

# Annual public media- monitoring

*Based on the 7:30 p.m. M1 news broadcasts in 2025*

AN ANALYSIS BY REPUBLIKON INSTITUTE



2026. february

## SUMMARY

- **The focus of the analysis:** The monitoring report by the Republikon Institute and Connect Europe examined the impartiality and balance of M1's 7:30 p.m. evening news program over a period of 11 months, based on domestic and EU legal standards.
- **Government dominance:** The analysis found that the structure and content of the news programs clearly follow the government's communication priorities and strategy.
- **Unbalanced screen time:** Pro-government politicians tend to receive a significant amount of airtime on the program, and their coverage is generally positive.
- **Negative framing of the opposition:** Opposition figures rarely get a chance to speak, and even when they do, they are typically portrayed in a negative, disparaging, or scandal-focused context (especially the Tisza Party).
- **One-sided use of sources:** Most of the experts interviewed are pro-government, while independent opinions or references to critical media outlets appear only sporadically in the news, and when they do, it is with the intent to refute them.
- **Symbiosis with government narratives:** The news program's choice of words (e.g., "war," "migration," "Soros") and selection of topics are closely aligned with Fidesz's current political messaging.
- **Changing themes:** During the reviewed year, there was a noticeable shift in focus from foreign policy issues toward domestic policy matters and actors.
- **Lack of public service:** Based on the analysis, M1 does not meet the requirements of objectivity and pluralism of opinion, as it disproportionately suppresses critical voices.

## INTRODUCTION

The fundamental function of public service media is to provide impartial, reliable, and diverse information to society. Their mission is to promote the functioning of democratic public life, ensure pluralism of opinion, and make cultural, educational, and public-interest content accessible. In addition, public service media play a key role in fostering national and minority identities, as well as in strengthening social cohesion. Act CLXXXV of 2010 on Media Services and Mass Communication (Media Act) defines public media as follows:

*„82. § Public service media*

- a) operates independently of the state and economic actors; the management of the public service media provider and those involved in its activities enjoy professional autonomy within the framework provided by law,*
- b) its system ensures accountability and the exercise of public oversight.”*

The independence of public media is governed not only by Hungarian law but also by EU regulations. The European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), which entered into force on May 7, 2024, addresses, among other things, the independence and impartiality of public service media.

For years, the Hungarian public media has been the subject of constant criticism accusing it of bias in favor of Fidesz-KDNP. These criticisms—and even more far-reaching conclusions—are well-founded by facts such as the court’s 2014 ruling that Dániel Papp, CEO of MTVA, could be called a fake news purveyor due to his falsification of a 2011 report, or that an audio recording leaked from an MTVA meeting prior to the 2019 European Parliament elections, in which Balázs Bende, the head of the foreign affairs department, made unmistakable references to the political bias of public media.

Republikon aims to examine, based on facts, the validity of criticisms regarding the impartiality and balance of public media, primarily public television news.

On February 1, 2025, Republikon Institute began the daily monitoring of the evening news broadcast on the public media channel M1, airing at 7:30 p.m., as part of a one-year project. The aim of the project is to determine the validity of criticisms directed at public media, which claim that its function is to support government communication rather than provide objective information. In our research, we examine M1's evening news broadcasts from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. In our analysis, we present the results for the year 2025 (February–December), as well as the trends and shifts in trends observed over the 11 months.

## METHODOLOGY

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to analyze the news program. The analysis focuses exclusively on the evening news broadcast, which begins at 7:30 p.m. on M1. The 7:30 p.m. broadcast was chosen from among the channel's daily news programs because television viewership is traditionally highest during this time slot. We analyzed the broadcasts individually, examining the news items one by one. From the aggregated daily results, a consolidated monthly dataset was compiled at the end of each month; the analysis of these data is presented in the following study.

Our research is based on three thematic pillars: the representation of political actors, the topics covered and how they are framed, and the news sources. In terms of the representation of political actors, we examine the following:

- the screentime of domestic politicians
- perceptions of domestic politicians' representation
- perceptions of politicians' representation from other countries
- frequency of mentions of politicians' names
- common expressions appearing in the context of politicians' names (the 9 words preceding and following them)

Regarding the topics covered:

- The number of speakers providing a narrative framework for the news

- The political affiliations of the speakers who provide a narrative framework for the news
- The frequency of terms that play a central role in the ruling parties' narrative (in this case, we used randomly selected episodes of RTL's evening news broadcasts as a point of reference)

Regarding the news sources:

- Number of media outlets cited
- The political affiliations of the media outlets cited
- Number of corrections

To examine the frequency of certain phrases and the context in which politicians' names appear, we used software to transcribe each daily news broadcast and analyzed the data using the Voyant-tools text analysis program.

## DATA

Between February and December 2025, we analyzed a total of 334 broadcasts using quantitative and qualitative methods. Political news accounted for a significant portion—211 hours—of the total duration of the analyzed broadcasts (281 hours). A more detailed analysis of the political segment clearly reveals the weighting of topics: purely domestic political news, with a duration of 107 hours, was significantly more prominent than foreign policy events, which received 46 hours. In addition, public media devoted a further 57 hours to foreign policy news that had direct domestic political implications.

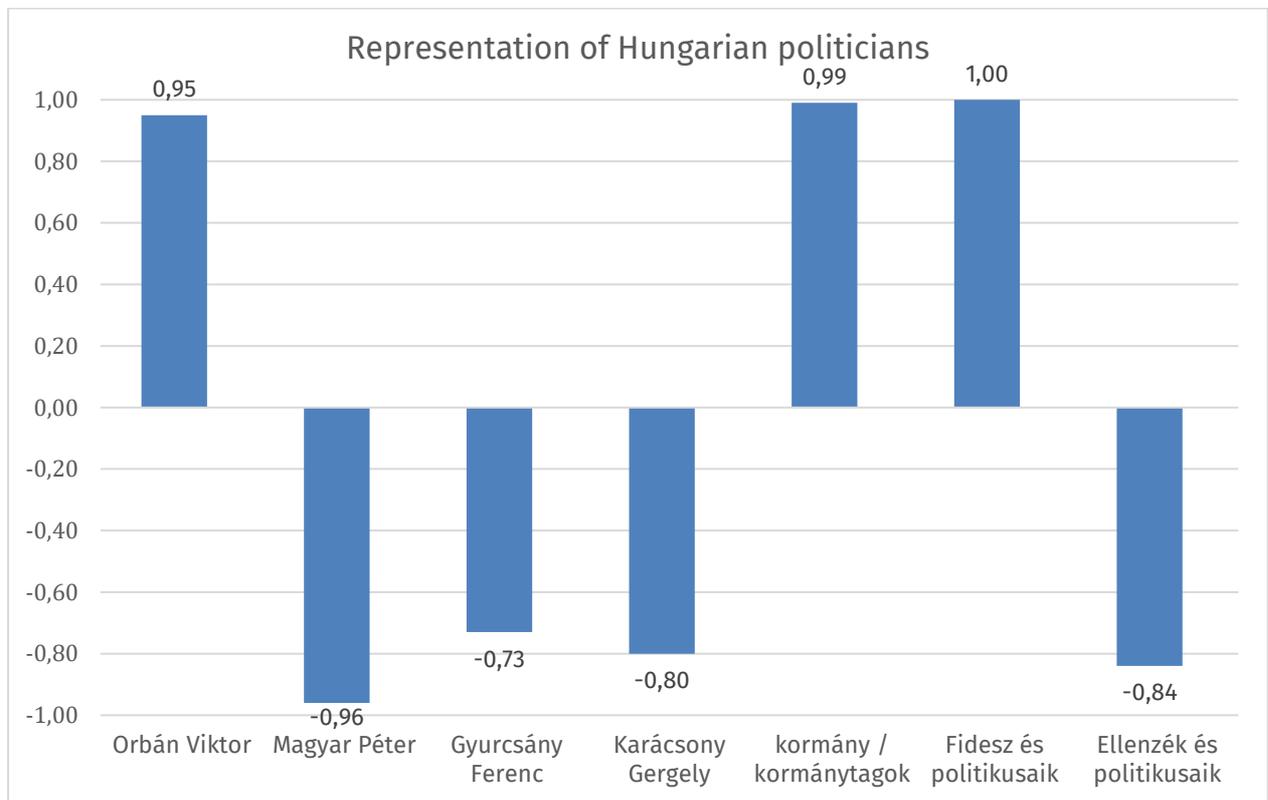
| Data (2025)   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Length of the 7:30 pm broadcasts (in minutes)                     | 281:07:23 |
| Politics related news items (in minutes)                          | 211:58:40 |
| Domestic politics related content (in minutes)                    | 107:19:16 |
| Solely foreign policy related content (in minutes)                | 46:37:18  |
| Foreign policy related content with domestic overlap (in minutes) | 57:32:31  |

## REPRESENTATION OF POLITICIANS

An analysis of the screen time and contextual framing of the participants reveals sharp differences between the government and the opposition. During the period examined, pro-government politicians appeared on screen for a total of 35 and a half hours, which statistically means that, on average, a Fidesz-KDNP politician was visible every eight seconds. For a significant portion of this time, roughly 29 hours, the politicians were presented in an explicitly positive context. In contrast, the appearance rate of opposition politicians did not even reach 5 percent (a total of 13.5 hours), and moreover, for most of this limited time—10.5 hours—they appeared on screen in an explicitly negative light, and only 1 hour in a positive one. It is telling, however, that the government and pro-government politicians did not appear in a negative light for a single minute—that is, that is, the absence of criticism of the government, while the tone toward the opposition is explicitly critical, runs counter to the fundamental principles of public service media mentioned earlier, such as impartiality and the provision of credible information.

The trends underlying the quantifiable data become even more apparent when we examine the emotional and evaluative context in which news reports frame individual political figures. To this end, we evaluated the portrayal of politicians on a three-point scale, where 1 represents a positive portrayal, 0 a neutral one, and -1 a negative one. At the end of the study, we averaged the total scores for each individual or group examined. The results show that the portrayal of pro-government figures falls almost exclusively at the positive end of the scale. The scores for Fidesz and its politicians (+1.00), government members (+0.99), and Viktor Orbán (+0.95) indicate that they are discussed almost exclusively in a positive light. In practice, this value reflects a complete absence of critical commentary. In these cases, the public media does not report the news but conveys messages of support. In contrast, opposition figures are, without exception, relegated to the negative range. While the overall rating for opposition politicians is -0.84, Gergely Karácsony's is -0.80, and Ferenc Gyurcsány's is -0.73, the most intense rejection is observed in the case of Péter Magyar. His score of -0.96 indicates that his appearances in the public media occur almost exclusively in a hostile or

condemnatory context. These data thus suggest that, in news editing practice, political affiliation is a more decisive factor in the manner of representation than the requirements of neutrality and objectivity prescribed by public service codes. The representation of all the figures examined is shown in the figure below:



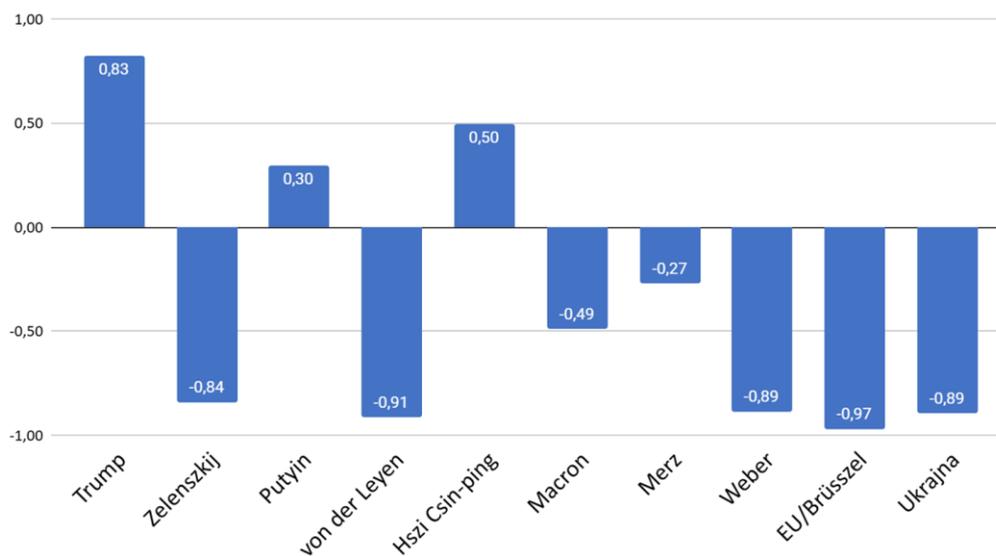
The analysis also features a section about how Viktor Orbán and Péter Magyar were represented in the broadcasts.

|  | Viktor Orbán                                      | Péter Magyar                          |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| How many times were they named?                | 3.158   | 3.940                                 |
| In what kind of context were they discussed?   | Almost always positive (+0,95)                    | Almost always negative (-0,96)        |
| Politicians most often named in their context  | Donald Trump (peace, patriot)                     | Manfred Weber (anti-Hungarian)        |
| Words often used in the context of their names | Pro-peace, family, patriot, strong prime minister | war, lying, insider trading, Brussels |

A peculiar phenomenon can be observed here: although Péter Magyar was mentioned or featured in the news roughly 700 times more often, this occurred almost exclusively in a negative context. In contrast, the prime minister's name was mentioned almost exclusively in a positive context. The supporting figures associated with the two politicians also reinforced this narrative: Alongside Viktor Orbán, Donald Trump's name appeared most frequently as a symbol of peace and patriotism, while Péter Magyar was most often linked to Manfred Weber, who was portrayed as a "Hungary-hater," or to Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the Ukrainian president. There is also a striking difference in the choice of words: while terms such as "peace-loving," "family," "patriot," and "strong prime minister" dominated in connection with the prime minister's name, in Péter Magyar's case, the words "war," "lies," "insider trading," and "Brussels" appeared. He has been repeatedly accused of corruption, forgery, theft, or extortion, and has been called a spy, a poser, a clown, or even a bug. Finally, the nature of their communication was also portrayed differently: Viktor Orbán's statements were presented as decisive actions (announcements or declarations), while Péter Magyar's statements were depicted as reactive processes, mere responses, and it was often noted when he denied something. The news program devoted significant attention to both politicians'



party's political opponents are pushed deep into the negative zone. The most intense rejection is observed in the case of the EU/Brussels (-0.97) and Ursula von der Leyen (-0.91), but a similarly hostile tone characterizes figures in German political life, such as Manfred Weber (-0.89). The distortion of the war narrative is indicated by the fact that while the Russian president's rating remained in the positive range, Volodymyr Zelensky (-0.84) and Ukraine as a whole (-0.89) fell into the bottom quarter of the scale. Overall, the data suggest that in the news editing practices of the supposedly non-partisan public media, political affiliation and the federal system of government are far more decisive factors than the requirement of objectivity. The representation of the foreign politicians examined is summarized in the figure below:



## SPEAKERS AND NEWS SOURCES

The composition of the 1,885 politicians and experts featured in news reports reveals a striking imbalance: the vast majority of those featured—74.9 percent—are affiliated with Fidesz, while those classified as belonging to the opposition account for only 10.4 percent. The presence of non-partisan experts is also limited, accounting for only 14.7 percent of the statements. Moreover, these individuals are most frequently featured in non-political news coverage. Thus, the non-partisan speakers are primarily engineers, doctors, and experts in fields unrelated to politics. Among the most frequently featured opinion leaders are Géza Sebestyén

(head of the MCC Economic Policy Workshop), Dániel Deák (senior analyst at the 21st Century Institute), Olivér Hortay (founder and director of the Századvég Institute for Economic Research), and Szabolcs Pásztor (also a senior researcher at Századvég). The data show that public media reinforces the government's narrative not only through politicians but also by selecting a seemingly objective pool of experts. This method may give viewers the impression that the government's position is supported by a scientific consensus, whereas this is not necessarily true due to the favoritism shown toward pro-government experts, because expert commentary thus does not serve pluralistic debate but functions as a tool to provide professional legitimacy for political messages.



Unsurprisingly, among politicians, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was the one most frequently featured in the news (primarily through clips taken from his interviews on public radio). Other frequent figures included Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó, State Secretary Tamás Menczer, Fidesz's communications director, as well as Member of Parliament Zsófia Koncz, who appeared on several occasions, and Balázs Orbán, the Prime Minister's political director.



During the period under review, news coverage was characterized by significant asymmetry in the use of news sources, particularly with regard to the political orientation of the media outlets cited. The data indicate that pro-government media outlets dominate editorial practice, far outpacing both foreign and domestic independent sources. The total number of citations is highest for pro-government media (1,013 instances), which is more than three times the number of citations from independent media outlets (324 instances). In news reports, MTI was cited only a negligible number of times (54 times), while foreign sources (452 instances) feature more prominently in the news than domestic independent newspapers; editors cited international sources nearly one and a half times as often as domestic critical voices.

In terms of temporal distribution, the frequency of references peaked in September, when the number of references to pro-government publications rose to 134. This spike can be closely linked to the media coverage of the so-called “Tisza Package.” During this period, a distinctive referencing mechanism was observed: pro-government newspapers primarily reproduced and quoted each other’s content, thereby creating a sort of closed information ecosystem that lent credibility to the narratives they disseminated.

Overall, the selection of sources is not primarily based on the principle of pluralism, but clearly leans toward media outlets that reflect the government’s position. The marginal presence of the independent press (an average of 20–40 references per month) indicates that news programs provide limited information from the perspective of source criticism. Moreover, in the majority of cases, these references served to support the government’s narrative, or news reports from independent media critical of the government were cited solely to be subsequently refuted by citing pro-government sources.

## THE MAIN TOPICS OF BROADCASTS

An analysis of news content reveals that the selection of topics and the frameworks through which they are interpreted are closely aligned with the government’s communication priorities. This trend is particularly evident in the proportion of expert commentary and in the coverage of major events during the period under review. These thematic spikes were organized around clearly distinguishable communication campaigns: for example, during September and October, the “Tisza Package” and the associated narrative of tax increases dominated the news, with the aim of negatively framing the economic program of the political rival.

As part of the analysis, we also examined the frequency of the terms “migrant/migration,” “war,” “peace,” “sanctions,” and “sovereignty,” as well as the name “George Soros,” in 48 randomly selected broadcasts of public television and RTL Híradó. Looking at the data as a whole, it can be concluded that the examined terms were used significantly less frequently on the non-state-funded RTL. The sharpest difference is evident with the words “migrant” and “migration”: while these terms were mentioned a total of 2,191 times in M1 news broadcasts during the period under review, they appeared only six times on RTL Híradó (an average difference of fiftyfold when considering the same number of broadcasts). The difference is also drastic in the case of the word “war,” which appeared on M1 an average of 11 times per broadcast (every 4 minutes and 20 seconds), while on RTL it appeared approximately 3.5 times. Similar patterns emerge when mentioning “peace,” “sovereignty,” and the name “George Soros.” The smallest difference is observed with the term “sanctions,” which averaged 1.55 per broadcast on M1 and 0.9 on RTL.

| Expression in M1 broadcasts                     | Migrant/ migration | War   | Peace | Sanction | Sovereignty | Soros |
|---|--------------------|-------|-------|----------|-------------|-------|
| Total   | 2.191              | 3.827 | 2.076 | 517      | 504         | 250   |
| Broadcast average                               | 6,56               | 11,46 | 6,22  | 1,55     | 1,51        | 0,75  |
| Expression in RTL news (based on 48 broadcasts) | Migrant/migration  | War   | Peace | Sanction | Sovereignty | Soros |
| Total   | 6                  | 170   | 79    | 43       | 43          | 7     |
| Broadcast average                               | 0,13               | 3,54  | 1,65  | 0,9      | 0,9         | 0,15  |

## CONDITION OF THE PRESS

The primary objective of the analysis was to inspect the balance of public media, which we achieved by examining the evening news programs of public television. During the study, we focused on the fulfillment of independence and pluralism requirements, as well as on the extent to which critical comments directed at public media can be considered well-founded. Furthermore, it is essential to examine the institutional framework, which already exhibits distinctive features at the level of the regulatory environment. The Media Act, which serves as the foundation of the system, was drafted and adopted unilaterally by the ruling parties without consensus, a move that fundamentally determined the structure of the supervisory bodies. As a result, the current members of the Media Council were elected in 2019 exclusively by Fidesz-KDNP representatives for a nine-year term, thereby ensuring a long-term, one-sided decision-making mechanism. This picture is further complicated by the composition of the operational leadership: MTVA is headed by CEO Dániel Papp, who, it is important to note, has been found by a court to be a proven purveyor of fake news. While serious concerns arise regarding the independence of management and oversight, the institution's financial resources have expanded to record levels. The public media's budget has risen from 83 billion forints in 2019 to 166 billion forints by 2025, meaning that funding has exactly doubled in just six years. The study is important, among other reasons, because the international assessment of the state of the domestic press accurately reflects the structural problems uncovered by the research.

|                        |                    |                         |                         |                 |                  |
|------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1 Norway               | 31 Poland          | 61 South Korea          | 91 Northern Cyprus      | 121 Togo        | 151 India        |
| 2 Estonia              | 32 Suriname        | 62 Ukraine              | 92 Benin                | 122 Nigeria     | 152 Bhutan       |
| 3 Netherlands          | 33 Slovenia        | 63 Brazil               | 93 Bolivia              | 123 Singapore   | 153 Tajikistan   |
| 4 Sweden               | 34 Armenia         | 64 Côte d'Ivoire        | 94 Ecuador              | 124 Mexico      | 154 Yemen        |
| 5 Finland              | 35 Moldova         | 65 Andorra              | 95 Tanzania             | 125 Burundi     | 155 Iraq         |
| 6 Denmark              | 36 Costa Rica      | 66 Japan                | 96 Serbia               | 126 Algeria     | 156 Sudan        |
| 7 Ireland              | 37 Montenegro      | 67 Malta                | 97 Brunei               | 127 Indonesia   | 157 Bahrain      |
| 8 Portugal             | 38 Slovakia        | 68 Hungary              | 98 Eswatini             | 128 Kuwait      | 158 Pakistan     |
| 9 Switzerland          | 39 East Timor      | 69 Chile                | 99 Kosovo               | 129 Tunisia     | 159 Türkiye      |
| 10 Czechia             | 40 Fiji            | 70 Bulgaria             | 100 Angola              | 130 Peru        | 160 Venezuela    |
| 11 Germany             | 41 Gabon           | 71 Congo                | 101 Mozambique          | 131 Cameroon    | 161 Cambodia     |
| 12 Liechtenstein       | 42 North Macedonia | 72 Central African Rep. | 102 Mongolia            | 132 Lebanon     | 162 Saudi Arabia |
| 13 Luxembourg          | 43 Dominican Rep.  | 73 Guyana               | 103 Guinea              | 133 DR Congo    | 163 Palestine    |
| 14 Lithuania           | 44 Samoa           | 74 Senegal              | 104 Maldives            | 134 Oman        | 164 UAE          |
| 15 Latvia              | 45 Seychelles      | 75 Comoros              | 105 Burkina Faso        | 135 El Salvador | 165 Cuba         |
| 16 New Zealand         | 46 Tonga           | 76 Malawi               | 106 Zimbabwe            | 136 Somalia     | 166 Belarus      |
| 17 Iceland             | 47 Belize          | 77 Cyprus               | 107 Lesotho             | 137 Libya       | 167 Azerbaijan   |
| 18 Belgium             | 48 OECs            | 78 Papua NG             | 108 Chad                | 138 Guatemala   | 168 Djibouti     |
| 19 Trinidad and Tobago | 49 Italy           | 79 Qatar                | 109 South Sudan         | 139 Sri Lanka   | 169 Myanmar      |
| 20 United Kingdom      | 50 Mauritania      | 80 Albania              | 110 Guinea-Bissau       | 140 Hong Kong   | 170 Egypt        |
| 21 Canada              | 51 Mauritius       | 81 Botswana             | 111 Haiti               | 141 Kazakhstan  | 171 Russia       |
| 22 Austria             | 52 Ghana           | 82 Zambia               | 112 Israel              | 142 Honduras    | 172 Nicaragua    |
| 23 Spain               | 53 Panama          | 83 Niger                | 113 Madagascar          | 143 Uganda      | 173 Vietnam      |
| 24 Taiwan              | 54 Liberia         | 84 Paraguay             | 114 Georgia             | 144 Kyrgyzstan  | 174 Turkmenistan |
| 25 France              | 55 Romania         | 85 Thailand             | 115 Colombia            | 145 Ethiopia    | 175 Afghanistan  |
| 26 Jamaica             | 56 Sierra Leone    | 86 Bosnia-Herzegovina   | 116 Philippines         | 146 Rwanda      | 176 Iran         |
| 27 South Africa        | 57 United States   | 87 Argentina            | 117 Kenya               | 147 Jordan      | 177 Syria        |
| 28 Namibia             | 58 Gambia          | 88 Malaysia             | 118 Equatorial Guinea   | 148 Uzbekistan  | 178 China        |
| 29 Australia           | 59 Uruguay         | 89 Greece               | 119 Mali                | 149 Bangladesh  | 179 North Korea  |
| 30 Cabo Verde          | 60 Croatia         | 90 Nepal                | 120 Morocco / W. Sahara | 150 Laos        | 180 Eritrea      |

## PUBLIC MEDIA FUNDING ACROSS EUROPE

Public media funding systems vary significantly across European countries, both in terms of revenue mechanisms and the extent of government involvement. The country examples presented below illustrate that the operation of public media can be placed along a spectrum: at one end are systems financed almost exclusively from the central budget, while at the other are models based on household contributions that formally ensure greater institutional autonomy.

In Hungary, public media is financed predominantly from public funds. The total budget of the Media Services Support and Asset Management Fund for 2025 is 165,611.3 million forints, which corresponds to approximately 0.19 percent of GDP (National Assembly, 2024). However, public funds do not constitute the sole source of revenue: according to MTVA's financial statements, commercial and other operating revenues amount to several billion forints (MTVA, 2025). The Hungarian government has manipulated the media market by curtailing media freedom and pluralism, resulting in unequal ownership structures (European Federation of Journalists, 2019). According to the European Commission, transparency regarding media ownership remains lacking, and risks of political influence persist in the area of media pluralism, particularly in the context of media market concentration and state intervention (European Commission, 2025). A disproportionately large share of government advertising goes to media companies close to the government, which distorts competition and strengthens politically favored media platforms (Mérték, 2020).

In Poland, the financing of public media is based on a legally mixed model in which subscription fees are supposed to play an important role; in practice, however, state compensation has become the dominant source of funding due to low payment rates. Official documents from the Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji (KRRiT) already indicated difficulties in collecting fees as early as the beginning of the 2020s (KRRiT, 2021). The share of state subsidies in the financing of Telewizja Polska (TVP) steadily increased during the PiS government's term (2015–2023). Following the change of government in 2023, the opposition coalition reduced the

level of subsidies: while TVP alone received 2.67 billion zloty in state funding in 2023, this figure dropped to 1.851 billion zloty in 2024, and in 2025 it stood at around 1.595 billion zloty (Polskie Media, 2025).

The Czech Republic is an exception among the Visegrad countries, as the backbone of public media funding here is provided by a household-based license fee. According to Česká televize's 2025 budget plan, approximately 85–90 percent of its revenue comes from subscription fees; total revenue is 7.49 billion Czech koruna, of which 6.37 billion comes directly from license fee payments (Česká televize, 2025). The fee system was raised in 2025 for the first time since 2010, extended to internet-enabled devices, and made inflation-indexed. The role of advertising and other own revenues in the budget is marginal. At the same time, the governing coalition (ANO, SPD, and Motoristé) intends to abolish public media subscription fees by 2027 and provide funding directly from the state budget (Brno Daily, 2026).

In Slovakia, the previous license-fee-based funding system was discontinued in 2023 and replaced by direct, GDP-based state funding (STVR/ENRSI, 2023). In the 2025 fiscal year, this contribution amounted to 0.12 percent of GDP, equivalent to approximately 147.4 million euros, while the broadcaster's own revenues—primarily from advertising and other operating sources—totaled around 10 million euros (STVR/ENRSI, 2025). As a result, the financing of Slovak public media now depends almost entirely on budgetary resources.

In Hungary and Slovakia, public media today relies primarily on direct budgetary funding, while in Poland, although the subscription fee remains in place in name, state subsidies have become the dominant source of funding in practice. The Czech Republic is currently the only country in the region where the primary source of public media funding remains the household license fee, although all of the Visegrad countries previously operated such a system.

In Romania, the subscription fee was abolished as early as 2017 and replaced by direct state funding (Portal Legislativ, 2016). In 2025, public media received approximately 428.3 million lei, or about 84.6 million euros, in state subsidies, which accounted for about 95 percent of the total budget (RomaniaTV, 2025). The

Romanian model is thus heavily budget-dependent, with own revenues playing a supplementary role.

In Austria, public media funding is based on a mandatory, device-independent household contribution. The ORF-Beitrag (monthly fee) generated 732 million euros in revenue in 2024, accounting for approximately 65 percent of total funding. The remainder came from advertising and other operating revenues. ORF's total revenue in 2024 was 1.13 billion euros (ORF, 2025). Thus, in the Austrian system, commercial revenues are not negligible, which results in greater financial diversification while also increasing market exposure.

In Germany, public media funding is based on a mandatory, device-independent household fee (Rundfunkbeitrag), similar to the system in Austria. Revenue from the contribution amounted to 8.74 billion euros in 2024, accounting for approximately 85 percent of total funding (Beitragservice, 2024). Advertising and other revenues do exist, but German media regulations impose time and volume limits on the advertising activities of public service channels, so the role of commercial revenues in the funding structure is deliberately limited (Medienstaatsvertrag, 2023; ZDF, 2024).

Following the abolition of the traditional license fee in France, public media shifted to direct state funding. In 2025, public media service providers received €3.949 billion in state subsidies, accounting for approximately 75–80 percent of total funding (ARCOM, 2025). Reform plans affecting the governance structure of public media service providers (such as the creation of a holding company) are on the agenda and are at the center of parliamentary debates (Vie publique, 2025).

According to comparative studies, the funding model of public media is closely linked to the issues of institutional autonomy and political influence. Analyses by the European Broadcasting Union highlight that in countries where public media operates primarily through direct budgetary support, the stability of funding is more heavily dependent on current political decision-making, which can increase political exposure (EBU, 2023). In contrast, models based on household contributions or license fees offer greater financial independence from the

executive branch, which can serve as a guarantee of formal institutional independence (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022). At the same time, the fee system is vulnerable: several European examples show that the amount or existence of the fee can be modified or abolished by a parliamentary decision (Public Media Alliance, 2026). According to the Council of Europe’s policy recommendations, the predictability of funding and multi-year guarantees are key to ensuring editorial autonomy, regardless of whether revenue comes from budgetary or license fee sources (Council of Europe, 2018). Commercial revenues do not become a dominant funding pillar in any of the models; however, in some countries—such as Austria—they play an important supplementary role in the funding mix (EBU, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

According to the analysis by Republikon Institute, the evening news program on the public broadcaster M1 in 2025 clearly failed to meet the public service requirements set forth by both domestic media laws and European standards. The content and structure of the news program do not reflect political diversity, do not ensure equal opportunities for political actors, and do not offer unbiased, fact-based information to viewers. Furthermore, public media is not only biased but has fundamentally become a tool of social polarization rather than social integration. Serious concerns may also arise regarding what remains of public service if institutional autonomy (both professional and financial) is completely subsumed by the government’s will. It can therefore be said of the M1 channel’s news program that the content of the news does not reflect reality, but rather validates a pre-fabricated political narrative.

A recurring pattern in the news is that government figures are portrayed in a positive light, while opposition figures (especially politicians from the Tisza Party) are often depicted in a disparaging context. Critical or alternative viewpoints are rarely given airtime, and when they are, it is as a counterpoint to the government’s perspective, not as a standalone position. Thus, the majority of publicly funded

media regularly dehumanizes and character-assassines political figures instead of providing a space for debate.

With regard to the funding of public service media, the question arises: can such a high level of support be justified if it serves not to improve the quality of public service but to deepen political influence? It may also be interesting to see how Hungary's reputation within the international community evolves, given that the state of press freedom is problematic according to leading indices and that, at the European level, Hungary ranks near the bottom of the list in this regard.

The findings of the analysis and the current state of the media make it clear that the current operation of public media requires structural reforms. Reviewing the operation of public media would be one of the most important steps toward restoring democratic public discourse, and social oversight is what would be necessary for institutional transformation and accountability.