption Mechanism**.
- ▶ **Significant progress** in **ensuring** the effective monitoring and verification of asset declarations by the **Transparency Entity**.
- ▶ **No progress** in finalising the **reforms to improve the transparency of law-making**, particularly on the implementation of impact assessment tools.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the relevant country-specific recommendations under the European Semester, **it is recommended to Portugal to:**

- ▶ **Step up efforts to improve the efficiency of the justice system**, in particular of Administrative and Tax Courts.
- ▶ **Take forward measures** to ensure the **adequacy of the general criminal procedure legislation** to efficiently deal with complex criminal proceedings.
- ▶ **Adopt rules on the regulation of lobbying**, including the creation of a comprehensive public lobbying registry.
- ▶ Finalise the reforms to improve the **transparency of law-making**, particularly on the implementation of impact assessment tools.





## ABSTRACT – ROMANIA

### Justice system

Significant steps have been taken by Romania to complete the process initiated in view of taking into account the recommendations of the Venice Commission on the Justice Laws, which addressed concerns for the independence, quality and efficiency of the justice system. Legislative steps are explored to further strengthen safeguards pertaining to the independence of high-ranking prosecutors and the judicial police and an evaluation of the implementation of the Justice Laws will be considered by the Ministry of Justice after a sufficient period of time from their adoption, taking into account the need to maintain the stability of the legal framework. The transparency of case-law on disciplinary sanctions has improved, due to awareness raising efforts. The Ministry of Justice showed openness to adapt its reform of IT systems in courts to ensure that judicial independence is guaranteed. Some further efforts were made to ensure adequate human resources for the justice system, including with new recruitments, despite budgetary restrictions. Several initiatives have been taken to facilitate access to legal aid. The length of proceedings increased compared to previous years.

### Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the 2021-2025 Anti-Corruption Strategy remains on track and a new Strategy is under preparation, building on the *ex-post* evaluation of the current strategy. Authorities maintain a positive track record in combating corruption, including as regards high-level corruption cases. However, following rulings on the statute of limitations, national courts have closed many corruption cases and annulled convictions. There have been further steps taken in relation to the system for investigating and prosecuting criminal offences in the judiciary. The updating of the legislative framework on integrity is in discussion, with a draft law addressing revolving doors being elaborated. The National Integrity Agency maintained its record in managing conflicts of interest and asset declarations, however, a Constitutional Court ruling will require Romania to re-assess what was seen as a strong asset declaration system. Some initial steps have been taken to introduce rules on lobbying for Members of Parliament and legislation to improve the transparency of political party financing remains pending in Parliament. Corruption and fraud have been identified by the national authorities as risks in the public procurement process with some measures ongoing to address them.

### Media freedom and pluralism

There have been no steps to enhance the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media. The financing of private media by political parties and state authorities has led to an increase of untransparent political advertising. While the National Audiovisual Council would benefit from more human resources and a long-awaited new IT system, information on media ownership beyond the audiovisual sector is still insufficient. Media actors have yet to agree on self-regulation. Issues on transparency and access to information remain, pending discussions on a new Code of Administrative Procedures. Threats and instances of harassment of journalists remain an issue and political pressure on editorial independence affects journalists' work.

### Institutional checks and balances

Some steps have been taken to improve public consultations, while a number of shortcomings remain in practice. Legislative unpredictability, the frequent use of Government Emergency Ordinances, problems with the quality of legislation and regulatory burden, remain primary concerns for businesses and civil society organisations. Presidential elections were repeated in 2025, following the Constitutional Court's decision to annul the first round of elections held in 2024. A final decision is still pending regarding the accreditation of National Human Rights Institutions. A Strategy for Open Government was adopted to address the increasing challenges for civil society organisations.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Romania has made:

- ▶ **Significant progress** on completing the process initiated in view of **taking into account the recommendations of the Venice Commission** on the Justice Laws, including through consultations and evaluations in view of further improving the Justice Laws at a next opportunity.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on ensuring adequate **human resources for the justice system**, including for the prosecution services, taking into account European standards on resources for the justice system.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on taking **measures**, in particular at an operational level, to **ensure efficient investigation and prosecution of criminal offences** in the judiciary, including as regards corruption offences, taking into account European standards.
- ▶ **No progress** on introducing **rules on lobbying for Members of Parliament**.
- ▶ **No progress** on strengthening the rules and mechanisms to **enhance the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media** taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ **Some progress** on ensuring effective **public consultations before the adoption of legislation**.
- ▶ **No progress** on taking forward the process for **obtaining accreditation for two National Human Rights Institutions**, taking into account the UN Paris Principles.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the relevant country-specific recommendations under the European Semester, **it is recommended to Romania to:**

- ▶ **Take forward legislative steps** to strengthen **safeguards to ensure the independence of high-ranking prosecutors** and for the organisation and functioning of the judicial police.
- ▶ **Take measures to ensure efficient investigation and prosecution of criminal offences in the judiciary**, including as regards corruption offences.
- ▶ **Introduce rules on lobbying for Members of Parliament** and ensure the effectiveness of the asset declaration system.
- ▶ **Step up efforts** to strengthen the rules and mechanisms to **enhance the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media** taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ **Step up efforts** to **address the frequent use of government emergency ordinances** and to ensure effective public consultations before the adoption of legislation.
- ▶ **Take forward the process for obtaining accreditation for the National Human Rights Institutions**, taking into account the UN Paris Principles.



## ABSTRACT – SLOVENIA

### Justice system

The Slovenian justice system saw positive developments, with safeguards for judicial independence and autonomy of prosecutors as regards parliamentary inquiries having entered into force. The level of remuneration of judges and state prosecutors has increased, and work is ongoing to strengthen the rules related to their protection. Amendments to the judicial legislation introducing safeguards to the disciplinary framework and the appointment procedure for Supreme Court judges, as well as reforming the judicial map are in discussion before Parliament. Plans to amend the procedure of promotion and appointment of prosecutors are envisaged to address staffing challenges in State Prosecution Offices. Digitalisation efforts continue, and a full transition to electronic communication remains a priority. The efficiency gains in recent years have not prevented backlogs from further increasing and length of trials remain a challenge particularly in money laundering and corruption cases, but measures taken by the Supreme Court resulted in an increase of the number of resolved cases.

### Anti-corruption framework

A new anti-corruption strategy and action plan were adopted. Efforts towards establishing a track record of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments in corruption offences continued. The Commission for the Prevention of Corruption called for more transparency and integrity in the appointment of high-level officials such as the Police Director-General. The lobbying guidelines were updated to clarify the existing exemptions from the registration obligation. Transparency and clarity were improved in the updated rules on the submission of the annual reports of political parties. The technical capabilities of the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption improved although concerns remain on staff recruitment. Efforts to improve transparency and competition in public procurement continued.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The media regulator generally remains independent, while concerns exist regarding its human and financial resources, including in relation to the envisaged responsibilities. The independence of public service media has further improved. Some steps were made to ensure the adequate funding for public service media, such as a proposed revision of the financing model, although challenges persist. The private media remain affected by financial difficulties and risks to media pluralism. The framework for accessing public information remains favourable. Some further steps were taken to improve the protection of journalists, yet the challenges remain.

### Institutional checks and balances

To address the Constitutional Court's considerable caseload, the transfer of certain types of cases to administrative courts was achieved by interpretation of legislative changes. Legislative amendments would extend the competence of the Human Rights Ombudsperson and allow the Constitutional Court to establish the incompatibility of office of its members. The civic space in Slovenia continued to improve and has been upgraded to 'open'.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Slovenia has (made):

- ▶ **Fully implemented** the recommendation to finalise the legislative process to **amend the rules on parliamentary inquiries** with adequate safeguards for independence of judges and state prosecutors, taking into account European standards on judicial independence.
- ▶ **Significant progress** on taking further measures to ensure that the **reform of judicial appointments** contains adequate **safeguards for judicial independence**, taking into account European standards on judicial independence.
- ▶ **Fully implemented** the recommendation to finalise the measures to increase the remuneration of judges and state prosecutors, taking into account European standards on resources and remuneration for the justice system.
- ▶ Fully implemented the recommendation to complete the **adoption of the new anti-corruption strategy** and action plan and begin implementation, and **some further progress** on taking measures to ensure a **track record of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments** in corruption offences, including in **high-level cases**.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on the recommendation to further advance with the process of adopting legislative and non-legislative safeguards to **improve the protection of journalists**, particularly online, taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists.
- ▶ **Some progress** on ensuring that rules or mechanisms are in place to **provide funding for public service media** that is appropriate for the realisation of its public service remit while **guaranteeing its independence**.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, **it is recommended to Slovenia to:**

- ▶ **Take further measures** to ensure a **track record of investigations**, prosecutions and final judgments in corruption offences, including in high-level cases.
- ▶ **Further advance** with the process of adopting legislative and non-legislative safeguards to **improve the protection of journalists**, taking into account European standards on the protection of journalists.
- ▶ **Complete** reforms to ensure that the rules or mechanisms are in place to **provide funding for public service media** that is appropriate for the realisation of its public service remit while guaranteeing its **independence**.



## ABSTRACT – SLOVAKIA

### Justice system

Since the 2024 Report, Slovakia has engaged in an intensive dialogue with the Commission to resolve the issues identified, and efforts in this regard are ongoing. In this context, a series of amendments to the Criminal Codes were passed in the second half of 2024 to adjust earlier amendments, with a view to align the legislation with the Directive on the protection of EU financial interests. The Government proposed amendments to judges' laws introducing various changes, some of which are welcomed by stakeholders as addressing the efficiency of courts. They also re-introduce bonuses for judges and amend the rules for evaluation. The draft amendments furthermore propose establishing a second instance review in disciplinary decisions regarding judges, prosecutors, notaries and bailiffs, while giving an increasing role to the Judicial Council. Reflections are ongoing on introducing safeguards to ensure sufficient guarantees of independence as regards the dismissal of the members of the Judicial Council, though no formal steps have yet been taken. While amendments to the Criminal Codes introduced last year clarified some procedural aspects regarding criminal liability for judicial decisions and the Government indicated openness for further legislative action, there is still a need to make further progress on introducing sufficient safeguards. There are plans to address some challenges reported by stakeholders related to the implementation of the judicial map reformed in 2023. A reform extends the access to free legal aid to a wider group of society, while digitalisation efforts are ongoing. The justice system continues to face challenges as regards its efficiency, particularly in administrative cases.

### Anti-corruption framework

Whereas the 2024 criminal law reform was realigned to be consistent with EU law, other aspects still raise specific anti-corruption concerns and previously identified risks appear to have materialised with several high-level cases statute-barred or reclassified as misdemeanours only. The closure of specialised anti-corruption entities (National Crime Agency and Special Prosecutor's Office) resulted in delays in investigations transferred to other bodies and significant drops in the number of corruption cases. Prosecutorial decisions deemed to be illegal continued to be annulled by the Prosecutor General, including in high-level corruption cases, who is able to reassign such cases and give direct instructions. A new National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2024-2029 and a related Action Plan are in preparation for intergovernmental consultation procedure. There are some initial developments to strengthen the prevention of conflict of interest. Political commitments to introduce legislative initiatives on lobbying or asset declarations are still to be translated into proposals.

### Media freedom and pluralism

A draft law amending the Media Services Act aims to expand the competences of the national regulator. The abolition of the previous public service broadcaster and the establishment of a new entity continues to raise concerns about the autonomy of public service media. The Freedom of Information Act was amended to introduce additional conditions for accessing information in certain cases. No measures have been taken to improve the safety and working environment of journalists, with stakeholders concluding that there has been a deterioration in this field.

### Institutional checks and balances

Practices by-passing stakeholders' involvement in the law-making process and frequent recourse to fast-track legislative procedures continue to raise concerns. The civil society environment faces further pressure, and new reporting and information disclosure obligations introduce additional burden for civil society organisations.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Slovakia has made:

- ▶ **No progress** on introducing measures to ensure that the **members of the Judicial Council**, notably those not elected by judges, are subject to sufficient **guarantees of independence** as regards their dismissal, taking into account European standards on independence of Judicial Councils.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on ensuring that sufficient **safeguards** are in place and duly observed when **subjecting judges to criminal liability** for the crime of “abuse of law” as regards their judicial decisions.
- ▶ **Some progress** on **strengthening the legislation on conflicts of interest**, and no progress on introducing proposals to regulate lobbying and asset declarations.
- ▶ **No progress** on ensuring the effective and independent **investigation and prosecution of high-level corruption cases** with a view to establishing a robust track record, including by preventing any undue interference in such cases and by restricting the use of the Prosecutor-General’s powers to annul final investigatory and prosecutorial decisions.
- ▶ **No progress on** strengthening the rules and mechanisms to restore and further **safeguard the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media** taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ **No further progress** on advancing with the process to establish legislative and other **safeguards to improve the physical safety and working environment of journalists**, including the reform of defamation law, taking into account the European standards on the protection of journalists.
- ▶ **No progress** on ensuring effective **public consultation** and stakeholder involvement in the **law-making process**, including by avoiding excessive use of the fast-track procedure.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, and in addition to recalling the relevant commitments made under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the relevant country-specific recommendations under the European Semester, **it is recommended to Slovakia to:**

- ▶ **Introduce measures to ensure sufficient guarantees of independence** as regards the dismissal of members of the Judicial Council, notably those not elected by judges, taking into account European standards on independence of Judicial Councils.
- ▶ **Ensure** that sufficient **safeguards** are in place and duly observed when **subjecting judges to criminal liability** for the crime of “abuse of law” as regards their judicial decisions.
- ▶ **Introduce proposals to regulate lobbying**, strengthen the asset declaration and verification system, and continue ongoing efforts to reform conflicts of interest rules.
- ▶ **Ensure** the effective and **independent investigations and prosecutions of high-level corruption cases** to establish a robust track record, including by preventing any undue interference and restricting the use of the Prosecutor-General’s powers to annul final investigatory and prosecutorial decisions.
- ▶ **Strengthen** the rules **and** mechanisms to restore and further safeguard the **independent governance and editorial independence of public service media** taking into account European standards on public service media.
- ▶ **Advance** with the process to establish **legislative** and other **safeguards to improve the physical safety and working environment of journalists**, including the reform of defamation law, taking into account the European standards on the protection of journalists.
- ▶ **Ensure effective public consultation** and stakeholder involvement in the **law-making process**, including by addressing the frequent use of the fast-track procedure.



## ABSTRACT – FINLAND

### Justice system

The level of perceived judicial independence in Finland continues to be very high. The working group aiming to strengthen the independence of the justice system proceeded with their work, and limited steps were taken on the issue of the appointment of lay judges. The reliance on the appointment of non-permanent judges is a concern for stakeholders. The Government took steps to strengthen victim protection in the context of alternative dispute resolution in criminal cases. The project of digitalising case management for general courts was concluded in 2024, with a further development of the system ongoing. The level of legal aid fees for private legal practitioners was increased. While the justice system functions efficiently overall, the latest figures indicate a slight increase in the length of proceedings in certain areas.

### Anti-corruption framework

The perception among experts, citizens and business executives is that Finland is one of the least corrupt countries in the world. The new anti-corruption Action Plan for 2024–2027 was approved in 2025. Cooperation between the police and prosecution continues smoothly, with adequate resources allowing them to efficiently perform their tasks. The government is planning to propose legislation to criminalise trading in influence and revise the foreign bribery offence once the proposed EU Directive against corruption is agreed. Further initiatives are taking place to potentially further strengthen the integrity framework for Ministers with a Code of Conduct. The Transparency Register Act is reported to function well. A legislative proposal on limiting ‘revolving doors’ for Ministers has been submitted to Parliament and legislative amendments on developing transparency in political party financing legislation entered into force. New initiatives are aimed at tackling corruption risks in the public procurement area, which remains a high-risk area for corruption, just as urban and land use planning.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The national media regulatory authorities are undergoing structural changes while their independence remains stable. The updates of ethical rules for the press have started to apply and the self-regulatory Finnish Council for Mass Media continues to deal with a high number of complaints about journalistic ethics. The government has proposed new legislation to further strengthen the independence of the public service media while also reducing its funding. Some steps have been made to strengthen the right of access to information. The framework for the protection of journalists has remained stable.

### Institutional checks and balances

The law-making process is overall inclusive, though stakeholders highlight areas for improvement, such as ensuring that the minimum length of consultation periods is observed in practice. The civil society framework remains open, although some stakeholders continue to report a change in the narrative concerning the role of civil society actors.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Finland has (made):

- ▶ **Fully implemented** the recommendation to continue the work of the working group ‘**Rule of Law Guarantees and Development of the Judicial System**’ with a view to strengthen the independence of the justice system and increase the quality of legal protection.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on **reforming the appointment of lay judges**, taking into account European standards on judicial independence.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on adopting **legislation on trading in influence** and proposing a revision on the criminal offence of foreign bribery.
- ▶ **Limited progress** on **strengthening the integrity and accountability framework applicable to ministers** and other persons entrusted with top executive functions by adopting a code of conduct for them.
- ▶ **Some further progress** on further advancing with the **reform of the Act on the Openness of Government Activities** to ensure effective and wider access to documents taking into account the European standards on access to official documents.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, **it is recommended to Finland to:**

- ▶ **Advance the reform of the appointment of lay judges**, taking into account European standards on judicial independence.
- ▶ **Take forward the revision of the criminal offence of foreign bribery.**
- ▶ **Continue efforts** to **strengthen the integrity and accountability framework applicable to ministers** and other persons entrusted with top executive functions by adopting a code of conduct for them.
- ▶ **Advance** with the **reform of the Act on the Openness of Government Activities** to ensure effective access to documents taking into account the European standards on access to official documents.





## ABSTRACT – SWEDEN

### Justice system

In Sweden, the level of perceived judicial independence continues to be very high among the general public and is now high among companies. The Government presented proposals amending the Constitution to further strengthen judicial independence, in particular as regards judges' appointments, disciplinary procedures, and establishing a more independent court administration agency. The debate on strengthening safeguards to ensure independence in the nomination of lay judges is still ongoing but has not yet led to any changes. The Swedish courts were granted increased financial resources to deal with an increase in cases and to increase security at courts. Swedish judges' salaries are set within the parameters of a collective agreement between the National Courts Administration and the trade union representing judges, and reviewed annually based on an individual assessment. Initiatives related to the right to an effective remedy are on-going, including as regards the threshold to qualify for legal aid. The justice system continues to perform efficiently despite a peak of incoming cases in 2024.

### Anti-corruption framework

The perception among experts, citizens and business executives is that Sweden is one of the least corrupt countries in the world. New legislation on limitation periods has now entered into force while the Government continues to review criminal legislation in relation to corruption. The investigation and prosecution of corruption continues to achieve results, although addressing foreign bribery remains a challenge and law enforcement are concerned by a possible underreporting of corruption cases. The obligation for agencies under the Government to prevent corruption is now clarified in law, while some gaps in asset declaration for public officials remain. A committee recommended reforms to the political party financing framework and introduction of rules on lobbying, while there hasn't been any follow-up so far on the evaluation of the rules on revolving doors. Measures are taken to address the risk of infiltration of the public service by organised crime through corruption, such as the adoption of legislation to strengthen background checks of municipal employees.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The independent national regulatory authority, the Swedish Agency for the Media, deals with an increasing variety of tasks. The Government is preparing to renew the periodic public service mission with new rules for independence of public service media. The access to documents framework has been adjusted to counter the misuse of transparency by organised crime. The overall conditions for journalists remain favourable and the Swedish Agency for the Media has been tasked to monitor the safety of journalists.

### Institutional checks and balances

Some stakeholders express concern about the acceleration of legislative preparatory work which they consider poses challenges to public participation. The Government presented a proposal amending the Constitution to provide a framework to better deal with serious crises. It also presented a proposal to strengthen the procedure for amending the Constitution. The National Human Rights Institution has obtained an A-status accreditation and the Parliamentary Ombudsmen discharge their mandates effectively. There were further steps on the legal framework for the funding and operation of civil society organisations, which entered into force in 2025. The civil society space remains open.

## Recommendations



Overall, **concerning the recommendations in the 2024 Rule of Law Report**, Sweden has made:

- ▶ **No progress** on ensuring that the **nomination system of lay judges safeguards their independence**, taking into account European standards on judicial independence.
- ▶ **No progress** on ensuring the appropriate follow-up to the evaluation of the **rules on revolving doors**.
- ▶ **No further progress** on **strengthening the fight against foreign bribery**, by amending the existing legal definitions to improve on the prosecution of, and final judgments in foreign bribery cases.
- ▶ **Significant progress** on continuing efforts to ensure that the **reforms to the legal framework for the funding and operation of civil society organisations** do not unduly affect civil society engagement.

On this basis, and considering other developments that took place in the period of reference, **it is recommended to Sweden to:**

- ▶ **Ensure that the nomination system of lay judges safeguards their independence**, taking into account European standards on judicial independence.
- ▶ **Strengthen the fight against foreign bribery**, including through amending the existing legal framework and improving enforcement.
- ▶ **Ensure** the appropriate follow-up to the **evaluation of the rules on revolving doors**.



## ABSTRACT – MONTENEGRO

### Justice system

Montenegro is working on the implementation of the 2024-2027 Judicial Reform Strategy and its accompanying 2024-2025 action plan, yet not all planned activities for 2024 have been fully implemented. The implementation of the previously amended legal framework has yielded some initial positive results, while the composition of the Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils remains to be further improved. The lack of a dedicated law on labour rights of judges remains a challenge. The new President of the Supreme Court has been appointed by unanimity, while the filling of judicial and prosecutorial positions remains to be ensured. Implementation of measures to enhance judicial digitalisation is in progress. Challenges as regards human resources, ICT and infrastructures continued. The Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils' public communication and transparency are improving, but there is still room for improvement to ensure full transparency on the publication of reasoned decisions on promotions, appointments, and disciplinary cases. Some improvements have been achieved on efficiency, while significant backlogs persist in administrative cases.

### Anti-corruption framework

The implementation of the 2024-2028 strategy for the fight against corruption and its 2024-2025 action plan is ongoing, but challenges remain concerning the monitoring of its implementation. The track record of investigations and prosecutions in cases of high-level corruption continues to improve, but the low number of final convictions and lack of effective and deterrent penalties contributes to a perception of impunity. Human resources capacities in the fight against corruption have slightly increased but remain insufficient overall. The Agency for the Prevention of Corruption continued to carry out its tasks, despite some disruption caused by the expiration of the term of office of its management, ineffective governance and resource constraints. The adoption of nine by-laws enabled the effective implementation of the Law on Lobbying. The legal framework regulating political parties' funding continues to be hampered by shortcomings in its scope, clarity and implementation. The implementation of the improved legal framework on the protection of whistleblowers is ongoing. Progress has been made in enhancing public procurement transparency with electronic systems.

### Media freedom and pluralism

Delays in appointing members to the Councils of the Agency for Audiovisual Media Services and the Radio Television of Montenegro hinder the implementation of the media legislative framework. Rules on transparency of media ownership information have improved but only in relation to media providers. The legal provisions regulating the transparency of public funding allocations for media are yet to be fully implemented. The legal framework on access to information remains to be amended, but there are significant challenges in ensuring its effective implementation. The authorities continue to provide prompt and effective institutional and law enforcement responses to new cases of violence against journalists.

### Institutional checks and balances

An established framework for inclusive legislative processes is in place, but challenges remain in terms of effectiveness of public consultations. A deep institutional and political crisis emerged over the decision of the Parliament to unilaterally declare the retirement of a Constitutional Court judge, raising concerns about the respect for the independence of the Constitutional Court. A new law on the Ombudsperson's Office is being drafted to fully align with the Paris Principles and aimed at achieving an upgraded accreditation to 'A' status. Civil society organisations function within an overall enabling environment, although several challenges persist.



## ABSTRACT – NORTH MACEDONIA

### Justice system

North Macedonia continued implementing its judicial reform. Interference and pressure from other State branches raise serious concerns about judicial independence. The dismissal procedure launched against the Chief Prosecutor exposed shortcomings in the rules for the dismissal and a risk of politicisation. Measures were taken across the judiciary to enhance transparency, while some concerns remain regarding appointment decisions. Legislative drafting processes are ongoing regarding the independence of the judiciary and the autonomy of the public prosecution service. The limited financial resources allocated to the judiciary continue to affect its financial autonomy. While the lack of human resources was partly mitigated by new recruitments, shortages of staff remain a concern. Efforts to further improve the digital tools for case management and court statistics continue, but challenges remain, such as with outdated infrastructure. The efficiency of the judiciary has overall declined as the length of proceedings increased for almost all case categories.

### Anti-corruption framework

Implementation of the national anti-corruption strategy continues to be insufficient overall. Despite recent efforts in investigating and prosecuting corruption, delays in court proceedings and resource constraints continue to hinder the establishment of a robust track record of high-level corruption cases. The 2023 amendments to the Criminal Code continue to significantly undermine efforts to combat corruption, particularly affecting the prosecution of high-level corruption cases. The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption continues to focus on prevention and institutional cooperation but is less active in detecting and reporting alleged instances of corruption. Concerns remain regarding the effective verification of asset declarations. Effective oversight of political party financing continues to be hampered by an inadequate legislative framework and a lack of resources and expertise. Whistleblower protection remains weak, discouraging individuals from reporting corruption. Corruption risks are high, in particular in the healthcare and public procurement areas, while the impact of political influence on efforts to address corruption is highlighted as a concern.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The financial independence of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services has been improved. Appointments of new members to its Council are still pending. The self-regulatory Council of Media Ethics continues its activities despite concerns about securing long-term sustainable funding. The Public Service Broadcaster faces challenges despite improvements in its funding. Challenges remain concerning transparency of media ownership. The reintroduction of state-funded advertising has drawn criticism from media experts and civil society organisations. While the legal framework for access to public information is in place, its inconsistent implementation can pose challenges to the effective exercise of this right. Despite some progress in strengthening the legal protection for journalists, their working environment has not improved.

### Institutional checks and balances

The Parliament is implementing the new Rules of Procedure, which were adopted with the aim of improving its oversight and efficiency. Challenges remain regarding parliamentary appointments which raise concerns about merit-based selections. Shortcomings remain in implementing processes for inclusive and evidence-based policymaking. The new Constitutional Court Act entered into force, strengthening its role in the monitoring and enforcement of its decisions. Financial and human resource constraints continue to affect the functioning of the Ombudsperson's Office and of the Commission for Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination. The Government initiated measures to enhance cooperation with civil society, while civil society raised challenges, including online hate speech.



## ABSTRACT – ALBANIA

### Justice system

Albania continued implementing the judicial reform strengthening judicial independence and prosecutorial autonomy. The vetting process of all judges and prosecutors was finalised in first instance, further strengthening accountability. Challenges remain regarding timely and qualitative evaluations, and appointments of non-magistrate members to the High Judicial Council and the High Prosecutorial Council. The High Justice Inspector is operational, but the high number of magistrate-inspector vacancies affects its effective operation. While the resilience of the judiciary improved, attempts of undue influence on the judicial system by public officials or politicians aggravated. Sufficient budget was allocated for the modern integrated electronic case management system, but full operability is foreseen only for 2030. Shortcomings remain regarding the quality of justice including in access to justice, judicial training, financial and human resources. Challenges regarding the length of proceedings and backlog increased, while decisive measures to increase efficiency are yet to be implemented.

### Anti-corruption framework

The Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2024-2030 has been adopted. The legal framework to fight corruption is broadly in place, but legislation on prevention of corruption needs to be completed. The Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK) further consolidated its positive results in fighting high-level corruption and made tangible progress towards a solid track record in the fight against corruption. The institutional framework for prevention continues to have a limited impact and coordination with law enforcement remained weak. The state police remains vulnerable to corruption. Shortcomings remain with transparency and how effectively the High Inspectorate for the Declaration and Audit of Assets and Conflicts of Interest checks declarations of assets and interests.

### Media freedom and pluralism

The independence of the Audio-Visual Regulatory Authority remains an issue of concern. Concerns as regards the independence of the public broadcaster have increased. High concentration of media ownership continues to negatively impact media independence. Media market penetration by high profile business groups with political links also remain a serious concern. Shortcomings in terms of fair allocation of state advertising and other state resources as well as the right to access to information remain. Verbal and physical attacks, smear campaigns and strategic lawsuits against public participation targeting journalists are a continued cause for concern and self-regulation remains weak.

### Institutional checks and balances

Challenges regarding the quality of the legislative process, including limited effectiveness of public consultations, remain. Shortcomings exist regarding the work, methodology and impact of the *ad hoc* parliamentary committee on deepening reforms for good governance, rule of law and anti-corruption. The Constitutional Court continues to function effectively, while there are concerns about the Parliament's ongoing failure to comply with some of its rulings, and legal uncertainty regarding the precise duration of the mandate of its members. The mandates of the Ombudsperson and the Commissioner against Discrimination still need to be renewed, and some obstacles to their effective working remain. Civil society organisations remain overall free to operate, but challenges remain including on registration requirements and limited public funding.



## ABSTRACT – SERBIA

### Justice system

Serbia continued the implementation of the constitutional reform to strengthen judicial independence. Political pressure on the judiciary and the prosecution services remained high, with little or no follow-up by the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils, the Government or Parliament. The transparency of the High Judicial Council needs to be further strengthened. Challenges remain to fill the considerable number of vacant judge and prosecutor positions, and the Constitutional Court annulled for the first time an appointment procedure in line with the new appeal procedure. An IT solution for the new prosecutorial case management system was finalised and is being implemented, while a new uniform and centralised case management system for courts is still lacking. On efficiency the overall picture continues to be positive for civil, commercial, and criminal cases, while serious challenges in the handling of administrative cases and constitutional complaints remain.

### Anti-corruption framework

The National Anti-Corruption Strategy for the period of 2024-2028 was adopted in July 2024. Following the canopy collapse at Novi Sad railway station in November 2024, which prompted widespread public protests, authorities launched investigations into alleged corruption linked to the tragic incident which are yet to be completed. The Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime still has shortcomings, such as the insufficient regulation of its role and mandate in the legal framework. This risks inconsistent action in corruption investigations of the different specialised bodies. Establishing a robust track record of investigations, indictments, and final convictions in high-level corruption cases, including the seizure and confiscation of criminal assets, remains a challenge. The Anti-Corruption Council remained active in exposing and analysing cases of systemic corruption with limited follow-up by other institutions. The verification of asset declarations and conflict of interests continue to present weaknesses. The limited scope of the Law on lobbying undermines its effectiveness in practice and the Law on financing of political activities has several weaknesses. Challenges exist for whistleblowers exposing corruption. Exemptions to the Law on public procurement continued to be widely used to circumvent its application, and oversight mechanisms are insufficient.

### Media freedom and pluralism

Serbia adopted new media legislation in June 2025 to align further with the EU acquis and European standards. Serious concerns remain on the independence of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM), and the delay and shortcomings in the selection procedure of a new REM Council undermine public trust in the process. The Press Council continues to effectively monitor print media's compliance with the Serbian Journalists' Code of Ethics. Issues of editorial autonomy and pluralism of public service media have become an increasing concern. Measures to increase transparency in ownership structures and public funding of the media sector have only been partially implemented. Journalists continue to face either frequent refusals by public bodies to disclose information of public importance or no response at all. The safety of journalists has become a source of increasing concern.

### Institutional checks and balances

Parliament's effectiveness and oversight function continued to be hampered by the low frequency of sessions and the lack of genuine political debate. The process of public consultations still needs further strengthening. The fact that four vacant positions at the Constitutional Court remained unfilled is a concern. The three independent bodies working in the area of fundamental rights keep facing resource constraints and the follow-up to their recommendations remains inconsistent. Civil society organisations face increasing pressure. The impact of the Strategy and the Action Plan for creating a stimulating environment for the development of civil society has yet to be demonstrated.

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