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ANNEX

## **ANNEX**

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### **COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

#### **2025 Rule of Law Report**

##### **The rule of law situation in the European Union**

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BELGIUM**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BULGARIA**

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

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

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

- Take steps to adapt the relevant legislative framework to avoid long-term secondment of judges to fill in vacant positions, taking into account European standards on secondment of judges.
- Advance with the draft legislative amendments aiming at improving the functioning of the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council and avoiding the risk of political influence, in particular by involving judicial bodies in the selection of its members.
- Re-initiate the process to reform the Supreme Judicial Council, in particular its composition, to ensure its independence and effectiveness, taking into account European standards on Councils for the Judiciary.
- Ensure a robust track record of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments in high-level corruption cases and take further steps to ensure the effective performance of the Anti-Corruption Commission.

- Improve the integrity of top executive functions, taking into account European standards, in particular by ensuring that clear integrity standards for the Government as well as an appropriate sanctioning mechanism are in place.
- Complete the work aimed at improving transparency in the allocation of state advertising, in particular with regard to state advertising contracted through intermediaries, such as media agencies.
- Strengthen the quality of the legislative process by ensuring the use of public consultations and impact assessments for legislative initiatives by Parliament.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CZECHIA**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DENMARK**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GERMANY**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ESTONIA**

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

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

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

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



## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IRELAND**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GREECE**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SPAIN**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FRANCE**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CROATIA**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ITALY**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CYPRUS**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LATVIA**

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

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

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

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



## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LITHUANIA**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LUXEMBOURG**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUNGARY**

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

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

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

- Improve the transparency of case allocation systems in lower-instance courts, taking into account European standards on case allocation.
- Take measures to ensure that the ongoing increase in the remuneration of judges, prosecutors and judicial and prosecutorial staff is carried out in a structured manner, taking into account European standards on remuneration for the justice system.
- Put forward comprehensive legislative reforms on lobbying and revolving doors, and further improve the system of asset declarations, providing for effective oversight and enforcement.

- Establish a robust track record of investigations, prosecutions and final judgments for high-level corruption cases.
- Introduce mechanisms to enhance the functional independence of the media regulatory authority taking into account European standards on the independence of media regulators.
- Adopt measures to ensure fair and transparent distribution of advertising expenditure by the state and state-owned companies.
- Strengthen the rules and mechanisms to enhance the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media taking into account European standards on public service media.
- Ensure that there are no obstacles hindering the work of civil society organisations, including by repealing legislation that hampers their capacity of working, and foster a safe and enabling civic space.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MALTA**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NETHERLANDS**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AUSTRIA**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLAND**

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

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

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

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



## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PORTUGAL**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ROMANIA**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SLOVENIA**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SLOVAKIA**

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

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

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

- Introduce measures to ensure sufficient guarantees of independence as regards the dismissal of members of the Judicial Council, notably those not elected by judges, taking into account European standards on independence of Judicial Councils.
- Ensure that sufficient safeguards are in place and duly observed when subjecting judges to criminal liability for the crime of “abuse of law” as regards their judicial decisions.
- Introduce proposals to regulate lobbying, strengthen the asset declaration and verification system, and continue ongoing efforts to reform conflicts of interest rules.
- Ensure the effective and independent investigations and prosecutions of high-level corruption cases to establish a robust track record, including by preventing any undue interference and restricting the use of the Prosecutor-General’s powers to annul final investigatory and prosecutorial decisions.

- Strengthen the rules and mechanisms to restore and further safeguard the independent governance and editorial independence of public service media taking into account European standards on public service media.
- Advance with the process to establish legislative and other safeguards to improve the physical safety and working environment of journalists, including the reform of defamation law, taking into account the European standards on the protection of journalists.
- Ensure effective public consultation and stakeholder involvement in the law-making process, including by addressing the frequent use of the fast-track procedure.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FINLAND**

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

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

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

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SWEDEN**

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

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

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

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