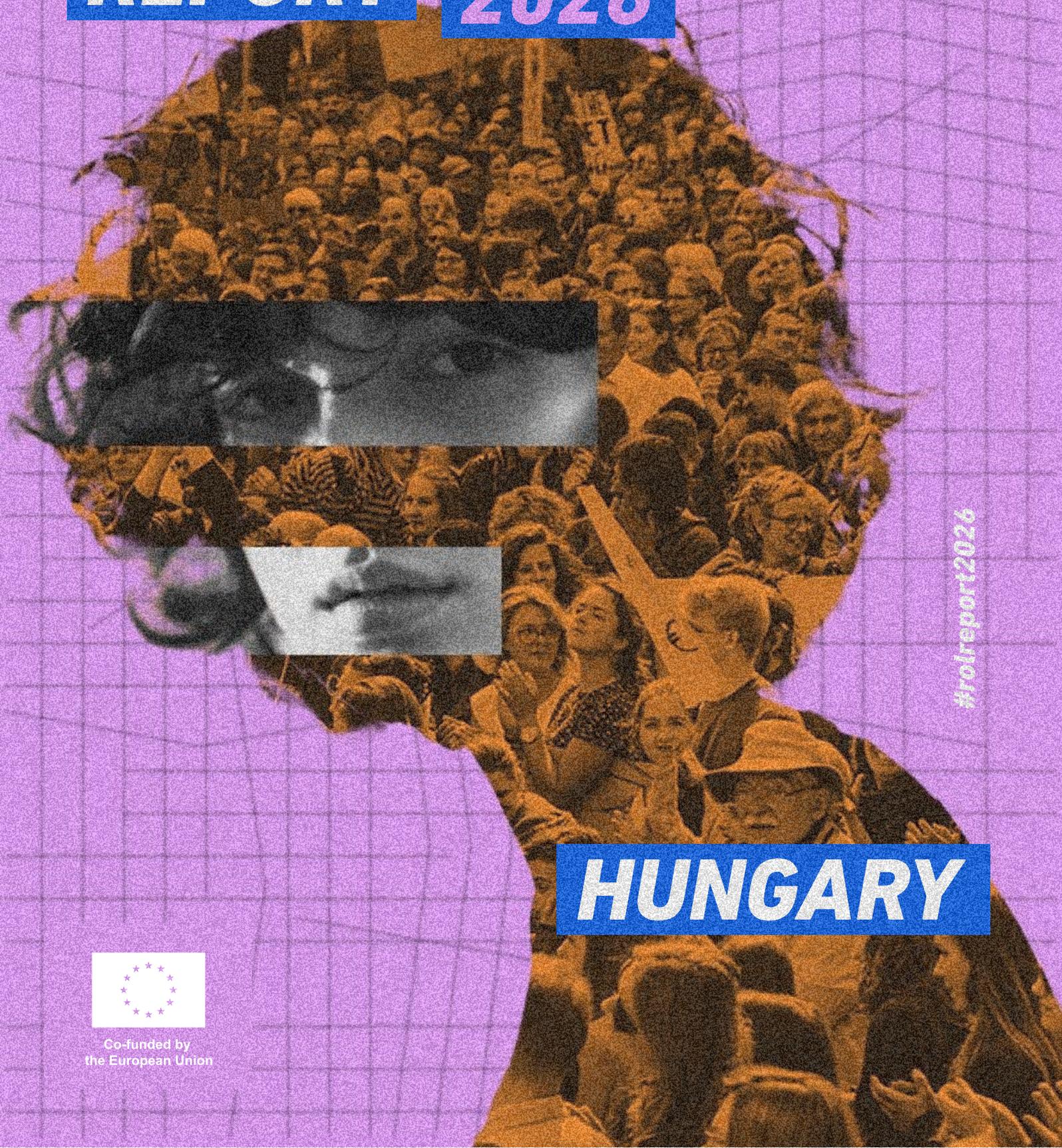


LIBERTIES

RULE OF LAW

REPORT

2026



#roi2026

HUNGARY



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FOREWORD

The Liberties Rule of Law Report 2026 is the seventh annual report on the state of rule of law in the European Union (EU) published by the Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties). Liberties is a non-governmental civil society organisation promoting the civil liberties of everyone in the EU, and it is built on a network of national civil liberties groups from across the EU. Currently, we have member organisations in Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden, as well as a contributing partner organisation in Greece.

Liberties, together with its members and partner organisations, carries out advocacy, campaigning and public education activities to explain what the rule of law is, what the EU and national governments are doing to protect or harm it, and gathers public support to press leaders at EU and national level to fully respect, promote and protect our basic rights and values.

Drafted by Liberties and its member and partner organisations, the 2026 report covers the situation during 2025 with the purpose of providing the European Commission with reliable information and analysis from the ground to feed its own rule of law reports, and to provide an independent analysis of the state of the rule of law in the EU in its own right. Liberties' report represents the most in-depth reporting exercise carried out to date by a civil society network to map developments in a wide range of areas connected to the rule of law in the EU.

The 2026 report includes EU-wide trend analysis in the justice system, anti-corruption framework, media freedom, checks and balances, based on 22 country reports that follow a common structure, mirroring and expanding on the priority areas and indicators identified by the European Commission for its annual rule of law monitoring cycle. Nearly 40 organisations contributed to the compilation of these country reports. The 2026 report places particular emphasis on the recommendations made by the European Commission and how, in the assessment of Liberties' members, they have been implemented. Specific gaps were identified alongside new issues that arose in 2025.

[Download the full Liberties Rule of Law Report 2026 here.](#)

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HUNGARY

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTING ORGANISATIONS

Hungarian Civil Liberties Union



The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) is a non-profit human rights watchdog NGO established in Budapest, Hungary, in 1994. The HCLU is a Hungarian human rights watchdog working independently of political parties, the state, or any of its institutions. The HCLU's aim is to advance the case for fundamental rights and principles laid down by the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary and by international conventions. Generally, it has the goal of building and strengthening civil society and the rule of law in Hungary and in the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region. Since the HCLU is an independent non-profit organisation, its financial resources are mostly provided by foundations and by an increasing number of private individuals. The HCLU strives to educate citizens about their basic human rights and freedoms, and takes a stand against undue interference and misuse of power by those in positions of authority.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT: DISMANTLER

In 2025, Hungary's domestic rule-of-law backsliding occurred against a context of sustained international pressure, notably linked to the suspension or conditional disbursement of significant EU funding. The European Commission (EC) and EU institutions continued to withhold large tranches of payments to Hungary under various conditionality and recovery-fund mechanisms, which has translated into tangible economic and political leverage and increased pressure on the government to take remedial steps.

Domestically, the government continued to deploy a security and enemy-framing narrative, frequently invoking the war in Ukraine and the need to protect national sovereignty, to justify an extended 'state of danger' and a suite of exceptional measures that have implications for fundamental rights and parliamentary scrutiny. The state-of-danger regime was extended during 2025 and remained a feature of the legal landscape, allowing rapid executive action in ways that reduce safeguards. At the same time, official discourse often framed Brussels and EU institutions as political adversaries and used geopolitical anxieties related to the Ukraine conflict to legitimise restrictive domestic policies. This is a pattern that reinforced public fear and underpinned continued exceptional-powers rhetoric. This combination of external economic pressure and internal securitising rhetoric produced a dual effect in 2025: (i) concrete leverage from the EU that increased incentives for formal compliance, and (ii) a sustained governmental emphasis on national security and anti-external narratives that, in practice, justified measures weakening checks and balances and constraining civic and media space.

Assessment of the trajectory

In 2025, Hungary's rule of law situation continued to deteriorate across several core areas. While in some fields the formal assessment points to 'no progress' rather than further backsliding, this static classification risks obscuring the underlying reality. By 2025, systemic and severe rule of law deficiencies had already become entrenched, and the government's clear intent to undermine core guarantees had long been implemented. The absence of further deterioration in certain areas, therefore, reflects the consolidation of an already degraded baseline rather than stabilisation or correction, supporting Hungary's classification as a rule of law 'dismantler'.

The justice system was marked by only limited improvements, and no meaningful progress was made in the anti-corruption framework. Although salary increases partially alleviated long-standing resource constraints in the judiciary, they were embedded in broader reforms that introduced new risks to judicial independence, amid continued executive intolerance toward critical voices. Anti-corruption reforms stagnated despite repeated European Commission recommendations: long-overdue lobbying and revolving-door rules were not adopted, asset disclosure oversight was not strengthened, and the parliament abolished campaign spending limits, increasing the risk of money-driven political

corruption. Enforcement gaps persisted, with no progress in prosecuting high-level corruption, reinforcing public mistrust and de facto impunity.

At the same time, regression was most pronounced in the media environment and the system of checks and balances. No steps were taken to strengthen the independence of the media regulator or to align national rules with the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), while centralised state advertising continued to function as a de facto subsidy scheme for pro-government media, and public service media remained a government communication tool. Pressure on civil society intensified through the continued application of Act LXXXVIII of 2023 (the Sovereignty Protection Act),¹ the proposed new transparency legislation,² the expanded biometric surveillance,³ and the 15th amendment to the Fundamental Law.⁴ This amendment introduced content-based restrictions on freedom of expression and facilitated broad limitations on freedom of assembly, including the systematic banning of LGBT-QIA+ related demonstrations. Taken together, these developments further weakened independent institutions and deepened Hungary's divergence from European rule of law standards in 2025.

ACTIVATING OTHER PARTS OF THE EU RULE OF LAW TOOLBOX

The Commission should avoid framing the situation as mere stagnation, where, in reality, a structurally degraded baseline has consolidated, and 'no progress' risks obscuring the durability of the deterioration. A more consistent and firmer response is warranted in areas where the report identifies clear regression in 2025, notably in the media environment (including non-alignment with the EMFA and the continued distortive role of state advertising) and in the system of checks and balances and civic space. In particular, the combined effect of the Sovereignty Protection Act, Pride-banning, the expansion of biometric surveillance, the absence of effective safeguards against arbitrary secret

- 1 Act LXXXVIII of 2023 on the protection of national sovereignty (*A nemzeti szuverenitás védelméről*), ('Sovereignty Protection Act'), <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2300088.tv> [in Hungarian].
- 2 Bill T/11923 On the transparency of public life (*A közélet átláthatóságáról*), ORSZÁGGYŰLÉS, 23 January 2026, https://www.parlament.hu/web/guest/folyamatban-levo-torvenyjavaslatok?p_p_id=hu_parlament_cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8&p_p_lifecycle=1&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_auth=VcOhWAsU&_hu_parlament_cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8_pairAction=%2Finternet%2Fcplsql%2Fogy_irom.irom_adat%3Fp_ckl%3D42%26p_izon%3D11923 [in Hungarian].
- 3 Act III of 2025 amending Act LV of 2018 on the right of assembly with regard to the protection of children, and amending related Acts, <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/en/2025-3-00-00> [in Hungarian].
- 4 Bill T/1152 on the Fifteenth Amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary, <https://www.parlament.hu/irom42/11152/11152.pdf> [in Hungarian].

surveillance, as well as the use of spyware, and the 15th amendment to the Fundamental Law calls for heightened scrutiny and a more explicit escalation in the Commission's engagement. The prolonged maintenance of the 'state of danger' and its rule of law implications, including reduced parliamentary scrutiny, should also be treated as a priority concern.

Developments in 2025 indicate that recommendations alone have limited traction where the authorities' incentives remain largely confined to formal compliance. In this context, the Commission should maintain and, where necessary, strengthen the use of financial conditionality as a tangible form of leverage. This should be complemented by a more explicit escalation logic in areas affecting civic space, including the use of surveillance technologies and secret surveillance tools. The infringement steps already initiated in December 2025 in relation to non-compliance with the EMFA and the Audio-visual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) should be pursued in a consistent manner. The Commission's approach should also address civic space as a systemic element of the rule of law architecture, acknowledging the cumulative impact of multiple instruments that restrict public participation and scrutiny, including the Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO), the Bill T/11923 on Transparency of Public Life,⁵ restrictions on assembly, and the use of facial recognition.

Several developments warrant consideration from an EU law compliance perspective. The Commission launched an infringement procedure in December 2025 regarding non-compliance with the EMFA and the AVMSD. Act LXXXVIII of 2023 (Sovereignty Protection Act) remains in force and is pending before the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), which underscores the need for continued escalation and focused treatment within the broader rule of law toolbox. New surveillance regulations, including biometric surveillance in public spaces, appear to breach the EU AI Act, providing a concrete basis for enforcement action. Concerns related to secret surveillance and the use of spyware similarly call for a firm response where effective safeguards and remedies are not ensured. The Commission should frame the lack of safeguards over national security surveillance as a rule of law concern rather than a national security matter, as doing otherwise risks legitimising the use of national security as a *carte blanche* for the consolidation of unchecked governmental power. The continued non-implementation of the 2020 CJEU judgment concerning the asylum/transit zones

5 Hungarian Parliament (ORSZÁGGYŰLÉS), Bill T/11923 on the transparency of public life, (*A közélet átláthatóságáról*), 23 January 2026, https://www.parlament.hu/web/guest/folyamatban-levo-torvenyjavaslatok?p_p_id=hu_parlament cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8&p_p_lifecycle=1&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_auth=VcOhWAsU&_hu_parlament cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8_pairAction=%2Finternet%2Fcpls%2Fogy_irom_irom_adat%3Fp_ckl%3D42%26p_izon%3D11923 [in Hungarian]

framework,⁶ accompanied by the ongoing imposition of penalties and daily lump sums, constitutes an additional area where EU law compliance concerns remain acute.

The current level of withheld funding remains significant, including the absence of payments under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) (€5.8 billion) due to the non-fulfilment of the super milestones, and the continued blocking⁷ of approximately €6.3 billion in cohesion funds under the Conditionality Regulation. In light of the persistence of structural deficiencies and the regressions observed in 2025, the continued application of conditionality mechanisms remains justified. Implementation deficits in the anti-corruption commitments, including the lack of rules on lobbying and revolving doors, weaknesses in asset declaration control, the absence of a high-level corruption track record, and the retaliatory-type pressure affecting the Integrity Authority, support the conclusion that financial conditionality remains necessary and proportionate. Financial pressure has also proven more tangible than purely recommendation-based engagement, reinforcing the case for maintaining this approach until meaningful and verifiable progress is achieved. Consideration should also be given to using financial conditionality, where legally available, as part of the Union's broader response to persistent non-compliance with CJEU judgments, which undermines the rule of law itself.

Any politically driven suspension or slowing-down of these tools or of ongoing procedures, including in light of the proximity of elections, would risk being perceived by the Hungarian authorities as an implicit signal of tolerance or acquiescence; consistent follow-through is therefore necessary.

State of play (versus 2025)

-  *Justice system*
-  *Anti-corruption framework*
-  *Media Environment and Media Freedom*
-  *Checks and balances*

Legend

- | <i>Regression</i> | <i>No progress</i> | <i>Progress</i> |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |

6 Case C-808/18, *Commission v Hungary*. https://infocuria.curia.europa.eu/tabs/affair?sort=AFF_NUM-DESC&searchTerm=%22C-808%2F18%22&publishedId=C-808%2F18

7 Amnesty International Hungary, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, K-Monitor, Transparency International Hungary: Assessment of Hungary's compliance with conditions to access European Union funds, November 2025, https://transparency.hu/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/HU_EU_funds_assessment_2025.pdf

JUSTICE SYSTEM -

General assessment

In 2025, the situation of the justice system in Hungary showed only limited and fragile improvement, driven primarily by external - EU-level - pressure rather than by genuine domestic political commitment to strengthening judicial independence. While long-standing resource constraints were partially alleviated through salary increases for judges and court staff, these measures were embedded in a broader reform package that introduced new risks to judicial independence. Changes to judicial career paths, appointment procedures, and promotion rules in particular point towards an increased scope for executive influence. As a result, material improvements were offset by structural developments that weaken institutional safeguards.

The developments observed in 2025 suggest that backsliding risks are becoming entrenched rather than reversed. Legislative amendments affecting judicial appointments, promotions, and conditions of service have increased the scope of administrative discretion, thereby introducing unpredictability into judicial career paths. Importantly, these changes were not always accompanied by meaningful consultation with the National Judicial Council, weakening the role of judicial self-governance. Although courts annulled certain retaliatory administrative measures against judges and court staff in 2025, the Commission characterises these remedies as *ex post* corrections. They did not prevent the initial chilling effect, nor did they address the underlying structures enabling pressure to be exercised in the first place. As a result, judicial protection remains reactive rather than preventive.

A particularly significant signal was the unprecedented public protest by judges in February 2025,⁸ supported by national and European judicial associations. This protest underscored concerns about judicial independence that they are no longer confined to expert or civil society assessments but are openly articulated within the judiciary itself. Following consultations with Hungarian stakeholders, in February 2025 the European Network for National Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ) Executive Board also concluded that the independence of the judiciary in Hungary faces serious challenges. The key concerns identified largely overlapped with the objectives of the demonstration, including judges' freedom of expression, the lack of meaningful consultation on reforms affecting the judiciary, the role and protection of the service courts, and judicial remuneration.⁹

8 The detailed programme of the demonstration is available on the official website of the Hungarian Association of Judges (Magyar Bírói Egyesület, MABIE), 20 February 2025, <https://mabie.hu/hirek/a-demonstracio-programja> (in Hungarian).

9 European Network for National Councils for the Judiciary, 21 February 2025, <https://www.encj.eu/node/817>.

Implementation of 2025 Commission recommendations

Recommendation: Improve the transparency of case allocation systems in lower-instance courts, taking into account European standards on case allocation (first made in 2023)

Steps taken by the government towards implementation: In 2025, no legislative or regulatory steps were taken to revise the case allocation framework applicable to lower-instance courts.¹⁰ The government reiterated its position that the existing legal framework already ensures objectivity, even regarding case allocation, and therefore does not require amendment. No additional measures aimed at increasing the transparency or external verifiability of case allocation practices in lower courts were reported.

Gaps and obstacles: As reflected in the Commission's 2025 Rule of Law Report, several stakeholders reiterated that, in practice, the discretion afforded to court managers, the scope of exemptions from pre-established allocation rules, and the frequent modification of allocation schemes make it difficult for parties and the general public to verify whether the rules are consistently applied.¹¹ In the absence of any regulatory changes, these concerns remain valid.

Commission's 2025 assessment: No progress

HCLU's current assessment: No progress

10 Neither the Parliament adopted Act XLIX of 2025 on the Amendment of Justice-related Laws, nor any other legislative initiative adopted during the reporting period addressed the issue of case allocation. This assessment is consistent with the Contributions of Hungarian CSOs to the European Commission's Rule of Law Report, 16 January 2026, pp. 10-11, https://tasz.hu/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/HUN_CS0_contribution_EC_RoL_Report_2026.pdf.

11 European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, Hungary – Justice System, p. 6.

Recommendation: 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 (first made in 2024; reworded in 2025)

In 2025, Parliament adopted budgetary measures increasing remuneration in the justice system. As reflected in the Commissions' Rule of Law Report, a 15% increase introduced in 2025 was followed by a further increase in the 2026 annual budget adopted in June 2025. However, the increases were not accompanied by structural solutions, such as automatic indexation, and the salary base continues to be determined annually by parliament. As a result, despite significant progress in nominal terms, long-term predictability and structural safeguards remain limited.¹²

The Commission's recommendation is clear and precise for the government to take actions, although its operative content is not self-contained. It derives its full meaning from the analytical context of the Rule of Law Report, where a 'structured manner' of remuneration refers to predictable, system-wide salary adjustments aligned with European standards, as opposed to ad hoc or discretionary increases.

Commission's 2025 assessment: No progress

HCLU's current assessment: No progress

Gaps in the Commission's Report

Lack of effective safeguards for judges' and court staff's freedom of expression

In 2025, two court cases illustrated a recurring pattern of retaliation against judges and court staff in Hungary for expressing professional criticism related to the functioning of the judiciary.¹³ In the first case, a senior judge of the Kúria (A.K.) was suspended from his leadership position after publishing an academic study raising institutional concerns about the court's internal governance, including the concentration of administrative powers, limited transparency in decision-making, and the potential chilling effect of uniformity mechanisms on judicial independence. In June 2025, the Budapest Court of Appeal ruled the suspension unlawful, finding that the Kúria's President had acted

12 This assessment is consistent with the Contribution of Hungarian CSOs to the European Commission's Rule of Law Report, 16 January 2026, p. 3, https://tasz.hu/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/HUN_CS0_contribution_EC_RoL_Report_2026.pdf.

13 These cases are also discussed in the Contribution of Hungarian CSOs to the European Commission's Rule of Law Report, pp. 34–35, which presents a convergent assessment, https://tasz.hu/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/HUN_CS0_contribution_EC_RoL_Report_2026.pdf.

without legal authority. In the second case, a senior legal adviser was dismissed in October 2024 after making critical remarks at a closed professional workshop concerning systemic challenges within the court system. In October 2025, the Labour College of the Metropolitan Regional Court found the dismissal unlawful, holding that her remarks constituted protected professional expression.¹⁴

These cases reflect a broader pattern in which internal professional criticism, particularly on issues of judicial governance and independence, are subjected to formal or informal pressure applied outside disciplinary proceedings. Even where such measures are later annulled by courts, their initial use risks producing a chilling effect on internal debate essential to judicial independence.

In a public statement, the President of Kúria condemned judges who protested against a speech of the Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, in which civil society actors and journalists were referred to as “parasites,”¹⁵ and questioned the impartiality of those judges.¹⁶

Judicial independence and legal status of judges

A relevant legislative development affecting the legal status of judges was not reflected in the report’s assessment of the broader reform of judicial service rules in 2025. New draft amendments required judges seeking continued service beyond retirement age to undergo mandatory psychological and medical examinations, without providing for an effective right to appeal against negative decisions, and introducing a discretionary decision-making framework affecting judicial careers, including for judges of the Kúria.¹⁷

These proposals, along with other elements of the reform, triggered strong opposition from judicial self-governing bodies and civil society organisations and resulted in an unprecedented public protest by judges. Critics argued that the proposed examinations lacked objective criteria and could be used

14 Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Attempts to Silence Judicial Dissent: The cases of Judge András Kovács and X, a senior scientific advisor at the Kúria, 22 October 2025, <https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/10/Attempts-to-silence-judicial-dissent-in-Hungary.pdf#:~:text=X%20with%20immediate%20effect,case%2C%20nor%20was%20she%20presented>.

15 Telex: Orbán likens his critics to ‘bugs,’ as Péter Magyar seeks public input through 12 questions, (*‘Orbán Viktor lepoloskázta a kritikusait, Magyar Péter 12 kérdésben kéri ki az emberek véleményét’*), 15 March 2025, <https://telex.hu/belfold/2025/03/15/marcius-15-megemlekezesek-orban-viktor-magyar-peter-mi-hazank-mkqp>.

16 Statement by the President of the Curia, (*‘A Kúria elnökének közleménye’*), Kúria, 17 March 2025, <https://kuria-birosag.hu/hu/sajto/kuria-elnokenek-kozlemenye-4> [in Hungarian]

17 Draft Act on the Amendment of Justice-related Laws, Article 63, <https://kormany.hu/application/documents/b399704c-4ed1-49da-a3b4-0d2dd3075be9/download>

as a tool for discretionary or selective exclusion of judges, raising concerns about potential political influence over decisions affecting judicial careers.¹⁸ As a result of sustained institutional and public pressure, the most intrusive elements of the proposal were removed before the bill was adopted in June 2025 (Act XLIX of 2025 on Amending Acts on Judicial Matters). While the Commission's 2025 report may justifiably omit proposals that were ultimately abandoned, the fact that the government retreated only following judicial and civil resistance - and that the adopted framework still introduced a discretionary decision-making mechanism - warranted attention as part of the broader assessment of reforms affecting the legal status and independence of judges.

New Issues that Emerged in 2025

Arbitrary decision-making in judicial appointments

In November 2025, a final decision was delivered by the Constitutional Court in the case of Csaba Vasvári,¹⁹ a district court judge, who initiated a labour dispute in 2017 after repeatedly being denied appointment to the Budapest Court of Appeal, despite being ranked first by the competent judicial council. Following the proposal of second-ranked candidates by the president of the Court of Appeal, the president of the National Office for the Judiciary declared the appointment procedures unsuccessful, and the positions were subsequently filled on a temporary basis. Following initially successful proceedings before the ordinary courts, the outcome was reversed by a subsequent decision of the Kúria. In 2021, Vasvári lodged a constitutional complaint with the Constitutional Court. His case raises concerns regarding safeguards against arbitrary decision-making in judicial appointments, the availability and effectiveness of judicial remedies in service-related disputes, and the external guarantees of judicial independence. The Constitutional Court concluded the proceedings in November 2025. The Court found that the applicant's arguments, although framed as constitutional claims, in substance challenged the legality of the Supreme Court's interpretation of the ordinary law. The Constitutional Court further held that judicial independence was not infringed, as the system of judicial appointments contains sufficient guarantees through the involvement of multiple actors, including judicial councils, court presidents, and the president of the National Office for the Judiciary, even where the final decision is taken by a single authority. According to the Court, a candidate ranked first by a judicial council does not automatically acquire a right to appointment, and the declaration of a

18 Res Iudicata Association (Res Iudicata Egyesület), Opinion on the amendment of laws related to the judiciary, (*Vélemény az igazságügyi tárgyú törvények módosításáról*), 22 April 2025, https://resiudicata.hu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/velemen-y-az-igazsagugyi-targyu-torvenyek-modositasarol_RI_20250422-1.pdf, p. 1-2.

19 3339/2025. (XI. 12.) AB végzés, [https://public.mkab.hu/dev/dontesek.nsf/0/1fea204e6d0e-6228c1258766005ab079/\\$FILE/3339_2025_AB_v%C3%A9gz%C3%A9s.pdf](https://public.mkab.hu/dev/dontesek.nsf/0/1fea204e6d0e-6228c1258766005ab079/$FILE/3339_2025_AB_v%C3%A9gz%C3%A9s.pdf).

competition as unsuccessful, provided it follows the statutory framework, does not in itself undermine judicial independence.

It would be important for the 2026 Commission report to underline the requirement of objective and predictable evaluation of judicial appointment procedures, and to assess whether judges adversely affected by these decisions are granted access to effective legal remedies.

Erosion of National Judicial Council's powers

In 2023, the National Judicial Council (OBT) was granted the right to issue an opinion on draft legislation affecting the organisation of the courts and, if this right is not ensured, to seek legal remedy before the Constitutional Court. In 2025, the justice administration adopted a comprehensive legislative amendment concerning the court system (Act XLIX of 2025), which gave rise to a dispute as to whether the OBT, acting as a collective body, had a genuine opportunity to provide an opinion on the draft before its adoption. On 26 June 2025, the OBT turned to the Constitutional Court, arguing that the Ministry of Justice had provided only a very short deadline for issuing an opinion, thereby infringing the OBT's right to be consulted. In its decision delivered in September 2025, the Constitutional Court rejected the OBT's motion seeking the annulment of certain provisions of the law.²⁰ The Court found that the Ministry had formally complied with its obligations: it had transmitted the draft in early April 2025, extended the initial seven-day deadline to fourteen days, and the OBT had submitted its response within that period. Accordingly, the Constitutional Court held that no violation had occurred and that the exercise of the right to give an opinion had not been rendered impossible. Although the OBT argued that certain provisions of the law suffered from public-law invalidity due to the lack of proper consultation, the Court did not examine this claim on the merits, stating that such a request for annulment could not be submitted in the given procedure. The case thus highlighted that, given the limits of the new remedial mechanism, the government can comply with the statutory requirement through minimal, purely formal consultation.²¹

Instead of merely ensuring the formal existence of the right to give an opinion, it should be guaranteed that the OBT is granted sufficient time and thus a genuine opportunity to discuss draft proposals, and that its substantive comments are taken into account.

20 Alkotmánybíróság, The Constitutional Court has ruled on the motion of the National Judicial Council (*'Döntött az Alkotmánybíróság az Országos Bírói Tanács indítványáról'*) (Press release), Alkotmánybíróság, 12 September 2025, <https://alkotmanybirosag.hu/kozlemeny/dontott-az-alkotmanybirosag-az-orszagos-biroi-tanacs-inditvanyarol/> [in Hungarian]

21 For further details of the case regarding other anomalies concerning the legislative process itself please see Checks and Balances, subsection 3.

Structural underfunding of public defenders

In Hungary, the system of appointed defence lawyers has long been affected by chronic underfunding and structural shortcomings. Remuneration and cost reimbursement for appointed defenders remain far below market rates, and many essential defence activities such as client consultations, drafting submissions, or travel are not remunerated at all. This creates a risk that lawyers are unable to devote sufficient time and resources to such cases, adversely affecting the quality of defence and the effective enjoyment of defence rights. These concerns have been repeatedly raised by civil society organisations, especially by the Hungarian Helsinki Committee.²² In 2025, the government addressed persistent delays in the payment of appointed defenders' fees, particularly during the investigative phase, and introduced a new payment mechanism from 1 May 2025 under which fees incurred before indictment are advanced and paid by the Ministry of Justice.²³ This administrative adjustment, which was welcomed by the Bar, is expected to reduce payment delays and improve predictability. However, it did not address the structural underfunding of the system. Remuneration levels remain unchanged, several essential defence activities continue to be unpaid, and no quality assurance or monitoring mechanisms were introduced to mitigate the impact of these shortcomings on the effectiveness of legal defence. A draft regulation (government decree)²⁴ published in January 2026 proposes a 50% increase in the hourly fee for judge-appointed lawyers, from €18 to €29.²⁵ However, this amount still represents only about one-third of the market rate.

It is important that the Commission closely monitor the adoption and implementation of the decree, in particular its impact on the effectiveness of legal defence.

22 Hungarian Helsinki Committee, The public defender system should not be treated as a stepchild of the criminal justice system (*A kirendelt védői rendszert nem szabad a büntető igazságszolgáltatás mostohagyermekéként kezelni*), 16 December 2024, <https://helsinki.hu/a-kirendelt-vedoi-rendszert-nem-szabad-a-bunteto-igazsagszolgalatasi-rendszer-mostohagyermekekent-kezelni/> [in Hungarian]

23 See Decree No. 4/2025 (IV. 30.) of the Ministry of Justice amending justice-related decrees, available in the Hungarian Gazette at <https://magyarkozlony.hu/dokumentumok/3a537c5a3854b43c0bc726320385ebbb-3cd89d13/megtekintes>, pp. 2768-2772.

24 Decree .../2026 (...) of the Minister of Justice amending Decree No 32/2017 (XII. 27.) of the Minister of Justice on the fees payable to legal guardians ad litem, appointed defence lawyers, and appointed counsel, <https://kormany.hu/application/documents/6c8dcbbb-0b44-4df6-acc8-e69ba6217f35/download>

25 Tibor Polish, This way, it can reach up to a quarter of the market price: the government would increase the fees of seconded lawyers (*Így már elérheti a piaci ár akár negyedét is: megemelné a kormány a kirendelt ügyvédek díját*), HVG, 21 January 2026, https://hvg.hu/itthon/20260121_kirendelt-ugyved-oradij-emeles [in Hungarian]

Implications and Recommendations for 2026

The threats to judges' freedom of expression and independence are serious issues that require attention from the European Commission through new recommendations in its next report.

Suggested recommendation: Implement safeguards for judges' freedom of expression, in line with the European standards, so that raising rule of law concerns and criticizing systemic issues does not trigger punitive integrity investigations or removals, and does not deter judges from engaging in public discourse compatible with their judicial role. It should be recommended (i) the Kúria president to refrain from using administrative procedures to penalize judges for lawful opinions, and (ii) any disciplinary actions strictly follow due process under independent oversight.

Suggested recommendation: Ensure that future reforms affecting the legal status, career progression, and conditions of service of judges fully respect the principles of judicial independence, legal certainty and objective decision-making. Legislative initiatives should not introduce discretionary mechanisms capable of exerting pressure on individual judges.

To address the new development of constitutional overreach by the Kúria, the Commission should issue a new recommendation that instructs the government to ensure that it does not adjudicate outside of its mandate.

Suggested recommendation: Ensure a strict and unequivocal separation of competences between the Kúria and the service courts, making clear that disciplinary, integrity-related matters concerning judges fall exclusively within the jurisdiction of the service courts.

Implementation of Judgments

No major progress could be observed in 2025 in the implementation of long-outstanding European Court of Human Rights' (ECtHR) judgments in the rule-of-law domain. No systemic reforms were adopted to address judgments concerning judicial independence,²⁶ surveillance,²⁷ freedom of assembly,²⁸ or detention conditions²⁹ - areas in which ECtHR rulings have remained unimplemented for

26 Judgment of the ECtHR, application no. 20261/12, *Baka v Hungary*.

27 Judgments of the ECtHR, application no. 37138/14, *Szabó and Vissy v Hungary* and application no. 58032/16, *Hüttl v Hungary*.

28 Judgment of the ECtHR, application no. 5529/05, *Patyi and Others v Hungary*.

29 Judgements of the ECtHR, application nos. 14097/12, 45135/12, 73712/12, 34001/13, 44055/13, and 64586/13, *Varga and Others v. Hungary*.

years. While the payment of just satisfaction to successful applicants is generally timely, the adoption of general measures, including legislative or policy changes aimed at preventing similar violations in the future, remains inadequate.

Unlike some countries that develop meaningful action plans or dedicated task forces to execute the ECtHR's judgments, Hungary has no comprehensive strategy. As the European Implementation Network pointed out in its current report, Hungary has failed to adopt a coherent national implementation program with timelines and parliamentary oversight. The National Assembly does not systematically review the execution of ECtHR judgments, and there is little public reporting by the government on progress. This institutional gap contributes to delays and early cosmetic closure of cases without true resolution.³⁰

Hungary has failed to implement the 2020 CJEU's judgment regarding the asylum system and transit zones. Although the government closed the transit zones, it failed to align legislation with the judgment's requirements. As a consequence, the Court imposed a €200,000,000 fine on Hungary in 2024, with an additional daily penalty of €1,000,000 that continues to accrue.³¹ These penalties are deducted from EU funds allocated to Hungary.³² Rather than taking the necessary steps to comply, the government announced on 15 December 2025, that it is suing the CJEU itself before the General Court, seeking damages through a compensation lawsuit.³³

30 European Implementation Network, Justice Delayed and Justice Denied: Report on the Non-Implementation of European Judgments and the Rule of Law, 2025, <https://www.einnetwork.org/justice-delayed-justice-denied#:~:text=thematic%20areas%20,discrimination%2C%20SLAPPs%2C%20etc>

31 Judgement of the Court of Justice of the European Union, Case C-123/22, Judgment of 13 June 2024, *Commission v Hungary*.

32 Márton Balázs, The penalty for Hungarian asylum rules was more severe than proposed, amounting to nearly 80 billion forints (*A javasoltnál súlyosabb, közel 80 milliárd forintnyi lett a büntetés a magyar menekültügyi szabályok miatt*), *Télex*, 13 June 2024, <https://telex.hu/kulfold/2024/06/13/europai-unio-birosaga-magyarország-menekultugy-birosag-europai-bizottsag> [in Hungarian]

33 Barnóczki Brigitta and Márton Balázs, Hungary sues EU court over ruling on Hungarian asylum rules (*Magyarország bepereli az EU bíróságát a magyar menekültügyi szabályokról hozott ítélete miatt*), *Télex*, 15 December, 2025, <https://telex.hu/belfold/2025/12/15/tuzson-bence-magyarország-bepereli-az-europai-birosagot> [in Hungarian]

ANTI-CORRUPTION FRAMEWORK –

General assessment

Hungary’s anti-corruption framework saw no genuine progress and notable backsliding in 2025. Two (recurring) EU recommendations – “put forward comprehensive legislative reforms on lobbying and revolving doors, and further improve the system of asset declarations, providing for effective oversight and enforcement” and “establish a robust track record of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments for high-level corruption cases” – remained unaddressed. The European Commission had repeated its recommendations for Hungary to enact comprehensive lobbying and revolving-door rules and to strengthen asset disclosure oversight. However, by the end of 2025, no such laws were adopted – the government missed its own November deadline³⁴ for a lobbying bill.

Meanwhile, independent anti-corruption bodies faced obstruction – the Integrity Authority’s president came under a criminal investigation^{35 36} seen as retaliatory. In early 2025, the Central Chief Prosecution Office of Investigations launched a criminal investigation against the Integrity Authority’s president, Ferenc Biró, on charges of alleged misuse of the office and breach of trust. In January, authorities even raided the Integrity Authority’s offices and interrogated Biró. He denied wrongdoing and refused to resign, and, notably, the State Audit Office (which has a role in the Authority’s oversight) declined to suspend him.³⁷ Biró publicly remarked on the “interesting timing” – the investigation was initiated soon after the Integrity Authority reportedly began examining contracts in Antal Rogán’s ministry.³⁸ No charges were filed against him by the prosecutor’s office. Indeed, insiders

34 National Anti-corruption Strategy 2024–2025 (‘Nemzeti Korrupcióellenes Stratégia’), 23 January 2026. <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2024-1025-30-22> [in Hungarian]

35 Prosecutor’s office search at the Integrity Authority (‘Ügyészi házkutatás az Integritás Hatóságnál’), Szabad Európa, 16 January 2025, <https://www.szabadeuropa.hu/a/ugyeszsegi-hazkutat-as-integritas-hatosagnal/33277789.html> [in Hungarian]

36 *The Prosecution Service of Hungary (Magyarország Ügyészsége), The Central Prosecutor’s Office questioned the President of the Integrity Authority on suspicion of new crimes* (‘Újabb bűncselekmények gyanúja miatt hallgatta ki a Központi Nyomozó Főügyészség az Integritás Hatóság elnökét’), 13 February 2025, <https://ugyeszseg.hu/ujabb-buncselekmények-gyanuja-miatt-hallgatta-ki-a-kozponti-nyomozo-fougveszseg-az-integritas-hatosag-elnoket/> [in Hungarian]

37 Bakró-Nagy Ferenc, The chairman of the Integrity Authority, suspected of abuse of office, will remain in office (‘Továbbra is helyén marad az Integritás Hatóság hivatali visszaéléssel gyanúsított elnöke’), Telex, 19 August 2025, <https://telex.hu/belfold/2025/08/19/allami-szamvevoszek-integritas-hatosag-elnok-biro-ferenc-pal> [in Hungarian]

38 András Kósa, The chairman of the Integrity Authority says the timing of the investigation against him is interesting: they were just starting to investigate Antal Rogán’s office (‘Az Integritás Hatóság elnöke szerint érdekes az ellene indított nyomozás időzítése’), Szabad Európa, 17 January 17 2025, <https://www.szabadeuropa.hu/a/az-integritas-hatosag-elnok-szerint-erdekes-az-ellene-indított-nyomozas-idozítése-eppen-rogan-hivatalat-kezdték-vizsgálni/33279103.html> [in Hungarian]

reported that the probe had a chilling effect on the Integrity Authority's operations since they did not communicate about any closed cases for months.³⁹

The multi-stakeholder Anti-Corruption Task Force deadlocked over its annual report, with civil experts rejecting a government-drafted report that downplayed systemic corruption. All independent members of the NGO refused to endorse the government's watered-down report, and the government, in turn rejected the civil draft, dismissing it as "political".⁴⁰

The enforcement against high-level corruption stagnated: no new convictions were secured, and a major embezzlement investigation (involving ~€600,000,000 of public funds at the Central Bank's foundations) made no tangible progress (the investigation was initiated by the State Audit Office). The Prosecutor's Office continued to deny the concept of 'high-level' corruption, despite evidence of selective or ineffective action in cases implicating political elites. Transparency International's index again ranked Hungary as the EU's worst performer.⁴¹

Government MPs submitted a bill (Bill T/11923) ostensibly on public life transparency.⁴² In reality, it would empower the Sovereignty Protection Office to register NGOs and media receiving foreign support as threats and impose sweeping restrictions. According to the bill, listed organisations must get advance authorisation to accept foreign funds, lose eligibility for tax-deductible donations, and their leaders must file asset declarations as 'distinguished public figures'. Parliament did not adopt the

39 Dániel Kozák, The Chairman of the Integrity Authority, who is suspected of abuse of office, will not be fired (*Nem rúgják ki az Integritás Hatóság elnökét, akit hivatali visszaéléssel gyanúsítanak*), 24.hu, 19 August 2025, <https://24.hu/belfold/2025/08/19/integritas-hatosag-biro-ferenc-hivatali-visszaeles-allami-szamvevoszek-ugyeszseg/> [in Hungarian]

40 Transparency International Hungary (Transparency International Magyarország Alapítvány), No annual report has been adopted for the Anti-Corruption Working Group, Civil Shadow Report 2024 (*A Korrupcióellenes Munkacsoport Civil Tagjainak A 2024. Évre Vonatkozó Árnycjelentése*), 5 May 2025, <https://transparency.hu/hirek/kemcs-civil-arnycjelentes-2024/> [in Hungarian]

41 Transparency International Hungary (Transparency International Magyarország Alapítvány), Once more, Hungary takes last place in the EU on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, CPI 2024 Results, 11 February 2025, <https://transparency.hu/en/news/cpi-2024-results-annual-report/>

42 Hungarian Parliament (ORSZÁGGYŰLÉS), Bill T/11923 on the transparency of public life (*A közélet átláthatóságáról*), 23 January 2026, https://www.parlament.hu/web/guest/folyamatban-levo-torvenyjavaslatok?p_p_id=hu_parlament cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8&p_p_lifecycle=1&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_auth=VcOhWAsU&_hu_parlament cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8_pairAction=%2Finternet%2Fcplsql%2Fogy_irom.irom_adat%3Fp_ckl%3D42%26p_izon%3D11923 [in Hungarian]

draft legislation, but it still appears on the list of submitted bills to this day.⁴³ The regulation could undermine independent civil society and investigative journalism⁴⁴ – key pillars of the anti-corruption framework – by chilling watchdog activities and cutting their funding.

In March 2025, the parliament passed a law imposing Hungarian asset declaration obligations on Members of the European Parliament elected from Hungary. The bill permits the Hungarian Election Committee to invalidate a Member of the European Parliament’s (MEP) mandate if their wealth declaration is found non-compliant. Critics argue it’s a political weapon aimed at opposition MEPs. This law ostensibly promotes transparency, but in practice could pressure opposition voices.⁴⁵

In June 2025, the parliament lifted the cap on campaign spending, fueling concerns about unchecked political financing.⁴⁶ Removing campaign finance limits amplifies corruption risks by opening the door to unchecked spending, including potential misuse of public funds or oligarchic money to sway elections. It undermines transparency and fair competition, linking corruption with electoral integrity.

43 Hungarian Parliament (ORSZÁGGYŰLÉS), Bill T/11923 On the transparency of public life (*A közélet átláthatóságáról*), 23 January 2026, https://www.parlament.hu/web/guest/folyamatban-levo-torvenyjavaslatok?p_p_id=hu_parlament cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8&p_p_lifecycle=1&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_auth=VcOhWAsU&_hu_parlament cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8_pairAction=%2Finternet%2Fcpls%2Fogy_irom_irom_adat%3Fp_ckl%3D42%26p_izon%3D11923 [in Hungarian]

44 Renáta Uitz, A Threat to the Core Why the New Hungarian Transparency Bill is an Attack on the Foundations of the European Union, *Verfassungsblog*, 21 May 2025, <https://verfassungsblog.de/hungary-transparency-law-for-foreign-funding/>

45 Nóra Diószegi-Horváth, Amendment to the law on asset declarations by MEPs voted on (*Megszavazták az EP-képviselők vagyonnyilatkozat-tételéről szóló törvény módosítást*), 444.hu, 29 April 2025, <https://444.hu/2025/04/29/megszavaztak-az-ep-kepviselok-vagyonnyilatkozat-tetelerol-szolo-torvenymodositast> [in Hungarian]

46 Tibor Lengyel, Parliament has decided, money doesn’t matter: green light for unlimited campaign spending (*Döntött a parlament, a pénz nem számít: zöld út a korlátlan kampányköltségnek*), HVG, 17 June 2025, https://hvg.hu/itthon/20250617_Zold-ut-a-korlatlan-kampanykoltesnek-ebx [in Hungarian]

Implementation of 2025 Commission recommendations

Recommendation: Put forward comprehensive legislative reforms on lobbying and revolving doors, and further improve the system of asset declarations, providing for effective oversight and enforcement (first made in 2022)

Anti-corruption reforms stagnate amid new restrictive laws:⁴⁷ In 2025, Hungary made no meaningful headway on long-standing anti-corruption reforms, and instead introduced legislation that further constrains oversight. The European Commission had repeated its recommendations for Hungary to enact comprehensive lobbying and revolving-door rules and to strengthen asset disclosure oversight. However, by the end of 2025 no such laws were adopted – the government missed its own November deadline for a lobbying bill. The asset declaration system saw substantial change as a new bill permits the Hungarian Election Committee to invalidate an MEP’s mandate if their wealth declaration is found non-compliant. Critics argue that the institutions deciding on MEPs’ mandates are not independent, and that in any case, it is the Court of Justice of the European Union that should have the jurisdiction to rule on MEPs’ mandates.⁴⁸ The new law ostensibly promotes transparency but in practice could pressure opposition voices.⁴⁹

The abolition of campaign spending limits – rushed through Parliament in June – rolled back an anti-corruption safeguard in elections.⁵⁰ By removing the cap on campaign expenditures, the playing field tilts heavily toward the ruling party, which enjoys vastly greater resources (often from opaque or state-linked sources). This change raises the risk of money-driven political corruption, as unlimited funds can be deployed to influence voters without adequate monitoring. In summary, instead of addressing known gaps in its integrity framework, Hungary in 2025 backtracked in key areas, adopting measures that shrink democratic oversight and transparency, contrary to EU recommendations and international best practices.

Commission’s 2025 assessment: No progress

HCLU’s current assessment: Backsliding

47 The following paragraphs rely on the Contributions of Hungarian CSOs to the European Commission’s Rule of Law Report, 16 January 2026, p. 36, https://tasz.hu/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/HUN_CS0_contribution_EC_RoL_Report_2026.pdf

48 Dániel G. Szabó and Beáta Bakó, The CJEU must decide on the revocation of the EP mandate, (*Az EP-mandátum visszavonásáról az EUB-nak kell döntenie*), ELTE ÁJK Jogtudományi Blog, 6 May 2025, <https://jog.tk.elte.hu/blog/2025/05/az-ep-mandatum-visszavonasarol-az-eub-nak-kell-dontenie> [in Hungarian]

49 Balázs Cseke and András Mizsur, Parliament Passes Controversial New Laws, Telex (English Edition), 30 April 2025, <https://telex.hu/english/2025/04/30/parliament-passes-controversial-new-laws>

50 Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Democratic Backsliding: State of Electoral Integrity in Hungary, 26 November 2025, <https://helsinki.hu/en/state-of-electoral-integrity-hungary/>

Recommendation: Establish a robust track record of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments for high-level corruption cases (first made in 2022)

Although several high-profile corruption scandals emerged in 2025, this does not in itself indicate a systemic deterioration. Rather, a structurally weak and deficient integrity framework predictably generates such cases on a recurring basis, without this necessarily reflecting a further decline in the system's underlying quality.

Enforcement gaps and high-level impunity persist: Despite some high-profile investigations, Hungary's authorities failed to deliver breakthroughs in prosecuting high-level corruption in 2025. The most significant case of the year concerned the Central Bank's foundations (PADMA/PADME).

Quantitatively, Hungary's track record remained one of the worst in the EU: there was no increase in convictions of senior officials. The Office of the Prosecutor General continued to publicly claim that "high-level corruption" was an intangible concept⁵¹ – a stance that undermines taking any effective measures. In essence, 2025 demonstrated that when it comes to grand corruption – the kind that involves political power or large sums – the system provides de facto impunity. This ongoing failure undermines deterrence and feeds a culture of cynicism and mistrust among the public.

Commission's 2025 assessment: No progress**HCLU's current assessment: No progress**

Gaps in the Commission's Report

Corruption as a systemic problem

The Commission should increasingly treat corruption in Hungary as a systemic problem rather than as a series of isolated deficiencies, as the patterns identified in successive Rule of Law Reports point to a coherent and self-reinforcing governance model rather than fragmented shortcomings.

First, the persistence of the same core weaknesses over multiple reporting cycles – notably the absence of effective lobbying regulation, weak asset declaration oversight, the lack of a track record in high-level corruption cases, and the limited independence of key accountability institutions – demonstrates that these are not implementation gaps but structural features. Despite repeated recommendations,

51 Prosecutor General's Office: European Commission's rule of law report contains untruths (*Legfőbb Ügyészesség: Valótlanságokat tartalmaz az Európai Bizottság jogállamisági jelentése*), Jogászvilág, 24 July 2024, <https://jogaszvilag.hu/napi/legfobb-ugyeszseg-valotlansagokat-tartalmaz-az-europai-bizottsag-jogallamisagi-jelentese/> [in Hungarian].

reforms are either not adopted, adopted only in formality, or designed in ways to neutralise their practical impact. This recurring pattern suggests deliberate policy choices rather than technical delays.

Second, individual deficiencies interact and reinforce one another, creating a closed integrity system. Weak transparency rules and restricted access to public information limit external scrutiny; politicised or ineffective oversight bodies fail to detect or pursue wrongdoing; and a prosecution service shielded from meaningful judicial control ensures that high-level cases rarely reach trial. When courts' reviews of prosecutorial inaction are non-binding and independent watchdogs face political or legal pressure, corruption risks cannot be addressed in isolation because each safeguard depends on the functioning of the others.

Third, recent legislative trends actively undermine existing safeguards, further supporting a systemic reading. Measures such as the abolition of campaign spending limits, the use of asset declaration rules with potential political leverage, and planned – although eventually abandoned – laws restricting civil society and independent media do not merely leave gaps unfilled, they weaken the ecosystem of accountability itself. These changes increase the concentration of political and economic power while reducing the likelihood that corruption will be exposed or sanctioned.

Fourth, outcomes-based indicators consistently confirm a systemic failure. Hungary's continued inability to establish a credible track record of high-level corruption prosecutions, its lowest-ranking position in EU corruption perception indicators,⁵² and the need for sustained EU budgetary conditionality all point to entrenched problems affecting the entire governance framework. The fact that substantial EU funds remain frozen despite years of 'reforms' underscores that the issue is not compliance with individual benchmarks, but the absence of genuine institutional independence and political will.

Finally, treating corruption as a collection of isolated issues risks underestimating the nature of the challenge and misdirecting policy responses. Technical recommendations addressing single elements, such as asset declarations or procurement rules, are unlikely to be effective if the broader system is structured to prevent accountability. A systemic approach would instead focus on the cumulative effect of legal design, institutional capture, enforcement selectivity, and restrictions on oversight actors.

The core issue lies in the absence of any meaningful progress in implementing the recommendations. This persistent lack of action constitutes a pattern that indicates the government's systematic disregard for them. In this regard, there have been no substantive developments over the past year; rather, the

52 Transparency International Hungary (Transparency International Magyarország Alapítvány), Corruption Perceptions Index 2024, <https://transparency.hu/adatok-a-korrupcirol/korrupcio-erzekelesi-index/cpi-2024/> [in Hungarian].

mere passage of another year without reforms further underscores that the government's continued inaction is deliberate.

In light of the above factors, the Commission should explicitly acknowledge corruption in Hungary as a systemic governance problem and calibrate its assessments and recommendations accordingly. This would justify more integrated, conditional, and structural responses – linking judicial independence, prosecutorial accountability, political finance, transparency, and civic space – rather than continuing to address each failure as an isolated anomaly.

New Issues that Emerged in 2025

In 2025, no totally new issues emerged. The only noteworthy development was the launch of an investigation into a corruption case involving sums on the order of hundreds of billions of forints (the case concerning the foundations of the Central Bank). Even though the essence of the case had been known to the public for years. Apart from this development, constancy and passivity of the state institutions were more characteristic. In addition, a new development was the initiation of an investigation against the President of the Integrity Authority, as already presented in the first point of this chapter.

The most significant case of the year, concerning the Central Bank's foundations (PADMA/PADME)⁵³, exemplified the enforcement gap. Even with approximately Ft266,000,000,000 (~€600 million) in public funds suspected⁵⁴ to have been siphoned off or lost under former Central Bank Governor György Matolcsy's watch, the investigation made no meaningful progress. By the end of the year, neither Matolcsy nor other key figures had been interrogated, and no assets were seized for recovery. Among the irregularities affecting the Central Bank's foundations, the case involving the foundation of Neumann János University stands out. In March 2025, the State Audit Office (SAO) released a report concerning the University of Kecskemét. In the report, the SAO found that the foundation operating the university received Ft144,500,000,000 in public funds at the beginning of the decade, of which it lent Ft127,500,000,000 to Optima Zrt., a company belonging to the Central

53 State Audit Office of Hungary (Állami Számvevőszék), The State Audit Office's report on the management of the Pallas Athéné Domus Meriti Foundation (PADME) is public (*Nyilvános az Állami Számvevőszéknek a Pallas Athéné Domus Meriti Alapítvány (PADME) gazdálkodásáról szóló jelentése*), 19 March 2025, <https://www.asz.hu/nyilvanos-az-allami-szamvevoszeknek-a-pallas-athene-domus-meriti-alapitvany-padme-gazdalkodasrol-szo-lo-jelentese> [in Hungarian]

54 Transparency International Hungary (Transparency International Magyarország Alapítvány), Transparency International Hungary has again filed a complaint regarding the MNB's foundations (*A Transparency International Magyarország ismét feljelentést tett az MNB alapítványai ügyében*), 8 April 2025, <https://transparency.hu/hirek/mnb-ujboli-feljelentes/> [in Hungarian]

Bank's business empire. An unsuccessful attempt was first made to recover this money in January last year. According to the SAO, the facts brought to light raise the suspicion of several criminal offenses; they filed a criminal complaint.⁵⁵ After the SAO's announcement, the Kecskemét-based news outlet KecsUP.hu submitted a freedom of information request to the foundation, seeking access to the minutes of the meetings of the board of trustees and the supervisory board overseeing it.⁵⁶ The foundation did not provide the documents, but allowed limited access to some of them, meaning that significant parts of the documents were blacked out, rendering the content inaccessible. The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) provided assistance to KecsUP in turning to the National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information. The authority instructed the foundation to review its earlier decision regarding the disclosure of the data.⁵⁷

Despite some high-profile investigations, Hungary's authorities failed to deliver breakthroughs in prosecuting high-level corruption in 2025. The inaction fits an enduring pattern: cases implicating members or close associates of the ruling elite languish or are handled with caution. Besides the Central Bank's foundations case, another emblematic case is the Völner–Schadl criminal case, involving a former Justice Ministry, State Secretary and the president of the court bailiff president accused of a cash-for-favors scheme. While the prosecution did indict the duo (in 2022), the trial proceeded at a sluggish pace and without public transparency in 2025.⁵⁸ Pál Völner has been able to work again as an

55 Vilmos Weiler, They talk about the 127 billion deal as if they have nothing to hide. The minutes reveal something else ('*Úgy beszélnek a 127 milliárdos üzletről, mintha nem lenne titkolnivalójuk. A jegyzőkönyvek másról árulkodnak*'), Telex, 3 November 2025, <https://telex.hu/gazdasag/2025/11/03/kecskemeti-neumann-janos-egyetemert-alapitvany-szemereyne-pataki-klaudia-mnb-ugy-matolcsy-klan-jegyzokonyvek> [in Hungarian]

56 István Hraskó, Covered up protocols: the National Data Protection and Freedom of Information Authority sent a firm warning to the Kecskemét university foundation ('*Kitakart jegyzőkönyvek: határozott felszólítást küldött az egyetemi alapítványnak a NAIH*'), KecsUP, 30 December 2025, <https://kecsup.hu/2025/12/kitakart-jegyzokonyvek-hatarozott-felszolitast-kuldott-az-egyetemi-alapitvanynak-a-naih-unikum/> [in Hungarian].

57 István Hraskó, Covered up protocols: the National Data Protection and Freedom of Information Authority sent a firm warning to the Kecskemét university foundation ('*Kitakart jegyzőkönyvek: határozott felszólítást küldött az egyetemi alapítványnak a NAIH*'), KecsUP, 30 December 2025, <https://kecsup.hu/2025/12/kitakart-jegyzokonyvek-hatarozott-felszolitast-kuldott-az-egyetemi-alapitvanynak-a-naih-unikum/> [in Hungarian].

58 Schadl–Völner case ('*Schadl–Völner-ügy*'), HVG, 2025, <https://hvg.hu/cs/v%C3%B6lner-%C3%BCgy> [in Hungarian]

attorney since the end of 2025,⁵⁹ while György Schadl, despite his suspension from his position as a bailiff, remains a member of the bailiff office that operates with significant revenue.⁶⁰

The year 2025 proved the leverage of EU financial conditionality, as Hungary's government struggled to convince the Union that its anti-corruption efforts were credible.⁶¹ Throughout 2025, no payments were made from Hungary's €5,800,000,000 Recovery and Resilience Facility; the government had not met the key "super milestones" tied to the rule of law. Likewise, around €6,300,000,000 in Cohesion Funds remained blocked⁶² under the Conditionality Regulation.

Also worth mentioning is the submission of the transparency bill, as its adoption would have made it almost impossible for anti-corruption organisations and parts of the independent press to operate.⁶³

Implications and Recommendations for 2026

Instead of issuing new recommendations in the area of anti-corruption, the Commission's recommendations should be more comprehensive, given that the current recommendations address only certain specific aspects of corruption but do not tackle its root causes. The institutional system should take meaningful steps against high-level corruption. Despite the fact that sufficient evidence of adequate quantity and quality is often available, criminal proceedings related to high-level corruption cases do not progress at an appropriate pace, thereby creating a particular form of impunity.

59 Sz. Zs., Pál Völner can work as a lawyer again, the Metropolitan Court has returned all his licenses (*Völner Pál újra ügyvédként dolgozhat, a Fővárosi Törvényszék visszaadta minden jogosítványát*), Népszava, 2 December, 2025, https://nepszava.hu/3303599_schadl-volner-ugy-volner-pal-magyar-ugyved-i-kamara-nyergesujfalu-ugyved-i-iroda-ugyfelek-fovarosi-torvenyszek-korrupcio [in Hungarian].

60 As a suspended bailiff, György Schadl already earned 249 million forints, and the prosecution would fine him 200 million forints (*Felfüggesztett végrehajtóként már 249 millió forintot keresett Schadl György, akit 200 millióra büntetne az ügyészség*), HVG, 8 January 2026, https://hvg.hu/gazdasag/20260108_schadl-gyorgy-felfuggesztett-vegrehajto-iroda [in Hungarian]

61 Transparency International Hungary (Transparency International Magyarország Alapítvány), Hungarian CSOs assessment of Hungary's compliance with conditions to access European Union funds – November 2025, November 2025. <https://transparency.hu/en/news/rule-of-law-assessment-november-2025/>.

62 Amnesty International Hungary, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, K-Monitor, Transparency International Hungary: Assessment of Hungary's compliance with conditions to access European Union funds, November 2025, https://transparency.hu/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/HU_EU_funds_assessment_2025.pdf.

63 Renáta Uitz, A Threat to the Core Why the New Hungarian Transparency Bill is an Attack on the Foundations of the European Union, Verfassungsblog, 21 May 2025, <https://verfassungsblog.de/hungary-transparency-law-for-foreign-funding/>

MEDIA ENVIRONMENT AND MEDIA FREEDOM

General assessment

Media authorities remain heavily influenced by the current parliamentary majority, as well as showing biased enforcement practice. Competition on the market is distorted. Major concentration events in 2025, including Indamedia's acquisition of Ringier Hungary (including market-leading tabloid *Blikk*)⁶⁴ and the closure of Radio Free Europe,⁶⁵ further reduced media plurality. State advertising constitutes approximately 30% of the total advertising market and is systematically channelled to pro-government outlets through centralised procurement structures. Central European Press and Media Foundation (*Közép-Európai Sajtó és Média Alapítvány* - KESMA) receives 75-80% of its revenue from state advertising, functioning as a de facto subsidy mechanism that economically marginalises independent media.⁶⁶

Furthermore, media capture is evident with the media giant, KESMA, centralising public service media and giving control in the hands of the current ruling party. Public service media operates primarily as a government communication tool: analysis shows Fidesz-KDNP politicians received 73% of M1 news screen time (February-June 2025) with virtually no negative coverage, while opposition received only 27%.⁶⁷

No legislative or policy measures were taken in 2025 to address the European Commission's 2025 recommendations in these areas.

64 A real-life test – Assessing the Ringier-Indamedia merger under the European Media Freedom Act, *atlatszo*, 7 November 2025, <https://mertek.atlatszo.hu/a-real-life-test-assessing-the-ringier-indamedia-merger-under-the-european-media-freedom-act/>.

65 Radio Free Europe's Hungarian news site is shutting down, (*Megszűnik a Szabad Európa magyar híroldala*), HVG, 20 November 2025, https://hvg.hu/itthon/20251120_szabad-europa-megszunes.

66 European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report - Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Hungary, Commission Staff Working Document SWD(2025) 917 final, 8 July 2025, p. 20, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/524bd8d4-33ba-4802-891f-d8959831ed5a_en?filename=2025%20Rule%20of%20Law%20Report%20-%20Country%20Chapter%20Hungary.pdf.

67 Republikon Institute – ConnectEurope, Half-yearly public media monitoring. Based on the 7:30 p.m. news broadcasts from February to July 2025, (*Féléves közmédiá-monitoring. A 2025. február-júliusi 19:30-as híradók alapján*), September 2025, https://republikon.hu/media/165840/002_Koetzmedia-feleves-jelentes_V3.pdf pp. 10–11 [in Hungarian] in Contributions of Hungarian CSOs to the European Commission's Rule of Law Report (January 2026), 27 January 2026, https://tasz.hu/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/HUN_CS0_contribution_EC_RoL_Report_2026.pdf.

2025 could have been a year of change, as the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) became applicable on 8 August 2025. It created and demanded adherence to new standards on issues such as state advertising transparency, public service media safeguards and media ownership transparency. Hungary not only ignored the regulation, but explicitly refused to comply. As a result, by year's end, the European Commission opened an infringement procedure against Hungary.⁶⁸

'Sovereignty' narratives are increasingly used to exert pressure and delegitimise critical voices, such as independent media and watchdog organisations. The introduction of the 'Bill on the Transparency of Public Life' (T/11923) was criticised as enabling blacklisting and financial restrictions against foreign-funded organisations, including segments of independent media. Although the vote was postponed amid protests and criticism, the proposal itself contributed to an uncertain environment and potential chilling effects.

Critical early warning signs being ignored include the proliferation of unregulated online platforms (e.g. Holy Crown Radio) operating outside media law and publishing defamatory content without National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH) intervention; escalating Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) litigation; the government's pursuit of legal action to invalidate EMFA requirements, indicating a long-term strategy to resist EU standards; and continued zero implementation of the Anti-SLAPP Directive despite its importance for journalist protection.

Overall, the media environment is under constant pressure, either by state capture, or by delegitimation.

Implementation of 2025 Commission recommendations

Recommendation: Introduce mechanisms to enhance the functional independence of the media regulatory authority taking into account European standards on the independence of media regulators (first made in 2022)

No legislative, regulatory or institutional steps were taken in 2025 to enhance the functional independence of the media regulatory authority. The governance and appointment framework of the Media Council remained unchanged, continuing to allow decisive political influence by the governing majority.

68 European Commission, Commission calls on Hungary to comply with European Media Freedom Act and Audiovisual Media Services Directive, Letter of formal notice INFR(2025)2194, 11 December 2025, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-calls-hungary-comply-european-media-freedom-act-and-audiovisual-media-services-directive>

Enforcement practice further deteriorated in 2025, particularly with regard to the oversight of public service media, where complaints concerning unbalanced reporting did not result in effective remedies.

Overall, the lack of reform, combined with the continued non-implementation of relevant European standards and the European Media Freedom Act, suggests not only stagnation but a worsening of conditions affecting the regulator's ability to act independently and effectively.

Given the inaction by the government, the Commission should consider strengthening this recommendation along the following lines:

Adopt concrete and binding measures to ensure the functional independence of the media regulator, including pluralistic and transparent appointment procedures for Media Council members, involving opposition and independent actors; strengthened conflict-of-interest and incompatibility rules; enforceable obligations to provide reasoned decisions.

Commission's 2025 assessment: No progress

HCLU's current assessment: Backsliding

Recommendation: Adopt measures to ensure fair and transparent distribution of advertising expenditure by the state and state-owned companies (first made in 2022)

No legislative measures were taken to ensure fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory distribution of state advertising. On the contrary, centralised state communication practices remained intact and were further entrenched.

State advertising and government communication spending continued to be channelled through centralised procurement structures, allowing discretionary allocation and limiting effective competition. This system continues to function as a de facto subsidy mechanism favouring pro-government media outlets, while economically marginalising independent and critical media.

All state and state-owned company advertising expenditure should be disclosed and broken down by outlet, campaign, and selection criteria.

Commission's 2025 assessment: No progress

HCLU's current assessment: Backsliding

Recommendation: 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 (first made in 2022)

Public service media continued to function primarily as a government communication tool rather than as an independent public-interest service. Oversight bodies remained weak and ineffective.

Moreover, Hungary did not adopt the legislative changes required to align public service media governance with newly applicable European standards, including those introduced by the European Media Freedom Act, further widening the gap between EU requirements and national practice.

Overall, the absence of reform, combined with continued political control and lack of accountability, points to a deterioration.

Moreover, the problem of pluralism extends beyond public service media to encompass government-aligned media outlets, which collectively restrict access to diverse information.

In order to ensure the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media, the government should abolish KESMA.

Commission's 2025 assessment: No progress**HCLU's current assessment: Backsliding**

Gaps in the Commission's Report

Threats framed around 'sovereignty' narrative

There is an increase in legislative threats and quasi-regulatory pressure on independent media, particularly those framed around sovereignty narratives such as the operation of the Sovereignty Protection Office, which was already prevalent in 2024. The Bill on the Transparency of Public Life (T/11923) was submitted in May 2025 by Fidesz MP János Halász. The bill would empower the Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO) to recommend placing foreign-funded organisations on a government blacklist if their activities are deemed to threaten Hungary's sovereignty.⁶⁹ The SPO published an article

69 Horváth Kávai Andrea, Világi Máté, Vorák Anita, Russian-style bill targeting independent press and NGOs tabled in Hungarian parliament, Telex, 14 May 2025, <https://telex.hu/english/2025/05/14/russian-style-law-targeting-independent-press-and-ngos-tabled-in-hungarian-parliament;> Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Bill T/11923: Transparency of Public Life (2025), https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/05/Bill-T11923_Transparency-of-Public-Life.pdf.

which explicitly mentions media and civilians as agents, thus this already foreshadowed the bill's intent; its goal to undermine the press.⁷⁰ Although postponed amid domestic and international criticism,⁷¹ the proposal created regulatory uncertainty and chilling effects.

Media concentration

The Commission should have addressed media mergers and concentration, which severely distort the market in Hungary. The problem of pluralism affects not only public service media but also government-owned and government-aligned media more broadly, which significantly limits access to independent information. The Indamedia acquisition of Ringier Hungary (closed 31 October 2025), covering the market-leading tabloid *Blikk* and associated outlets, demonstrates how competition rules can be circumvented to further concentrate media ownership in government-aligned hands.

New Issues that Emerged in 2025

A relatively new issue is the government's explicit and deliberate resistance towards acts adopted by the European Union, namely the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), expressing intent to pursue legal action to resist it. Following the entry into force of EMFA, the Commission launched an infringement procedure against Hungary in December 2025 for non-compliance with EMFA and certain requirements of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) (Directive (EU) 2018/1808).⁷²

Implications and Recommendations for 2026

Leaving the aforementioned problems of 'sovereignty' pressures and media concentration unaddressed perpetuates uncertainty and chilling effects on independent journalism while allowing continued market distortion through concentration. The Sovereignty Protection Office operates as a quasi-regulatory body targeting critical voices without judicial oversight, while unchecked mergers consolidate

70 Láncki Tamás, Agents are working in the media world and among NGOs, (*Ügynökök dolgoznak a média világában és a civilek között*), Sovereignty Protection Office, 28 March 2025, <https://szuverenitasvedelmihivatal.hu/hirek/ugynokok-dolgoznak-a-media-vilagaban-es-a-civilek-kozott> [in Hungarian].

71 Reuters, Hungary Postpones Vote on Law That Could Curb Foreign-Funded Groups, 4 June 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/hungary-postpones-vote-law-that-could-curb-foreign-funded-groups-2025-06-04/>

72 *Commission calls on Hungary to comply with European Media Freedom Act and Audiovisual Media Services Directive* INFR(2025)2194, European Commission, 11 December 2025, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-calls-hungary-comply-european-media-freedom-act-and-audiovisual-media-services-directive>

government control over information markets. Together, these mechanisms severely restrict citizens' access to diverse, independent information sources.

Suggested recommendation: Abolish the Sovereignty Protection Office and introduce enforceable safeguards against media concentration aligned with EMFA, including: substantive and procedural rules to assess mergers affecting pluralism; dismantling or restructuring concentrated ownership arrangements (particularly KESMA) that enable government control; and establishing effective remedies when concentration threatens media diversity.

CHECKS AND BALANCES

General assessment

In 2025, the strengthening of Péter Magyar's The Respect and Freedom Party (TISZA) created a new situation in Hungarian domestic politics, as the previously near-exclusive dominance of the Fidesz–KDNP alliance faced a credible political challenger. This development had implications for the system of checks and balances, although it did not fundamentally alter the underlying power structure. Threats to civil society intensified further: anti-civil-society rhetoric escalated, and concrete government actions, such as the banning of Pride events, crossed boundaries that had previously been considered untouchable. The systematic dismantling of key checks and balances had already taken place years earlier, and the emergence of a new challenger without parliamentary representation did not change this baseline reality. The fusion of state institutions with the government and the ruling party remained extreme and became less and less concealed, while the quality of legislation continued to deteriorate, with particularly severe examples in politically sensitive cases in 2025. The bias, indifference, or ineffectiveness of independent institutions persisted as a structural problem. Moreover, the issues affecting the electoral system identified in the 2025 report remained unresolved. The two main concerns remain the overlap between the state institutions', the government's and the governing parties' political campaigning and official communication, as well as limitations on the right to vote. The latter arises from the unequal voting arrangements for citizens abroad: voters residing in Hungary but staying abroad on election day may vote only at foreign representations, while non-resident voters may vote by mail. As a result, the right to vote is not exercised under uniform conditions, and voters residing in Hungary face discriminatory treatment.

Implementation of 2025 Commission recommendations

Recommendation: 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 (first made in 2022; reworded in subsequent reports)

The new turn in domestic politics has posed new challenges for the government, which is using the perceived threat to a free civil society to divert voters' attention from systemic problems. The government had clearly no intention of implementing the recommendation, signs of further regression are visible.

- Stigmatising narratives dehumanizing members of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are promoted directly by the Prime Minister himself. In his public speech delivered on 15 March 2025 on the anniversary of the 1848 revolution, the Hungarian prime minister raised the necessity of a “spring cleaning” to the country, labelling several target groups as “parasites”, namely “bought politicians, judges, civilians, journalists, fake NGOs, political activists”.⁷³
- New legislation was adopted restricting the right to peaceful assembly, which led to banning both the Budapest Pride⁷⁴ and Pécs Pride.⁷⁵
- New biometric surveillance regulations were introduced that violate the EU Artificial Intelligence Act.⁷⁶
- Act LXXXVIII of 2023 (Sovereignty Protection Act), currently before the CJEU⁷⁷ is still in effect. The act established the Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO) granting it broad investigative authority over CSOs based on loosely defined criteria.

73 Nikoletta Nagy, Andrea Horváth Kávai (translation), Bugs, cockroaches, vermin – how dehumanising propaganda sets the stage, Telex, 17 March 2025, <https://telex.hu/english/2025/03/17/bugs-cockroaches-vermin-how-dehumanising-propaganda-sets-the-stage>

74 Amnesty International, Háttér Society, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Legislating Fear: Banning Pride is the latest assault on fundamental rights in Hungary, 21 March 2025, https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/03/AIHU_Hatter_HCLU_HHC_Pride_03202025.pdf

75 Háttér Society, Police ban related to Pécs Pride, <https://hatter.hu/sites/default/files/dokumentum/kiadvany/pecs-pride-summary-of-banning-decision-updated.pdf>

76 Társaság a Szabadságjogokért, Hungary’s new biometric surveillance laws violate EU AI regulation (*‘Magyarország új biometrikus megfigyelési törvényei sértik az EU mesterségesintelligencia-rendeletét’*), TASZ, 29 April 2025, <https://tasz.hu/cikkek/magyarorszag-uj-biometrikus-megfigyelesi-torvenyei-sertik-az-eu-mestersegesintelligencia-rendeletet/> [in Hungarian]

77 The Commission decides to refer HUNGARY to the Court of Justice of the European Union considering its national law on the Defence of Sovereignty to be in breach of EU law INFR(2024)2001, European Commission, 3 October 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_4865

- In May, the Bill on the Transparency of Public Life was submitted to Parliament. The legislation would enable the government to blacklist civil society organisations (CSOs) considered ‘sovereignty risks,’ effectively block or severely restrict their foreign funding, impose administrative constraints on domestic funding, monitor bank accounts, levy fines, and even suspend or dissolve targeted organisations. The Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO) would have the authority to propose which entities are blacklisted, with no adequate legal remedies available to challenge such decisions. Although the bill’s adoption was postponed in June 2025, it remains under consideration.⁷⁸
- In June, the Parliament adopted a new law transferring the registry of CSOs from the courts to a new – to this moment still undetermined – authority. The law will enter into force on 1 January 2027, until that time it is unclear if it will provide an opportunity for further political interventions.⁷⁹

The Commission’s recommendation is relatively clear but steps to take are not clearly articulated. The meaning of a ‘safe and enabling’ civic space could be made more specific; however, the problem lies not in the clarity of the recommendation, but in the lack of political will to implement it. That said, a stronger wording would be:

Ensure that civil society organisations can operate without undue obstacles, including by reducing administrative burdens applicable to CSOs, prohibiting financially restrictive measures that result in politically motivated discrimination, repealing legislation that hampers their activities, and fostering a safe and enabling civic space.

Commission’s 2025 assessment: No progress

HCLU’s current assessment: Backsliding

78 Bill no. T/11923 is indexed as pending on the Parliament’s website here: https://www.parlament.hu/web/guest/folyamatban-levo-torvenyjavaslatok?p_p_id=hu_parlament cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8&p_p_lifecycle=1&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_auth=R6fxNQap&hu_parlament cms_pair_portlet_PairProxy_INSTANCE_9xd2Wc9jP4z8_pairAction=%2Finternet%2F-cplsql%2Fogy_irom.irom_adat%3Fp_ckl%3D42%26p_izon%3D11923.

79 Act LX of 2025 on certain court proceedings and liquidation relating to legal persons, National Legislation Database (Nemzeti Jogszabálytár), <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2025-60-00-00>.

Gaps in the Commission's Report

Process for preparing and enacting laws

In 2025, the previously identified problems persist: the lack of meaningful public consultation and the maintenance of rule by decree under the state of danger. The rules on public consultation are characterized by short deadlines for submitting opinions, numerous exemptions from mandatory consultation, and the absence of effective sanctions in cases of omitted consultations.⁸⁰ The obligation to consult is still circumvented by submitting bills that form part of government policy, not by the government itself, but by governing-party MPs or parliamentary committees. For example, the 15th amendment to the Fundamental Law was not subject to public consultation either, as it was submitted by MPs,⁸¹ as well as the related amendment to the Freedom of Assembly Act, which allows LGBT-QIA+-themed assemblies to be banned under the pretext of protecting children. According to the Venice Commission, “the amendments [...] were adopted without ensuring an inclusive public debate and in the absence of a genuine consultation of all the relevant stakeholders”.⁸² The judicial reform package, aiming to reach an agreement with the European Commission, was submitted in clear violation of the parliamentary rules of procedure. The Minister of Justice had previously submitted a bill amending the rules on asset declarations, which included four provisions proposing non-substantive amendments to individual sections of laws foreseen under the judicial reform.⁸³ The proposal was discussed by the parliament’s Justice Committee, the debate was closed, and then, weeks later, just a few days before the final vote, the Deputy Prime Minister initiated proceedings in the Legislative Committee. On the same day, members of the Legislative Committee submitted, in the form of amendments, a comprehensive package of judicial laws, replacing the earlier contentless amending

80 Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Deficiencies of the Law-Making Process in Hungary, (*A jogalkotási folyamat hiányosságai Magyarországon*), August 2025, https://helsinki.hu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/MHB_jogalkotasi_folyamat_hianyossagai_2025.pdf [in Hungarian]; https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/08/HHC_law-making_process_mapping_paper_2025.pdf [in English]

81 Case number: T/11152, 11 March 2025, <https://www.parlament.hu/irom42/11152/11152.pdf>

82 European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission), Hungary – Opinion on the compatibility with international human rights standards of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary, CDL-AD(2025)043, 13 October 2025, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2025\)043-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2025)043-e), para. 84.

83 For example, the proposals concerned the replacement of conjunctions with their synonyms. <https://www.amnesty.hu/hazszabaly-ellenes-a-kormany-eljarasa-a-birosagi-torvenycsomaggal-kapcsolatban/>

provisions. The proposal was adopted, thereby preventing judges,⁸⁴ civil society actors, and opposition MPs from participating in any meaningful debate.

The practice of adopting emergency decrees for purposes not related to the cause of the state of danger (presently the war in Ukraine) continues.⁸⁵

More generally, it can be stated that the government approaches the entire legal system as an instrumental tool serving its current political objectives. This applies to the Fundamental Law as well, which is often amended in a manner lacking genuine normative content, even though it should serve as the solid foundation of the legal system. The 15th amendment to the Fundamental Law is a striking example of this approach,⁸⁶ as it elevated into constitutional text a declarative statement that a person is either male or female.⁸⁷ This provision lacks normative content: it does not regulate state action, does not depend on governmental decision-making or political will, and therefore has no functional role within a constitutional framework.

84 Due to the lack of consultation, on 26 June 2025 the National Judicial Council requested the Constitutional Court to annul the adopted law retroactively, with effect from its promulgation on 19 June 2025, <https://obt-jud.hu/hu/az-igazsagugyi-targyu-torvenyek-modositasarol-szolo-2025-evi-xlix-torvennyel-szembeni>.

85 For examples from 2022, 2023 and 2024, see: Hungarian Helsinki Committee, *Deficiencies of the Law-Making Process in Hungary*, 2025, https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/08/HHC_law-making_process_mapping_paper_2025.pdf, pp. 21–23.

86 Dorina Galicza, The 15th Amendment to the Fundamental Law, which restricts the right to assembly and prohibits drugs, was voted on, (*Megszavasták a gyülekezési jogot korlátozó és a drogokat betiltó 15. Alaptörvény-módosítást*), HVG, 14 April 2025, https://hvg.hu/itthon/20250414_Megszavastak-az-Alaptorveny-15-modositasat-Pride-drog-keszpenz-allampolgarok-kiutasitasa-ebx [in Hungarian].

87 A similar example is the also newly introduced ‘suspension’ of citizenship into the Fundamental Law, which lacks clear content and has no precedents in international law: Fehér János, Andrea Horváth Kávai (translation), In our view, the suspension of citizenship is an unprecedented concept in international law, Telex, 11 April 2025, <https://telex.hu/english/2025/04/11/in-our-view-the-suspension-of-citizenship-is-an-unprecedented-concept-in-international-law>.

Independent authorities

Constitutional Court

The framework enabling the parliamentary majority to appoint members of the Constitutional Court without opposition backing has remained unchanged.⁸⁸ In May and June 2025, this mechanism was used to select three new justices, all drawn from senior political or state positions closely associated with the governing majority, including the former Prosecutor General, who was simultaneously elected the president of the Constitutional Court. At the conclusion of his term, the former Commissioner for Fundamental Rights transitioned directly into membership of the Constitutional Court.⁸⁹ The third new member is a veteran pro-government member of parliament and former chair of the Parliament's Legislative Committee. Toward the end of 2025, further amendments reshaped the Court's operational rules.⁹⁰ From 1 January 2026, its decisions were published in a separate official gazette issued by the Court itself rather than in the state gazette, a change widely interpreted - drawing on comparative experience from Poland - as intended to shield promulgation from interference by a future government. The amendments also introduced mandatory preliminary constitutional review of parliamentary decisions declaring the temporary incapacity of the president of the Republic.

Commissioner for Fundamental Rights

The assessment made in the 2025 Rule of Law Report — that concerns persist regarding the independence and effective operation of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights⁹¹ — continues to apply. The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) reclassified Hungary's national human rights institution in 2022, lowering the status of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights from 'A' to 'B', which status is still unchanged. This decision was based on sustained inactivity across several key human rights domains, including the protection of ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ persons, human rights defenders, refugees and migrants, as well as issues related to media pluralism, civic space, and judicial independence. GANHRI concluded that these shortcomings reflected insufficient

88 See e.g.: Eötvös Károly Institute – Hungarian Civil Liberties Union – Hungarian Helsinki Committee – Transparency International Hungary, *Hungary Fact Sheet 1 – Undermining Constitutionality*, September 2014, https://helsinki.hu/wp-content/uploads/Hungary_fact_sheets_20140921.pdf, pp. 1–2.

89 Parliamentary Resolutions 28/2025. (V. 20.) OGY, 32/2025. (VI. 11.) OGY and 33/2025. (VI. 11.) OGY

90 Act CXI of 2025 on the Amendment of Certain Acts of Parliament Related to the Constitutional Court

91 European Commission, *2025 Rule of Law Report – Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Hungary*, p. 26., https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/524bd8d4-33ba-4802-891f-d8959831ed5a_en?file-name=2025%20Rule%20of%20Law%20Report%20-%20Country%20Chapter%20Hungary.pdf.

institutional independence and non-compliance with the Paris Principles, and further identified deficiencies in the inclusiveness and transparency of the selection and appointment process.⁹²

In 2025, Imre Juhász assumed the position of Commissioner for Fundamental Rights. He was elected by the Parliament on 22 September 2025 for a six-year term. The post had previously been held by Ákos Kozma, who was elected to the Constitutional Court in May 2025, thereby vacating the office and prompting the appointment of a new Commissioner. The replacement of the office-holder did not result in any change in the institution's continued inactivity. Although the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights has formal competencies to monitor both closed institutions and the protection of children's rights, including juvenile correctional facilities such as the Szőlő Street reformatory, the institution did not take any substantive action when the Szőlő Street child protection scandal surfaced.⁹³ Previous ombudsman reports had already documented troubling conditions and abuses at the institution,⁹⁴ yet no effective follow-up measures were initiated in response to the later public revelations.

In late 2025, controversy arose around the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights following the removal of several earlier recommendations issued by the former Deputy Commissioner responsible for the rights of national minorities from the institution's website.⁹⁵ The deleted documents addressed systemic issues, including segregation in education and discrimination affecting Roma communities. While the Office initially suggested technical explanations, it later acknowledged that the materials would not be republished, arguing that deputy commissioners' opinions lacked formal legal status unless explicitly endorsed by the Commissioner. Civil society actors and legal experts criticised the move as an attempt to retrospectively neutralise substantively important rights-protection

92 Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), *Report and Recommendations of the Virtual Session of the Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA)*, 14-25 March 2022, pp. 43–47., https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/SCA-Report-March-2022_E.pdf.

93 Alexander Faludy, Hungary's government faces fresh child abuse crisis, *Balkan Insight*, 26 September 2025, <https://balkaninsight.com/2025/09/26/hungarys-government-faces-fresh-child-abuse-crisis/>.

94 Report of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, acting as the National Preventive Mechanism under OPCAT, in case No. AJB-755/2023, concerning the visit to the Budapest Juvenile Correctional Institute. https://www.ajbh.hu/documents/10180/7536814/AJB_755_2023_jelent%C3%A9s.pdf?

95 Szalayné Sándor Erzsébet concluded her mandate as Deputy Commissioner for the Rights of National Minorities on 4 November 2025, upon the expiry of her term of office, *Alapvető Jogok Biztosának Hivatala*, 4 November 2025, <https://www.ajbh.hu/-/november-4-%C3%A9n-megkezd%C5%91d%C3%B6tt-dr.-gyeny-laura-mand%C3%A1tuma> [in Hungarian].

work, raising concerns about institutional independence, historical accountability, and the chilling effect on future advocacy within formally independent bodies.⁹⁶

Overall, no tangible improvement can be observed in the functioning of independent authorities. While these bodies formally benefit from extensive statutory safeguards, such as lengthy mandates and immunity for their leadership, they continue to be staffed by office-holders who show limited readiness to act decisively, given that a single political force controls the parliamentary supermajority required for their appointment.

New Issues that Emerged in 2025

Content-based restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly

The above-mentioned 15th amendment to the Fundamental Law introduced a rigid hierarchy of fundamental rights by elevating the child's right to protection and care above all other rights, with the sole exception of the right to life.⁹⁷ As a result, where this right is deemed to conflict with other fundamental freedoms, such as the right to peaceful assembly, the application of restrictions no longer requires a proportionality or balancing assessment, which runs a risk of a structural failure to comply with the relevant obligation stemming from the ECtHR's case-law.⁹⁸ Relying on this constitutional amendment, Parliament amended Act LV of 2018 on the Freedom of Assembly⁹⁹ by inserting a new Article 13/A. The provision introduced an additional ground for banning assemblies by prohibiting

96 Attila Szabó, The Deputy Nationality Ombudsman did what is his job in a constitutional system: he tried to protect the rights of the vulnerable (*A nemzetiségi ombudsmanhelyettes azt tette, ami egy alkotmányos rendszerben a dolga: próbálta megvédeni a sérülékenyek jogait*), Qubit, 21 November 2025, <https://qubit.hu/2025/11/21/a-nemzetisegi-ombudsmanhelyettes-azt-tette-ami-egy-alkotmanyos-rendszerben-a-dolga-probalta-megvedeni-a-serulek-enyek-jogait> [in Hungarian].

97 Article XVI (1) of the Fundamental Law was amended to include that every child's "right to the protection and care necessary for their proper physical, mental and moral development [...] shall prevail over any other fundamental right other than the right to life". Bill T/1152 on the Fifteenth Amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary, <https://www.parlament.hu/irom42/11152/11152.pdf>.

98 European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission), Hungary – Opinion on the compatibility with international human rights standards of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary, 13 October 2025, CDL-AD(2025)043, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2025\)043-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2025)043-e)

99 Bill T/11201 on Amending Act LV of 2018 on the Freedom of Assembly in Relation to the Protection of Children and Amending Related Acts of Parliament, <https://www.parlament.hu/irom42/11201/11201.pdf>. The Bill entered into force on 15 April 2025 as Act III of 2025.

any gathering that violates the prohibition laid down in Article 6/A of Act XXXI of 1997 on the Protection of Children and Guardianship Administration, a provision originally introduced by the 2021 so-called ‘Propaganda Law’. These legislative changes were accompanied by amendments to the Act on Minor Offences, which reshaped the sanctions applicable to participation in banned assemblies and expanded the legal framework to allow the use of facial recognition technologies in this context.¹⁰⁰ Together, these measures significantly increased the deterrent effect of assembly-related sanctions and heightened the risks associated with participation in public demonstrations. In a series of cases concerning assemblies in support of LGBTQIA+ rights, the Kúria consistently applied the constitutional rule giving precedence to the child’s right to protection and care over the freedom of peaceful assembly. Throughout the spring and summer of 2025, the police prohibited all assemblies related to LGBTQIA+ issues, with a single exception, and these bans were systematically upheld by the Kúria.¹⁰¹

Budapest Pride, organised by the Municipality of Budapest, took place on 28 June 2025. Although, as a municipal event, it formally fell outside the scope of the Assembly Act, the police issued a decision banning the event.¹⁰² Following the event, a criminal investigation was launched, and in August 2025, the Mayor of Budapest was interrogated as a suspect. Under Article 217/C of Act C of 2012 on the Criminal Code, organising a banned assembly or calling for participation in such an assembly is punishable by up to one year of imprisonment.¹⁰³ A similar pattern emerged in the case of Pécs Pride. The police banned the assembly on the basis of Article 13/A of the Assembly Act,¹⁰⁴ a decision later

100 Act III of 2025 amending Act LV of 2018 on the right of assembly with regard to the protection of children, and amending related Acts, <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/en/2025-3-00-00>

101 See the following decisions of the Kúria: Kgyk.VII.39.057/2025/8, 31 May 2025, www.kuria-birosag.hu/hu/gyulhat/kgykvii3905720258-szamu-hatarozat; Kgyk.VI.39.061/2025/7 (11 June 2025) www.kuria-birosag.hu/hu/gyulhat/kgykiv3906120257-szamu-hatarozat; Kgyk.VI.39.069/2025/6, 27 June 2025, www.kuria-birosag.hu/hu/gyulhat/kgykvi3906920256-szamu-hatarozat.

102 Decision of the Budapest Police Headquarter, 19 June 2025, https://www.police.hu/sites/default/files/2025.06.28_Budapest_Tilt%C3%B3_hat%C3%A1rozat.pdf?fbclid=IwY2xjawLAuPhleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHqwxPgAb-ALaaddRJ7mtwsbkpJV6YPTP54pCneZvehEWUX24cEdA2BVGozZaKp_aem_L3iElpHcNrBIPUg8kO6_GQ [in Hungarian].

103 On 12 December 2025, the police proposed that the prosecutor bring charges against the Mayor in connection with his role in organising Budapest Pride; Hungarian police propose charges against Budapest mayor over banned Pride march, 12 December 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/hungarian-police-propose-charges-against-budapest-mayor-over-banned-pride-march-2025-12-12/>.

104 Decision of the Pécs Police Department, 5 September 2025, https://www.police.hu/sites/default/files/2025.10.04_P%C3%A9cs_hat%C3%A1rozat.pdf [in Hungarian]

upheld by the Kúria.¹⁰⁵ Despite the ban, the march took place on 4 October 2025. On 28 October 2025, the organiser was summoned for questioning as a criminal suspect for organising a prohibited assembly, and media reports in early November indicated that the police had recommended that the prosecutor press charges.¹⁰⁶

Another element of the above-mentioned 15th amendment to the Fundamental Law follows the same regulatory logic by introducing a content-based restriction on freedom of expression. The amendment elevated the prohibition of the production, use, distribution, and promotion of narcotic drugs to a constitutional level. The amendment employs an undefined and open-ended concept of ‘promotion’. In the absence of clear limits, this notion may extend even to the mere reference to narcotic drugs, irrespective of whether such expression produces any concrete harm or interferes with the fundamental rights of others. Based on the above restriction, in March, the police prohibited a demonstration organised by the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party advocating the legalisation of cannabis.¹⁰⁷

In 2025, the Hungarian government stepped up what it described as a ‘war on drugs,’ deploying a series of high-profile police operations and raids under its anti-narcotics programme.¹⁰⁸ Some of the raids drew particular public attention when they targeted well-known cultural figures. For example, police conducted searches at the home of popular artist ByeAlex and his band, reportedly finding small quantities of a controlled substance. In the aftermath, the Government’s drug policy commissioner stated that such artists, including ByeAlex, allegedly ‘promote a drug-related lifestyle’ affecting young followers, even if direct links to organised criminality were not established.¹⁰⁹ Selective

105 Decision Kgyk.VI.39.087/2025/8. of the Kúria, 14 September 2025, <https://kuria-birosag.hu/hu/gyulhat/kgyk-vi3908720258-szamu-hatarozat> [in Hungarian]

106 Benjámin Vida, Prosecution recommended against Pécs Pride organiser (*‘Vádemelést javasolnak a Pécs Pride szervezője ellen’*), Telex, 7 November 2025, <https://telex.hu/belfold/2025/11/07/pecs-pride-szervezo-vademeles> [in Hungarian].

107 András Nádor, Police have banned the Dog Party’s marijuana legalization protest in advance (*‘Előre betiltották a rendőrök a Kutypárt fülegalizációs tüntetését’*), Telex, 21 March 2025, <https://telex.hu/belfold/2025/03/21/magyar-ketfarku-kutya-part-tuntetes-betiltas-kannabisz-marihuana-fu-fulegalizacio-drogpolitika-420-million-marijuana-march-alaptorveny> [in Hungarian].

108 Hungary in the crosshairs of drug traffickers (*‘A drogkereskedők célkeresztjében Magyarország’*), Magyar Nemzet, 4 December 2025, <https://magyarnemzet.hu/belfold/2025/12/a-drogkereskedok-celkeresztjeben-magyarorszag> [in Hungarian].

109 Márton Bede, Nine months late, now the Hungarian war on drugs is here (*‘Kilenc hónapot késett, most itt a magyar drogellenes háború’*), 444.hu, 14 November 2025, <https://444.hu/2025/11/14/kilenc-honapot-kesett-most-itt-a-magyar-drogellenes-haboru> [in Hungarian].

enforcement and publicity-driven raids focused on public figures risk undermining proportionality and equal treatment principles in criminal justice.

Implications and Recommendations for 2026

The main consequence of the lack of meaningful public consultation is that legislative constraints of parliamentarism do not prevail: the legislative process can be freely bypassed or accelerated in line with the political intentions of the governing party, and substantive debate can be eliminated. The elimination of public debate, poor regulatory quality, and the inclusion of meaningless declarative statements undermine the social legitimacy of legislation and weaken the foundations of legal compliance.

With regard to the electoral framework, it follows from the anomalies that the Hungarian electoral framework applies discriminatory treatment to certain groups of voters, in several instances, through the persistent breach of international obligations.

Suggested recommendation: The legislator should ensure the transparency and democratic nature of adopting a law by inducing meaningful debate, providing meaningful reasons, and involving key stakeholders in the process.

Suggested recommendation: The legislator should adopt a regulatory framework for parliamentary national minority elections that brings it into conformity with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Suggested recommendation: The legislator should eliminate the discrimination between voters with a registered residence in Hungary and those without a registered residence in Hungary concerning the method of casting their vote.

Suggested recommendation: Respecting Hungary's international obligations, the legislator must abolish the possibility for courts to restrict the voting rights of persons under guardianship and must establish a framework enabling the immediate review of such decisions in cases where persons under guardianship have already been excluded from the exercise of voting rights.

Suggested recommendation: The nomination procedure for members of independent authorities should guarantee the appointment of office-holders who are functionally independent.

The Commission should also address the newly observed issue of content-based restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of assembly through a new recommendation.

Suggested recommendation: Review with a view to repeal the legal provisions enabling the prohibition of LGBTQIA+ demonstrations.

CONTACTS

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The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) is a non-profit human rights watchdog NGO established in Budapest, Hungary, in 1994. The HCLU is a Hungarian human rights watchdog working independently of political parties, the state, or any of its institutions. The HCLU's aim is to advance the case for fundamental rights and principles laid down by the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary and by international conventions. Generally, it has the goal of building and strengthening civil society and the rule of law in Hungary and in the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region. Since the HCLU is an independent non-profit organisation, its financial resources are mostly provided by foundations and by an increasing number of private individuals. The HCLU strives to educate citizens about their basic human rights and freedoms, and takes a stand against undue interference and misuse of power by those in positions of authority.

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The Civil Liberties Union for Europe

The Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties) is a non-governmental organisation promoting the civil liberties of everyone in the European Union. We are headquartered in Berlin and have a presence in Brussels. Liberties is built on a network of 24 national civil liberties NGOs from across the EU.

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