De-Orbanisation of the Hungarian media – how to free the media from political pressure

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9 October 2026, Varaždin

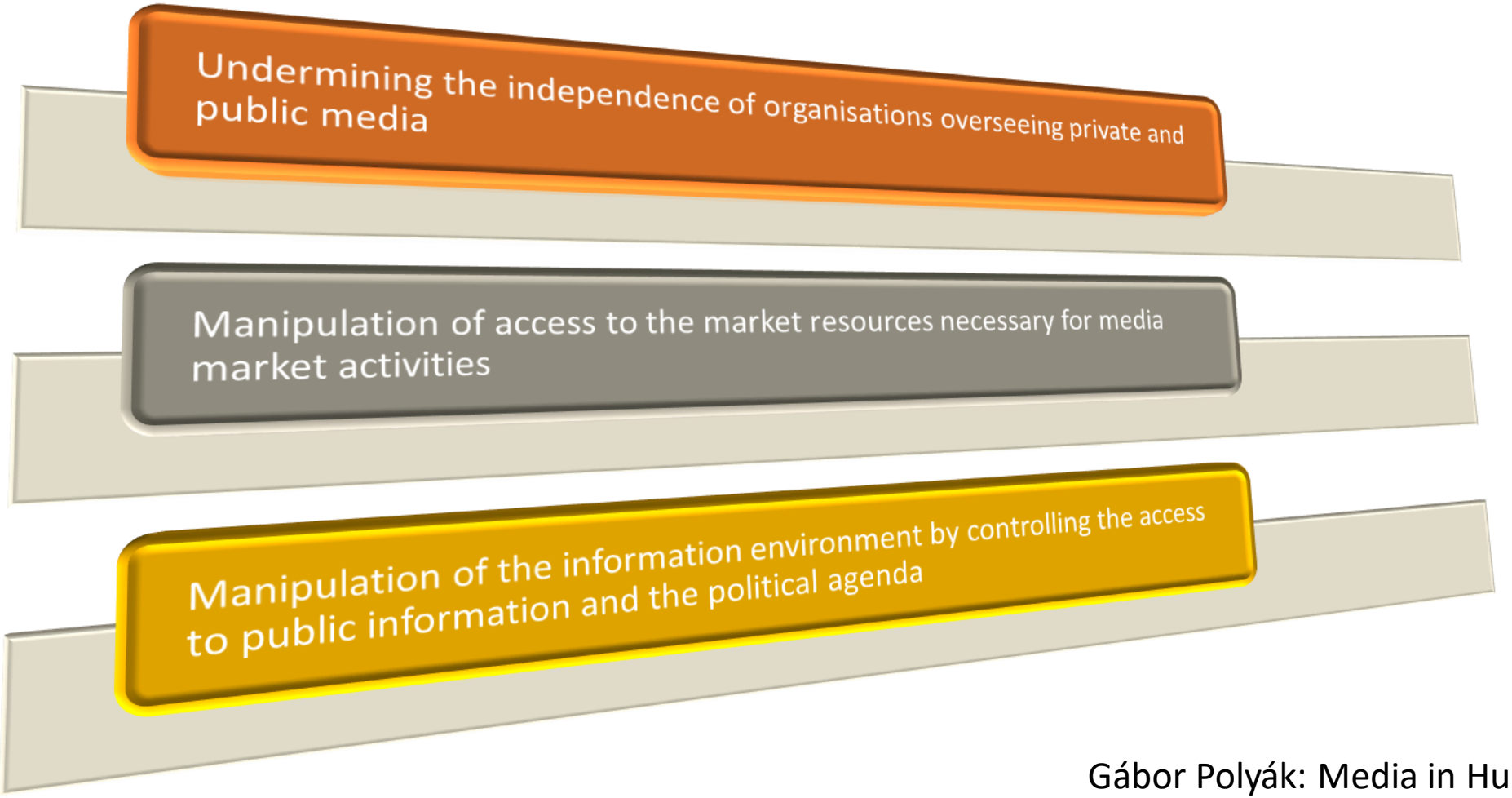
Democratic backsliding in Hungary between 2010 and 2026

- Hungary could be seen as a laboratory of illiberal democracy and a creator of a new type of illiberal political regime within the European Union – a regime showing signs of authoritarianism
- electoral manipulations, threat to free elections
- state capture & media capture
- high level of corruption & lack of transparency
- attacks against independent institutions and bodies
- attempts to eliminate the system of checks and balances
- deterioration of the situation of minorities and other vulnerable groups (cumulative disadvantage and multiple discrimination based on protected characteristics)
- attacks against academic freedom, arts, civil society organisations, measures taken to silence other critical voices
- strengthening of political and ideological narratives (smear campaigns, character assassinations & hate campaigns)
- highly-polarized societies / parallel societies and realities
- geopolitical manoeuvres, 'illiberal international', Eastern Opening Policy

the European Parliament adopted a resolution for the very first time in the history of the European Union that Hungary has become an "electoral autocracy" and can no longer be considered a full democracy (European Parliament, 2022)

Erik Uszkiewicz: The State of Human Rights and Democratic Backsliding in Hungary: A Brief Summary of Recent Developments

Three pillars of an illiberal media policy



Gábor Polyák: Media in Hungary: Three Pillars of an Illiberal Democracy

Consequences in the media ecosystem

unprecedented levels of ownership concentration

reshaping market segments through licensing practices and business interventions

ruling party-dominated media authority & Media Council

market-distorting impact of state advertising & political campaigns

politically motivated media regulation

state-owned news agency in a monopolistic position

state media as a propaganda tool & one of the main sources of Russian disinformation

low propensity of consumers to spend money on quality content & low level of media literacy

denial of access to information and sources

attacks against independent voices, smear campaigns & surveillance

political interference with editorial content

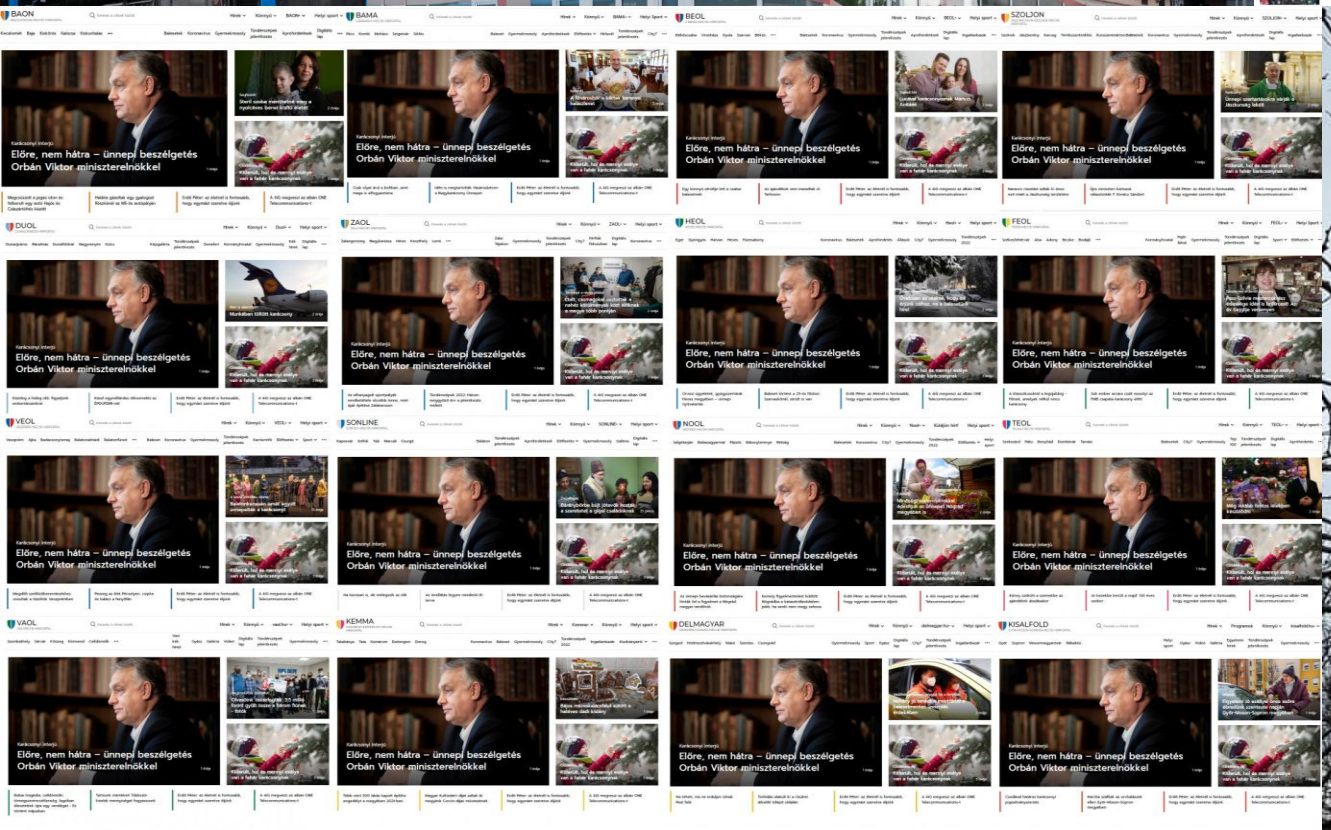
declining media diversity / pluralism

a distorted, highly polarized media market and low level of trust amongst media consumers, with only a small free and independent segment of the media which still maintains the traditional journalistic ethos

Omnes pro uno

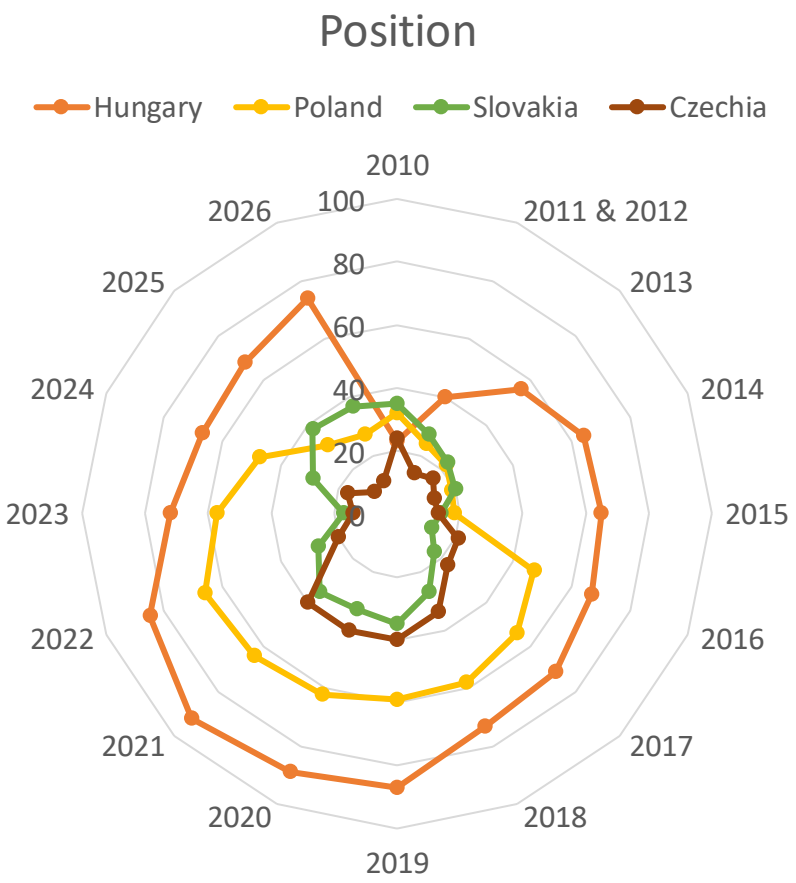








State of media freedom in the V4 region (2010 – 2026)



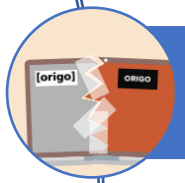
Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index 2010 – 2026



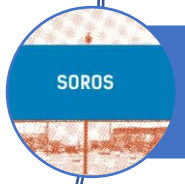
2010: Adoption of new media laws – profound changes in the Hungarian media landscape



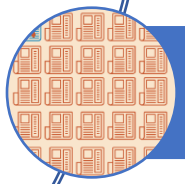
Since 2012: “Klubrádió Saga”



2014: Dismissal of Origo’s editor-in-chief, the editorial staff's resignation



2015: Beginning of (defamatory, manipulative, and hate-inciting) billboard campaigns



2016: Closure of Népszabadság



2018: Establishment of the Central and Eastern European Media Foundation (KESMA)

Mertek Media Monitor: 2010-2026: A legfontosabb magyar médiapolitikai események



2020: Seizure of index, the editorial staff’s resignation



2021: Pegasus spyware



2024: Establishment of the Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO) – attacks against independent media outlets and civil society



2025: MCC became part of the media system



2025: Closure of the Hungarian editorial office of Radio Free Europe

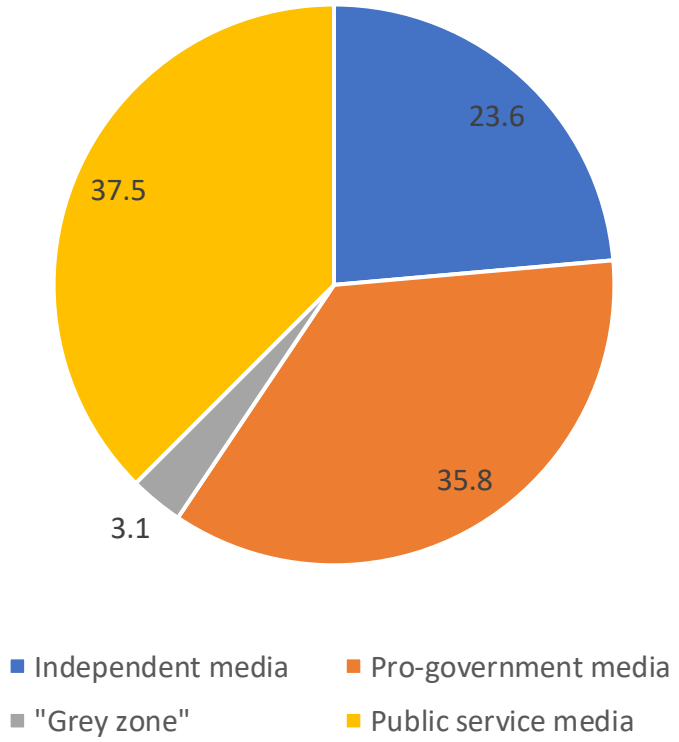


2025: Most of Ringier’s Hungarian publications will be transferred to close-to-government oligarch, including Blikk, Kiskegyed, and Glamour

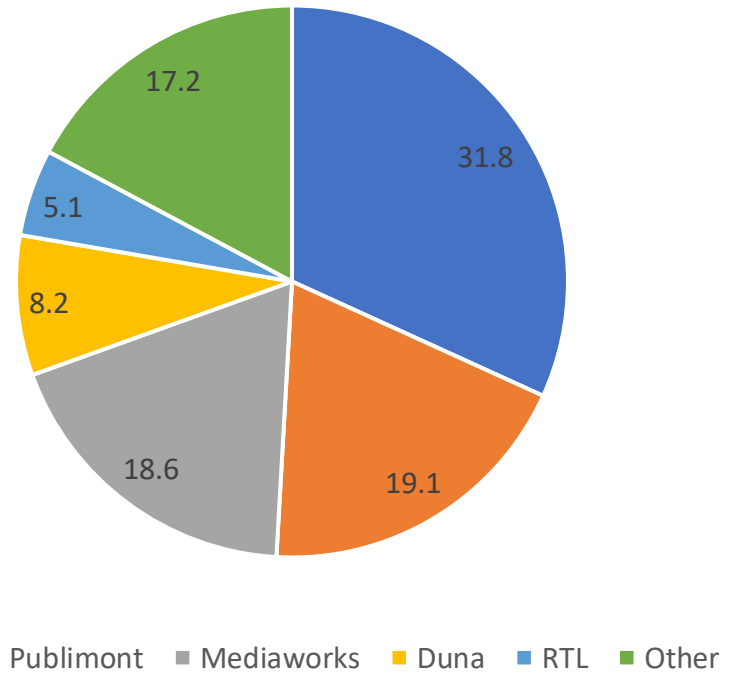
Mertek Media Monitor: 2010-2026: A legfontosabb magyar médiapolitikai események

Distorted conditions of the Hungarian media market

Share of media category revenues (2024)



Breakdown of state advertising at list prices (2023)

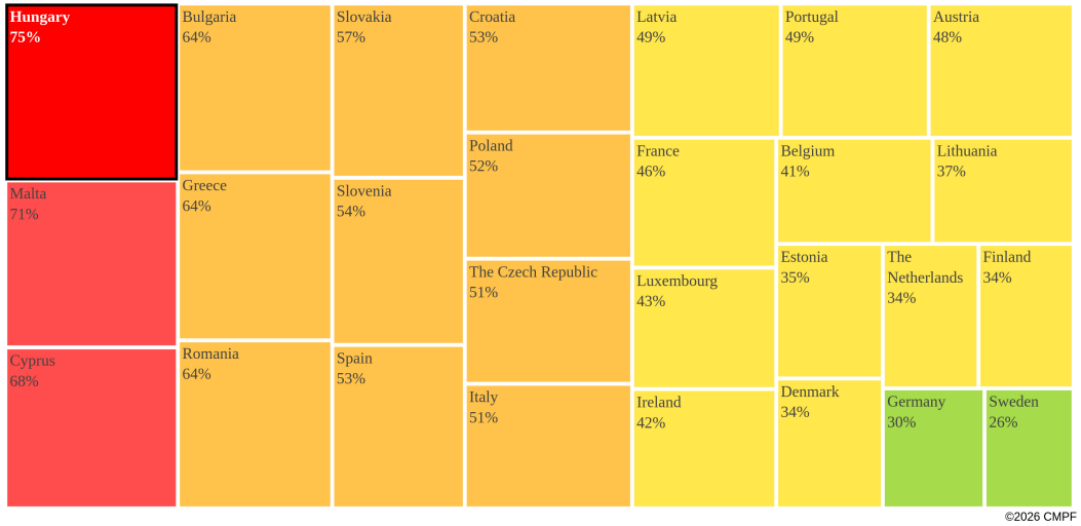


Mertek Media Monitor:
Sovereignist Media Policy – Soft Censorship 2024

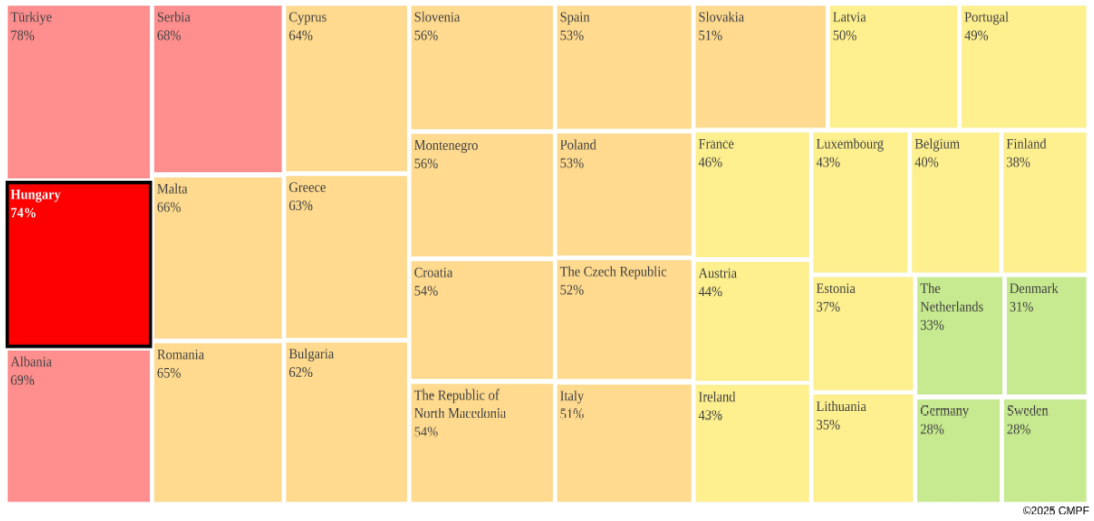
Ágnes Urbán:
A független média ellehetetlenítése Magyarországon

Media pluralism under pressure

2026

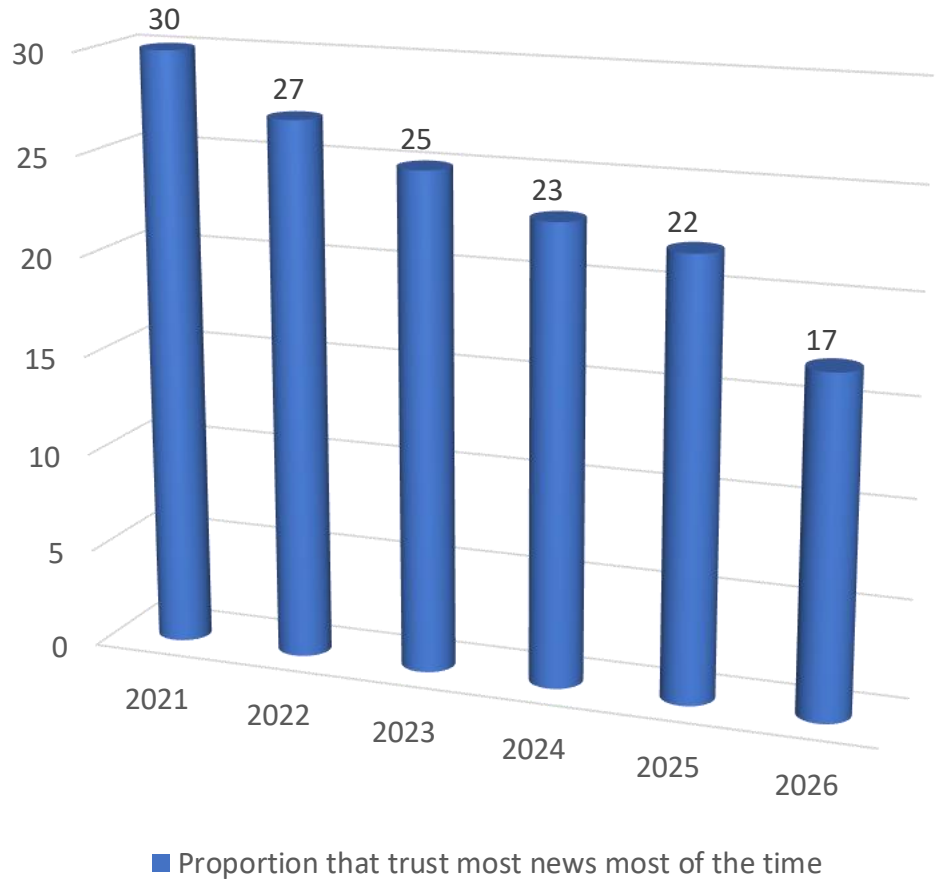


2025



Konrád Bleyer-Simon – Gábor Polyák – Ágnes Urbán:
Monitoring Media Pluralism in the European Union. Results of the MPM2025. Country report: Hungary
Monitoring Media Pluralism in the European Union. Results of the MPM2026. Country report: Hungary

Devastating effect on trust



"Trust in news declined by 5pp to 17%, the lowest figure recorded for Hungary since 2016, and the lowest of all 48 markets this year. The brands enjoying the most trust are independent while those with the lowest trust are Fidesz-government-aligned, including the public service broadcaster, MTV."

(Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2026)

Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026

Taking over the entire media ecosystem

- media agency
- sales house
- distribution systems (newspaper distribution, television program distribution)
- printing house

Creative & innovative forms of resistance



- Building a community
- Fighting against mis- and disinformation
- Growing significance of solutions journalism (SoJo)
- Growing importance of activism in news deserts
- Changing ownership structures

Erik Uszkiewicz: More Communication and Dialogue: Towards an Inclusive Civic Space *(forthcoming)*

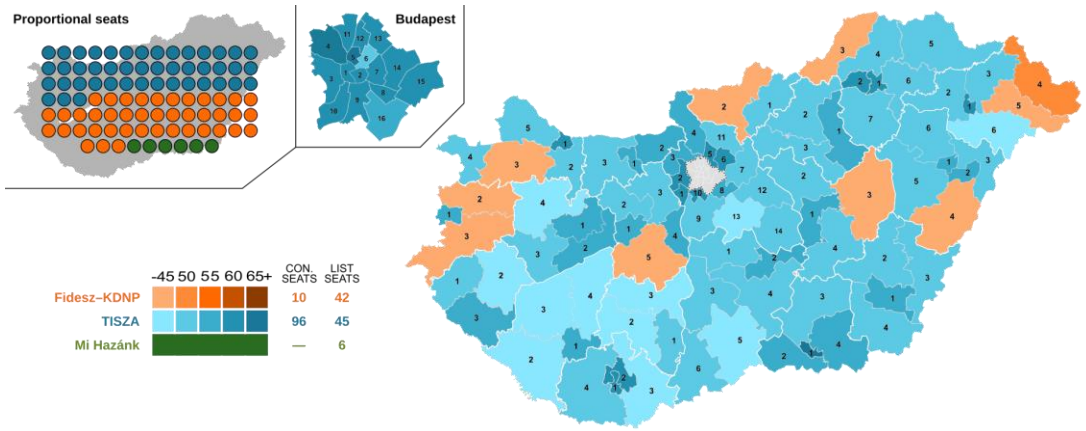
The rise and fall of an information autocracy

One of the election's most important lessons is that the persuasive authority of an informational autocracy can collapse much faster than its institutional infrastructure.

A credible challenger with a competing governing alternative	The battle of narratives between Fidesz and the TISZA Party	Losing the digital freedom fight, losing the elections	AI-driven fearmongering reached a breaking point
Political campaign after the ban on political advertisement	Successful preemptive communication	Pro-Russian narrative turned against Fidesz	Propaganda turned inward: Fidesz's campaign of self-disinformation

Péter Krekó – Csaba Molnár – Richárd Demény – Adél Tilistyák: Why State-sponsored Disinformation can Fail? Lessons from the Collapse of Orbán's Informational Autocracy

12 April 2026 – end of an era





The colonization of the media is followed either by its **decolonization** or by a **new colonization**.

(Von Artur Weigandt: Das Land kann zu einem Preis von vorn beginnen, den vor allem die Bürger zahlen – interview with Hungarian media experts published by Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on 26 July 2026)

New challenges ahead of media outlets

Brain drain (HR problems)	Potential loss of support from the audience and sponsors – continuous pressure for economic innovation (financial problems)	Developing a new perspective on and attitude toward the so-called "regime change" (substantive issues)	Disappearance of the "common enemy," loss of a shared identity, weakening of networks of loyalty, and organizational transformations (organizational problems)	The new political power co-operates with the media, uses innovations in communication, and seeks relationships with the press (strategic issues)	Confronting any past ties to the previous ruling party and addressing them in a transparent and self-critical manner (confronting past legacies)	Transition of operations to "a non-military approach" (operational issues)

Kamilla Vida: „Hogy mi a faszért vagyunk még itt azt senki sem érti" –
A közös ellenség eltűnésének következményei a beletörődésiparban és az antiorbánista nyilvánosságban

Right direction…

After the Hungarian parliamentary election, the Fidesz-controlled media is collapsing right before our eyes; journalists and staff are being laid off one after another, and newsrooms are being shut down.

- as of 16 June 2026, publication of the daily newspaper **Bors** has been suspended
- on 16 June 2026, staff cuts were carried out at **Világgazdaság**, and the entire editorial office of **Pesti Srácok** was fired
- the operation of the **Ripost.hu** and **Metropol.hu** websites was also suspended
- Effective 1 July 2026, the print editions of **three county daily newspapers**—the Nógrád Megyei Hírlap, the Heves Megyei Hírlap, and the Komárom-Esztergom County 24 Óra—were suspended
- the 30 July 2026 edition of **Mandiner**, which featured Mária Schmidt on the front page, was the last edition to go to press

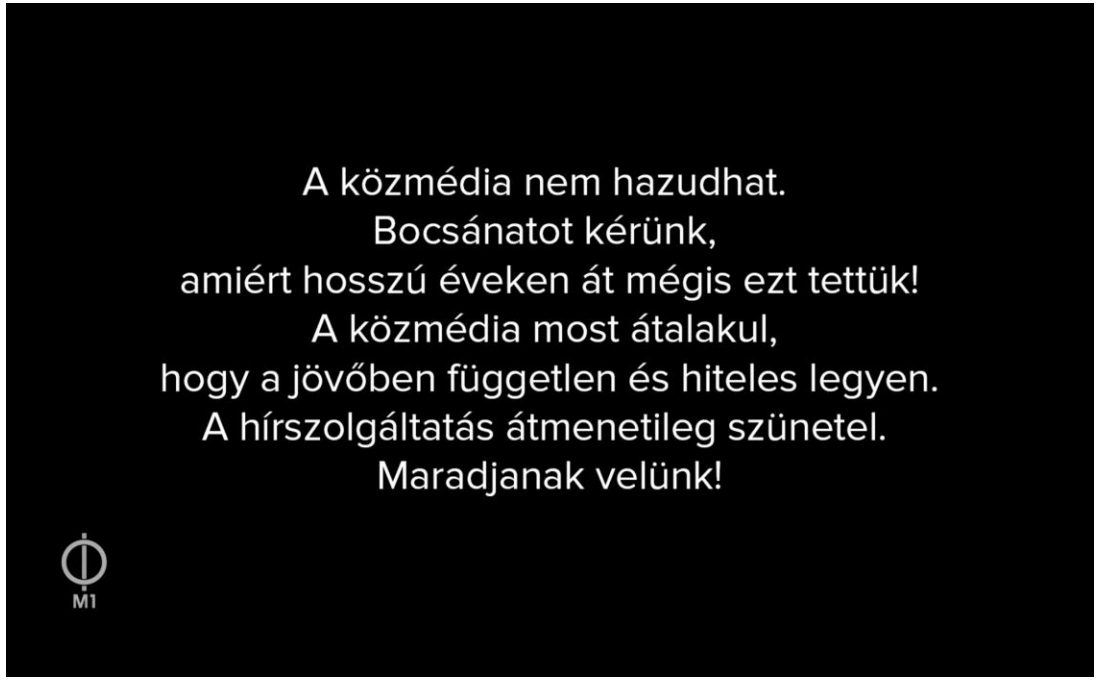
  ("She was the chief ideologue of the NER [Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere – System of National Cooperation], the spokesperson for its cultural and scientific policies, a regime politruk described as a historian, though her personal scholarly achievements were of little significance to the scientific community." — Gábor Gyáni)
- after laying off half of its staff, **Magyar Nemzet** ceased publication as a daily newspaper; the conservative paper will now appear only as a weekly starting 1 August 2026
- starting 1 August 2026, **several county daily newspapers** (Békés Megyei Hírlap, Délmagyarország, Észak-Magyarország, Fejér Megyei Hírlap, Hajdú-bihari Napló, Kelet-Magyarország, Napló, Petőfi Népe, Somogyi Hírlap, Tolnai Népújság, Új Dunántúli Napló, Új Néplap) will be published as weekly newspapers and will be delivered to subscribers on Saturdays



Photomontage created by 444

Right direction…

- 13 April 2026, during his **first international press conference** incoming PM Péter Magyar allowed representatives of independent Hungarian media outlets to ask the first questions
- June 2026 **abolishment of the Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO)**
- 23 June 2026, the Hungarian Parliament adopted a **media law** that ended the mandates of the previous state media and regulatory leadership
- 10 July 2026, the new interim leadership took office at the **public service media (PSM)** and suspended its broadcasting
- by August 2026, only seven members remained from the **Megafon** staff, which had previously consisted of 72 people, and their office had been cleared out as well
- 18 August 2026, Duna Médiaszolgáltató Zrt. published a **482-page document** produced by "Pro Domo" working group. A group of journalists and news editors working on foreign policy issues, have been gathering **evidence of state-sponsored disinformation and manipulation** for more than 10 years: the first document dates from 2015, and the last one is from the day before this year's election
- 22 September 2026, Hungarian Parliament has elected Gábor Polyák as President of both the **National Media and Infocommunications Authority** (NMHH) and the **Media Council**
- 8 October 2026, **Népszabadság** – which was closed down 10 years ago for political reasons – relaunches in both online and weekly print formats



…or wrong track?

- on 28 May 2026, Mediaworks terminated its contract with **Népszava** with immediate effect, announcing that it would no longer print or distribute the newspaper; accordingly, that day marked the last time Népszava appeared in print (after 153 years)
- after 1 August 2026 Hungary became the only country in the European Union **without a printed political daily**
- 4 August 2026, **PSM** withdrew the (highly controversial) appointment of the editor-in-chief and presenter of M1 news programme, which had been announced the previous day, following a comment posted by PM Péter Magyar on Facebook (“I do not think so…”)



’Illiberal international’in media

- Business circles with close ties to the Orbán government began investing in the Balkans in March 2017: in **Slovenia** the portfolio included Ripost Založništvo, a company operating a television station, a tabloid, an online newspaper and a print newspaper. In **North Macedonia**, they established the consultancy firm Target Media Group, acquired a stake in a TV station, and also launched a news website called Ripost MK.
- Ma7 media group in **Slovakia**, which was launched in 2018, has received 12 million euros over the past nine years, of which 1 million euros was channelled through a media agency that carries out campaign-related tasks for a Hungarian minority party in Slovakia allied with Fidesz.
- The Transylvanian Media Space Association, established with the support of the Orbán government has received more than 35 million euros since 2017. From this source they acquired a significant proportion of the entire Hungarian press in **Transylvania**: daily and weekly newspapers, news websites and radio frequencies.
- 17 August 2026, Alpac Capital has taken control of the Adria News Network (ANN), an umbrella organisation for **Serbia**’s independent media, and management changes have immediately begun at N1, Nova, Danas and Radar. The Portuguese investor’s financial and political connections in Hungary, Pedro Vargas David’s relationship with Aleksandar Vučić, and his father, Mario David’s long-standing friendship with Orbán had been known for some time.



Illustration created by Balk Magazin

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- Weigandt, v. A.: Das Land kann zu einem Preis von vorn beginnen, den vor allem die Bürger zahlen

Thank you for your attention!

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