

Hungary



*Measuring compliance with the
European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)*

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

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

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

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

This report covers developments up to September 2026.

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READ THE BASELINE

Media Capture Monitoring Report: Hungary 2025

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The 2026 election and the landslide defeat of Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party marked a historic shift in Hungary's political and media landscape. The new Tisza government led by Prime Minister Péter Magyar has pledged a major democratic reset, including greater transparency, fair competition, and stronger independence of the public service media, as well as an end to the state funding of political propaganda. Initial reforms have included the swift adoption of a modification of the media law (Act XXI of 2026), which implemented key provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) on public media and regulatory independence. Whether the reforms change practice as well as law remains an open question: the first nominations under the new framework were contested by some organisations, and two public media appointments were reversed immediately after an intervention by the Prime Minister. Initial media law reforms look likely to be followed with additional legislation in the fall of 2026 and some key issues have yet to be addressed. The ongoing reform process in Hungary offers a key European test case of post-authoritarian media capture reform.

THE YEAR IN BRIEF

DEC 2025	European Commission opens its first-ever infringement action under the EMFA, against Hungary.
APR 2026	Tisza wins a two-thirds majority, ending 16 years of Fidesz government.
JUN 2026	Parliament adopts media law amendments (Act XXI of 2026), ending the mandates of the Media Council head and public media leadership.
JUL 2026	Interim leadership removes public media management; public broadcaster suspends news programmes.
AUG 2026	Two public media appointments withdrawn after the Prime Minister's comment. Eight professional organisations contest the board nomination process. Criminal complaint filed over the role of a former Fidesz politician in public media.
SEP 2026	Parliament elects the Independent Public Media Board, chaired by Judit Bayer. Gábor Polyák confirmed as head of the Media Council.

01

EMFA compliance under the Orbán government

The Orbán government's capture of the media ecosystem was a central element¹ of Hungary's democratic backsliding. During 16 years of rule, the Fidesz party of Orbán built and then maintained the most sophisticated system of media control ever developed within the EU. Through this coordinated exploitation of legal, regulatory and economic powers, it is estimated that Fidesz wielded direct or indirect control over 80 per cent of the media market. This drove a dramatic erosion of media pluralism and the solidification of political control over public discourse in a way not thought possible in an EU member state. Regulatory control, discriminatory state advertising, and ownership consolidation enabled the expansion of a pro-government media system, with damaging effects on media pluralism and democratic debate. In an effort to protect this system, the Orbán government had strongly opposed the EMFA, portraying it as an attempt by "Brussels" to interfere in Hungary's affairs. It challenged several provisions before the Court of Justice of the European Union. On 11 December 2025, the European Commission launched its first-ever infringement action under EMFA over Hungary's non-compliance, and certain requirements under the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD). Hungary remains the only Member State to have been challenged by the Commission under EMFA, and the infringement remains in place.² The end of the Orbán era offers a historic opportunity for a democratic reset and a new era for media freedom in Hungary after a decade and a half of sustained backsliding.

REGULATORY AUTHORITY

AVMSD ART. 30

The Orbán-era media regulatory system was shaped by laws passed by Fidesz in 2010-2011 that created the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH) and its Media Council. Under this centralised architecture, Hungary's media regulatory system became the most politically captured in the EU. Within this legal framework, Fidesz repeatedly abused its two-thirds majority to nominate and appoint its candidates to all five seats on the Media Council. Under this leadership, a majority of media tender decisions over the past decade favoured outlets aligned with Fidesz, and the authority often prioritised pro-government interests in media mergers and frequency allocations.

Hungary's implementation of Article 30 of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) under the previous government also raised³ significant concerns about the independence of the media regulator. Although the NMHH was formally an independent institution, the governing party's control over the appointment of its president and of the members of the Media Council, a body within the NMHH responsible for monitoring and enforcing media laws, has limited its operational

1. Nemeth, R. (2025). Media Capture Monitoring Report: Hungary 2025. IPI and MJRC. journalismresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Hungary-2025-1.pdf
2. "Hungary: IPI welcomes EU legal action over violations of European Media Freedom Act." International Press Institute. Dec 12, 2025. ipi.media/hungary-ipi-welcomes-legal-action-against-hungary-over-eu-media-freedom-act-violations/
3. Nemeth, 2025, Media Capture Monitoring Report, *cit.*

independence. The nomination process also lacked transparency, with appointments often reflecting government and ruling-party interests rather than political impartiality.

The NMHH has also faced significant criticism over its regulatory decisions, including media tenders, mergers and frequency allocations, where pro-government outlets have reportedly benefited disproportionately. The Media Council has also been accused of making unjustified and discriminatory licensing decisions affecting media critical of the government.

These practices weakened media pluralism and contributed to an uneven regulatory environment. While the legal framework formally reflected EU requirements, its implementation raised concerns about political influence over media regulation.

The assessment of compliance with Article 5 of the EMFA under the Orbán government also highlighted the significant gap between Hungary's legal framework and the operation of the country's public service broadcaster. Although the law formally required the PSM to operate independently and without government or economic influence, control over funding and content was concentrated within the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA), giving the government substantial leverage over editorial output.⁴

Political dominance further reinforced this influence. For years, there have been reports of journalists being dismissed for political reasons, while biased reporting, disinformation, and editorial directives indicated persistent interference in news coverage.

Monitoring⁵ of the Hungarian public service broadcaster in 2025 by the Republikon Institute and Connect Europe revealed that the news coverage closely followed government communication priorities. Governing-party politicians received disproportionate and predominantly positive coverage, while opposition figures, particularly representatives of Péter Magyar's Tisza Party, appeared less frequently and mainly in negative contexts. Sources were also largely government-aligned, with independent and critical voices rarely included. The broadcaster's language and topic selection frequently echoed current government messaging. The findings reinforced concerns about the broadcaster's compliance with public service standards of objectivity and pluralism.

Another example of biased coverage was MTI, the national news agency, which is legally required to provide balanced, impartial, and objective coverage. A review⁶ of its output during the final 11 days of the 2026 election campaign found a striking imbalance: Viktor Orbán appeared in 354 reports, compared with just 36 mentioning Péter Magyar.

PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

EMFA ART. 5

4. Nemeth, 2025, Media Capture Monitoring Report, *cit.*
5. Republikon Institute and Connect Europe. Éves közmédia monitoring [Annual public media monitoring]. republikon.hu/media/174835/Ri_E%CC%81ves-ko%CC%88zme%CC%81dia-monitoring.pdf
6. Telex. (2026, April 12). Mit gondol, hány hírt adott ki az MTI a kampányhajrában Orbán Viktorról? Na és Magyar Péterről? [How many reports did MTI issue about Viktor Orbán in the final campaign stretch? And about Péter Magyar?]. telex.hu/belfold/2026/04/12/mit-gondol-hany-hirt-adott-ki-az-mti-a-kampanyhajraban-orban-viktorrol-na-es-magyar-peterrol

MTI reports mentioning each candidate

Final 11 days of the 2026 election campaign, number of reports



Source: Telex review of MTI output (see note 6).

A 482-page document⁷ compiled by a group of MTI journalists and published after the elections provides even more extensive evidence of political interference in the news agency over more than a decade. Drawing on emails and internal messages, it records cases of suppressed, discarded, manipulated, censored, and fabricated news. The document describes editorial instructions to withhold or rewrite stories according to political considerations, covering domestic, economic and foreign policy issues.

Former and current public media employees also described⁸ political pressure. They talked about editorial directives, the removal of certain topics, and restrictions on citing independent media. One former MTI journalist said that staff were instructed to report on selected government politicians' Facebook posts regardless of their news value. Another reporter described restrictions on asking questions at press conferences.

These revelations prompted an investigation by the new interim PSB leadership installed in the summer. At the end of August 2026, it announced⁹ a criminal complaint, citing documents that it says demonstrate direct involvement of Attila Várhegyi, a prominent former Fidesz politician and businessman, in the management of public media.

Várhegyi was formally employed by the Hungarian public service broadcaster as an adviser from 2019, and the investigation revealed his significant influence over the organization's operations. According to information uncovered during the internal review, his role extended beyond advice to personnel and operational decisions. Senior managers reportedly sent him texts and proposals for approval before broadcast, regularly reported to him on various issues, and had to follow his instructions.

The implementation of Article 25 of the EMFA, which seeks to prevent the misuse of state funds to influence media output, remained¹⁰ a major weakness in Hungary under the Orbán government. Hungarian law did not provide adequate safeguards for the fair and transparent allocation of state advertising, leaving substantial room for political considerations to shape where public money is spent. In practice, state advertising has become an important source of revenue for government-aligned media, while independent outlets faced a less favorable financial environment or were completely cut off from state advertising revenue.

MISUSE OF STATE FUNDS

EMFA ART. 25

7. Document compiled by a group of MTI journalists. mtva.hu/wp-content/uploads/sites/17/2026/08/mti-400.pdf
8. Interviews with former and current public media employees, see more at www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sjQH18hDH8
9. Flachner, B. (2026, August 31). "Feljelentést tesz az MTVA átmeneti vezetése, szerintük korábban törvénytelenül irányították a közmédiát" [MTVA's interim leadership files a criminal complaint, saying the public media was previously run unlawfully]. Telex. telex.hu/belfold/2026/08/31/kozmedia-mtva-varhegyi-attila-feljelentes
10. Nemeth, 2025, Media Capture Monitoring Report, *cit.*

Data obtained¹¹ by Transparency International illustrates the scale of state spending. The media plans for 15 government campaigns show that between April and December 2025, the government spent at least HUF 9 billion (~EUR 23 million) on advertising in online and print media, alongside HUF 7.1 billion (~EUR 18.4 million) on television, HUF 1.1 billion (~EUR 2.85 million) on radio, and HUF 246 million (~EUR 636k) on social media. The beneficiaries were overwhelmingly outlets aligned with the government.

Government advertising spend by channel, April-December 2025

Media plans for 15 government campaigns, Hungarian forints



Source: data obtained by Transparency International, reported by 444.hu (see note 11).

At the same time, according to the Hungarian Advertising Association¹², the domestic media market was worth HUF 415.9 billion (~EUR 1.08 billion) in 2025. Global digital platforms accounted for 36.1 percent, while Hungarian digital content providers received 19.6 percent. In this environment, reliable state-funded advertising significantly affected¹³ the financial viability of outlets. Advertising agencies, media sales houses, state demand, and ownership structures have developed into a system in which government-aligned media faced considerably less market risk than independent competitors. The lack of transparent allocation criteria and independent oversight therefore continued to undermine media pluralism.

Under the Orbán government, Hungarian legislation only partially¹⁴ reflected Articles 6 and 22 of the EMFA on media pluralism and political influence. While media outlets had to disclose basic operational information, detailed ownership structures were not subject to comprehensive transparency requirements.

Ownership concentration further limited pluralism, with regulatory safeguards applied selectively. Authorities have blocked some mergers, while the creation of KESMA, a foundation bringing together hundreds of pro-government outlets, was exempted from scrutiny after being designated as being of national strategic importance. This selective enforcement weakened accountability, limited ownership diversity, and raised concerns about the effectiveness of safeguards for media pluralism. In this system, it was estimated that Fidesz wielded direct or indirect control over 80 per cent of the media market, dramatically eroding media pluralism.

MEDIA PLURALISM AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE

EMFA ART. 6 & 22

11. 444.hu. (2026, July 3). Az Origo fél év alatt félmilliárdot, a Pesti Srácok kétszázmilliót szakított állami hirdetésekkel [Origo took half a billion and Pesti Srácok two hundred million from state advertising in six months]. 444.hu/2026/07/03/az-origo-fel-ev-alatt-felmilliardot-a-pesti-sracok-ketszazmilliot-szakított-allami-hirdetesekbol
12. Kreatív. Hungarian Advertising Association media market figures 2025. kreativ.hu/cikk/mrsz-mediator-ta-2025-media-kommunikacio-piac-magyar-reklamszovetseg
13. Antal, B. (2026, August 19). Nem kellett felvásárolni az egész médiapiacot, elég volt megdőteni a pályát (There was no need to buy up the entire media market; it was enough to tilt the field.) G7. telex.hu/g7/kozelet/2026/08/19/mediapiac-ner-hirdetese-kozmedia-atmedia-lounge-mediaworks
14. Nemeth, 2025, Media Capture Monitoring Report, *cit.*

02

Changes under the new government

When the Tisza Party won a landslide two-thirds majority in the April 2026 election, it gave the new government the parliamentary power necessary for major institutional reforms, including the country's Orbán-era media law framework.

Already in June, the Parliament adopted¹⁵ amendments to the media law that ended the mandates of the head of the Media Council, the Public Service Foundation's board of trustees, and senior public media executives. Fulfilling a manifesto pledge, the newly installed transitional management suspended the news programming of the public broadcaster, silencing a symbol of political propaganda. The new media law significantly amends the governance structures of the public media and the media regulation bodies, establishes a new multi-year model for funding the public media, and establishes a new Press Fund aimed at supporting independent media.

The new media law, adopted in June, explicitly recognized¹⁶ the role of the national media regulator in protecting opinion pluralism, democratic public debate and the rule of law. It also introduced¹⁷ a new appointment system for the NMHH and the Media Council, replacing its existing leadership.

Both the government and the opposition can nominate three members each to the Media Council for four-year terms. The seventh member, the chair, is selected through an open professional competition¹⁸ and then appointed by the President of the Republic for a five-year term. The law also strengthens incompatibility rules, excluding government officials and MPs from serving on the council.

The reform is intended to strengthen the independence of media regulation, although its practical impact remains to be seen. On September 21, the parliamentary committee nominated Gábor Polyák, one of Hungary's best-known media lawyers and press freedom advocates, as the new head of the regulatory body. Polyák has frequently advocated for the implementation of the EMFA and published extensively on its importance. He was subsequently confirmed by the Parliament the next day.

The committee has also approved the party-nominated members of the Media Council.¹⁹ The ruling party nominated three lawyers with professional backgrounds that could give reason for optimism about the Media Council's future independence. However, the three members nominated by the opposition have

REGULATORY AUTHORITY

AVMSD ART. 30

Media Council 7 members

- ● ● Government nominees
4-year terms
- ○ ○ Opposition nominees
4-year terms
- Chair, chosen by
open competition
5-year term

15. Bicsérdi-Fülöp, Á. (2026, June 23). "Elfogadta a parlament a médiatörvényt, amivel felszámolják a jelenlegi közmédiát" [Parliament has passed the media law, which will dismantle the current public media]. Telex. telex.hu/belfold/2026/06/23/mediatorveny-elfogadas-kozmedia-atalakitasa-sajtoalap-mtva-mti
16. 2026. évi XXI. törvény a médiaszolgáltatásokról és a tömegkommunikációról szóló 2010. évi CLXXXV. törvény, valamint az Országgyűlésről szóló 2012. évi XXXVI. törvény módosításáról [Act XXI of 2026 Amending Act CLXXXV of 2010 on Media Services and Mass Communication and Act XXXVI of 2012 on the National Assembly]. njt.jog.gov.hu/jogszabaly/2026-21-00-00
17. Act XXI of 2026, cit.
18. NMHH (2026, July 31). "Pályázati felhívás a Médiatek elnöki tisztségének betöltésére" [Call for Applications for the Position of Chair of the Media Council]. nmhh.hu/cikk/260900/Palyazati_felhivas_a_Mediatek_elnoki_tisztsegenek_betoltesere
19. Bicsérdi-Fülöp, Á. (2026, September 21). "Polyák Gábor: Kutya kötelessége a Médiateknek feltárni, kik a valódi médiatulajdonosok" [Gábor Polyák: It is the Media Authority's duty to uncover who the real media owners are]. Telex. telex.hu/belfold/2026/09/21/polyak-gabor-kutya-kotelessege-a-mediateknek-hogy-feltarja-kik-a-valodi-tulajdonosok-a-mediatekek-mogott

PUBLIC SERVICE
MEDIA

EMFA ART. 5

either close political ties or a record of promoting pseudoscientific claims.²⁰ The Parliament approved the three nominees by the ruling party but only one nominated by the opposition, and rejected the two others.²¹

The post-election transition of the Hungarian public service media has been marked by several abrupt changes. For two days after the election, its news channel appeared to move towards more balanced coverage, including references to independent media. According to several sources cited by Telex²², this coincided with the temporary absence of the channel's senior management, but previous editorial practices quickly returned after their reappearance.

In July 2026, the new interim leadership, installed shortly before, removed²³ the broadcaster's management, and announced an overhaul aimed at ending propaganda and restoring independent, objective news coverage. The same day, the broadcaster's news channel and its website temporarily suspended²⁴ news programs, displaying an apology for years of misleading public media coverage.

News broadcasts resumed after one and a half months, but not without controversy over appointments. A new editor and a presenter with previous roles in the propaganda machine were initially appointed, prompting public criticism and ultimately the withdrawal²⁵ of their appointments. The withdrawal followed a Facebook comment by the Prime Minister on an article about the appointments, in which he simply wrote, "I wouldn't think so."

The episode attracted particular attention because the government had repeatedly insisted that it would not interfere in the operations of the public broadcaster. The fact that the appointments were reversed shortly after the Prime Minister's intervention nevertheless raises questions about the continued political influence over the PSM.

The new media law states²⁶ that PSM must provide impartial and balanced information, operate independently of government, political and economic actors, and respect editorial independence. This marks a clear departure from the previous system, in which the legal requirement for the PSM's independence coexisted with highly centralized political and financial control.

The most important institutional change is the abolition²⁷ of the Public Service Foundation and the establishment of an Independent Public Media Board (Független Közmédia Testület). The nine-member board is designed to include three members nominated by the governing party and three by opposition parties, each

20. Inkei, B. (2026, July 30). "Klímaszkeptikus DPK-alapítót jelöl köztársasági elnöknek a Mi Hazánk" [Our Homeland Nominates Climate-Skeptic DPK Founder for President]. 444. 444.hu/2026/07/30/klimaszkeptikus-dpk-alapitot-jelol-koztarsasagi-elnokek-a-mi-hazank

21. Nádor, A. (2026, September 22). "Nem választotta meg a parlament a Fidesz és a KDNP jelöltjeit a Média Tanácsba" [Parliament did not elect the Fidesz and KDNP candidates to the Media Council]. Telex. telex.hu/belfold/2026/09/22/mediatanacs-parlament-nem-valasztottak-meg-ellenzsek-fidesz-kdnp

22. Sajó, D. (2026, April 17). "Két napra elszökött Pitbull, máris hangnemet váltott az MTVA" [Pitbull went missing for two days, and MTVA has already changed its tone]. Telex. telex.hu/after/2026/04/17/mtva-nemeth-zsolt-pitbull-magyar-peter-mti-hirszolgaltatas

23. Pupli, A. S. (2026, July 7). "Megvan az MTVA új vezetése, felmentették Németh Zsolt 'Pitbullt', az M1 hírekért felelős csatornaigazgatóját" [MTVA's new leadership has been appointed; Zsolt Németh, known as "Pitbull," the channel director in charge of M1 news, has been dismissed]. Telex. telex.hu/belfold/2026/07/07/nemeth-zsolt-pitbull-m1-csatornaigazgato-felmentes-mtva

24. Sarkadi, Zs.; Weiler, V. (2026, July 7). "Leállították az M1 adását és a Hirado.hu-t" [Broadcasting of M1 and Hirado.hu has been suspended]. Telex. telex.hu/belfold/2026/07/07/leallit-az-m1-adasa

25. Spirk, J.; Horváth, Cs. L. (2026, August 4). "Előbb a népharag csapott le az MTV-re, aztán jött Magyar Péter kommentje" [First, public outrage hit MTV, and then came Péter Magyar's comment]. 24.hu. 24.hu/belfold/2026/08/04/mtv-hajdu-gabor-borsa-miklos-nepharag-visszavonas-24extra/

26. Act XXI of 2026, cit.

27. 2010. évi CLXXXV. törvény a médiaszolgáltatásokról és a tömegkommunikációról [Act CLXXXV of 2010 on Media Services and Mass Communication]. njt.jog.gov.hu/jogszabaly/2010-185-00-00.60

Independent Public Media Board

9 members

- ● ● Governing party nominees
4-year terms
- ○ ○ Opposition nominees
4-year terms
- ● ● Professional media organisations
2-year terms

with four-year mandates, and three by professional media organizations, with mandates of two years. The inclusion of professional representatives and the requirement for public nominations and hearings are intended to reduce political control over PSM governance.

The new board has broader responsibilities²⁸ than its predecessor. It exercises ownership rights over the public media companies, monitors compliance with public service principles, commissions annual independent assessments of content, oversees financing and management, and appoints and dismisses the chief executive. This creates a governance structure in which responsibility for the operation and independence is more clearly separated from direct government control. The legislation also introduces greater transparency, including public minutes of board meetings and an obligation for the public media company to maintain a register of contracts.

The institutional structure of the public broadcaster has also been changed.²⁹ The Duna Media Services Nonprofit Ltd. and the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA) were replaced by a new Hungarian Radio and Television Nonprofit Inc. (Magyar Rádió és Televízió Nonprofit Zrt.), responsible for public service broadcasting and content production, while MTI, the news agency, is re-established as a separate entity. The reform therefore reverses the previous concentration of these functions within MTVA.

The appointment of public service broadcaster's leadership is subject³⁰ to significantly more transparent procedures. The chief executive must be selected through an open competition, with the vacancy publicly and widely advertised. Applicants' names are made public, candidates are subject to public hearings, and the final decision requires a majority vote of the Independent Public Media Board. The board also becomes the employer of the chief executive and can terminate the appointment.

The legislation further strengthens³¹ the formal guarantees of editorial independence through a new Public Service Charter. It establishes principles including independence from political parties and political organizations, factuality, plurality, objectivity and balanced reporting. It also explicitly protects editorial freedom and addresses transparency, source management, disinformation, the use of artificial intelligence, cultural and minority representation, and the autonomy and responsibility of journalists and other staff members. These provisions are considerably more detailed than the previous general requirement that public service media operate independently.

The new system also introduces³² stronger mechanisms for social and professional oversight. The existing Public Service Council, now with an increased membership of 18, is responsible for monitoring compliance with public service obligations and providing oversight. The chief executive must report annually on compliance with the Public Service Charter, and the Council can propose the termination of the chief executive if serious shortcomings are identified. The legislation also mandates independent expert involvement in financial oversight and introduces three-year public media budgets, replacing the previous annual funding framework.

28. Act CLXXXV of 2010, *cit.*

29. Act CLXXXV of 2010, *cit.*

30. Act CLXXXV of 2010, *cit.*

31. Act CLXXXV of 2010, *cit.*

32. Act CLXXXV of 2010, *cit.*

Taken together, these changes substantially strengthen the formal safeguards for the independence, transparency, and accountability of the public service media, and bring the legal framework much closer to EMFA requirements. They address several of the structural weaknesses identified³³ under the previous regime, particularly the concentration of governance, opaque leadership appointments, limited independent oversight, and political control over funding and operations.

The key question, however, remains how these safeguards will operate in practice. The previous framework also formally required public service media to be independent and impartial, while political influence remained extensive. The new institutional structure and more detailed legal guarantees therefore represent an important change, but their effectiveness will depend on whether the new bodies exercise their powers independently and whether editorial and managerial decisions are in practice insulated from political influence.

Nevertheless, the establishment of the Independent Public Media Board was already marked by controversy over the transparency and fairness of the appointment process. In August 2026, the Public Service Council selected³⁴ three candidates put forward by professional organizations from the media sector. The candidates were selected through a secret vote following public hearings.

The procedure was subsequently criticized³⁵ by eight professional organizations, which raised several concerns about the legal basis and transparency of the process. They questioned whether all six nominating organizations were entitled to participate, arguing that the Public Service Council had not provided a clear legal interpretation. They also objected to being given only consultative, rather than voting, rights during the hearings. A further concern was that the selection criteria focused primarily on editorial and media experience, although most of the new board's responsibilities relate to corporate governance and financial oversight. The organizations argued that the EMFA requires appointment procedures to be transparent and objective and that selection criteria should reflect the actual responsibilities of the position.

At the same time, the parliamentary group of the ruling party proposed³⁶ its own candidates, all three from the list of candidates prepared by the professional organizations. The opposition, however, nominated³⁷ three candidates with either previous roles in the propaganda machine or ties to extreme right groups.

The process was completed in September 2026. The parliament elected six members: the three nominated by the governing parties and the three by professional organizations, with Judit Bayer, a respected media lawyer and researcher, one of the nominees of the professional organizations, as chair.³⁸ The opposition's three nominees were not elected.

33. Nemeth, 2025, Media Capture Monitoring Report, *cit.*

34. Vida, B. (2026, August 19), "Megvan, kiket jelölnek a médiászakmai szervezetek a Független Közmédia Testületbe" [It is known who the media industry organisations are nominating to the Independent Public Media Board]. Telex. telex.hu/belfold/2026/08/19/fuggetlen-kozmedia-testulet-mediaszakmai-szervezetek-jeloltjei

35. Patakfalvi, D. (2026, August 25), "Nyolc médiaszervezet tételesen is felsorolta levelében a kifogásait a Független Közmédia Testület jelölési eljárása miatt" [Eight media organisations listed their objections to the Independent Public Media Board's nomination process in detail in their letter]. Telex. telex.hu/after/2026/08/25/fuggetlen-kozmedia-testulet-nyolc-mediaszakmai-szervezet-tiltakozik-level

36. Flachner, B. (2026, August 31), "Megvannak a Tisza jelöltjei a Független Közmédia Testületbe és a Médiatanácsba is" [The Tisza Party has selected its candidates for both the Independent Public Media Board and the Media Council]. Telex. telex.hu/belfold/2026/08/31/mediatanacs-fuggetlen-kozmedia-testulet-tisza-part-jeloles

37. Ósze, A.; Pál, Zs. (2026, September 2), "Radnai Márk: az ellenzék által jelölt tagok nélkül is megalakulhat a Független Közmédia Testület" [Márk Radnai: The Independent Public Media Board Can Be Formed Even Without Members Nominated by the Opposition]. 24.hu. 24.hu/belfold/2026/09/02/fuggetlen-kozmedia-testulet-tagok-kozmedia/

38. Diószegi-Horváth, N. (2026, September 8), "Bayer Judit a Független Közmédia Testület elnöke" [Judit Bayer is Chair of the Independent Public Media Board]. 444.hu. 444.hu/2026/09/08/bayer-judit-a-fuggetlen-kozmedia-testulet-elnoke

MEDIA PLURALISM AND
THE MISUSE OF STATE
FUNDS

EMFA ART. 25

The new body was thus established, but the disputes surrounding the nomination process highlighted the challenges of translating the new legal safeguards for the independence of the PSM into practice.

While state advertising was in many cases the main source of revenue for government-aligned media under the Orbán government, the withdrawal of state-funded advertising after the election has exposed their financial dependence. Within weeks, Mediaworks, the largest group of outlets aligned with the previous government and part of KESMA, announced³⁹ major cost-cutting measures, including mass layoffs and the closure or suspension of several newspapers and websites.

At the same time, the new media law establishes⁴⁰ a Press Fund (Sajtóalap), a dedicated fund intended to support independent media, community media, public service programming, and outlets operating according to ethical journalism standards. The fund is a legal entity administered by the Media Council and forms part of the NMHH budget. Its revenues include regulatory and frequency fees, fines, other payments, and voluntary contributions.

The Press Fund could provide a more pluralistic alternative to the previous system of politically concentrated state advertising, but its legal design could raise questions under the EMFA. Article 25 concerns not only transparency but also objective and non-discriminatory allocation of public resources. Giving the Media Council control over the fund therefore makes the transparency of its rules, eligibility criteria, decisions and beneficiaries particularly important.

Compliance with the EMFA will therefore depend on whether funding is distributed through clear, objective, and publicly verifiable criteria rather than becoming another channel for political influence. In other words, it will depend on whether the new Media Council will operate in alignment with the EMFA. The nomination of Gábor Polyák as new head provides some grounds for optimism. At his hearing before the parliamentary committee, he emphasized the importance of establishing a transparent database of state advertising and identifying the ultimate owners of Hungarian media companies.⁴¹

39. Jandó, Z. (2026, June 24), "Miért van ekkora vérengzés a fideszes médiánál?" [Why is there such a bloodbath in the Fidesz-aligned media?]. G7. telex.hu/g7/vallalat/2026/06/24/fideszes-media-leepitesek-bezasok-mediaworks-veszteseg-bevetelek

40. Act CLXXXV of 2010, *cit.*

41. Bicsérdi-Fülöp (2026), *cit.*

03

Has the situation improved?

In terms of legislation, the situation has substantially improved since the election of Tisza and the passing of its immediate media reforms. The June 2026 amendments dismantled the governance structures the 2025 report identified as the core of Hungarian media capture: the political control over the Public Service Foundation has been ended; MTVA's concentration of funding and content control is broken up; MTI is re-established as a separate entity; and the Media Council's nine-year mandates, designed to outlast electoral cycles, give way to four-year terms split between government and opposition under an openly and democratically recruited chair. The appointments of Judit Bayer as chair of the Independent Public Media Board and Gábor Polyák as chair of the Media Council offer grounds for cautious optimism, given their backgrounds in media law and research. In practice, however, some issues remain unresolved. The previous framework also required independence on paper, and the first nominations under the new one were already contested by eight professional organisations, while two public media appointments were reversed within days of a comment by the Prime Minister. The Press Fund, also placed under Media Council control, will be the next test of whether allocation criteria are genuinely objective.

04

Outstanding problems

MEDIA REGULATORS

AVMSD ART. 30

The new appointment system is untested. The Media Council's independence now rests on whether nominees act independently of the parties that put them forward.

PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

EMFA ART. 5

Formal safeguards are much stronger, but the first appointment round drew objections over its legal basis and transparency, the Prime Minister's intervention over two hires showed how quickly political influence can reassert itself, and the newsroom is rebuilding after the disclosures about MTI and the Várhegyi investigation.

MISUSE OF STATE FUNDS

EMFA ART. 25

The withdrawal of state support from government-aligned outlets has weakened Mediaworks and reduced the resources behind its propaganda output, a meaningful step toward a more balanced market. Its subsequent layoffs also reveal how dependent the group had become on public funding. The ownership concentration built through KESMA remains, however. The new Press Fund provides for public applications; the test will be whether its awards are fair and transparent. Objective, transparent rules for state advertising in line with the EMFA remain outstanding.

OWNERSHIP TRANSPARENCY AND PLURALISM

EMFA ART. 6 & 22

The least addressed area. The June amendments did not take up the Article 6 and 22 gaps recorded in the 2025 report: detailed ownership structures remain outside comprehensive transparency requirements, and the concentration built through KESMA is intact.

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



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