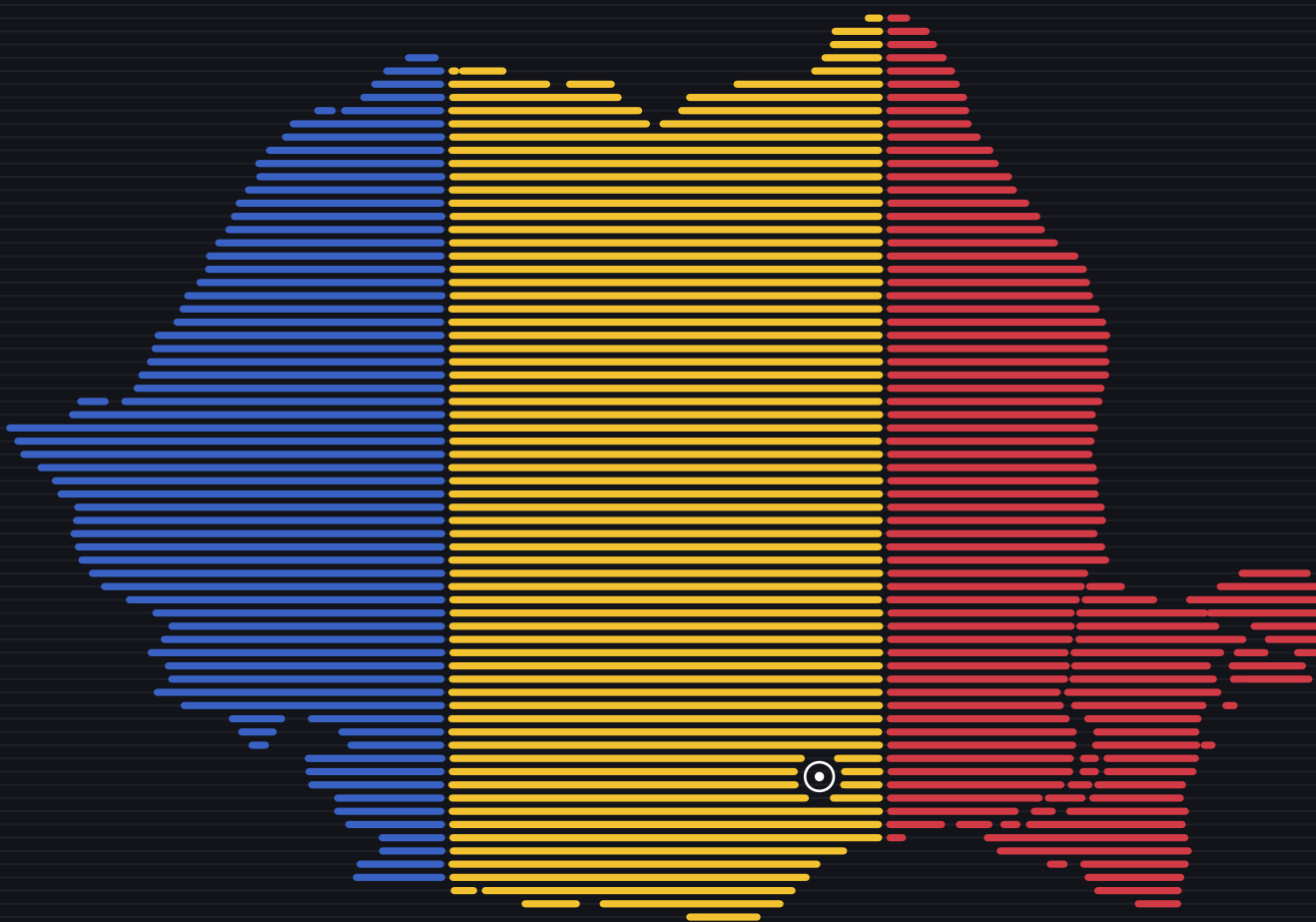


Romania



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

○ BUCHAREST 44°26'N 26°06'E

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**MEDIA FREEDOM
RAPID RESPONSE**

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: Romania 2025

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ipi.media/romania-media-capture-monitoring-report-2025/

Romania made no progress towards implementing the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) in the year to September 2026. The Ministry of Culture's 2025 consultations were never followed up, and no legislation has been proposed. Political instability deepened: the four-party coalition that took office in 2025 split over austerity, and in May 2026 a no-confidence motion initiated by the far-right AUR and backed by the Social Democrats brought down the government. Public service media remain tied to parliamentary majorities. After the Constitutional Court annulled the appointment of the TVR and SRR boards, Parliament's leadership installed in September 2026 interim heads, including an AUR nominee at TVR. The media regulator has become more assertive, but its elected president is yet to be validated by the Parliament and its new rules for video-sharing channels have been criticised as overreach. EU rules have brought some transparency to political advertising, but party subsidies still flow to partisan outlets and media ownership continues to consolidate. As a result, Romania continues to suffer from structural vulnerabilities which permit media capture practices to persist.

THE YEAR IN BRIEF

NOV 2025	Parliament votes in new boards for public television (TVR) and radio (SRR); the Prime Minister's spokesperson is nominated to the SRR board.
FEB 2026	The media regulator, the CNA, adopts new rules that bring some channels on video-sharing platforms under a notification regime.
APR 2026	The CNA withdraws the licences of Realitatea Plus and Gold FM for unpaid fines; both broadcasters challenge the decisions in court. The Constitutional Court rules the TVR and SRR board appointments unconstitutional.
MAY 2026	A no-confidence motion initiated by AUR and backed by PSD brings down the government; a caretaker cabinet takes over.
JUL 2026	The CNA sanctions Realitatea Plus for changing its ownership without consent and discusses the planned sale of a Hungarian-language radio network to a UDMR senator.
SEP 2026	The Court's rulings take effect. Parliament's leadership installs interim heads at TVR, an AUR nominee, and at SRR. The CNA's video-sharing rules enter into force.

01

EMFA compliance since the 2025 report

Following the tumultuous election years of 2024 and 2025 and the steep rise of the far right, Romania had a new government in place in June 2025, supported by a broad coalition of four parties. Faced with a huge budget deficit, the new administration made restoring fiscal balance its top priority. The austerity measures brought economic recession, which also affected the media market, even though total media revenues remained steady.¹ Austerity also split the coalition: the Social Democratic Party (PSD) withdrew in April 2026, and on 5 May 2026 a no-confidence motion initiated by the far-right Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) and backed by PSD brought the government down.² A caretaker government has been in office since then.

In this volatile context, political interest in aligning the legislation with the EMFA, or in respecting its provisions, has been low or non-existent. The Ministry of Culture ran a round of consultations with media and civil society organisations in 2025, before the new government was installed. There have been no follow-up public consultations since, and no legislative initiatives have been introduced to align the legal framework with the EMFA. Public institutions have also taken no measures to adapt their practices on issues such as state advertising transparency to their obligations under the EMFA.

The National Audiovisual Council (CNA) continues to function without a president. Its meetings are chaired by Vice-President Valentin Jucan, who also represents the institution.

The CNA's 2026 budget rose by 126.59% compared with 2025, to RON 47.77 million (around EUR 9.37 million).³ The increase is due to funds for DECA, an EU-funded digitalisation project, while total staff expenditure fell by 4.72%. The project is meant to provide the technology and software the CNA needs to increase its monitoring capacity and detect coordinated campaigns on social media. The equipment and software to be acquired through it⁴ were still not operational at the time of writing. The institution remains understaffed. In 2025, the CNA operated with an average of 113 staff against 151 approved positions, and its budget was cut as part of the government's austerity measures.⁵

REGULATORY
AUTHORITY

AVMSD ART. 30

CNA staffing, 2025

113

OF 151 APPROVED POSTS

Average staff in 2025. The 2026 budget rose 126.59% for an EU-funded digitalisation project, while staff spending fell 4.72%.

1. They reached EUR 840 million and EUR 838 million in 2025 and 2024, respectively. See more in Media Factbook Romania 2026.
2. Robert Greenall, "Romanian PM ousted in no-confidence vote", BBC, May 5, 2026. Available online: www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgkjpz2638ro
3. "Parlament - buget 2026/ Bugetul Consiliului Național al Audiovizualului - aprobat în Comisiile de buget-finanțe" (Parliament - 2026 Budget / National Audiovisual Council Budget - approved by the Budget-Finance Committees), Agerpres, 17 March 2026. Available online: agerpres.ro/politic/2026/03/17/parlament---buget2026-bugetul-consiliului-national-al-audiovizualului---aprobat-in-comisiile-de-buge--1538067
4. CNA press release, 28 May 2026, cna.ro/a-comunicat-de-presa-oh1zgk1zp3meyx0figuhrpus/
5. Raport anual de activitate 2025, 8 April 2026, CNA.

CNA sanctions, 2025

179

SANCTIONS

Including 66 fines totalling RON 1,707,500 (about EUR 340,000). Plus 412 orders to remove illegal content from very large online platforms.

The CNA has been more active since the 2024 elections. It reacts more promptly to serious breaches, examines more cases and applies harsher penalties. However, the sanctioning framework in the current legislation does not deter broadcasters from breaking the law, as sanctions remain relatively mild. In 2025, the CNA imposed 179 sanctions, including 66 fines totalling RON 1,707,500 (about EUR 340,000); the rest were warnings or other non-financial sanctions.⁶ For online content, the Council adopted 412 decisions ordering the removal of illegal content from very large online platforms.

The CNA did, however, apply the maximum penalty in two cases, withdrawing in April 2026 the licences of the news channel Realitatea Plus⁷ and the radio station Gold FM⁸ for failing to pay their fines on time. Both broadcasters challenged the decisions in court and the Bucharest Court of Appeal suspended them pending a final ruling. AUR accused the CNA of censorship and called in Parliament for the Council to be dissolved and its responsibilities transferred to the courts.⁹

Political influence remains a problem for the credibility and functioning of the institution. In December 2025, after the public channel TVR1 aired a documentary by the independent investigative platform Recorder¹⁰ into dysfunctions in the judicial system, one of the CNA members, nominated by PSD, summoned the public television to a hearing, and accused it to be part of a campaign trying to influence the appointment of the heads of judicial institutions by broadcasting the investigation.¹¹ The hearing ended without any sanction.

In its zeal to combat disinformation, the CNA has also continued to apply controversial interpretations of the regulations. As noted in the 2025 report, it has sanctioned audiovisual material outside its jurisdiction, including so-called disinformation content posted on the social media accounts of ordinary internet users, who cannot be considered media service providers.

In February 2026, the CNA adopted a new regulation (Decision No. 116/2026,¹² published on 28 August 2026 and in force from 27 September 2026) revising and clarifying the rules on the notification, licensing and authorisation of audiovisual programme services. Besides provisions for traditional, linear services, the decision introduces specific rules for some providers of on-demand (non-linear) audiovisual media services, namely those with a channel on video-sharing

6. Raport anual de activitate 2025, 8 April 2026, CNA.
7. Iulia Bunea, "BOMBA ZILEI. CNA a retras licența Realitatea Plus. Postul lui Maricel Păcuraru se închide" (NEWS OF THE DAY. The CNA has revoked the Realitatea Plus license. Maricel Păcuraru's channel is shutting down), 7 April 2026, Pagina de Media. Available online: www.paginademedia.ro/stiri-media/cna-retrage-licenta-realitatea-22403050
8. Andrei Georgescu, "CNA a retras și licența postului Gold FM, radioul controlat de Cozmin Gușă" (The CNA has also revoked the license of Gold FM, the radio station controlled by Cozmin Gușă), 7 April 2026, HotNews.ro. Available online: hotnews.ro/realitatea-plus-nu-e-singurul-post-ramas-fara-licenta-si-gold-fm-radioul-lui-cozmin-gusa-e-in-aceeasi-situatie-2213110
9. Ștefania Brândușă, "Legea care întărea atribuțiile CNA a picat la vot în Senat. AUR cere desființarea instituției cenzurii: «Au închis Realitatea TV. Acolo unde se spune ce nu convine sistemului, închidem»" (The bill strengthening the CNA's powers was defeated in the Senate. AUR calls for the abolition of the censorship body: "They shut down Realitatea TV. Wherever things are said that don't suit the system, we shut it down"), ActiveNews, 7 April 2026. Available online: www.activenews.ro/stiri/Legea-care-intarea-atributiile-CNA-a-picat-la-vot-in-Senat-AUR-cere-desfiintarea-institutiei-cenzurii-Au-inchis-Realitatea-TV-Acolo-unde-se-spune-ce-nu-convine-sistemului-inchidem-204242
10. Andreea Pocotilă, Mihai Voinea, "Justiție capturată" (Captured Justice), 9 December 2025, Recorder. Available online: recorder.ro/documentar-recorder-justitie-capturata/
11. Iulia Bunea, "Aripa PSD din CNA a chemat TVR la «urecheat» pentru documentarul Recorder, difuzat acum cinci luni. Apropiatul Olguței a propus și o sancțiune!" (The PSD faction within the CNA summoned TVR for a "dressing-down" over the Recorder documentary aired five months ago. An associate of Olguța even proposed a sanction!), 30 April 2026, Pagina de Media. Available online: www.paginademedia.ro/stiri-media/cna-documentar-recorder-psd-22428337
12. Decision nr. 116/24.02.2026, CNA. Available online: cna.ro/a-decizie-nr-116-din-24-februarie-2026-privind-procedura-de-licentiere-de-autorizare-si-de-notificare-a-serviciilor-media-audiovizuale-f71m0wjz0eli08jh4l0add17/

platforms. It sets new criteria for determining when a video-sharing platform user qualifies as an on-demand audiovisual media service provider, and introduces a notification procedure for some of these providers, based on five further criteria, such as a combined audience or subscriber base of at least 100,000, commercial activity bringing financial or other benefits, and targeting users in Romania or Romanians abroad. Notification requires submitting a set of data and documents¹³ in a format specified by the CNA, which nevertheless may be rejected for bureaucratic reasons, transforming the notification process into a *de facto* registration.¹⁴

This secondary legislation, which effectively turns a large group of video platform users into audiovisual media service providers, has been criticised¹⁵ for creating legal uncertainty, overstepping the audiovisual law and being excessively bureaucratic for a large number of users.

PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

EMFA ART. 5

No progress has been made in implementing the EMFA provisions on public service media. No legislative proposal has been developed by Romanian authorities to align national media legislation with EMFA Article 5. As a result, the long-standing structural problems in the legal framework, which undermine the independence and proper functioning of the public broadcasters and directly contradict the EMFA, resurfaced in 2025 and 2026.

In November 2025, after the mandates of the previous boards expired, Parliament voted in new boards for the public television (TVR) and the public radio (SRR). The governing coalition parties had agreed on the members each would propose, so the vote went smoothly. One controversial nomination was that of Ioana Ene Dogioiu, the Prime Minister's spokesperson, proposed by the Government for the board of the public radio. A well-known former journalist, Dogioiu accepted the nomination without giving up her position in the Prime Minister's office, drawing harsh criticism from a number of media and civil society organisations.¹⁶

An even more serious problem led to the entire process being challenged before the Constitutional Court. AUR argued that the parliamentary parties' nominations for the eight board seats reserved for them by law were unconstitutional, because they ignored the legal requirement that these seats be distributed according to the political configuration of Parliament. On 29 April 2026, the Constitutional Court

13. The data and documents required under CNA Decision 116/2026 go well beyond those listed in Art. 48 of the Audiovisual Law.

14. Bogdan Manolea, "Ce înțelegem din decizia CNA de înregistrare a influencerilor + the Good, the Bad and the Ugly" (What we gather from the CNA's decision to register influencers – plus the good, the bad, and the ugly), Association for Technology and Internet, 17 September 2026. Available online: apti.ro/ce-intelegem-din-decizia-cna-de-inregistrare-a-influencerilor/

15. Ibidem.

16. "Nominalizarea purtătorului de cuvânt al Guvernului în CA al SRR ridică probleme de compatibilitate și de independență instituțională" (The nomination of the Government spokesperson to the SRR Board of Directors raises issues regarding compatibility and institutional independence), public statement signed by 5 NGOs, 18 November 2025. Available online: activewatch.ro/articole/nominalizarea-purt%C4%83torului-de-cuv%C3%A2nt-al-guvernului-%C3%AEn-ca-al-srr-ridic%C4%83-probleme-de-compatibilitate-%C8%99i-de-independen%C8%9B%C4%83-institu%C8%9Bional%C4%83/

upheld AUR's complaint and asked Parliament to restart the appointment process for the eight seats, reflecting the current parliamentary configuration.¹⁷ The decisions¹⁸ took effect on 3 September.¹⁹

On 8 September, the Permanent Bureaus of Parliament appointed the journalist Sorina Matei as interim head of the public television, replacing Adriana Săftoiu, for 60 days pending the appointment of the new eight members of the board. Matei was nominated by AUR, and her appointment was backed by PSD as well as by far-right parliamentarians outside AUR.²⁰ On the same day, Răzvan Dincă, who headed the public radio as President-Director General from 2021 to 2025, was appointed its interim head.

Both broadcasters say their funding is insufficient to achieve their mission and has remained almost unchanged from previous years, and have asked for increases, especially for technical infrastructure and maintenance.²¹ Their 2026 budgets rose by 3.34% (TVR) and 5.45% (SRR) compared with 2025.²² These increases should be seen in the context of high inflation (7.3% in 2025²³, and expected to be 6.1% in 2026²⁴), which means that both budgets have fallen in real terms.

Public service media budgets for 2026 against inflation

Change compared with 2025, %



Sources: Agerpres (note 22); National Statistics Institute (note 23); National Bank of Romania via Digi24 (note 24).

17. "«Numirea membrilor CA din TVR și Radio România este neconstituțională», a decis CCR" ("The appointment of the TVR and Radio Romania board members is unconstitutional," the Constitutional Court ruled), TVR Info, 29 April 2026. Available online: tvrinfo.ro/numirea-membrilor-ca-din-tvr-si-radio-romania-este-neconstitucionala-a-decis-ccr/
18. Decisions nr. 394/29.04.2026 and nr. 395/29.04.2026, Romanian Constitutional Court. Available online: www.ccr.ro/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/Decizie_394_2026.pdf and www.ccr.ro/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/Decizie_395_2026.pdf
19. Iulia Bunea, "TVR și Radio România rămân oficial fără conducere. Deciziile CCR au fost publicate în Monitorul Oficial" (TVR and Radio Romania remain officially without management. The CCR decisions were published in the Official Gazette), 4 September 2026, Pagina de Media. Available online: www.paginademedia.ro/stiri-media/ctvr-conducere-tvr-demisa-22694306
20. "UPDATE Parlament/ Conducere interimare la Televiziunea publică și la Radio - Sorina Matei și Răzvan Dincă" (UPDATE Parliament / Interim leadership for Public Television and Radio - Sorina Matei and Răzvan Dincă), Agerpres, 8 September 2026. Available online: agerpres.ro/viata-parlamentara/2026/09/08/update-parlament-conducere-interimare-la-televiziunea-publica-si-la-radio---sorina-matei-si-razvan-d-1591700
21. "Reprezentanții SRTv, discuții pe marginea bugetului Televiziunii Publice pentru 2026 cu Președintele Comisiei pentru Cultură și Media a Senatului" (SRTv representatives hold discussions on the Public Television budget for 2026 with the Chair of the Senate Committee on Culture and Media), TVR, 9 March 2026. Available online: www.tvr.ro/reprezentan-ii-srtv-discu-ii-pe-marginea-bugetului-televiziunii-publice-pentru-2026-cu-pre-edintele-comisiei-pentru-cultura-i-media-a-senatului-romaniei_54411.html#view
22. "Bugetele SRR și SRTv - aprobate de Comisiile de buget-finanțe" (SRR and SRTv budgets - approved by the Budget and Finance Committees), 17 March 2026, Agerpres. Available online: agerpres.ro/politic/2026/03/17/parlament---buget2026-bugetele-srr-si-srtv---aprobate-de-comisiile-de-buget-finanțe--1538390
23. National Statistics Institute press release from January 14, 2026. Available online: www.mdlpa.ro/uploads/articole/attachments/69689e77c6496354057263.pdf
24. "BNR și-a revizuit în creștere prognoza de inflație: 6,1% la final de 2026 și 3,4% la sfârșitul lui 2027" (The NBR has revised its inflation forecast upwards: 6.1% by the end of 2026 and 3.4% by the end of 2027), 21 August 2026, Digi24. Available online: www.digi24.ro/stiri/economie/bnr-si-a-revizuit-in-crestere-prognoza-de-inflatie-61-la-final-de-2026-si-34-la-sfarsitul-lui-2027-3915921

The funding mechanism itself, under which the two broadcasters receive their money directly from the state budget, remains at odds with the EMFA's requirement of adequate, sustainable and predictable funding based on transparent and objective criteria, and there have been no recent initiatives to change it.

No steps have been taken to implement the EMFA provisions on use of public funds in the media. Despite the austerity measures, local administrations continue to fund loyal media preferentially. The methods range from direct subsidies for outlets owned by local authorities²⁵ to contracts for advertising space and promotion, as well as other inventive mechanisms, such as subscriptions for large numbers of printed copies, event organisation and the production of promotional materials.

The government's austerity measures also targeted state subsidies for political parties, which were cut by 20% in the 2026 budget.²⁶ In recent years, these subsidies have been a substantial source of revenue for many media outlets. Despite the cut, the parties remain as opaque as before about what they spend on political advertising and propaganda in the media. Two mainstream parties, PSD²⁷ and PNL,²⁸ still refuse to publish their political advertising contracts with the media, despite promises made during the 2024 and 2025 election years. Some online news outlets and TV news channels continue to give favourable editorial coverage to the political actors with whom they have political advertising contracts, most visibly Realitatea Plus, which, most of the time, openly supported AUR.

One step forward, although not stemming from EMFA, has come from the Regulation (EU) 2024/900 on the transparency and targeting of political advertising,²⁹ which has applied since October 2025: some outlets have started to publish transparency notices on their websites for political advertising contracts.³⁰ These notices show the sponsor of the published material, the amount paid for each campaign and the duration of the contract. Nevertheless, these notifications allow to identify only a part of the political advertising spend.³¹

MISUSE OF STATE FUNDS

EMFA ART. 25

Party subsidies, 2026

-20%

STATE SUBSIDIES TO PARTIES

A substantial source of revenue for many outlets. PSD and PNL still do not publish their media contracts.

25. Răzvan Chiruță, "Televiziunea de propagandă a lui Pandele a înghițit peste 20 milioane de euro din bani publici, în cinci ani de funcționare. Metropola TV are datorii uriașe și este pe locul 79 din 81 în topul stațiilor auditate" (Pandele's propaganda TV station has swallowed over 20 million euros in public funds during its five years of operation. Metropola TV has massive debts and ranks 79th out of 81 among audited stations), 24 February 2026, Buletin de București. Available online: buletin.de/bucuresti/analiza-televiziunea-de-propaganda-a-lui-pandele-a-inghitit-pest-20-milioane-de-euro-din-bani-publici-in-cinci-ani-de-functionare-metropola-tv-are-datorii-uriasi-si-este-pe-locul-79-din-81-in-top/
26. Cristian Andrei, "Bolojan s-a ținut de cuvânt, dar n-a anunțat. Guvernul a tăiat din banii partidelor. «Unii dintre liderii partidelor nu au știut»" (Bolojan kept his word, but didn't make an announcement. The government cut party funding. "Some party leaders didn't know"), 17 October 2025, HotNews. Available online: hotnews.ro/bolojan-s-a-tinut-de-cuvant-dar-n-a-anuntat-guvernul-a-taiat-din-banii-partidelor-unii-dintre-liderii-partidelor-nu-au-stiut-2088480
27. Cristian Andrei, "Cum au ajuns toate televiziunile din România să ascundă minciunile lui Sorin Grindeanu" (How all the TV stations in Romania ended up covering up Sorin Grindeanu's lies), 11 March 2026, HotNews. Available online: hotnews.ro/cum-au-ajuns-toate-televiziunile-din-romania-sa-ascunda-minciunile-lui-sorin-grindeanu-2190314
28. Cristian Andrei, "«Prefer să nu mai minți»". Faptele din spatele unei acuzații și marea miză: contractele secrete cu presa" ("I'd prefer you stopped lying". The facts behind an accusation and the high stakes: secret contracts with the press), 18 September 2025, HotNews. Available online: hotnews.ro/prefer-sa-nu-mai-mintiti-faptele-din-spatele-unei-acuzatii-si-marea-miza-contractele-secrete-cu-presa-2068360
29. The Permanent Electoral Authority press release from 9 October 2025. Available online: www.roaep.ro/prezentare/en/comunicat-de-presa/comunicat-de-presa-referitor-la-intrarea-in-vigoare-a-regulamentului-ue-2024900-privind-transparenta-si-vizarea-unui-public-tinta-in-publicitatea-politica/
30. Available online: www.realitatea.net/notificare-transparenta-publicitate-politica
31. ExpertForum, "Contractele partidelor cu presa în 2026. Trei firme încasează 80% din bani" (Political party contracts with the press in 2026: Three firms receive 80% of the funds), 30 August 2026. Available online: expertforum.ro/contracte-partide-presa/

MEDIA PLURALISM AND
POLITICAL INFLUENCE

EMFA ART. 6 & 22

Realitatea Plus and AUR

- Anca Alexandrescu
main talk-show host; AUR-
backed mayoral candidate,
Dec 2025
- Alexandra Păcuraru
owner's family; leading
positions in AUR
- Maricel Păcuraru
former owner; lent AUR
candidates about EUR 2.3m
in 2024
- AUR advertising
contracts rose to EUR 2m in
the 2024 European elections

Sanctioned by the CNA **July 2026**

There have also been positive examples of voluntary disclosure of public funds among mainstream media outlets, as required by Article 6.1 of EMFA, one example being the online outlet HotNews, which disclosed the total revenue it received from national and European public budgets as well as from political advertising contracts.³²

Yet, public authorities have thus far failed to act on the EMFA transparency requirements related to public spend in the media.

No EMFA-required provisions on transparency of funding and ownership, or on the assessment of media market concentration and media pluralism have been implemented to date. Apart from CNA's list of audiovisual providers, Romania has not taken steps to implement EMFA Article 6, which requires the establishment of a media ownership database as a tool to provide transparency of ownership.

Both the market structure and editorial practices have changed little since the 2025 report. With the market stagnating and little prospect of economic improvement, fierce competition in a market dominated by large platforms and television channels forces outlets to adapt and fight over limited resources.

The toxic relationship between some media outlets and political parties persists. The political interests or overt affiliations of some owners, and the party money still flooding the market, distort both the market and the public agenda: such outlets spread narratives designed to serve particular political actors, with little or no regard for the public interest or the public's right to fair information. This undermines trust in journalism and in the media's democratic role, and contributes to political and social polarisation and the accelerated rise of far-right movements.

The starkest example is Realitatea Plus, one of the most influential news channels. Its main talk-show host, Anca Alexandrescu, ran for mayor of Bucharest in December 2025 as an "independent", with the full backing of AUR.³³ Alexandra Păcuraru, member of the family that owns the channel, who used to host a primetime show on the channel, currently holds leading positions in AUR.³⁴ Maricel Păcuraru, the channel's former owner and the husband of its current owner, Daniela Madi Păcuraru, lent AUR candidates around EUR 2.3 million during the 2024 European Parliament election campaign, and the candidates in turn lent the money to the party. The Permanent Electoral Authority (AEP) refused to reimburse these amounts because they exceeded the statutory limits, and the candidates sued the party.³⁵ During the same elections, Realitatea Plus political

32. "HotNews își face public bugetul. Câți bani a primit în 2024 și 2025 pentru publicitate politică și de la ce partide" (HotNews discloses its budget: how much money it received in 2024 and 2025 for political advertising and from which parties), 19 May 2026, HotNews. Available online: hotnews.ro/hotnews-isi-face-public-bugetul-cati-bani-a-primit-in-2024-si-2025-pentru-publicitate-politica-si-de-la-ce-partide-2249160
33. Mirabela Vasile, "PORTRET. Cine este Anca Alexandrescu, candidata AUR la alegerile pentru Primăria Capitalei 2025" (PROFILE. Who is Anca Alexandrescu, the AUR candidate for the 2025 Bucharest mayoral election), 19 November 2025, Euronews. Available online: www.euronews.ro/articole/portret-alexandrescu-candidata-aur-primaria-capitalei-alegeri-bucuresti
34. Marius Florian, "Păcuraru a «descălecat» pe litoral: Conferință de înscăunare, ca să priceapă Murad cine conduce AUR Constanța" (Păcuraru has 'set foot' on the coast: An inauguration conference, so that Murad understands who is in charge of AUR Constanța), 12 February 2026, TomisNews. Available online: tomisnews.ro/pacuraru-a-descalecat-pe-litoral-conferinta-de-inscaunare-ca-sa-priceapa-murad-cine-conduce-aur-constanta/
35. Teodora Stroe, "EXCLUSIV Șase dintre cei opt membri AUR care au dat în judecată partidul ca să-și recupereze banii cheltuiți la europarlamentarele din 2024 au pierdut în primă instanță. Cinci dintre ei au luat bani împrumut de la Maricel Păcuraru, patronul Realitatea Plus" (EXCLUSIVE: Six of the eight AUR members who sued the party to recover the money they spent on the 2024 European Parliament elections lost their case at first instance. Five of them borrowed money from Maricel Păcuraru, the owner of Realitatea Plus), 23 March 2026, G4Media. Available online: www.g4media.ro/exclusiv-sase-dintre-cei-opt-membri-aur-care-au-dat-in-judecata-partidul-ca-sa-si-recupereze-banii-cheltuiti-la-europarlamentarele-din-2024-au-pierdut-in-prima-instanta-tribunalul-ilfov-i-a-trimis-sa.html

advertising contracts with AUR increased to EUR 2 million.³⁶ Realitatea Plus was sanctioned in July 2026 by the CNA for making changes in its ownership structure without notifying the Council and without its prior consent³⁷.

Ownership changes over the past year have pointed in different directions. At the end of 2025, HotNews announced that the Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF), a US non-profit that invests in independent media in more than 50 countries, had joined its shareholders.³⁸ Another online publication, cotidianul.ro, was sold by its owner, the journalist Cornel Nistorescu, to the Clever EAD group,³⁹ which publishes several other outlets, such as profit.ro and primanews.ro, owns TV stations such as Prima and Prima Sport, and holds the broadcasting rights to the national football league. The deal is another example of consolidation among the large media groups and reinforces the concentration of the media market.

The situation of Hungarian-language media is of particular concern, given both the size of the Hungarian minority and the political leverage of the party that represents it, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), which has been part of almost every governing coalition for the past 30 years. UDMR Senator Lorand Turos, a former journalist and CNA member who owns the publication Szatmári Friss Újság, is set to acquire a 55% stake in Alamo Impex 97 SRL from the Hungarian non-profit association MMTK.⁴⁰ Until recently directly funded by the Hungarian government, the company holds the licences for 12 local radio stations (Radio GaGa), as well as the trademarks for these stations and for other Hungarian-language publications in Transylvania, Krónika and Székelyhon. The transaction was notified to the CNA and discussed at its meeting on 22 July 2026.

Hungarian-language radio

55%

STAKE TO BE ACQUIRED

In Alamo Impex 97, licence holder for 12 local radio stations (Radio GaGa), by UDMR senator Lorand Turos. Notified to the CNA, July 2026.

36. Cristian Andrei, "Mirosul banilor din campanie. AUR și PNL au dat peste 3 milioane de euro la Realitatea, șapte televiziuni au promovat PSD" (The scent of campaign money: AUR and PNL paid over €3 million to Realitatea; seven TV stations promoted the PSD), 7 October 2024, Snoop. Available online: snoop.ro/mirosul-banilor-din-campanie-aur-si-pnl-au-dat-pest-3-milioane-de-euro-la-realitatea-sapte-televiziuni-au-promovat-psd/
37. Iulia Bunea, "Realitatea, amendată pentru modificarea acționariatului fără acord" (Realitatea fined for changing its shareholding structure without consent), 7 July 2026, Pagina de Media. Available online: www.paginamedia.ro/stiri-media/realitatea-amenda-modificare-actionariat-fara-acord-22508776
38. Andrei Georgescu, "O organizație cu sediul la New York, care manageriază compania Pluralis din Olanda și este interzisă de Putin în Rusia, a anunțat statul român că vrea să investească în HotNews" (A New York-based organization that manages the Dutch company Pluralis—and is banned by Putin in Russia—has informed the Romanian state of its intention to invest in HotNews), 28 November 2025, HotNews. Available online: hotnews.ro/o-organizatie-cu-sediul-la-new-york-care-manageriaza-compania-pluralis-din-olanda-specializata-in-investitii-in-presa-independenta-a-anuntat-statul-roman-ca-pluralis-intentioneaza-sa-investeasca-in-2118652
39. Petrișor Obae, "Site-ul Cotidianul, al lui Cornel Nistorescu, cumpărat de grupul care deține Profit.ro și PrimaNews" (Cornel Nistorescu's Cotidianul website has been bought by the group that owns Profit.ro and PrimaNews), 18 September 2025, Pagina de Media. Available online: www.paginamedia.ro/stiri-media/cornel-nistorescu-cotidianul-orlando-nicoara-21891071
40. Sipos Zoltan, "UDMR vrea controlul trustului media finanțat de guvernul Orbán" (The UDMR wants control of the media group funded by the Orbán government), July 29, 2026, Atlatzo Erdely. Available online: atlatzo.ro/ro/important/udmr-trust-media-fidesz-romania/

02

Has the situation improved?

No. The 2025 report found that Romania had yet to implement any element of the EMFA, and not a single step forward has been taken since. The political crisis that followed the government's fall in May 2026 has resulted in political deadlock and further institutional dysfunction, making a legislative initiative even less likely in the near term. The structural problems remain: public service media boards and heads are still appointed by parliamentary majorities, resulting in political influence and a lack of independence, and TVR and SRR are still funded year by year from the state budget, with 2026 increases below inflation. The Constitutional Court's ruling on the boards turned on how the party seats were shared out, and the interim heads installed in September were chosen by Parliament's leadership with the votes of PSD and AUR. The CNA has been more assertive, withdrawing two licences for unpaid fines, but it still has no appointed president, is understaffed and remains exposed to political pressure. No steps have been taken to implement EMFA provisions on transparency of funding and ownership, or on the assessment of media market concentrations. The few improvements, such as the political advertising notices required by EU Regulation 2024/900 and voluntary disclosures by outlets such as HotNews, came from other EU laws or from the media themselves, not from the Romanian state or its alignment with EMFA.

03

Outstanding problems

MEDIA REGULATORS

AVMSD ART. 30

The CNA still has no appointed president and works with a quarter of its approved posts unfilled. Its sanctions remain too mild to deter repeated breaches, while its reach into online content, from sanctioning ordinary social media users to the new notification regime for video-sharing channels, has been criticised as going beyond its legal mandate. Political pressure on the Council continues.

PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

EMFA ART. 5

Nothing has changed in the appointment and funding model that conflicts with the EMFA. Boards and heads are still chosen along party lines, both broadcasters are now run by interim heads installed by Parliament's leadership pending new boards, and funding is still set annually from the state budget, falling in real terms in 2026, which undermines stable and sustainable funding required under EMFA Article 5.

MISUSE OF STATE FUNDS

EMFA ART. 25

State subsidies to political parties, though cut by 20%, still pay for favourable coverage, and the majority of political parties still refuse to publish their media contracts and spending. This spending falls outside Article 25, which binds public authorities and entities rather than political parties; it is nonetheless public money buying editorial coverage, and in its effect on editorial independence it is indistinguishable from captured state advertising.⁴¹ State advertising by public authorities is conducted in a non-transparent manner, without effective enforcement of rules on objectivity or proportionality. Local authorities keep funding loyal outlets through subsidies, advertising and other contracts. No rules for the fair and transparent allocation of state advertising, as Article 25 requires, have been proposed.

OWNERSHIP TRANSPARENCY AND PLURALISM

EMFA ART. 6 & 22

No steps have been taken on the EMFA's ownership transparency and concentration provisions. Consolidation continues, as the sale of cotidianul.ro to the Clever group shows, while the Realitatea Plus case shows how closely ownership, party politics and party money are intertwined. The planned transfer of a Hungarian-language radio network, once funded by the Hungarian government, to a UDMR senator will test the CNA's scrutiny of ownership changes.

41. EMFA Article 25 applies to "public authorities or entities", defined in Article 2(18) as national or subnational governments, regulatory authorities or bodies, and entities they control directly or indirectly; political parties fall outside it. Paid coverage bought by a party is instead political advertising under Regulation (EU) 2024/900 on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, applicable since 10 October 2025, whose exclusion for content under editorial responsibility does not hold where remuneration is involved. That obligation binds only where the payment is declared.

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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