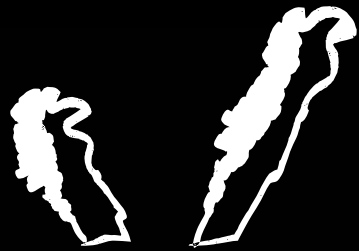


# PRESSURE ON PUBLIC MEDIA

A decisive test for European democracies



France Télévisions	Arte	SRG SSR	Arte Deutschland
ARD	ZDF	Duna Média	France Médias Monde
BBC	RTVE	RAI	RTBF
BRF	NPO	DR	RTP
SVT	SR	MTVA	Yle
NRK	VRT	S4C	Česká televize
MTVA	TV5 Monde	ERT	Telewizja Polska



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## RSF SURVEY

### METHODOLOGY

For this report, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) collaborated with its network of European Union (EU) correspondents, as well as the German, Finnish, Austrian, Swedish, Spanish, and Swiss sections of RSF, and its UK bureau. To add a comparative dimension to the study, examples from non-EU countries in Europe, such as the United Kingdom and Switzerland, are also included throughout the analysis.

Twenty-nine individuals, both external experts and members of the RSF network, responded to an English-language questionnaire comprising 35 questions relating to the public service media’s ecosystem, independence, funding, subjection to interference, and developments over the past ten years.

The report also draws on interviews with experts and public service media professionals, as well as previously published reports on the subject.

## DEFENDING A PUBLIC SERVICE

**Thibaut Bruttin**

*RSF Director General*

On 8 August 2025, Article 5 of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) will come into effect. It places binding obligations on European Union (EU) member states regarding both the editorial and operational independence of public service media. Article 5 is as much a recognition of the important role of public service media as it is a safeguard.

US President Donald Trump's decision to dismantle his country's international broadcasting service echoes the offensive being waged by certain political forces against public radio and television broadcasters across Europe. The takeover, defunding and closure of these media outlets are increasingly common components of the political programs of those who seek to emulate Trump's policies.

Since my appointment as Director General of Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in July 2024, I have had the opportunity to meet with a large number of European public broadcasting executives. All have reported facing criticism – often fierce, and at times excessive. Each of these exchanges came to the same conclusion: public media organisations are subject to political interests, and are becoming pawns in a political game. Reforms to their governance can raise the spectre of authoritarianism, and legitimate budgetary constraints in a difficult economy can conceal the politicisation and instrumentalisation of public funding. The road to hell is often paved with good financial intentions.

As a result, Europe's public service media is experiencing of crises on multiple fronts. Economically, their funding is frequently called into question. Technologically, they must keep up with digital platforms. Politically, these outlets can be easily turned into government mouthpieces, as seen in Italy, or into propaganda tools for the Kremlin, as seen in Hungary. Finally, there is the crisis of trust in these media, reflected in the increasingly tense debates on their independence and funding mechanisms.

At the same time, public service media, like all news media, should not be above criticism. Their operations should be strengthened to meet standards for independence. Moreover, the fact that they are funded by taxpayers and belong to the civic community (evidenced by nicknames for public media such as Mamma RAI or Auntie BBC) heightens the need for transparency and legitimises the public scrutiny and political debate concerning their role.

This report aims to assess the current state of affairs, sketch out scenarios – some encouraging (such as the increase in licence fees in Czechia, others disheartening (such as the impending disappearance of Liechtenstein's public radio station) – and provide recommendations. Europe needs a sharp awakening in order to create the public media of tomorrow.

The image shows a vertical strip of the European Union flag on the left side of the page. It features a blue field with twelve yellow five-pointed stars arranged in a circle. The flag is slightly wavy, suggesting movement. A red vertical bar is positioned to the right of the flag, partially overlapping the main title area.

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA IN THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) — KEY DATES

Late 1920s – early 1930s | The first public radio broadcasters appear in Europe.

1921 | In France, the first state-owned radio station is created at the Eiffel Tower, ushering in the beginning of civilian radio broadcasting, previously reserved for military purposes.

1922 | The British Broadcasting Company (BBC) is created in the United Kingdom, becoming a model of media independence across Europe. It becomes a public entity under the name “the British Broadcasting Corporation,” in 1927.

1923 | In Czechoslovakia, Radiojournal, the oldest public radio service in continental Europe, is launched.

1924 | The Unione Radiofonica Italiana is founded in Italy, the forerunner of RAI.

1933 | In Germany, radio broadcasting — with programs aired in 53 languages — falls under the strict control of Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda for the Third Reich.

1934 | The Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft is nationalised in Germany, becoming the country’s official public broadcaster.

1933 | Nazi and, later, Italian fascist regimes use radiobroadcasting to spread disinformation to the population of enemy states. Notably, in Italy, Mussolini gives live speeches on the radio.

1940 | The BBC offers news bulletins in 16 languages (up to 40 by the end of the war) to counter the narratives of Nazi and fascist regimes. The Vichy regime in France bans the BBC and punishes anyone who listens to it.

1942 | The US government creates Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and Radio Liberty.

1945 | In France, the interim government bans private radio and television stations, arguing that a strict state monopoly is the only way to protect broadcasting from foreign interference.

1950 | Broadcasters from across Western Europe come together to create the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), while Eastern European broadcasters form the International Radio and Television Organization (OIRT), which is dissolved in 1992.

1952 | Italian public television launches Telegiornale, a daily news broadcast.

1975 | The gradual end of the state monopoly in France begins with the closure of the Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (ORTF), which is replaced by seven separate entities, including Radio France and TF1.

The construction of the EU has gone hand in hand with the establishment of pan-European public media outlets such as Eurosport (1989), ARTE (1992), and Euronews (1993).

# 1 | THE INDEPENDENCE OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA: A MATTER OF SURVIVAL

## A/ THE IMPORTANCE OF HOW PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA ARE GOVERNED

While there is no single public broadcasting model in the EU, a steady transformation has occurred over the past few decades in Europe as state-controlled broadcasters turned into independent public service media. In 2012, The Council of Europe [acknowledged](#) that “securing the right level of independence from the State” remains one of the key challenges for these media outlets. Now, over a decade later, many public media in Europe appear to be slipping dangerously backwards, towards the state broadcaster model and away from a framework that ensures true operational and editorial independence. The trend towards merging various public media entities adds even more challenges in this area.

### | HOW DOES GOVERNANCE IMPACT INDEPENDENCE?

The fundamental requirements for how public media are governed stem from the role and function of these outlets in democratic societies. Their purpose is “to foster democratic debate, to underpin media freedom and pluralism, to support social cohesion and to contribute to Europe’s cultural diversity;” [according to the EBU](#), an association of broadcasting organisations that counts 113 members in 56 countries (mainly in Europe), promotes cooperation between broadcasters and works to ensure that the role of public service media is recognised and taken into account by decision-makers.

The primary method to protect public service media from being influenced by political and economic powers is to ensure these outlets are editorially and structurally independent, meaning they must have an independent form of governance and safeguards for resisting editorial interference.

According to the EBU, governance refers to “the framework of rules and practices which determine how an organisation is directed: who takes decisions, how stakeholders can make their voice heard and how the organisation is held accountable.” In the case of public service media, the EBU uses the word governance to refer to both an “external” governance system — such as a national broadcasting regulator, whose power is defined by public service media legislation — as well as the “internal” arrangements made by leadership such as oversight committees.

Political interference can be prevented through legal safeguards and oversight mechanisms that “distance PSM [public service media] from political institutions, in particular from the executive and legislative branches, but also from political parties;” [according](#) to the EBU, which recommends the following safeguards for independence:

- State officials and political leaders must be prohibited from joining or influencing public service media oversight bodies, and a strict separation between supervisory and management bodies must be maintained
- Public service leadership appointments must not be made by the executive or legislative branches, but by independent supervisory bodies, following clear and transparent procedures, with selection criteria based on professional qualifications and experience;
- Internal editorial guidelines and codes of ethics must be established to reinforce editorial independence.

## What is the EU position on governance and independence?

European standards on the independence of public service media are defined by the Council of Europe's 2012 [recommendation](#) on public service media governance and by Article 5 of the [European Media Freedom Act \(EMFA\)](#), a recently adopted and legally binding piece of European legislation. The EMFA entered into force on 7 May 2024, and most of its provisions will come into force on 8 August 2025.

“Member States shall ensure that funding procedures for public service media providers are based on transparent and objective criteria laid down in advance. Those funding procedures shall guarantee that public service media providers have adequate, sustainable and predictable financial resources corresponding to the fulfilment of and the capacity to develop within their public service remit. Those financial resources shall be such that the editorial independence of public service media providers is safeguarded.”

The management and board of directors of public service media must also be appointed in a transparent manner. Their term of office must be long enough to guarantee the independence of the media, and any dismissal before the end of their term must be duly justified and exceptional.

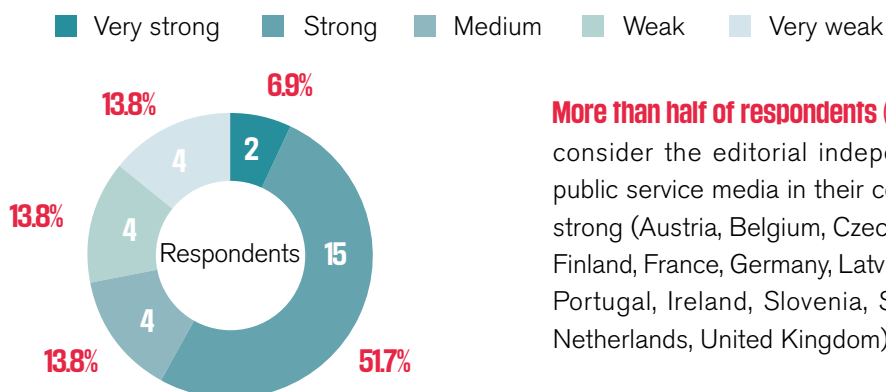
“Member States shall ensure that public service media providers are editorially and functionally independent and provide in an impartial manner a plurality of information and opinions to their audiences, in accordance with their public service remit.”

“*Member States shall ensure that public service media providers are editorially and functionally independent and provide in an impartial manner a plurality of information and opinions to their audiences, in accordance with their public service remit.*”

*Article 5 of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)*

### RSF SURVEY QUESTION

#### WOULD YOU SAY THAT THE EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA IS...



**More than half of respondents (15 out of 29)** consider the editorial independence of public service media in their country to be strong (Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Ireland, Slovenia, Switzerland, Netherlands, United Kingdom).

## **I NOMINATIONS MADE BY POLITICAL BODIES**

However, the true independence of public service media as much on the existence of an appropriate legal framework as on the effective, impartial implementation of this framework through an administrative regulatory body that can demonstrate its independence from executive and legislative powers. While public service media must have a minimum of contact with the legislative branch – such as hearings before parliament to ensure they are complying with their obligations – they must remain as separate as possible from the executive branch.

Although respondents to the RSF questionnaire voiced their relative confidence in the editorial independence of public services (see above), this independence has been undermined by the appointment of senior public media leaders by the executive branch, such as the governments of Cyprus, Greece and Malta; Ministries in Poland and Denmark; and the government and the political parties in power in Italy.

The way in which public media are run is fundamental to guaranteeing their independence or, conversely, bringing them under political control, which raises questions about the editorial autonomy of these institutions. When leaders of a public service media outlet – be it the director general or members of the board of directors – are appointed by one or more political bodies – government, president or parliament – the decisions taken thereafter are immediately politicised. In Greece, for example, government spokesperson is also responsible for supervising public service media – a conflict of interest. What's more, the Greek regulatory authority for public broadcasting, the National Council for Radio and Television, which has been accused of being slow and inefficient, has not seen significant reform under either the current or the previous government, hampering its ability to ensure the public media's independence. In Bulgaria, the public political statements made by the government-appointed Council for Electronic Media (CEM) has put pressure on the public media's editorial independence. In Hungary, the lack of independence from the government is reinforced by the state honours [regularly awarded](#) to the leaders and editors-in-chief of MTVA, the country's public broadcasting group.

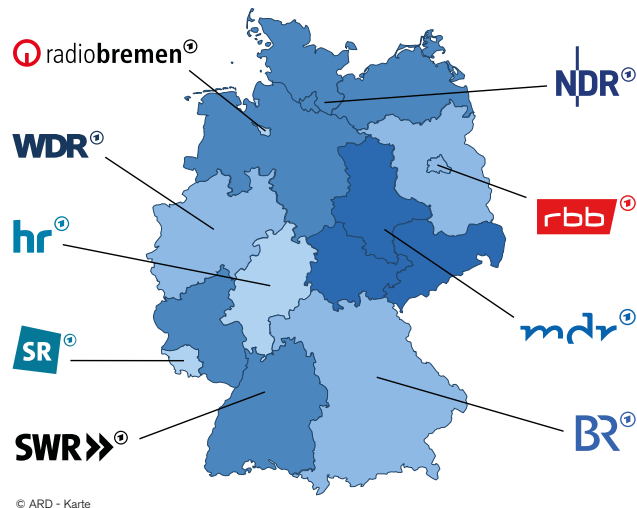
In Spain, the situation seemed to improve under the Socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, which, in 2006, approved a law ruling that parliament, not the government, would appoint the president of the public broadcaster RTVE. However, the following government, headed by Mariano Rajoy, a member of the People's Party, reverted to the political appointment model, leaving RTVE with very little editorial independence, illustrated by a [glaring lack](#) of diverse viewpoints expressed on air. In addition to appointing the head of the public broadcast service, the Rajoy government hired external journalists who shared his views. In 2018, RTVE employees organised months of ["Black Fridays,"](#) when all journalists at the public broadcaster dressed in black to protest against this political interference. This pressure helped lead to an historic agreement to elect the president and members of the board of directors by competitive tender. However, subsequent political opposition to the law and the COVID-19 pandemic ultimately prevented the creation of a permanent board. To put an end to the matter, the current government, led by Pedro Sanchez, adopted a decree that goes against Sanchez's previous commitments and the very spirit of the EMFA: it is now parliament, by an absolute majority (and no longer by two-thirds of the votes), that appoints the president and board of directors, which, de facto, was made up of a group of people close to the [government and its parliamentary allies](#) in the left-wing and pro-independence parties by the end of 2024.

## THE FRAGMENTATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA AND THE TREND TOWARDS MEDIA GROUPS

A fragmented and regionalised media landscape in Germany, a preponderance of regionalised, linguistically diverse outlets in Belgium and Spain, centralisation in the UK and Italy – the public service media landscape in Europe remains particularly heterogeneous.

In Germany, the public broadcasting network Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (ARD) brings together the country's regional public broadcasters (see map below).

### The regionalised organisation of public media in Germany



Belgium is unique in that it has no national public service media. Instead, three public service media cover their respective linguistic communities: Radio-Télévision Belge de la Communauté Française (RTBF) in French, Vlaamse Radio en Televisieomroep (VRT) in Flemish and Belgischer Rundfunk (BRF) in German.

In Spain, where power is highly decentralised, the public broadcasting network Federación de Organismos o Entidades de Radio y Televisión Autonómicos (FORTA) brings together 12 public broadcasters from the autonomous communities (regions).



However, a tendency towards merging broadcasters, particularly between public radio and television, has emerged over the past decade. By 2023, according to EBU data, the main public radio and television broadcasting services were provided by a single entity in 80 percent of the countries in the EBU area. This aligns with market and consumer trends, which indicate a convergence of media outlets, formats and consumption habits.

In Europe, only a few countries have retained two separate institutions for public radio and television: France, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechia, Sweden, Armenia and Latvia. In France, this distinction is a topic of debate as an initiative to merge the different public broadcasting outlets is currently being proposed to streamline their operations. The potential concentration of decision-making power within one holding company has raised fears that the independence of France's public service media will be at risk.

### Strength in unity?

During his election campaign in 2017, Emmanuel Macron discussed his desire to create a “BBC à la française.” Now, French senator Laurent Lafon’s [draft law](#), submitted in April 2023, provides for the creation of a new holding company, France Médias, which would bring together the subsidiaries France Télévisions, Radio France and the Institut national de l’audiovisuel (INA) – national public broadcasters – and whose capital would be directly and entirely owned by the state. However, France Médias Monde, which brings together France’s international broadcasting services (Radio France Internationale, France 24 and Monte Carlo Doualiya) was excluded from the France Médias project following [a government amendment](#), as many journalists felt that international broadcasters should not be regrouped with national public broadcasting.

France’s public broadcasting sector is up in arms over the proposed reform, and there were several days of strikes between March and June 2025. On 30 June the National Assembly rejected the draft law, which will be resubmitted in Autumn 2025. For economist and French media specialist Julia Cagé, it is necessary to think about the long-term consequences of the bill to understand the fears of broadcasting employees.

“This sector has been severely weakened in France in recent years. The resources it uses to keep us informed have been drastically reduced, with the end of compensation for financial losses linked to the ban on advertising, the failure to adjust licence fees in line with inflation for several consecutive years, the nominal reduction in the licence fee, and, finally, the licence fee’s outright elimination.

These drastic budget cuts now mean fewer resources and, therefore, fewer employees – especially journalists – for public broadcasting. In addition to this economic and financial insecurity, Emmanuel Macron’s decision to abolish the licence fee calls into question the conditions of public media’s independence. The licence fee, while imperfect, had the immense merit of being earmarked funding, and in this sense, it provided a foundation for independence. Also, the holding company project is on its way and we don’t really know the why or the how of it. For example, there has been no impact assessment study worthy of the name. Yet we know from previous experience that the holding company will inevitably be extremely costly, which signals that we are consolidating new layers just to end up with fewer resources to inform the public.”



“ At a time when private media is becoming increasingly centralised, and journalists’ independence is becoming increasingly compromised, we need strong, high-quality, independent and adequately funded public broadcasting. But the exact opposite is taking shape in front of our very eyes.”

**Julia Cagé**  
Media Economist

## Is the BBC the future of public service broadcasting?

Founded in 1922, and given its current name, the British Broadcasting Corporation, in 1927, the BBC has established itself as a global, if not European, success story in public broadcasting, in an ever-changing political, economic, technological and media context. Also known as “Auntie” or “The Beeb,” it is watched, listened to, and read by almost half a billion people every week in English and 41 other languages, including Bengali, Punjabi, Russian, Ukrainian, Amharic and Swahili.

“*Across the world, three-quarters of people do not have access to a free press. The world relies on a very small number of public services, including the BBC.*”

Claire Enders, founder of the media research company Enders Analysis, in an interview with the French daily [Le Monde](#) in 2022.

The BBC's independence has more to do with its long history than the way in which its leadership is appointed. In fact, the Royal Charter, which defines its obligations for an eleven-year period and guarantees its income and a Board of Governors – nine members appointed by the BBC and five others, including the chair, chosen by the

government – is only part of the picture. “Auntie” also draws its strength from an uncompromising journalistic tradition. In this respect, relations between the British government and the BBC have not always been rosy. During the Falklands War in 1982, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher accused the broadcasting group of betraying the country, and in 2003, Prime Minister Tony Blair questioned the outlet's bias over his decision to take part in the Iraq War.

The British public service broadcaster may be protected from political skirmishes, but it has not been spared from budget cuts. In 2015, as soon as David Cameron was re-elected to lead an all-Conservative government, the BBC was forced to take part in the savings plan imposed on many other public sector organisations. For the BBC, this austerity policy meant a 700 million GBP (796 million EUR) cut between 2015 and 2021; when Boris Johnson became Prime Minister in 2019, he called the license fee into question, exacerbating the budget crisis that had been brewing for years at the BBC, despite [91 percent](#) of Britons tuning in every week. These cuts translated to the loss of around a thousand jobs, the sale of 40 percent of the BBC's buildings and a reduction in its administrative operations.

## **B/ THE FAILURE TO SECURE FUNDING FOR PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA**

Funding for public service media can take different forms within the European Union and dictates the conditions of their survival and independence. European regulations stipulate that public service media **must benefit from** stable and adequate funding that is fair, transparent and independent from political interference in order to preserve their role of protecting and promoting reliable information from diverse, independent sources. Nonetheless, the cost of public media is often subject to criticism and a target for austerity policies.

### **| MONEY: THE HEART OF THE CONFLICT**

Public service media groups are frequently criticised for being too expensive, both in countries that have endured austerity measures (Spain, Portugal, Italy) and in countries in better economic health (Switzerland, Germany). In one extreme case, Greece went so far as to [shut down](#) its public broadcaster in 2013 for austerity reasons. After the employees of the Greek public broadcasting group, the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT), occupied the outlet's offices for several days, a temporary channel was launched in the summer of 2013 under the name DT, which lasted until May 2014, when the new group Hellenic Radio, Internet and Television (NERIT), was finally created. In 2015, NERIT disappeared following an election promise made by the new government, making way for the former public broadcaster ERT.

**In the coming years, European countries will have to deal with two main issues that may provoke changes in the way they fund public service media:**

- the economic slowdown (0.4 percent growth in the EU in 2023, and 1 percent in 2024), which poses a risk to funding as public media are unlikely to be spared by austerity policies
- the gradual implementation of the EMFA – in particular Article 5 – on 8 August 2025, which will require member states to review their public media strategy in order to comply with EU regulations.

EU member states are responsible for finding sustainable funding for public service media, so that the independent, reliable and diverse sources of information that every citizen should have access to are not hampered by commercial squabbles.

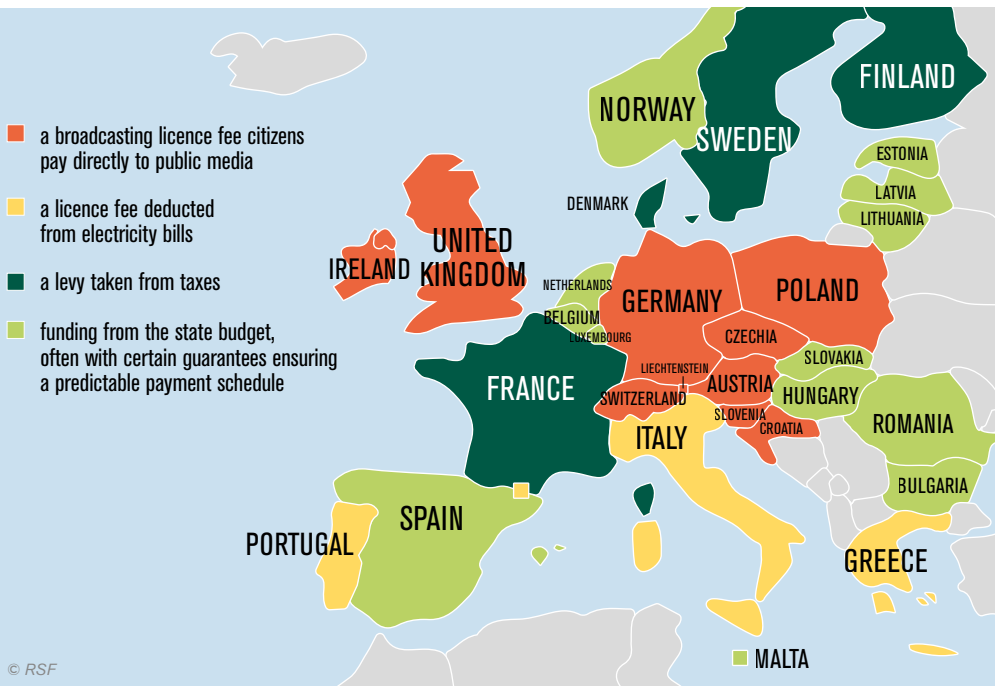
**In the European Union, funding for public service media can be:**

- **completely public:** generally funded via a licence fee or public funds drawn directly from the state budget. In some countries, such as Finland and Denmark, public funding is sufficient.
- **mixed:** funds come from both the public and private sector. The majority of public service media in the EU receive advertising revenue or revenue from other commercial activities in addition to complement their public funding.

**There are four main ways of financing public service media:**

- a broadcasting licence fee citizens pay directly to public media
- a licence fee deducted from electricity bills
- a levy taken from taxes
- funding from the state budget, often with certain guarantees ensuring a predictable payment schedule.

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE LICENSE FEE: WHEN POLITICS DICTATES FUNDING



License fees, used by ten of the 27 EU member countries (Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Poland, Ireland, Romania, Slovenia and Sweden), is a regular target when it comes to diminishing taxes, often for populist ends. As far back as 2008 in Italy, Silvio Berlusconi's People's Freedom Party – which is also the primary shareholder of Italy's largest media group, Mediaset – claimed the cost of the licence fee burdened household budgets, even though it was one of the lowest in Europe (107 EUR per year).

One proposed solution is allocating part of the state's budget to fund public media. This measure is problematic when there are no concrete measures to guarantee the funding is secured for multiple years at a time and protected from potential political pressure. According to [EBU data](#), when the licence fee is replaced by a system of finding money from within the state budget, the public media budget falls by around 9 percent, whereas it rises when the licence fee is augmented (+14 percent) or replaced by an earmarked tax (+9 percent). Funding also becomes vulnerable to annual political negotiations and potential budget cuts in favour of other government priorities.

In Slovakia, the licence fee was replaced by a percentage of the GDP, a measure initiated by the previous government. Under this new system, Robert Fico's new populist administration was able to lower the rate to 0.17 percent and then to 0.12 percent with such speed that the rate of 0.17 percent was never even applied. This new measure resulted in a 30 percent reduction in the budget of the public broadcasting group RTVS compared with the old system. In Romania, the licence fee was abolished and replaced by direct funding from the state budget in 2016, which ensured that the country's public service media, Romanian Television Society (TVR), remained underfunded.. The decision slowed the public broadcasters' development and made them more vulnerable to political pressure. Despite this, TVR continues to produce quality journalism.

Without sufficient, sustainable and predictable funding, editorial independence is nearly impossible. Yet certain political parties still advocate for measures that would bring their country's public broadcasting to this non-existent level of editorial independence, such as the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), which came out on top in the parliamentary elections in September 2024. Even though though FPÖ leader Herbert Kickl ultimately failed to form a coalition that would allow him to become chancellor, he remains determined to dismantle the national public broadcaster Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF). First and foremost, he intends to scrap the license fee and finance the ORF through the federal budget – a move that allows for direct and drastic cuts to its funding.

While licence fees still appear to be the best way of meeting EMFA requirements, they need to be reformed as it is currently only imposed on households that own a television or a radio at a time when people are consuming public broadcasting content via tablets, smartphones, and computers.

## The “No Billag” movement in Switzerland: when citizens help rescue public media

On 4 March 2018, employees of Switzerland's public broadcasting service breathed a long sigh of relief. The “No Billag” initiative which sought to privatise all media, was blocked by 71.6 percent of voters. Instead, they chose to continue paying the annual tax that funds the national public service broadcaster, Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, (SRG SSR), as well as the 34 local and regional private television and radio channels. However, the momentum behind No Billag illustrates the growing adversity to the compulsory funding of public broadcasting in Switzerland and elsewhere in Europe. Giving the public a choice helped quell the movement, but a new referendum is planned for 2026 that aims to considerably reduce the licence fee to 200 CHF per household per year.

This referendum is hotly contested and, if approved, would mean a radical change in the organisation and structure of SRG SSR.



In Liechtenstein, a similar vote on public media funding had the opposite effect. The referendum held on 27 October 2024 on the future of the principality's only public service broadcaster, [Radio Liechtenstein](#), resulted in its funding being withdrawn. Democrats for Liechtenstein (DPL), the opposition party that called for the vote, the cost of the radio station, arguing it was disproportionate to the quality of the programmes and the low subsidies granted to private media. Radio Liechtenstein faced the nightmare haunting European public broadcasting: privatise or cease to exist. It disappeared from the airwaves last April.

In Poland, where the licence fee system does not entirely fulfil its role due to very low collection rates, public media have been dependent on the state for many years. Public service media received subsidies from the state budget and, in return, the Law and Justice Party's (PiS) government had almost total control over Polish broadcasting. In order to mitigate PiS' stronghold over Polish Television (TVP) and Polish Radio, the new government under Prime Minister Donald Tusk, a politician from the Civic Coalition party who came into power in 2024, has put these public media into liquidation. Yet, at the same time, the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT), which is controlled by the PiS, has stopped redistributing the licence fee collected from households to the public media, as former PiS president Andrzej Duda blocked a bill ensuring the public media would receive sufficient funding from the license fee. As a result, the government is forced to fund public broadcasters directly from the state budget. Although PiS propaganda has been replaced by journalism on TVP, a [report](#) by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) found bias in favour of the government in the 2025 presidential election. RSF – whose recommendations were [taken into consideration](#) during a public consultation on a legislative reform to the public media launched by the government in 2024 – has [called on](#) Poland's new president, PiS member Karol Nawrocki, to commit to forging a bipartisan agreement on measures that will guarantee the independence of public broadcasting.

## Best practice: financing public service media in Czechia

Czechia is a textbook case of political debates on increasing licence fees. In April 2025, a law proposed by the minister of culture came into effect, upping the monthly licence fee for Czech Television by 15 CZK (around 0.60 EUR) and for Czech Radio by 10 CZK (0.40 EUR). This fee, the main source of funding for these media, is now 150 CZK (6 EUR) for television and 55 CZK (2 EUR) for radio. It is adjusted to inflation to avoid any loss of real value. Before this law, Czech Television was funded by a licence fee set 15 years ago, and the fee for Czech Radio had not increased in 18 years. From now on, every household with a radio, television or an internet connection will have to pay this fee.

Although the government has a majority in parliament, the vote on this increase in public media funding was initially prevented by obstruction from the opposition. Led by Andrej Babis – former Prime Minister and leader of the ANO opposition movement – the detractors accused the public media of being corrupted by the government without providing any evidence. While Andrej Babis insists that public media are biased in favour of the ruling parties, Tomio Okamura, leader of the Freedom and Direct Democracy party (SPD), accused Czech Television of censoring his party's statements and spreading Brussels propaganda without providing evidence. Rejecting what they argue is additional taxation, Andrej Babis and Tomio Okamura advocate for replacing the licence fee with direct subsidies from the state budget, which would make the public media vulnerable to political influence. If they come to power in the elections scheduled for autumn 2025, their plan to merge Czech Television and Czech Radio could mean the politically-resistant leaders currently heading these public broadcasters may be replaced. The controversies over how Czech Television is managed, which led to the abrupt dismissal of its director in May 2025, further fuel the narrative about public media's alleged waste of public money, a pretext for reducing these outlets' independence. Nonetheless, public broadcasting is likely to be a central point of debate in the forthcoming Czech parliamentary elections.



©Noémie Bonnafous/RSF

“ *As an independent, public service broadcaster, we do not depend on political parties or oligarchs. [...] Our license fee guarantees our independence and the public's trust in our work. It should not be removed, but increased – this would allow us to continue our mission of producing quality news for both domestic and international audiences.* ”

Declaration made by Czech Radio Director General René Zavoral during his visit to RSF in [February 2025](#).

In France, the “do-it-yourself” approach to funding public broadcasting that took root in 2022 is symptomatic of the latent instability of the methods used to fund public service media in the EU. The solution introduced by the 2022 Supplementary Budget Act replaced the licence fee with the allocation of a portion of the proceeds from value-added tax (VAT), a funding method made permanent by a reform to the Organic Law on Budget Acts (LOLF) in December 2024. However, this solution does not fully satisfy the conditions for guaranteeing the independence of public broadcasting, as the allocated amount is negotiated each year by members of Parliament as part of the debate on the Budget Act. Without guarantees for multi-year funding in the Public Finance Programming Law, the predictability and sustainability of public broadcasting remain insecure. The sector was considerably weakened in the autumn of 2019, when council tax – the base for the license fee – was phased out, and now, later, the future of France’s public media remains uncertain as Article 5 of the EMFA is about to come into force. In response to the 23.9 million EUR public media budget cut decided by the government at the start of 2025, Radio France President Sibyle Veil has announced a strategy called Innovating Without Constraints (*Innover sans contraintes*), which includes the decision to stop the programming and terrestrial broadcasting of the radio station Mouv’, created in 1997, starting summer 2025.

## PUBLIC VS PRIVATE MEDIA: AN UNFAIR COMPETITION?

Competition is fierce in the EU media landscape, and the private sector is fighting for its place in the market. In Czechia, private media are indignant that Czech public radio and television are taking to the internet, arguing that these public broadcasters are moving away from their statutory role, and criticising the development of new formats – especially podcasts – which are not intended for direct broadcasting. In 2022, the Minister-President of the German state of Bavaria highlighted the very high proportion of entertainment programmes on public service channels, which he felt should be left to private channels. Since then, he has repeatedly voiced [harsh criticism](#) of public service media. In 2018, in France, when plans to reform the public broadcasting system were underway, Nicolas de Tavernost, chairman of the privately-owned M6 group, [called for](#) “the complete abolition of advertising on public channels.” He argued that the public broadcaster France Télévisions should “concentrate solely on its public service mission, which would prevent it from constantly calling for an increase in its resources, particularly commercial resources.” More recently, the CEO of the private channel CNews, part of the Canal+ group, accused the public outlets France Inter and France 2 of being “media that censor, that behave like judges, that condemn and absolve depending on whether or not you are in their camp.” Responding to this criticism, which is symptomatic of the occasional conflicts between public and private media, French economist Julia Cagé told RSF, “It’s an ironic reversal of history when you look back 70 years. In many countries, public service media have become the main source of independent information at a time when private media are increasingly concentrated and used by their shareholders – most of whom come from other business sectors – to wage ideological or political battles.”

“ *In many countries, public service media have become the main source of independent information.* ”

Lithuania’s unicameral parliament – the Seimas – requested an audit of the Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT) in April 2025 to examine its operational efficiency, the relevance of its mission, its funding model and its governance. This came in addition to a previous audit of LRT’s “political neutrality,” decided in February – without consulting the media – by its supervisory body, the LRT Council. RSF and other international and local organisations have [criticised](#) these audits due to the risk of political interference influencing the results.

Moreover, moves to privatise public service media – whether recent, as in France, or older, as in Greece – demonstrate the authoritarian tendencies of governance reforms. In France, the far-right Rassemblement National party's platform for the 2024 early legislative elections proposed the total privatisation of public broadcasting and called for the consolidation of major national private groups, arguing that privatising these broadcasters is the only way to compete with American content platforms. Yet the privatisation of public broadcasting draws inspiration from the most authoritarian regimes in terms of press freedom, and means subjecting the entire media landscape to the pressure of ratings. Those who advocate for privatising public service media under the pretexts of budgetary savings and mitigating bias tend to have the goal of purging these outlets of their independence in order to transform them into communication tools. However, as French media historian Alexis Lévrier observed in an interview with the regional newspaper [Ouest France](#) in June 2024:

“ *If you look at the history of our societies more generally, when you want to set up a strong regime, it is in your interest to control the media rather than privatise them.*”

In Italy, for example, RAI has gradually been transformed into a state media, without its structure being dismantled, reformed or privatised.

In the end, it seems that a hybrid media landscape, where private meets public, may be a good solution, as underscored by the French historian Jean-Noël Jeanneney in a [Le Monde article](#) during the 2024 legislative elections. “Two sectors! The decisive advantage of face-to-face competition between them has long been proven. The private sector, by its very nature, is dedicated to satisfying the companies that provide its vital funding, striving to win over the widest possible audience on a day-to-day basis by giving them the lowest common denominator of what the much-awaited polls say they want. It is up to the public service to organise a different kind of programming, based on a different cultural and civic timeline. Not least by offering programmes that the public didn't know they would enjoy, because they weren't yet available. [...] Let's close our eyes and imagine, not without dread, a broadcasting landscape in the future in which the preponderance of big money left unchecked to chase its own obsessions would assert itself.” In fact, one [independent study](#) shows that funding public media's online news services has a positive effect on the private sector.

## Are public media and private media moving towards partnerships? The French example

Launched in 2016, the private media company Brut, which mainly produces videos, has been taking over content production from the public service outlets Franceinfo and France Télévisions since the beginning of 2025, adapting their content to the social media platforms Instagram and TikTok – a worrying partnership that was condemned by employees. Another example of a public-private partnership in France is the short-lived platform Salto, created in October 2020 as a joint venture between France Télévisions and the private broadcasters TF1 and M6. Salto ended up contending with [competitors that were none other than its own parent companies](#), and closed down three years later. Nevertheless, in 2024, France Télévisions, TF1 and M6, together with collective management organisations and producers' unions, created the non-profit organisation La Filière Audiovisuelle LaFA, and managed to overcome the divide that has traditionally separated the audiovisual sector in France. LaFA aims to unite the public and private sectors to collectively defend their interests when facing decision-makers. “The vitality of public broadcasting benefits everyone,” [emphasised](#) Rodolphe Belmer, CEO of TF1, who added that defending “high, dedicated, predictable and long-term public funding for public broadcasting, which is essential to maintaining its independence and fulfilling its specific, distinctive missions in the public interest” is a priority. David El Sayegh, Deputy Director General of the Society of Authors, Composers and Publishers of Music (SACEM), notes, “It's a question of money, but also of diversity. Some creators, if they're not broadcast on the public service, are not broadcast anywhere!” The union seems promising, and is not an isolated case in Europe; for example, private production companies have been used by the BBC since the Thatcher era.

## C/ IS PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA LOSING PUBLIC TRUST?

The degree of independence enjoyed by public service media directly shapes their reputation and the level of public trust they command. Public service media are currently the target of recurring threats within the European Union and while public confidence in these outlets remains high, it is eroding.

### I NO FOOLING THE PUBLIC: POLITICAL INTERFERENCE UNDERMINES TRUST

The primary mission of public service media is to reach out to the public wherever they may be, yet public confidence in these outlets is declining in the EU. This increased mistrust goes hand in hand with growing political control over public media. In Hungary, the direct political control over the public media has solicited a telling reaction: in 2023, only [23 percent](#) of citizens considered MTVA channels to be a reliable source of information.

In Poland, the new government is committed to restoring public service media's independence, yet the dismantling of these outlets by PiS, the national-conservative party that was in power from 2015 to 2023, has had a serious impact on public confidence. In 2024, the Polish public television news channel, TVP Info, was trusted by just [29 percent of the public](#). In 2012, only five percent of Poles considered TVP to be unreliable but by 2023, this figure had risen [to 38 percent](#). However, since 2023, the new government has been working to restore guarantees for TVP Info's independence to combat the common perception that it is a tool for political ends.

In Bulgaria, confidence in BNR and BNT, the country's two public radio and television groups, has [fallen considerably](#), from 72 percent and 70 percent, respectively, in 2021, to 59 percent and 60 percent in 2024. In countries like Austria, political rhetoric aimed at destabilising public service media is undermining their legitimacy and increasing mistrust: the far-right FPÖ party – which came out on top in the September 2024 parliamentary elections – is constantly making spurious accusations about the public service media. Always aggressive in its approach, the FPÖ publicly denigrates well-known members of the media. In a public speech given in February 2025, FPÖ Secretary General Christian Hafenecker referred to these media professionals as “old-left ORF [Austrian Broadcasting Corporation] luxury pensioners.”

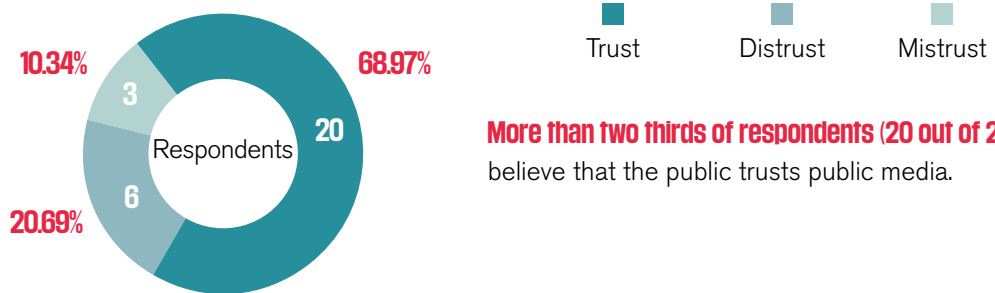
### I HOW TRUSTED ARE PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA?

Despite this downward trend, public service media in the European Union remain the most trusted outlets in the overall media landscape. According to numerous surveys in such as Dublin City University's [Digital News Report](#), radio RTÉ is the most listened-to station in the country and considered the nation's most reliable source of information. In Romania, while trust in all types of media has steadily declined over the past decade, public service media still enjoy a fairly high degree of public confidence. Public media also remain the most trusted sources of information in the German media landscape: trust in German public television has remained stable over the past ten years, with a slight increase – from 62 percent in 2022 to 64 percent in 2023<sup>1</sup> – despite controversial reform proposals.

<sup>1</sup> Another study also shows that, in Germany, 71 percent of respondents trust public television, and 77 percent trust public radio: <https://www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/umfragen/aktuell/glaubwuerdigkeit-der-medien/>

## RSF SURVEY QUESTION

**IN YOUR COUNTRY, WHAT IS THE PUBLIC'S RELATIONSHIP WITH PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA IN YOUR OPINION AND/OR ACCORDING TO ANY MEASUREMENTS OF PUBLIC TRUST?**



Even though the regional and local private press are French citizens' most trusted source of information (63 percent), the public service group France Télévisions comes in second place (60 percent), compared with [47 percent and 49 percent](#) for the private television channels TF1 and M6, respectively. Furthermore, while [61 percent](#) of French citizens think that public services “don't work well,” 69 percent think public broadcasting services do work well – better than public transport, for example (55 percent). When the French are questioned in detail, favourable opinions increase, with 81 percent having a favourable opinion of public radio and 71 percent having a favourable opinion of public television.

In some countries, such as Latvia, confidence in public service media has actually increased significantly in recent years. By 2023, 73 percent of Latvian residents got their news from public service media at least once a week, and 45 percent of them said that public media offered quality content. By 2024, this figure rose to 52 percent (+7 points). At the same time, only 34 percent of Latvians trust information [from the private media](#). In Spain, RTVE has also seen its trust and credibility ratings improve since the pandemic, as the level of trust among citizens rose from 43 percent in 2022 to 53 percent in 2024, according to the [Digital News Report](#). However, the level of trust in the public broadcaster [fell by five points](#) between 2024 and 2025 (48 percent). In Switzerland, even though trust in the media is declining overall – falling from 50 percent in 2015 to 41 percent in 2024 – the public broadcaster's brands [remain the most trusted](#), in both German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland.

## WHO IS THE AUDIENCE FOR PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA?

Public service media's transition from broadcasting to other formats has been accompanied by a change in the way information is disseminated and produced. Once restricted to television and radio, it now includes a wider variety of content, such as news websites, blogs, vlogs, podcasts and audiovisual content exclusively for online distribution, as well as other new forms of distribution, such as replay television.

“*What makes the public media special is not the medium – this was historically the case because of technical constraints, but we have moved on to another media universe! Now, it's the content: information is considered a public good, not just national and international information, but local information as well. I'm thinking in particular of Instagram and TikTok. It's also interesting to note that one of the great recent successes of French public radio has been the creation of high-quality podcasts – including original podcasts. This shows its strong ability to innovate.*”

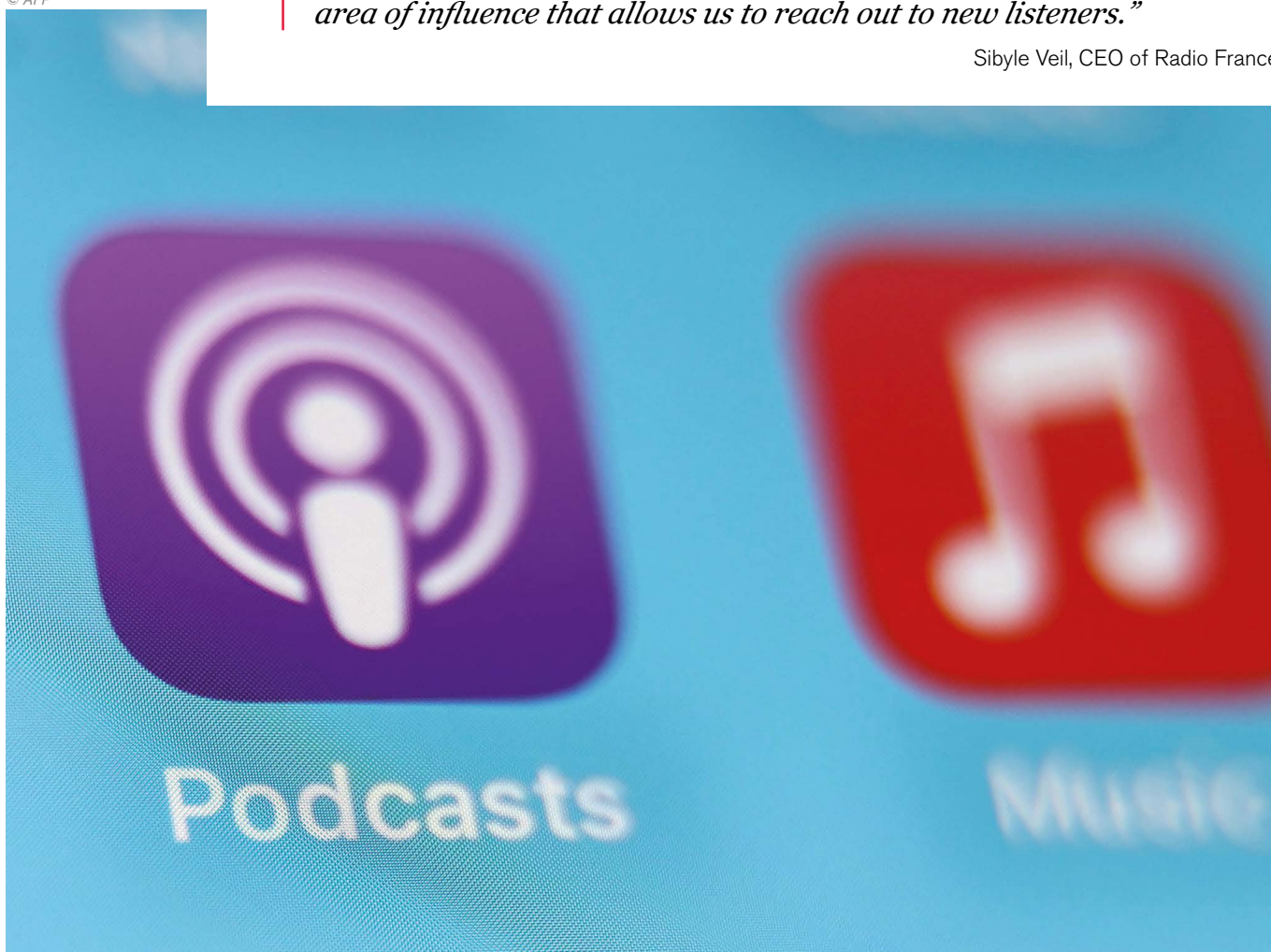
Julia Cagé, media economist

Radio France's CEO Sibyle Veil has made podcasting one of the priorities of her strategy "to continue to serve all audiences," which aims to maintain proximity to its audience and uphold internal pluralism. [In her opinion](#), "It's a new area of influence that allows us to reach out to new listeners." It's also important to note that public broadcasting, particularly in France, is a refuge for investigative reporting, which is no longer welcome on many private channels, and that high quality journalism, which is often costly, remains an objective for public service media. But this aspect of public service media does not please everyone, as illustrated by an episode of the French television programme Complément d'Enquête in June 2025, which revealed that the French Minister of Culture, Rachida Dati, had allegedly received 299,000 EUR from the French energy industrial group GDF Suez (now ENGIE) via a law firm. "Rachida Dati's pressure on our team was very real," Tristan Waleckx, the journalist who hosts the programme, told [Le Monde](#), "but the important thing is that it had no repercussions on our work."

“ | *Podcasts have the power to reach very specific audiences. It's a new area of influence that allows us to reach out to new listeners.*”

Sibyle Veil, CEO of Radio France

© AFP



# INFLUENCE, CENSORSHIP AND PLURALISM: THE MEDIA ACCORDING TO THE WORLD PRESS FREE

Are public media subject to economic or governmental pressure? Do they guarantee internal pluralism? Or ignore certain sensitive data? Based on the answers to four questions taken from the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index, RSF has created a unique map: “Influence, censorship and pluralism: the state of EU public media.” The results reveal a striking contrast between countries where public media function as fully independent institutions – such as the Netherlands, Sweden and Portugal – and those where public media are weakened or exploited – such as in Hungary and Greece, where political and economic pressures profoundly compromise public media’s democratic role.

**METHODOLOGY:** This map is based on an analysis of responses to survey questions ( 1 2 3 4 ) from the RSF World Press Freedom Index questionnaire. The data extracted covers the 27 member states of the European Union (EU) and aims to better understand how influence – particularly political and economic – on public media is perceived. The below results, published at the same time as this report, are based on data from 2024. Please note: the results presented here are not comparable to the scores in the World Press Freedom Index, which take into account other factors in order to measure the overall state of press freedom. This map, which focuses on the European Union, is based on a limited subset of questions and a specific aspect of the survey.

## PLURALISM

1

### Do public service or state media outlets cover all political views?

- Yes, completely
- Yes, somewhat
- Not really
- Not at all
- No existing public media outlets
- I don't know

In 2024, in **18 of the 27 European Union countries**, three-quarters of respondents said they believe that public or state media cover all political opinions completely or partially. Conversely, in **Hungary, Malta and Poland**, more than one in ten participants responded “not at all” or “not really.”

## INDIRECT CENSORSHIP

2

### Do public service or state media outlets ignore sensitive information regarding the government or administration that is covered by private media?

- Never, all information is published
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always
- No existing private medias
- I don't know

In five countries—**Croatia, Poland, Greece, Malta and Hungary**—a majority of respondents report frequent omissions (“often” or “always”) of sensitive information by public service media, illustrated by cases such as biased coverage of judicial reforms in **Poland** or silence on corruption scandals in **Malta**.

By contrast, in countries like the Netherlands, Ireland and Sweden, where over 90 per cent of respondents consider such omissions to be rare or non-existent, public service media also **report openly on criticism of the government**, as demonstrated by debates around COVID-19 management and migration policies.

## ECONOMIC INFLUENCE

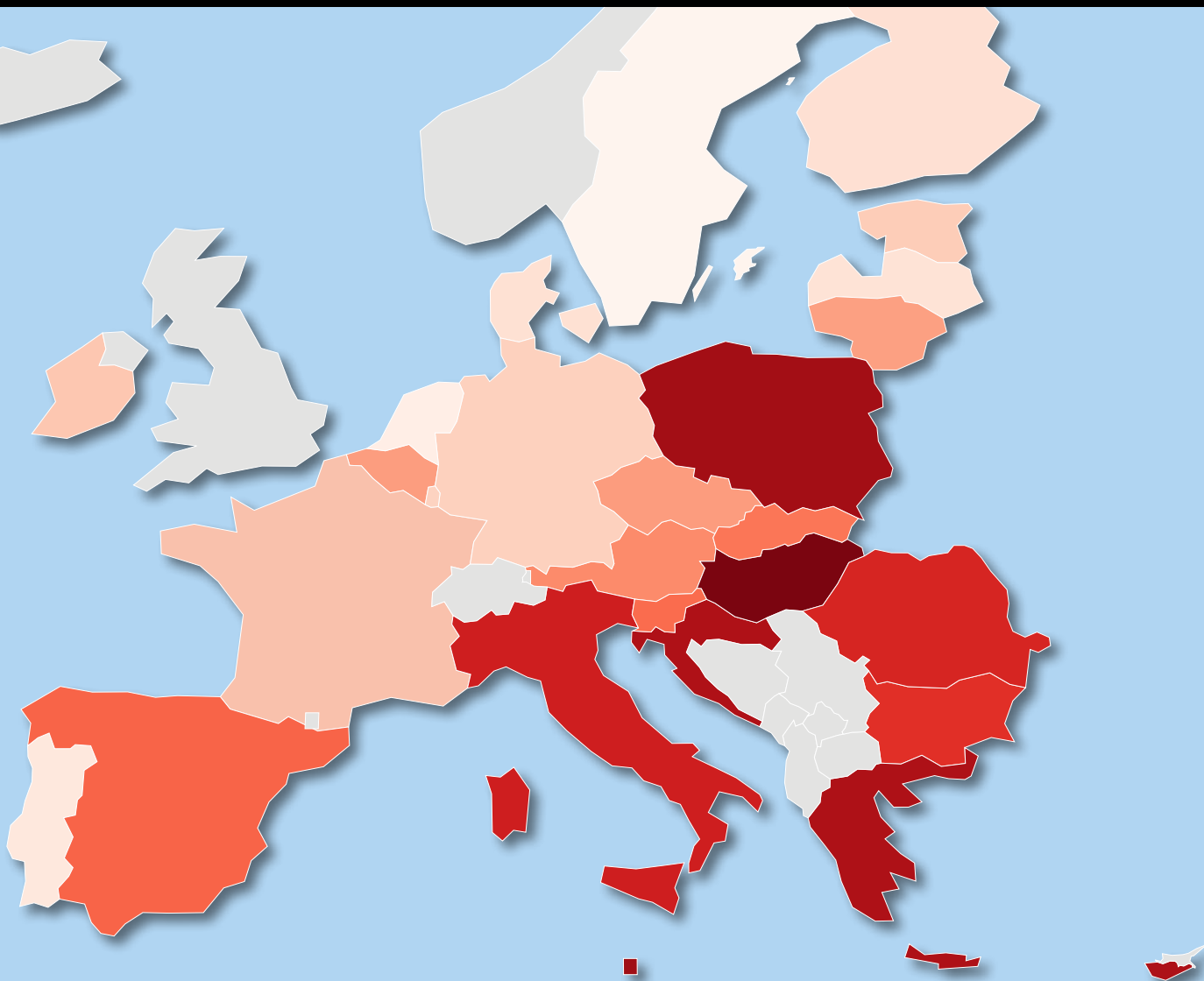
3

### What influence does economic power have over the news editor of the public service or state media?

- Very little
- Little
- Somewhat
- Fairly significant
- Significant
- I don't know

**Poland** is the only country where respondents clearly believe that public service media are more subject to economic influence than private media.

By contrast, in **Spain and Romania**, economic power is considered to exert greater influence over private media than over public service media.



## GOVERNMENT INFLUENCE

4

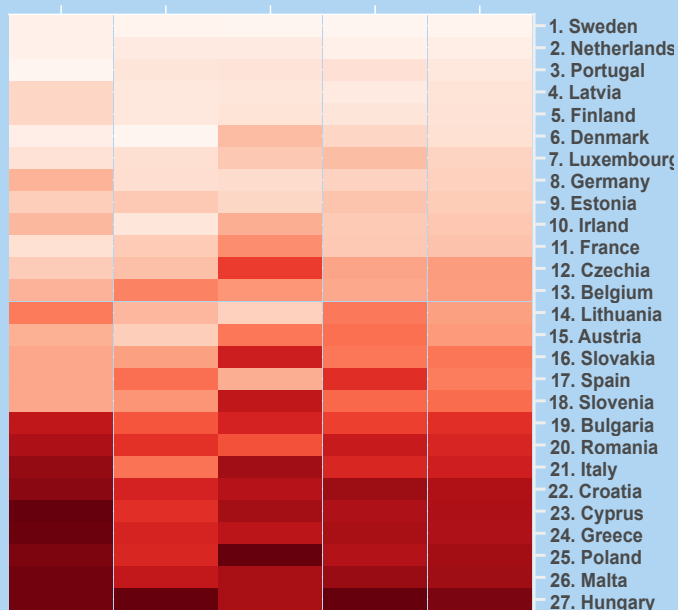
What influence does the government have on the editorial boards of public service or state media outlets?

- No influence at all
- Weak influence
- Strong influence
- Very strong influence
- I don't know

Scandinavian countries, in particular **Sweden** and **the Netherlands**, are seen as models when it comes to the separation of powers.

In contrast, **Hungary**, **Croatia**, and **Romania** appear to be in a critical situation: their governments are able to steer, censor or control the editorial lines of public media – often through appointments, funding and politically controlled regulatory bodies.

1 2 3 4 Overall scores  
(for the above map)



The darker the red, the weaker the score (from 0 to 100) and the more public media are in a worrying situation.

# 2 | PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA: POLITICAL PREY

## A/ RISING INTERFERENCE: THE RAPID SHIFT TOWARDS “ORBANISATION”

If the independence of public service media is under threat, it is because their funding and governance are unstable and, for the most part, left to the discretion of political decisions and disputes. The lack – or outright absence – of European regulation until the EMFA coupled with attempts at political instrumentalisation increases the risk of interference in Europe’s public service media. This is illustrated by the Hungarian government’s takeover of its public media, an emblematic case of a broader repressive trend. Neighbouring countries such as Slovakia and Italy are taking inspiration from this counter-model, which is a powerful vehicle for disinformation and propaganda, whether it comes from the state or abroad.

### The political takeover of public media in the EU: key dates

- 2011 | The public broadcasting group MTVA is created and paid for by the Hungarian government, one year after Viktor Orban becomes prime minister.
- 2015 | Prime Minister Matteo Renzi reforms the public media in Italy. In Poland, the government run by the Law and Justice party (PiS) signed controversial laws that politicised Polish Television.
- 2022 | **October:** Giorgia Meloni comes to power in Italy. She is the head of the Fratelli d'Italia party, which is far more aggressive against the public media than the parties of her predecessors.
- 2023 | **November:** Sigfrido Ranucci, host of the investigative television programme Report, is summoned to appear before the parliamentary committee that oversees RAI in retaliation for an episode about the President of the Senate, a member of Fratelli d'Italia, and an episode on the ex-wife of the late Silvio Berlusconi, founder of Forza d'Italia, a party in the ruling coalition.
- 2024 | **April:** The EU adopts the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), which draws on the lessons from the public media cases in Poland and Hungary, and guarantees the independence of public broadcasting.  
**June:** A new law on public broadcasting in Slovakia is enacted, which replaces Slovak Radio and Television (RTVS) with Slovak Television and Radio (STVR) in an attempt to remove the media’s leadership.  
**June:** RAI presenter Serena Bortone is suspended for disloyalty, after revealing on air that the speech by anti-fascist writer Antonio Scurati had been cancelled.

### | HUNGARIAN PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SINGLE NARRATIVE

All those who defend the independence of public broadcasting in Hungary will remember the date 22 December 2010, when the Parliament passed a law dismantling the existing public broadcasting structures and replaced them with MTVA, a state-owned conglomerate. One thousand six hundred journalists and media professionals were made redundant and replaced by employees aligned with the government, headed by Viktor Orban, who had returned to power in May 2010. In 2023, a former employee of the public television channel M1, now owned by MTVA, reported to the NGO Human Rights Watch that editors reportedly dictated to journalists what subjects to cover, what terms to use or avoid, and told them to leave if they disagreed. In short, the ruling national-conservative party, Fidesz, disseminated its messages via the public broadcaster, which showed “clear patterns of political bias” in its election-related programmes, according to the [2022 Freedom in the World Report](#) by the NGO Freedom House.

At the same time, Hungary's national news agency MTI, owned by the government through MTVA, gradually became a mouthpiece for the Fidesz party, while offering its content to the private media free of charge. "The pressure has been going on for many months, years. They have been censoring, they have been hiding materials, they have been banning topics. We used to compete with the big news agencies, but the destruction has become so great that we are looking less and less like a news agency," a former MTI employee lamented to [the Hungarian news website Telex in 2021](#). Since then, Hungarian public media has had no editorial independence, especially on government-related issues. When these outlets are not parroting the prime minister's point of view, they spread narratives from the Kremlin, Viktor Orban's great geopolitical ally. This became evident in February 2022 with the start of the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, described by MTI as a "military operation." Furthermore, the [MTVA](#) website considers the Russian state media Sputnik to be a news medium in its own right, even though it has been suspended by the Council of the European Union since March 2022.

This systematic control over information is reinforced by the fact that the regulatory body, the National Media and Communications Authority (NMHH), is headed by a close associate of Viktor Orban. Thanks to political manoeuvring

“ *They have been censoring, they have been hiding materials, they have been banning topics.* ”

and media buyouts by oligarchs close to Fidesz, the Prime Minister's faction now controls almost 80 percent of the political information market, according to the independent media watchdog [Mérték](#). A month after the 2022 parliamentary elections, in which Fidesz won a crushing majority for the fourth time in a row, the well-known weekly 168 Óra, which often criticised the government, went bankrupt for lack of sustainable funding. Political control is so constant, and the system of control so infallible, that the government no longer even needs to cancel programmes or sack critical journalists. Public broadcasting has undeniably become a state-owned medium.

#### RSF SURVEY QUESTION

##### ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY CASES OF JOURNALISTS WHO RESIGNED AFTER AN ACT OF INTERFERENCE?

**31% of respondents (nine out of 29)** knew of a case in which a journalist from a public media outlet resigned after an act of interference (Greece, Italy, Czechia, Slovakia, Malta, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Finland and France).

**14% of respondents (four out of 29)** are aware of a case of a journalist who was suspended after an act of interference (Germany, Austria, Croatia, Denmark).

**10% of respondents (three out of 29)** are aware of a case of a journalist who censored themselves after an act of interference (Poland, Belgium, Lithuania).

#### THE REORGANISATION AND POLITICAL TAKEOVER OF SLOVAK PUBLIC MEDIA

Slovak public broadcasting is suffering a similar fate to its Hungarian counterpart. The new law on public broadcasting, adopted in June 2024 under a fast-track procedure launched by Robert Fico's government, is part of a push to systematically weaken journalists' right to inform and citizens' right to reliable information. Shortly before the vote, the despairing presenters, cameramen and technicians of the public broadcaster RTVS declared a day of mourning to protest its approval. In the end, RTVS was replaced by a new entity, STVR, and the government openly announced its intention to change its management and editorial line. Robert Fico has followed the example of his Hungarian neighbour in his attempts to dismantle Slovakia's public service media: refusing to increase its budget, sacking the director of RTVS, introducing new governance, firing journalists critical of the government, etc. "Instead of RTVS, they want TV Slovan [an online disinformation channel owned by the Minister of Culture Martina Simkovicova]; instead of freedom, they want censorship. [...] The attack on RTVS was expected. [...] Autocrats' manuals put control of the media

– especially the public media – at the top of the list of measures to take,” [summed up](#) writer Matúš Kostolný in the independent Slovak newspaper Dennik N. A particularly glaring example of the outlet’s transition into a propaganda organ was when the Secretary General of the Ministry of Culture, flat-earther Lukas Machala, was appointed vice-president of STVR’s supervisory body by the very ministry he helps lead.

“*Instead of RTVS, they want TV Slovan. Instead of freedom, they want censorship.*”

The new law thus openly mocks EU requirements, for example those set out in the [2022 Rule of Law Report](#), which calls on the authorities to “strengthen the rules and mechanisms to enhance the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media.” At the beginning of 2024, Robert Fico and his allies in power demanded the departure of RTVS’ director general before the end of his term of office, and threatened to reorganise the outlet after cutting its funding by 30 percent. So how will Slovakia manage to comply with European legislation on media freedom, including [Article 5](#), which imposes obligations on the editorial and functional independence of public service media?

### **| ITALIAN PUBLIC BROADCASTING: FROM “MAMA RAI” TO “TELE MELONI”**

Changes and cuts to programming, strategically appointing leaders – while Italy’s governments over the past ten years have always tried to influence the public broadcaster RAI (Radiotelevisione italiana), Giorgia Meloni’s government, in power since October 2022, is the most aggressive yet.

In Italy, the threat of a political takeover of the public service media does not come from direct reforms but the exploitation of loopholes in legislation. RAI journalists have denounced a marked increase in pressure from the company’s management since the far-right government came to power, leading to significant self-censorship and the erasure of critical voices.

In May 2024, a RAI union [called for](#) a 24-hour walkout, a rare event for the group, to protest “the widespread control of news spaces by politics.” Their anger was sparked by the censorship of anti-fascist intellectual Antonio Scurati, whose appearance on one of the group’s channels was abruptly cancelled. The programme’s presenter, Serena Bortone, who revealed the affair on air, was suspended for six days at the end of June 2024 for disloyalty. RAI journalists also decried Giorgia Meloni’s attack on the investigative programme Report – which she accused of “lynching [the Albanian prime minister] for trying to help our nation” during a public meeting in April 2024 – and the general efforts to reduce RAI to a government megaphone.

In November 2023, Report host Sigfrido Ranucci was summoned to appear before a RAI parliamentary oversight committee in retaliation for two episodes, one about the president of the Senate, a member of Fratelli d’Italia, and the other about the ex-wife of the late Silvio Berlusconi, founder of Forza d’Italia, a party belonging to the ruling coalition.

Under pressure, RAI complied. One RAI journalist, who wishes to remain anonymous, told RSF: “Giorgia Meloni was the main guest on a programme I was taking part in, after several weeks of silence about a serious case involving a powerful Libyan politician, Al-Masri. The International Criminal Court had issued an arrest warrant for him, and he was supposed to be imprisoned. He was intercepted, arrested and then released by the government, which allowed him to return to Libya. No one was able to question Meloni about this. The presenter of the programme greeted her warmly and was excessively friendly, and we were only able to ask her insignificant questions. No one mentioned the Libyan affair – she had been assured in advance that this subject would not be raised.”

International news coverage seems to be hand-picked at the request of the Italian government. As another The journalist explained to RSF: “We received instructions from our management not to talk negatively about Donald Trump. Several of us did not follow this instruction.” What are the consequences of not obeying orders from leadership? Some journalists sidelined from international coverage. “Our weekly meetings with leadership then ceased, and proposed stories on international news were ignored.”

“ *RAI has become a big market where politicians trade influence, reputation, jobs, salaries, contracts for production companies. And at the same time, it’s a public service...*”

A RAI executive [told](#) Le Monde in June 2024, speaking under condition of anonymity,

Giorgia Meloni has placed a number of loyal fellows at the head of the group to manage this political arena. One of them, Giampaolo Rossi, a great admirer of Vladimir Putin, Viktor Orban and Donald Trump, was appointed director general of RAI in 2023. Meanwhile, the very strategic position of director of daytime programming has been entrusted to Angelo Mellone, a writer and former member of the neo-fascist youth movement.

The days of Mamma RAI may be over. Created in 1954, this reliable, unifying authority figure played a fundamental role as an intermediary between the people and the elites, and helped forge national unity in Italy – until the 1970s, when writer and film-maker Pier Paolo Pasolini accused it of committing “cultural genocide” by “erasing” the country’s many local identities. Today, its opponents are talking about the advent of a “Tele Meloni.”

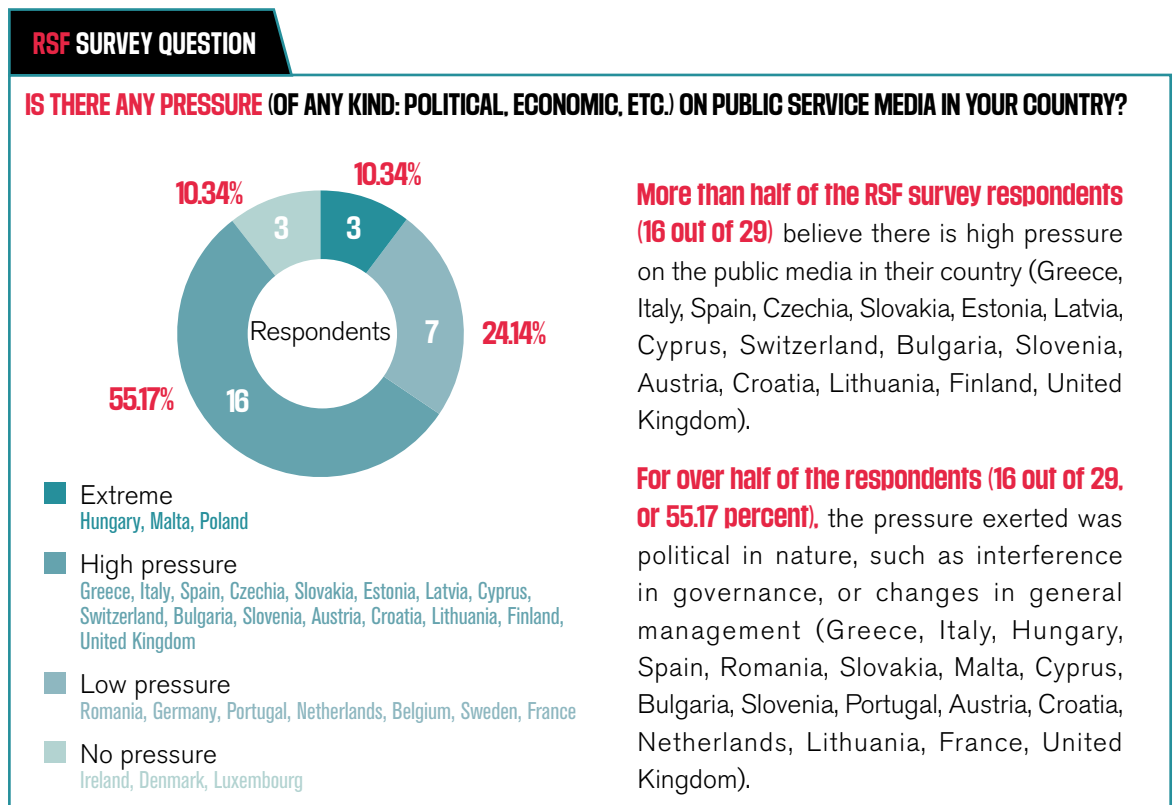
The RAI tower in Milan / © Miguel Medina/AFP



## B/ PUBLIC BROADCASTING: A SINGULAR POLITICAL TOOL

Public service media are recognised by the EU as entities that must have guaranteed editorial independence in accordance with the EMFA. Because of this, they are best placed to combat disinformation and political manipulation. Yet, their powerful ability to influence public debate makes them susceptible to political and economic interference.

### THE RISKS OF PROPAGANDA AND POLITICAL INSTRUMENTALISATION



Paradoxically, public service media can easily be hijacked and politically exploited because they are, by their very nature, the most reliable medium for getting messages across. The most targeted form of public service media is international broadcasting. In 2022 in France, for example, President Emmanuel Macron, told the country's ambassadors: "We must make much better use of the France Médias Monde network, which is absolutely key and must be a strength for us." The journalist societies of the international public broadcasters Radio France Internationale (RFI) and the television channel France 24, both part of the France Médias Monde network, responded in a [joint statement](#): "No, Mr. Macron, France Médias Monde (FMM) is not the mouthpiece of the Élysée Palace [...]. Our journalists are in no way and will never be a tool at the service of your communication and your politics. FMM's stations are not 'state media.'"

**“ We will never give up an ounce of our independence under any circumstances whatsoever. We are not journalists ‘to be used.’ That is our red line.”**

Joint press release from the sociétés des journalistes of FRI and France 24

In Belgium, recent political interference in the Flemish broadcaster VRT (Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie) is also a cause for concern. In spring 2024, a series of incidents plunged the group into a serious crisis, jeopardising its reputation. In one instance, leadership decided to broadcast a series of programmes celebrating Flemish innovation called Knappe Koppen. Yet according to an [investigation](#) by the Belgian newspaper De Standaard, VRT staff received this request from the director following an agreement with the cabinet of Minister-President Jan Jambon, which provided the funding for this programming. When contacted, VRT leadership assured De Standaard that the name of the programme's name and concept had been created internally, and that its content would be chosen by the broadcaster alone, in an independent manner. Jan Jambon's spokesperson gave a similar response. For De Standaard editor-in-chief Karel Verhoeven, the Knappe Koppen scandal was a new stage in the "institutional financing" of VRT, which has been placed "in the humiliating position of a government spokesperson."

Belgium's French-language broadcaster, RTBF, appears to be suffering a similar fate. In May 2025, the Belgian newspaper Moustique [reported](#) that Georges-Louis Bouchez, president of the Mouvement Réformateur party, was regularly calling RTBF journalists. "He applies pressure through personal insults, calling journalists – many of whom don't even have work contracts – to tell them that what they wrote about him is unacceptable. At times, it borders on harassment," RTBF journalist Fabrice Gérard told Moustique. "It's really impressive, he has everyone's number," another journalist for the broadcaster told Moustique under the condition of anonymity. A similar case occurred in Finland in 2016. In a scandal known as "Sipilagate", the centrist Prime Minister, Juha Sipilä, pressured journalists from the Finnish public broadcasting group Yle after the publication of an investigation into the links between the state-owned company Terrafame and one of its subcontractors, the company Katera Steel. After discovering that Terrafame had just signed a contract with Katera Steel, a company owned by members of the Prime Minister's family, journalist Salla Vuorikoski wrote an article on the potential conflicts of interest. An hour after publication, the journalist received angry emails from the prime minister. The outlet's editor-in-chief refused to talk about the incident publicly, and a television presenter who dared to mention it on air was given a warning and threatened with dismissal.

A radical form of this shift has been observed in Hungary. As public broadcasting is relatively trusted within the EU, the propaganda speeches disseminated via Hungarian public media are particularly effective – and problematic. In May 2024, Former Hungarian public television journalist Balazs Nagy Navarro explained the situation to [Franceinfo](#): "The manipulation of information exists in France – it exists everywhere [...]. But here we've reached a real level of manipulation on public service television. This kind of direct falsification of information exists in very few countries except dictatorships." In fact, the president of the media council that oversees MTVA – the person who appoints the leadership of the public broadcaster – is elected by the government and the parliamentary majority.

In sum, when it comes to attempts at disseminating political communication via public broadcasting, two trends emerge: the public media is either dismantled – which often involves privatisation under the pretext of budgetary savings, and the media is then purchased by someone close to the authorities – or it is infiltrated, without any apparent change to the structure of the media.

“ *The manipulation of information exists in France – it exists everywhere.* ”

## THE DECEPTIVE REFORMS TIGHTENING CONTROL OVER PUBLIC MEDIA

Implementing repressive legislative reforms under the pretext of optimising budgets and modernising public service media is now commonplace in several EU countries — a false pretext that leads to genuine control over public broadcasters. Enacted under the guise of improving the media machine or responding to frequent allegations of insufficient objectivity, these reforms actually weaken public media's independence and strengthen the executive branch's control over them. This trend — in several member states such as Slovakia and, until recently, Poland — already jeopardising the production and broadcasting of information from many independent, diverse sources within the EU.

The Slovak Prime Minister declared that the official reason for restructuring the country's public broadcasting was its lack of objectivity — a claim he made during the 2024 reform without providing any evidence. "RTVS cannot be objective because it's in permanent conflict with the Slovak government," he [said](#). Unofficially, the public media RTVS was transformed into a state media, STVR. It is telling that several members of the outlet's new supervisory body, the STVR Council, have conflicts of interest and that its vice-president Lukas Machaj — who is also Secretary General at the Ministry of Culture — supports conspiracy theories and has publicly doubted that the Earth is round. Last May, the election of the new director general of public broadcasting by the STVR Council highlighted the outlet's politicisation. Although STVR Council meetings are legally required to be held in public, the election was conducted behind closed doors. What's more, the proposals of the five candidates were kept confidential and not discussed by the STVR Council before the vote. This opaque procedure resulted in the politicised election of Martina Flasikova, the co-owner of the pro-government news website eReport, which she inherited from her father, who is also the co-founder of Prime Minister Robert Fico's party, Direction – Social Democracy (Smer-SD).

“ *The foundations of public media were destroyed. They were brutally politicised.* ”

Up until December 2023, Poland was also notorious for the gradual internal undermining of its public service media. Under the leadership of PiS, “the foundations of public media were destroyed. They were brutally politicised,” [stated Dorota Nygren](#), a media specialist with the Polityka Insight think tank and RSF correspondent in Poland. “Reforming” public service media was one of the first initiatives introduced by the ultraconservative PiS government. Arguing that the media was not fulfilling its role as a public service, the government decided to restructure it. Whereas they had previously operated as commercial companies controlled by the state, they now became national cultural institutions sponsored by a National Media Council (Rada Mediow Narodowych). Until 2023, hundreds of journalists in Poland's public broadcasting system were subject to layoffs, voluntary redundancies and demotions, not to mention the recruitment of pro-regime journalists [whose professionalism was of little importance](#). Political meddling in editorial policy, which took the shape of changing or cancelling programmes, was frequent and new programmes favourable to government policy were prioritised. For example, the television programme by the famous Polish journalist Tomasz Lis, entitled Tomasz Lis na ywo, was axed in 2016. The official reason given for ending the show was a change in the channel's programming strategy and a decision to refresh the television programming. In practice, many commentators felt that the decision was linked to politics as Tomasz Lis, well-known for his criticism of the government, had become a controversial figure in the eyes of the authorities. “The propaganda and language of hate were so strong in the public media that [since Donald Tusk's government came to power] it's a bit like the calm after the storm,” Dorota Nygren told the French daily Le Monde in August 2024. Although Poland's new government seems to be heading in the right direction, there is still a long way to go before public service media are fully independent of any political influence.

## Media pluralism, a cornerstone of independence

The battle for press freedom has been waged in Europe since the 18th century and left its mark on the history of journalism, but when it comes to media pluralism, there is real room for improvement. Media pluralism is vital, as it provides robust protection for a healthy public debate in the European media landscape. The concept comes from political philosophy, specifically the notion that the expression of divergent ideas and competing interests is an important condition for democracy, as it contributes to informed decision-making, both individually and collectively. For this reason, media pluralism should be seen as a key to ensuring the existence of high-quality information from independent sources, and seen as a guarantee of the protection of each individual's freedom of opinion. It is therefore essential that this notion be included – and taken into serious account – in discussions on European and national broadcasting regulations.

The European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) addresses **external pluralism** in Article 3, stating citizens' have a right to access to many different reliable sources of information, meaning a variety of media outlets. It addresses **internal pluralism** in Article 5.1, requiring EU member states to ensure that public service media provide a diverse range of information and opinions in an impartial manner. Many European countries have arrangements for monitoring internal pluralism, and that this is already being carried out for a large number of European public service media as, by their very nature, they have obligations around transparency – especially concerning funding and independence – and internal pluralism.

### THE CHALLENGES TO MEDIA PLURALISM

Internal pluralism, enshrined in Article 5 of the EMFA, obliges EU member states to ensure that public service media “provide in an impartial manner a plurality of information and opinions to their audiences.” This respect of both external and internal pluralism (see box above) and their implementation is one of the keys to restoring public trust in the media. Yet it is a real challenge, as public service media must ensure that a diverse array of voices are given air time, even though their budget and governance are dependent on the government in power.

In Hungary, Italy and, until recently, Poland, both internal and external pluralism have been severely weakened. During its eight years in power in Poland, the PiS government openly declared that transforming the public media into right-wing platforms was necessary to guarantee pluralism. The PiS also felt that transforming the public broadcaster was in line with media law. “Public media has a duty to present the Polish national interest [...]. The Polish national interest is to support the Polish government,” National Media Council president Krzysztof Czapanski told Radio ZET on 15 June 2018. Following the 2020 presidential elections in Poland, a special mission [report](#) by the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) stated that:

“ Throughout the campaign, *Telewizja Polska (TVP)* failed in its legal obligation to provide balanced and impartial coverage. Instead, it served as a campaign vehicle for the incumbent president and often portrayed his main opponent as a threat to Polish national values and interests. Some reports were accused of xenophobic and anti-Semitic undertones.”

In June 2020, as Poles were preparing to elect their president, the public broadcaster Telewizja Polska (TVP) [openly betrayed](#) its public service remit by acting as a virtually exclusive mouthpiece for the president and the government. According to a 2020 [report](#) by the Press-Service Monitoring Mediom agency, TVP's main news programme, Wiadomości, presented the head of state in a positive light 97 percent of the time, and a neutral light 3 percent of the time, throughout the presidential campaign. His opponent, Rafal Trzaskowski – already under-represented (he appeared on air 30 percent less often than his opponent) – was negatively presented in 87 percent of cases, and was neutrally presented in 13 percent of cases.

The obligation for internal pluralism within public service media can also be instrumentalised and used as an argument to justify political interference. In the previously mentioned Scurati affair, pluralism was used as a pretext when RAI was ordered to cancel a speech by writer Antonio Scurati criticising Giorgia Meloni for refusing to call herself an anti-fascist, because no one on the right-wing of the political spectrum was present to counter Antonio Scurati's discourse. The speech, which was supposed to be read during the programme Chesarà... on the channel RAI 3, was intended to commemorate 25 April 1945, the date of Italy's liberation from the Nazi occupiers and their allies in Benito Mussolini's regime. Cancelled for "editorial reasons" according to internal documents published in the [Italian press](#), Antonio Scurati's speech sought to condemn the ruling right party's inability to adhere to the anti-fascist foundation on which the Italian Republic was founded. RAI's journalists' union, Usigrai, [considered](#) this cancellation "the umpteenth sign that RAI is countering any cultural expression undesirable to those in power." The Scurati affair is ultimately characteristic of the stranglehold that is squeezing the RAI group's internal and external pluralism. As Bruno Vespa, the long-standing presenter of the programme Porta a porta, [summed up](#) the affair: "Parliament is the editor-in-chief of the RAI and the majority has always exerted its influence on nominations: the RAI has always been culturally conditioned by the left, even during the Berlusconi era. For the first time, a government managed to break through the glass ceiling. There is simply no more pluralism."

In other cases, the obligation for pluralism in public service media is completely ignored. This regularly occurs on Bulgarian National Television (BNT) channels. Notably, on the eve of the July 2021 parliamentary elections, BNT went so far as to violate its legal obligation to provide balanced coverage of the parties contesting the election. According to an [OSCE report](#), BNT devoted a disproportionate amount of airtime to the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) party, in power at the time, offering mainly positive coverage, while marginalising the other political candidates.

In contrast, it seems pluralism is better preserved when there is less political interference. Germany, where public broadcasting systems are organised in a way that ensures diversity of opinion, is a good example. German legislation is designed to prevent media companies from predominating public opinion and to guarantee diversity of opinion. The rules governing ownership of the broadcast media are defined in an agreement between the Länder, Germany's federal states, and the media, an accord known as Medienstaatsvertrag, or the Interstate Media Treaty. However, the far-right AfD party, the country's second largest political force, wants to put an end to the treaty and abolish the public broadcasting service, accusing it of propaganda and indoctrination.

In France, in November 2021, RSF asked ARCOM, France's broadcasting and digital communication regulator, to warn the television channel CNews that it was not complying with the truthfulness, independence and pluralism requirements legally imposed on the country's news broadcast media. After ARCOM refused to respond favorably to this request, RSF filed an appeal with the Council of State. On 13 February 2024, the French Council of State [overruled](#) ARCOM's refusal to take action against CNews, and forced the broadcasting regulator to review its control of on-air independence and pluralism. As a result, the public broadcasters Radio France and France Télévisions immediately increased their transparency around these issues.

## The media “cordon sanitaire” in French-speaking Belgium

The media “cordon sanitaire,” which literally translates to “quarantine zone” is a policy of no longer giving live airtime to representatives of the extreme right that was introduced at RTBF in the early 1990s. During discussions among the channel’s board of directors, “this decision went through like a knife through butter,” Michel Henrion, who was one of the vice-presidents at the time, [told](#) the *Revue des médias* of the Institut national de l’audiovisuel français (INA) in January 2025. Within the editorial team, “the cordon sanitaire did not give rise to any debate,” recalled journalist Yves Thiran in the same INA article. Yet in 1994, the system sparked controversy: the President of the Front National (FN), Daniel Féret, took RTBF to court to challenge his exclusion from election debates, and the Brussels Court of First Instance ruled in his favour. In response, the “cordon sanitaire” was hardened, using the forms of discrimination laid out in the law against racism and xenophobia to make sure that no one from any political party who espoused such rhetoric would have air time. “It is not normal that people

who do not respect democratic values should be able to express themselves on public service media,” Simon-Pierre De Coster, legal adviser to the RTBF’s general manager at the time, told INA. In 1999, a decision by the Supreme Court validated the legality of the “cordon sanitaire.” Then, the Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel (CSA), the broadcast regulator, recommended that private radio and television stations align themselves with public service practice. In 2012, the government of the French Community of Belgium turned this recommendation into an obligation for all broadcast media, private and public. Originally designed to combat the extreme right, the “cordon sanitaire” was later applied to the fundamentalist Islam party, as its political agenda was considered to have [violated](#) the principle of equality between women and men. Today, the term “cordon sanitaire” has been replaced by “social and democratic responsibility.” As RTBF news director Jean-Pierre Jacquemin said in the INA article, “This is really what’s at stake: we are aware of our responsibility in shaping the public debate.”



# 3 | PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA: A EUROPEAN AWAKENING

## A/ EUROPEAN PROGRESS AND LOCAL SUCCESS: STRENGTHENING PUBLIC MEDIA

At a time when widespread interference and pressure are affecting public service media across the EU, recent advancements—notably regulatory initiatives—are prompting member states to propose new legislative frameworks for public service media operations. Examples of best practice, particularly in the form of alliances, show the need for a re-evaluation of the broader public media landscape within and across the EU.

### | EUROPEAN ALLIANCES

Beyond the inspiring initiatives taking place at the national level, the EU alliances forged in recent years concerning the public service media sector have created interesting collaborations. The EBU is a pioneer in this field: in 2021 it launched a new collaborative news service called [A European Perspective](#), giving the public access to trustworthy content using innovative digital tools to overcome language barriers, sharing content from all over Europe. By bringing together ten European public service broadcasting groups (Belgian, Finnish, French, German, Irish, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swiss – as well as the Franco-German channel ARTE), the project aims to be a “guarantee of reliability and integrity.”

These types of alliances are crucial in the fight against disinformation. The fact-checking network [Spotlight](#), launched by the EBU in April 2025, is, for example, designed to act as a “powerful collective defence against misinformation,” providing public service media across the EU with the tools to counter disinformation.

“ *Public service media have a unique responsibility to be a haven of truth in a sea of false information and uncertainty. But we cannot tackle these challenges alone. We need ongoing training, effective tools, and global collaboration in order to identify and respond to local threats.* ”

Florent Latrive, Deputy Director of News at Radio France,  
one of Spotlight's media partners.

## **| CURRENT LEGISLATION: IS THE EU RESCUING PUBLIC MEDIA?**

European institutions monitor the state of public service media. The 2024 EU Rule of Law [report](#) highlighted concerns about the lack of independent governance in several member states – concerns that had been previously expressed and still remain unresolved in Romania, Malta and Hungary.

The implementation of the EMFA will therefore be closely watched and will inevitably at times come head-to-head with aforementioned national issues. It is also important to note there is a strong lack of awareness about the EMFA, not only in the media but also among the political parties represented in European Parliament.

## **| INSPIRING EXAMPLES**

Some member states did not wait for the EMFA to come into force before structuring solid guarantees of independence. The public media in some countries can serve as inspiring examples for the rest of the EU due to the inventiveness and effectiveness of the mechanisms that defend their independence, be they financial or editorial.

In Portugal, an independent council for the public broadcaster, RTP, [was created in 2014](#). As a result, the government can no longer appoint the members of RTP's board of directors, helping give RTP greater autonomy from political power.

Germany has one of the best networks of public television channels and radio stations, which are backed by a system managed at different levels by nine regional public broadcasters (the public media being under the jurisdiction of the Länder). Germany's public media are funded by a nationwide licence fee paid directly by households, which is the highest in the EU in absolute terms and per capita. The amount (18.36 EUR per month) is regularly reassessed in a three-stage process. First, the public media submit their requirements to the Commission for Determining the Financial Requirements of Broadcasters (KEF), which then assesses if the amounts requested are appropriate. The KEF then sends a new proposal to the governments and parliaments of the Länder, which must agree on the new level of the licence fee. Interestingly, the KEF's proposal is binding, meaning the Länder cannot deviate too far from it unless they can provide robust justification. While each of the nine public broadcasters operate in different ways, they share a number of guarantees, such as boards of directors made up of representatives of civil society and a minority of representatives of the Länder, which may not exceed one third.

As previously mentioned, Czechia has the strongest public service media among the former Eastern Bloc countries, and an example for Europe's post-communist countries to follow. The increase in the licence fee and its indexation to inflation, adopted by Parliament in April 2025, reinforces the guarantees of independence consolidated in 2022 with the [reform](#) to the law on public broadcasting. The procedure for appointing members of the Czech Television and Radio Councils (the oversight bodies of the two public broadcasters) has also been revised. The Chamber of Deputies used to elect all of these members but now can only elect two-thirds, while the remaining one-third are elected by the Senate, a system that helps reduce the influence of the ruling majority. Another interesting mechanism: candidates for the Councils can only be nominated by civil society organisations. The 2022 reform strengthened this system by stipulating that civil society organisations needed to exist for a minimum period of time in order to nominate candidates, in order to prevent these organisations being created in an ad-hoc manner with the sole purpose of proposing candidates. Lastly, this law removed the Chamber of Deputies' power to dismiss the all members of the oversight Councils in one fell swoop in the event both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies fail to approve the annual report.

## JTI-certified public broadcasters in Europe: a mechanism for identifying reliable information

At a time when mistrust of the media is growing and journalistic information is in direct competition with all other types of content, the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI), a certification launched by RSF in 2019, is a solution for safeguarding the right to reliable information. This international professional standard assesses newsrooms' methods of producing reliable information – such as the guidelines in the editorial charter, how errors are corrected, transparency around their sources of revenue – without assessing the content produced. The JTI certificate obliges outlets to adhere to stringent ethical standards while respecting the outlet's editorial independence. It signals to audiences, advertising agencies, donors and online platforms that the outlet is a credible source, and search engines can give JTI-certified outlets preferential treatment in their algorithms, creating more advertising revenue for reliable media.

To be JTI certified, each media outlet must carry out a self-assessment of over 100 criteria relating to transparency and editorial processes before undergoing an external audit by an independent auditor. Public service media outlets must describe their public service mission and the law their existence is based on. They must explain the structure of their governance, including the role of all relevant governance bodies (e.g. regulatory and supervisory boards or committees, the role of the government or parliament). They must describe how its income is generated and detail how much comes from public funds. They must also declare whether their internal and external governance measures guarantee its editorial independence.

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) is one of the founding members of the JTI standard. Among the over 2,000 media outlets that have engaged in the JTI certification process worldwide, 11 public broadcasting groups in eight countries have obtained JTI certification:



RSF has also identified six public service media in six European countries that have started the process but have, so far, been unable to achieve JTI certification due to reasons such as attempted political interference, shortcomings in institutional governance, and lack of financial and human resources.

Other safeguards exist to guard against state control, charters being primary among them. At the international public broadcaster France Médias Monde, journalists sign a [code of ethics](#) that reiterates and guarantees “essential principles” and “values” such as independence, transparency, internal pluralism, trustworthy reporting, etc. In other words, the state has no right to control editorial content.

## **B/ TOWARDS STRONG, INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC MEDIA**

**Disinformation is flourishing, and the role public broadcasting plays in disseminating reliable information worldwide is particularly vital. In the face of national and international crises, groups such as France Médias Monde, Deutsche Welle and the BBC World Service are instruments of democratic resistance. Their mission centres on three major factors: their specific role, their geopolitical reach and their necessary independence.**

### **| THE SINGULAR ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING**

By virtue of their size and influence, several external public service media groups stand out in Europe, such as Deutsche Welle in Germany, France Médias Monde in France, and the BBC World Service in the UK. Public service broadcasting plays a vital role in providing reliable information to viewers, listeners, and internet users around the world, particularly in times of crisis when the risks of misinformation are greatly increased.

In 2020, the French Senate’s Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and the Armed Forces, [emphasised](#) the essential role played by international public broadcasting in the global health crisis, “thanks to the editorial independence of the operators.” It noted that, in times of crisis, it is even more important for these outlets “to deliver reliable, credible and certified information throughout the world, drawing on the best sources and relaying the messages of institutions recognised internationally for their expertise.” They also play a vital role in the fight against disinformation and France Médias Monde, for example, has been ramping up its efforts against “fake news” for several years, through fact-checking programmes such as the Les Observateurs on France 24, and Les Dessous de l’Infox on RFI.

These channels are not specifically aimed at citizens living abroad. Rather, the programmes are designed to act as links to the home country’s culture and provide “free, independent, verified and balanced<sup>2</sup>” information in multiple languages. The France Médias Monde group broadcasts content in 21 languages, an effective way of reaching listeners abroad – although the approach comes with risks. On 3 August 2023, a week after overthrowing the elected president in Niger, [the junta blocked](#) the signals of RFI and France 24, deliberately violating many people’s right to media pluralism. In 2022, several France Médias Monde channels were also suspended in Mali and Russia.

### **| THE GEOPOLITICAL STAKES**

As with all public service media, the method and amount of funding for international broadcasting is a pillar of its independence. This can effect its reach: the abolition of the license fee in France had consequences for French public media in Germany, where “the local regulator (MABB) found that the guarantees of RFI’s independence from the State would no longer be ensured due to the budgetary arrangement initially proposed by the government, thereby threatening the renewal of RFI’s FM frequency, which RFI has held since 1994,” as France Médias Monde CEO Marie-Christine Saragosse [told](#) the National Assembly’s Committee on Cultural Affairs and Education in 2023. The MABB Media Council finally [reallocated](#) RFI’s frequency in October 2023.

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<sup>2</sup> 2022 report on the implementation of France Médias Monde’s contract on objectives and means.

The disastrous decision made by President Donald Trump's administration to [dismantle](#) the United States Global Media Agency (USAGM) – the independent government agency that distributes funding to international public broadcasters like Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) and Radio Free Asia (RFA) – was an enormous blow to the production and broadcasting of independent information worldwide. The dangerous cuts to RFE/RL, whose main newsroom is in Prague, is particularly worrying for Europe. At a time when there is a worldwide rise in authoritarian regimes, media manipulation and disinformation campaigns, RFE/RL – a non-profit organisation, a non-profit organisation and an editorially independent entity that is separate from the federal administration – informs nearly 50 million people across Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East every week.

In a world where regimes such as Russia and China are ramping up efforts to destabilise European states through disinformation, RFE/RL wields a peaceful but powerful weapon: journalism. Its employees, who are often exposed to direct threats, cover strategic territories such as Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Balkans and even Iran. Through rigorous investigation and on-the-ground reporting, they help to counter false narratives, expose human rights abuses, and strengthen democratic resilience in regions that are key to a harmonious Europe.

International news services are also under pressure in other countries. “In recent years, several liberal democracies have reconsidered or reduced funding to public service media, in particular foreign-facing media,” Colin

“ *In recent years, several liberal democracies have reconsidered or reduced funding to public service media.*”

Porlezza, director of the Institute of Media and Journalism at the Università della Svizzera italiana, [told](#) the public media Swissinfo. This is what the BBC World Service, the international service of the UK broadcaster, has been facing for the past fifteen years, undergoing drastic cuts. In January 2025, it announced that it was cutting 130 jobs as part of a plan to reduce its budget by 6 million GBP (around 7 million EUR).

“An unstable world requires more defence, but also more impartial, accurate and freely accessible journalism. This is absolutely essential,” stressed Jonathan Munro, Director of the BBC World Service, in an article by [Le Monde](#). In this sense, he added, the BBC “is part of a battle for global security and stability.” He then came to the fierce information battle the fierce information battle with Russia and China:

“ *If we don't increase the World Service's financial envelope over the next two, three or four years, we risk falling irreversibly behind the state actors who are developing very quickly.*”

Various models of public service media can guarantee both strong editorial independence and internal pluralism. The aim here is not to select one in particular, but to draw from existing best practices so that national legislation can be adjusted, particularly by 8 August 2025, when Article 5 of the EMFA comes into force. RSF is therefore issuing 12 main recommendations to the European Union, member states and public service media.

**1/ Ensure strong guarantees for independence in the appointment process for public service media leadership, to reduce political influence on the governance of public service media.**

Setting up a “firewall” between political oversight (a limited amount of which is necessary to hold public media accountable) and the independence of public media (which is necessary for the public interest) could take various forms:

- > an electoral college (organised as a supervisory board) elected by parliament;
- > an electoral college directly or indirectly elected by several bodies (two chambers of parliament, the president, the government);
- > civil society and those who represent journalists from public media outlets participating in the election of members of the electoral college;
- > diversity in the term lengths of electoral college members (no overlapping mandates);
- > electing the electoral college based on candidates’ expertise and independence from public influence in a transparent process (public hearings).

Although political influence, particularly via parliament, cannot be wholly eliminated as public service media are accountable to the citizens who fund them, this influence must be strictly limited to a dialogue between the legislative branch and public service media, without any intervention from the executive branch.

**2/ Ensure that, as part of their regular public hearings before parliament, public service media are held accountable for complying with their obligations in terms of independence, the ethical treatment of information and internal pluralism, without these obligations being exploited for political purposes that undermine their independence.**

**3/ Establish obligations concerning the transparency of editorial practices**, for example, by committing to the RSF Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI) certification, **and encourage public service media to adhere to the most ambitious international standards on journalistic ethics and independence**, such as the Paris Charter on Artificial Intelligence and Journalism, also developed by RSF.

**4/ Appoint an administrator to ensure independence and prevent conflicts of interest.** The law could require the board of directors to appoint an independent administrator to monitor issues concerning editorial independence and conflicts of interest.

**5/ Develop a common European culture for assessing internal pluralism.** Although the EU obliges member states to ensure their public broadcasters uphold internal pluralism, the specific measures used to assess internal pluralism are up to individual member states. It is necessary to move towards a common framework for assessing internal pluralism, which would reinforce its importance on a European level and develop common practices for enforcing internal pluralism among media regulatory authorities.

- 6/ Introduce clear, strengthened pluralism obligations**, requiring publishers to ensure adequate representation of a diverse range of viewpoints and opinions on the various topics covered, while respecting editorial freedom. The diversity of subject matter must be ensured. The requirements for public service media should, at the very least, be equivalent to that of private media, with additional obligations.
  
- 7/ Integrate the concept of “journalistic diligence” into the collective agreements of public broadcasters**, imposing obligations on on-air journalists and presenters, including a clear distinction between information and commentary, which is already the case in Switzerland and the UK.
  
- 8/ Create an independent body to estimate the financial needs of public service media** and inform public and political debates prior to the process of determining short and long-term funding. This body, which would be independent of both media regulatory authorities and the media, would provide expert opinions that would not be binding for the government or parliament. However, if government and/or parliament refuse to follow the recommendations, they would have to provide justification. This “advisory council” should span several political and legislative cycles and be composed of representatives of civil society and the expert community, who should also participate in the election of the advisory council members.
  
- 9/ Provide a multi-year funding plan for public service media.** By enshrining multiannual funding for public media in the public finance budget law, parliament would protect such media from annual political bargaining and potential budget cuts. Solid guarantees for the sustainability and independence of public media funding are necessary to ensure their continued existence and editorial freedom over the long term. The Organic Law on Finance Laws (LOLF) must allow public broadcasting to be exempt from lessened regulation over the year. Public broadcasting funding should be monitored by a dedicated independent authority. This long-term financial stability would make it possible to confidently consider establishing shared content verticals (news, science, culture, etc.) across all digital platforms offered by public service media, in order to provide broader and easier access to all content.
  
- 10/ Investigate a funding system at the European level, based on a tax imposed by member states on online platforms on online platforms** – such as social media and search engines – in accordance with the volume of the platform’s traffic in that country. This tax could complement another source of funding, such as a universal and progressive licence fee. Direct funding from the state budget, based on short-term decisions, is not in compliance with EMFA or aligned with RSF recommendations.

**11/ Make 3 May, World Press Freedom Day, “Media Day.”** Taking inspiration from the Heritage Days in France, public service media could organise days where newsrooms are opened up to the general public. Opening up places where information is produced to those who consume it could create a sense of transparency and rebuild trust. Exchanges between the public and editorial staff could take the form of assemblies, forums, debates, meetings, feedback, interviews, etc. A proactive public policy could develop these practices by encouraging the systematic creation of director of public relations positions. Many media outlets have abolished this position in recent years due to economic difficulties.

**12/ Create a European international broadcaster.** A coalition of member states – which could be broadened to include the United Kingdom and the whole of the EU – could ensure the survival of Radio Free Europe’s newsroom, in combination with other European players in the sector such as France Médias Monde and Deutsche Welle. This funding could be part of the 800 billion EUR announced for the defence of the European Union, as it would help solve the urgent issue of protecting the EU information space and bolster vital efforts against foreign interference and propaganda.

RSF is ready to assist governments, parliaments, civil society, expert communities and public service media with the implementation of these proposals and the creation of further, more detailed recommendations for national draft laws regarding the application of the EMFA.



REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS (RSF) works toward media freedom, independence and pluralism all over the world. Headquartered in Paris with 13 bureaus and sections and more than 150 correspondents around the world, it has consultative status with the United Nations and UNESCO.