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## **COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**

### **2025 Rule of Law Report Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Slovakia**

#### *Accompanying the document*

**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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## **ABSTRACT**

Since the 2024 Report, Slovakia has engaged in an intensive dialogue with the Commission to resolve the issues identified, and efforts in this regard are ongoing. In this context, a series of amendments to the Criminal Codes were passed in the second half of 2024 to adjust earlier amendments, with a view to align the legislation with the Directive on the protection of EU financial interests. The Government proposed amendments to judges' laws introducing various changes, some of which are welcomed by stakeholders as addressing the efficiency of courts. They also re-introduce bonuses for judges and amend the rules for evaluation. The draft amendments furthermore propose establishing a second instance review in disciplinary decisions regarding judges, prosecutors, notaries and bailiffs, while giving an increasing role to the Judicial Council. Reflections are ongoing on introducing safeguards to ensure sufficient guarantees of independence as regards the dismissal of the members of the Judicial Council, though no formal steps have yet been taken. While amendments to the Criminal Codes introduced last year clarified some procedural aspects regarding criminal liability for judicial decisions and the Government indicated openness for further legislative action, there is still a need to make further progress on introducing sufficient safeguards. There are plans to address some challenges reported by stakeholders related to the implementation of the judicial map reformed in 2023. A reform extends the access to free legal aid to a wider group of society, while digitalisation efforts are ongoing. The justice system continues to face challenges as regards its efficiency, particularly in administrative cases.

Whereas the 2024 criminal law reform was realigned to be consistent with EU law, other aspects still raise specific anti-corruption concerns and previously identified risks appear to have materialised with several high-level cases statute-barred or reclassified as misdemeanours only. The closure of specialised anti-corruption entities (National Crime Agency and Special Prosecutor's Office) resulted in delays in investigations transferred to other bodies and significant drops in the number of corruption cases. Prosecutorial decisions deemed to be illegal continued to be annulled by the Prosecutor General, including in high-level corruption cases, who is able to reassign such cases and give direct instructions. A new National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2024-2029 and a related Action Plan are in preparation for intergovernmental consultation procedure. There are some initial developments to strengthen the prevention of conflict of interest. Political commitments to introduce legislative initiatives on lobbying or asset declarations are still to be translated into proposals.

A draft law amending the Media Services Act aims to expand the competences of the national regulator. The abolition of the previous public service broadcaster and the establishment of a new entity continues to raise concerns about the autonomy of public service media. The Freedom of Information Act was amended to introduce additional conditions for accessing information in certain cases. No measures have been taken to improve the safety and working environment of journalists, with stakeholders concluding that there has been a deterioration in this field.

Practices by-passing stakeholders' involvement in the law-making process and frequent recourse to fast-track legislative procedures continue to raise concerns. The civil society environment faces further pressure, and new reporting and information disclosure obligations introduce additional burden for civil society organisations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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.

## I. JUSTICE SYSTEM<sup>1</sup>

### Independence

**The level of perceived judicial independence in Slovakia continues to be low among both the general public and companies.** Overall, 32% of the general population and 34% of companies perceive the level of independence of courts and judges to be ‘fairly or very good’ in 2025<sup>2</sup>. The perceived judicial independence among the general public has slightly decreased in comparison with 2024 (33%) but has increased in comparison with 2021 (28%). The perceived level of independence among companies has slightly increased in comparison with 2024 (33%) and has increased in comparison with 2021 (30%).

**A series of amendments to the Criminal Codes were passed in the second half of 2024 to adjust earlier amendments with a view to align the legislation with the Directive on the protection of EU financial interests**<sup>3</sup>. The 2024 Report noted that significant amendments introduced to the Criminal Codes had been adopted in a fast-track procedure without appropriate consultation of stakeholders<sup>4</sup>. The Commission voiced its serious concerns over the content of the reform<sup>5</sup>, including the impact of lowering of the penalties and statutes of limitations on the effectiveness of the fight against corruption, including as regards the protection of EU financial interests. Following extensive consultations between the Slovak Government and the European Commission, the Slovak Parliament adopted in December 2024 additional amendments, which ensured alignment with the Directive on the protection of EU financial interests (“PIF Directive”)<sup>6</sup>.

**The Government proposed amendments to the judges’ laws introducing changes on resource allocation, some of which are welcomed by stakeholders as addressing the efficiency of courts**<sup>7</sup>. With the objective of increasing efficiency<sup>8</sup>, the amendments, currently discussed in Parliament<sup>9</sup>, notably provide for the possibility of a visiting judge to be temporarily assigned from a district to a regional court based on the request of the president of the latter and following the decision of the Judicial Council. Stakeholders generally welcome the extended use of this provision as a solution to address the backlog at courts<sup>10</sup>. Unlike the already existing temporary assignment to district courts, which is subject to an exhaustive list of criteria, the conditions for the temporary assignment to a higher court are,

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<sup>1</sup> An overview of the institutional framework for all four pillars can be found [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> Figures 50 and 52, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard and Figures 49 and 51, 2023 EU Justice Scoreboard. The level of perceived judicial independence is categorised as follows: very low (below 30% of respondents perceive judicial independence as fairly good and very good); low (between 30-39%), average (between 40-59%), high (between 60-75%), very high (above 75%).

<sup>3</sup> Amendments of 8 February 2024 were further amended as regards EU financial interests on 16 July 2024, 11 September 2024 and 17 December 2024.

<sup>4</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, pp. 4 et seq.

<sup>5</sup> Concerns were also raised by the European Chief Prosecutor and the European Parliament. EPPO (2023), European Parliament (2024).

<sup>6</sup> See also Pillar II below.

<sup>7</sup> Government Bill No. 816, amending the following acts: Act on judges and lay judges, Act on the Judicial Council, Act on the disciplinary proceedings before the Supreme Administrative Court, and Act on courts.

<sup>8</sup> Slovak Government (2025), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Parliamentary Bill No. 816.

<sup>10</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Supreme Court, Supreme Administrative Court. The temporary assignment to a higher court will serve also as a background for promotion. Country visit Slovakia, Association of Judges.

however, not clearly defined<sup>11</sup>. The amendments also introduce the possibility for a judge to obtain protection from the police if needed, also when conducting work outside of court premises. Stakeholders welcomed this proposed change, aiming to increase the safety of judges<sup>12</sup>.

**The draft amendments to the judges' laws also re-introduce bonuses for judges and amend the rules for evaluation.** The Government also proposed changes to the rules on the evaluation of judges, increasing the Judicial Council's powers over the evaluation committees and their final decisions on the basis of a resolution of the Judicial Council following communication with the evaluation commission<sup>13</sup>. The draft amendments introduce the possibility to award bonuses to judges when they reach the age of 50 and/or 60. The mere fulfilment of the age criterion makes a judge eligible, however not entitled to a bonus. Since no further conditions for granting a bonus are specified, the provisions leave discretion in awarding them<sup>14</sup>. According to European standards, the remuneration should rely on objective and transparent criteria and bonuses which include an element of discretion should be excluded<sup>15</sup>.

**The draft amendments also propose establishing a second instance review in disciplinary decisions regarding judges, prosecutors, notaries and bailiffs, while giving an increasing role to the Judicial Council.** The draft amendments to judges' laws would introduce a full second instance review before the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC), which was welcomed by stakeholders as a positive step forward<sup>16</sup>. The Judicial Council would appoint one member and one lay judge within a three-member first instance disciplinary panel, and two members and two lay judges within a five-member second instance panel<sup>17</sup>. The Judicial Council would also have the power to initiate disciplinary cases against judges, as well as the right to appeal disciplinary decisions to the second instance<sup>18</sup>. While the Supreme Administrative Court judges would hold one position in a first instance

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<sup>11</sup> According to European standards, temporary assignment, even happening with consent and on a temporary basis, should be used only in exceptional circumstances. ODIHR (2023), para 35.

<sup>12</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Judicial Council, Supreme Administrative Court, Supreme Court, Association of Judges.

<sup>13</sup> Slovak Government (2025), written input, p. 9. Approved draft amendments, points 10 et seq. Supreme Court raised concerns over the amendments on the evaluation of judges. According to the Government, the aim is to strengthen the guarantees for judges in relation to the review of the report of the evaluation commission.

<sup>14</sup> When judges reach the age of 50, there is still discretion to grant the bonus. The decision to grant a bonus to a judge is made by that court's president, while the Minister of Justice decides on granting a bonus to a regional court president and the Judicial Council for the Supreme Court President. Stakeholders raised concerns over the introduction of bonuses and that this could be a tool for possible influencing or manipulating of judges. Country visit Slovakia, Via Iuris, Supreme Court.

<sup>15</sup> Venice Commission (2010), para 46.

<sup>16</sup> Amendments to the Act on the disciplinary proceedings at the Supreme Administrative Court.

<sup>17</sup> In cases against judges, the first instance panel would consist of a president (judge of the Supreme Administrative Court), one judge of other court and one layman. Second instance panel would consist of its president (judge of the Supreme Administrative Court), one judge of the Supreme Administrative Court, two judges of other court and a layman. Judges of other courts, as well as laymen, are chosen into databases created by the Judicial Council. The Judicial Council appoints the members into the database without a prior standard selection procedure, solely on the basis of their hearing before the Judicial Council. Concrete member will be selected from the relevant databases by random selection using technical and software tools when a disciplinary proposal is registered in the registry for each disciplinary proposal separately. Judicial Council (2025), additional written input.

<sup>18</sup> Before the amendments, only the President of the Judicial Council had the power to initiate the proceedings.

panel and two positions in a second instance panel, in practice the amended eligibility rules currently mean that only two judges would be eligible for the panel<sup>19</sup>. Several stakeholders have expressed concerns over the Judicial Council's expanded role and its potential to exert undue influence over disciplinary outcomes<sup>20</sup>.

**Whereas reflections are ongoing on introducing safeguards to ensure sufficient guarantees of independence as regards the dismissal of the members of the Judicial Council, no formal steps have yet been taken**<sup>21</sup>. The Slovak authorities have indicated to the European Commission that they are reflecting on the possibility of a constitutional reform concerning the conditions for the dismissal of Judicial Council members, notably those not elected by judges. The conditions for the dismissal of Judicial Council members, notably those not elected by judges, are still not laid out in law. Since November 2023, all members previously nominated by the Government, the President, and Parliament have been dismissed and replaced before completing their respective terms<sup>22</sup>. The Constitutional Court declined the constitutional complaints submitted by dismissed members<sup>23</sup>. The Judicial Council holds a key role, particularly in the selection process for judicial appointments, the vetting procedure of judges, disciplinary proceedings, awarding bonuses, and decisions on whether to terminate prosecution of a judge for the crime of 'abuse of law'. According to the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, judicial councils, where they exist, need to hold sufficient guarantees of independence in relation to the legislature and the executive power, including the way how their members can be dismissed<sup>24</sup>. In order to increase its credibility, the Judicial Council adopted a decision to promote and implement certain recommendations of the European Network of Judicial Councils<sup>25</sup>. A wide discretion to dismiss the members of the Judicial Council creates a potential risk of taking decisions with a form of prior compliance<sup>26</sup>. Considering that no formal steps have yet been taken to introduce guarantees

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<sup>19</sup> The amendments require that only a person who has more than 10 years of professional experience as a judge may sit in the panel, which *de facto* leads in only two out of all SAC judges being eligible. While the SAC judges hold a presiding position in the disciplinary panels, the weight of the president's vote does not outweigh the vote of the majority.

<sup>20</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Supreme Administrative Court, Via Iuris, Judges for Open Judiciary. See also ENNHRI (2025). According to the CCJE (2024), para 19 et seq., there should be a clear separation between those who initiate the proceedings and those who decide. According to the CCJE (2002), para 71, the body responsible for appointing such a tribunal should be independent.

<sup>21</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended Slovakia to 'introduce 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'.

<sup>22</sup> The Council is composed of 18 Members, half of which are judges elected by their peers. The Government, the Parliament and the President of the Republic each choose three members as well. Parliament dismissed two of its nominees on 2 May 2024, followed by the dismissal of two more members by the newly elected President on 15 July 2024. While the President appointed all three of his nominees on 16 July 2024, Parliament appointed two members in April 2024 and March 2025, one post remains vacant. Association of Judges (2025), written input, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> See 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> The Court of Justice of the European Union has recalled, as regards the process for appointing members of the judiciary, for a Council of the Judiciary to contribute to rendering that process more objective, it is necessary that such a body should itself be sufficiently independent of the legislature, the executive and the authority to which it is required to submit an opinion on the assessment of candidates for a judicial post (judgment of the CJEU, C-896/19, *Repubblika*, para. 66).

<sup>25</sup> Decision of the Judicial Council 212/2014 of 18 June 2024, to promote and implement recommendations set out in the Report on the Code of Conduct for Members of Judicial Councils and the recommendations of the Compendium of the European Network of Judicial Councils on Judicial Councils.

<sup>26</sup> CJEU, joined cases C-313/23, C-316/23 and C-332/23, para. 87 et seq.

for independence as regards the dismissal of members of the Judicial Council, there has been overall no progress on the implementation of this recommendation.

**While amendments to the criminal codes introduced last year clarified some procedural aspects regarding criminal liability for judicial decisions and the Government indicated openness for further legislative action, there is still a need to make further progress on introducing sufficient safeguards<sup>27</sup>.** Under this crime, judges may be prosecuted for an arbitrary decision causing damage to or bestowing a favour on another person<sup>28</sup>. Upon the concerned judge's request, the Judicial Council can dissent with the prosecution of the judge for this criminal offence by a vote of at least ten of its members<sup>29</sup>. This safeguard mechanism was applied in 2024 with the Judicial Council's dissent with the prosecution in three criminal proceedings<sup>30</sup>. Amendments to the criminal codes, adopted in 2024, clarified the moment from which the judge can file such a request, which can now be before the decision on indictment enters into effect. A 60 day time-limit for a judge's right to request a vote to dissent with the prosecution from the moment of delivery of a decision on indictment was introduced<sup>31</sup>. The vast majority of crime reports filed against judges have so far been dismissed at early stages of proceedings. Besides creating administrative workload, in the absence of clarity and of sufficient safeguards, the provision is prone to potential misuse, creating a chilling effect on the independent exercise of the judges' decision-making<sup>32</sup>. The existence of criminal proceedings against a judge is also relevant for the vetting procedure<sup>33</sup>. The need for further safeguards was also raised by the stakeholders<sup>34</sup>. The Slovak authorities are engaged in dialogue with the European Commission and the Council of Europe to address this issue, and showed openness for further revising the law to either abolish the criminal offence of 'abuse of law' or to introduce safeguards. However, as a legislative proposal is still in the consultation process, only limited progress has been made on this recommendation.

**The power of the Prosecutor General to annul final decisions of lower-ranking prosecutors, now combined with the new prosecutorial framework, remains a concern<sup>35</sup>.** The Prosecutor General can issue instructions at any stage of the proceedings, even before a final decision is taken by investigators and prosecutors. Combined with the new prosecutorial framework, this broadens his scope of areas of competence. No legislative steps have so far been taken to revise Section 363 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which gives the Prosecutor

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<sup>27</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended Slovakia to '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'.

<sup>28</sup> Section 326a of the Slovak Criminal Code.

<sup>29</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Judicial Council. Slovak Government (2025) additional written input.

<sup>31</sup> Amendments to the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code of 8 February 2024.

<sup>32</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, pp. 7, 8. Country visit Slovakia, Association of Judges, Judicial Council.

<sup>33</sup> Vetting procedure of a judge is initiated every time when there is a promotion of a judge to a higher court, but also by the decision of the Judicial Council if a majority agrees (i.e. more than 9), Act on the Judicial Council. Information received by the Association of Judges.

<sup>34</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Judicial Council and Association of Judges. Association of Judges (2025), written input, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> See in this context also pillar II.



General power to annul final decisions of lower-ranking prosecutors or the police<sup>36</sup>, though it may be revisited in the planned re-codification exercise in 2025-2026. While instructions not to prosecute are prohibited by law, Article 6(10) of the Act on Prosecutors still makes it possible for the immediate superior to remove a case from the subordinated prosecutor and decide on it. Additionally, the Serious Crime Unit, which was established after the dissolution of the Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO), does not benefit from the same level of autonomy as the previous SPO. The allocation of cases among the Regional Prosecutor's Offices and the Serious Crime Unit is conducted on an *ad hoc* basis without objective criteria.

## Quality

**There are plans to address some challenges reported by stakeholders related to the implementation of the judicial map reformed in 2023.** The reformed judicial map, including the new separate system of administrative courts, is in place since 1 June 2023. The reform is part of Slovakia's commitments under the Recovery and Resilience Plan and aims at improving the efficiency and quality of the justice system<sup>37</sup>. The administrative courts of first instance are reported to function well, with the expectations for the efficiency to continuously increase in the coming years<sup>38</sup>. Various authorities and stakeholders, including the Ministry of Justice, the Prosecutor General's Office, the Judicial Council, the Association of Judges and the Slovak Bar Association, have reported on difficulties encountered in its implementation, particularly due to the low number of judges available for the required specialisation at certain courts and the need for requalification of a high number of judges, which lead to delays in proceedings. Stakeholders also pointed to the fact that the reorganisation created logistical difficulties, as some courts now operate across multiple locations, requiring participants – including prosecutors – to travel significant distances, including to different cities<sup>39</sup>. The Ministry of Justice introduced amendments to address some of the practical issues<sup>40</sup>.

**A reform extends the access to free legal aid to a wider group of society, while digitalisation efforts are ongoing.** The reform of the system of legal aid entered into force on [1 July 2025]. Access to free legal aid is extended by raising the income threshold for eligibility, broadening the categories of eligible individuals, allowing for the waiver of fees for preliminary consultations, and lowering the minimum value required for a dispute to qualify<sup>41</sup>. They also aim at decreasing the administrative burden within the proceedings on the provision of free legal aid<sup>42</sup>. In December 2024, Slovakia launched a new platform for the Business Register, introducing new electronic services, namely as regards the registration and

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<sup>36</sup> In 2024, the Prosecutor General exercised his power under Section 363 in 97 cases, of which less than half had a direct impact on the resolution to bring charges. Some criminal proceedings were also re-opened by annulling decisions to discontinue criminal proceedings. Slovak Government (2025), written input, p. 33, and additional written input, respectively.

<sup>37</sup> For detailed description of the reform, see 2023 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, pp. 3-4.

<sup>38</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Supreme Administrative Court.

<sup>39</sup> Association of Judges (2025), written input, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> The amendments are proposed in the context of the judges' laws. Explanatory memorandum to the Government Bill amending Act. No. 385/2000 Coll. The two aspects proposed to be amended relate to budgetary chapter and that it will now be sufficient for a district court to have two instead of three specialised judges in order to create a territorial district for its workplace.

<sup>41</sup> Amendments to the Act on the provision of legal aid to persons in material need and several related acts.

<sup>42</sup> Explanatory note to the amendments to the Act on the provision of legal aid to persons in material need.

changes of data<sup>43</sup>. Work on the interconnection of the information systems of the police and the prosecution service is still ongoing and the development of a new digital court management system remains in the public procurement phase<sup>44</sup>.

## Efficiency

**The justice system continues to face challenges as regards its efficiency, particularly in administrative cases.** The estimated time for resolving civil and commercial cases at first instance increased slightly to 173 days in 2023 (168 days in 2022). In first instance criminal courts, the money laundering offences were resolved in 2023 in 791 days on average (significantly longer than 520 days on average in 2022)<sup>45</sup>. However, despite the reorganisation of the judicial map and the establishment of a dedicated administrative court system, the efficiency of administrative courts has significantly deteriorated. The estimated time for resolving administrative cases at first instance rose sharply from 648 days in 2022 to 1 040 days in 2023, making it one of the highest in the EU. Additionally, the clearance rate for administrative cases dropped from 93% in 2022 to 74% in 2023, indicating that courts were resolving considerably fewer cases than the number of incoming cases. Lengthy administrative proceedings have been identified by stakeholders in Slovakia as an obstacle for businesses, as it impacts on the process of obtaining the necessary permits and approvals<sup>46</sup>. This deterioration may be due to the initial implementation phase of the reorganisation of the judicial map and the establishment of a dedicated administrative court system, which was expected to cause temporary delays.

## II. ANTI-CORRUPTION FRAMEWORK

**The perception among experts, citizens and business executives is that the level of corruption in the public sector is high.** In the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International, Slovakia scores 49/100 and ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> in the European Union and 59 globally<sup>47</sup>. After several consecutive years of improvement, this perception is where it was five years ago<sup>48</sup>. The 2025 Special Eurobarometer on Corruption shows that 78% of respondents consider corruption widespread in their country (EU average 69) and 31% of respondents feel personally affected by corruption in their daily lives (EU average 30). As regards businesses, 85% of companies consider that corruption is widespread (EU average 63%) and 64% consider that corruption is a problem when doing business (EU average 35). Furthermore, 26% of respondents find that there are enough successful prosecutions to deter people from corrupt practices (EU average 36), while 10% of companies believe that people

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<sup>43</sup> Slovak Government (2025), written input, p. 28. The focus was on streamlining and developing existing information systems, e.g. Business Register. Work was done also on other already existing information systems.

<sup>44</sup> Slovak Government (2025), written input, pp. 29-31. The envisaged finalisation is in November 2027. Country visit Slovakia, Ministry of Justice.

<sup>45</sup> Figure 21, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard.

<sup>46</sup> Country visit Slovakia, the Rule of Law Initiative.

<sup>47</sup> The level of perceived corruption is categorised as follows: low (above 79); relatively low (between 79-60), relatively high (between 59-50), high (below 50).

<sup>48</sup> In 2020, the score was 49, while in 2024, the score is 49. The score significantly increases/decreases when it changes more than five points; improves/deteriorates (changes between 4-5 points) and is relatively stable (changes from 1-3 points) in the last five years. For Slovakia, the situation has overall worsened: In 2021, it went up to 52, in 2022 up to 53, in 2023 up to 54.

and businesses caught for bribing a senior official are appropriately punished (EU average 33)<sup>49</sup>.

**A new National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2024-2029 and related Action Plan are in preparation**<sup>50</sup>. The strategy will include measures on corruption risk management and will support integrity in public administration<sup>51</sup>. The action plan will focus on capacity building, education, corruption risk management, and data collection for monitoring. The submission of the strategy to the Government for intergovernmental consultation is planned to take place soon in 2025.

**Whereas adjustments have been made to ensure the protection of the EU's financial interests and the Slovak government has engaged actively to this end, with the entry into force of the criminal law reform of 2024, previously identified risks appear to have to a certain extent materialised.** The amendments reported on last year, notably relating to the statute of limitation periods and sanctions for corruption offences<sup>52</sup>, impacted on several ongoing corruption investigations and prosecutions<sup>53</sup>, including of high-level officials, politicians and businessmen closely affiliated to politics. Some cases, including several high-level corruption cases, were irretrievably affected due to the introduction of more lenient sanctions (*lex mitior*), with no opportunity to reopen the cases on the basis of the same evidence (*ne bis in idem*). The effective seizure of assets acquired through criminal activity was also negatively affected<sup>54</sup>. Concerns had previously been raised regarding the effectiveness and deterrence of reduced corruption sanctions, the shortened statute of limitation periods, and their alignment with the PIF Directive<sup>55</sup>. Several additional amendments were adopted in the second half of 2024 to address the PIF Directive-related concerns. These amendments aim at guaranteeing that the EU's financial interests remain protected, ensuring that the EPPO is fully enabled to pursue at least fraud and corruption affecting the EU budget.

**There has been no progress on the recommendation on investigating and prosecuting high-level corruption with a view to establishing a robust track record**<sup>56</sup>. In 2024, the

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<sup>49</sup> Data from Special Eurobarometer 561 (2025) and Flash Eurobarometer 557 (2025).

<sup>50</sup> Adopting a new strategy is a commitment in the Government Programme Statement of 2023.

<sup>51</sup> For the annual monitoring of sectoral anti-corruption measures of the individual ministries, most of the ministries have provided ex-post information to the Government Office by mid-2024, not reporting however against measurable indicators. The Council of Anti-Corruption Coordinators, who are placed in all ministries, continued to serve as an advisory body for the Head of the Government Office.

<sup>52</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, pp. 4 et seq., and 13-14 et seq.

<sup>53</sup> According to data collected by some stakeholders, the amendments may have affected the prosecution of at least 1 324 individuals, with 446 convicted persons released from prison. Zastavme Korupciu (2025), written input, p. 2. Official data reported by the government show that, in the period from 6 August to 31 December 2024, 104 prosecutions stopped due to statutes of limitations; 252 stopped as the act is no longer a criminal offence; 831 cases transferred to misdemeanour or disciplinary proceedings due to reclassification of the criminal act.

<sup>54</sup> In some specific cases, the accused's property acquired by criminal conduct remained seized, Slovak Government (2025), written input, p. 69. On systemic weaknesses of the Asset Management Office, Supreme Audit Office report (2025).

<sup>55</sup> For more details, see above in pillar 1.

<sup>56</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended Slovakia to '[e]nsure 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.' Similarly, European Semester,

Prosecutor General continued to use his powers to annul those final police and prosecutor decisions deemed to be illegal<sup>57</sup>, which has resulted in the closure of investigations, including as regards several high-profile defendants. The Prosecutor General is now also able to reassign high-level corruption cases formerly in the competence of the Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO) and give direct instructions to the previously more autonomous SPO prosecutors at all stages of the investigation<sup>58</sup>. At the same time, the reassignment of former SPO prosecutors to other priorities than corruption, risks leading to delays in practice in the prosecution of complex and high-level corruption cases in a situation where criminal proceedings are generally already lengthy. Government statistics show a drop of corruption cases being investigated<sup>59</sup> and prosecuted<sup>60</sup> in the second half of 2024, partly also do to organisational changes following the dissolution of the specialised police and prosecution agencies<sup>61</sup>. The split of NAKA's exclusive corruption competence among several general police entities at different levels may carry risks of less effective investigations<sup>62</sup>. The newly created central Bureau for Combating Crime (UBOK) has competence to investigate a number of crimes unrelated to corruption, but focuses primarily on the investigation of the most serious corruption crimes<sup>63</sup>. Other corruption cases are transferred to various lower-level police departments<sup>64</sup>. Several stakeholders and the EPPO highlight significant shortages of specialised corruption investigators and financial analysts, even for the central police<sup>65</sup>.

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Slovakia (2024) recommends 'that adequate safeguards for the effective investigation and prosecution of high-level corruption cases are in place.'

<sup>57</sup> See Independence section, above; some criminal proceedings were also re-opened. The Prosecutor General issued resolutions to annul corruption accusations in five cases, in response to his serious investigative conclusions on fundamental deficiencies in the concept of the factual sentence of the resolution to bring charges, on the selective evaluation of the results of the evidence, on the failure to deal with the negative condition of criminal prosecution in the form of its statute of limitations, or on the basis of the criminal prosecution of a specific person on evidence obtained in violation of the Criminal Procedure Code, as reported by the Government. See also Slovak Government (2025), written input, p. 34.

<sup>58</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 17.

<sup>59</sup> The Ministry of Interior recorded 149 new corruption cases (241 in 2023): 93 at NAKA (January-August), and 56 at UBOK (August-December). Slovak Government (2025), written input, p. 63. Enforcement levels of foreign bribery remain low. The Government Programme contains a commitment to develop a public police information system with up-to-date crime statistics. Currently, less analytical data is provided to the public and policymakers, with analytical units closed at the Ministry of Justice, of Defence, of Culture, and of Finance.

<sup>60</sup> In 2024, 137 were registered for criminal prosecution (in 2023, 160). According to the Slovak Government (2024), written input, pp. 63-66, the decrease in the number is not related to the activities of the prosecutor's office, but to the police, referencing also the significant organisational changes within the Police Presidium, both in terms of investigators and operatives. This transitional period may reflect the temporary decrease in the number of criminal cases.

<sup>61</sup> Slovak Government (2025), p. 68. See also Zastavme Korupciu (2025), written input, pp. 1. See also 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> Order of Police Force President (27 August 2024) on competence as governed by Regulation No. 175/2010, introduced "selective competence".

<sup>63</sup> Following the Criminal Code reform, fewer cases qualified as serious (corruption) crimes. UBOK also has less autonomy and less specialisation compared to NAKA. Slovak Government (2025), written input, pp. 41 et seq.

<sup>64</sup> The Government reports that since 1 June 2025, Regulation No. 56 (27 May 2025) as a non-public police internal order on activities in detecting crimes and on the procedure in criminal proceedings is in place, following Regulation No. 175 (30 December 2010) which introduced the 'selective competence' of the new UBOK. See also, Council of Europe (2001), p. 8; UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials.

<sup>65</sup> The Recovery and Resilience Plan includes corruption trainings only for NAKA, see component 16. Ca. 100 officers were reassigned to regional or local district, Slovak Government (2025x), p. 43. EPPO (2025),

Operational questions remain on the coordination and effectiveness of interlinked corruption and organised crime investigations, which are now in the competence of separate entities<sup>66</sup>. The effectiveness of police investigations continues to be hampered by the lack of a central electronic information exchange system and central access to databases<sup>67</sup>. Against this background, there has been no progress on the recommendation made in the previous years.

**While the whistleblower protection framework remained in place, low reporting and reduced institutional cooperation impact its effectiveness.** The Ministry of Interior ran internal and social media awareness raising campaigns to promote the whistleblower protection framework in 2024<sup>68</sup>. Reporting remains however low, especially in areas where the private sector engages with the state<sup>69</sup>. The processing of whistleblower reports in practice by the police is negatively affected by the dissolution of NAKA, with risks of delays in handling corruption reports and a reported lack of clarity as to which police entity is dealing with reports previously submitted to NAKA<sup>70</sup>. In a decision of 23 October 2024, the Whistleblower Office found that the Ministry of Interior had violated the law by not consulting the Whistleblower Office before it suspended, as previously reported, ten anti-corruption investigators who had the status of protected whistleblowers and imposed on the Ministry a EUR 90 000 fine<sup>71</sup>. The Ministry of the Interior disagreed with the fine and court proceedings are currently ongoing in the matter<sup>72</sup>. Several amongst the NAKA anti-corruption investigators concerned appealed against the Ministry's suspension decisions (cases pending at first instance). This context impacted the interinstitutional cooperation between Government entities and the Whistleblower Protection Office<sup>73</sup>.

**There has been no progress to regulate lobbying activities<sup>74</sup>.** Lobbying in Slovakia remains unregulated. In its Programme Statement, the Government committed to propose legislation to regulate the contacts of public officials with persons representing the interests of individuals or organisations to strengthen transparency in the decision-making process<sup>75</sup>. In December 2024, members of Parliament from the government coalition submitted to

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written input, p. 56: Due to institutional changes and retirements, a considerable number of experienced, specialised investigators have left the police.

<sup>66</sup> The reintroduced line-unit management per individual crime topic was abolished after the Jan Kuciak murder and replaced by a cross-crime, regional approach to allow for holistic investigations of interlinked crimes.

<sup>67</sup> Tax data can only be requested causing delays in investigations, 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Ministry of Interior.

<sup>69</sup> High-risk corruption areas in this context are in particular bribes from entrepreneurs to public officials for the provision of subsidies, non-refundable financial contributions, and lucrative contracts, among others. See also 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 22.

<sup>70</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Office for the Protection of Whistleblowers. In law, the handling of corruption reports is defined in section 196 Criminal Procedure Code and a new police internal order (Regulation No. 56 of 27 May 2025, in force since 1 June 2025).

<sup>71</sup> Decision UOO-453/2024, No 4806/2024. The decision is final but subject to administrative review. 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> The Ministry of Interior pointed out that the mentioned investigators were, however, accused of criminal activity, and according to the law, a police officer must be temporarily suspended from state service if his continuing service endangered an important interest of the state service or the course of clarifying their conduct, and that there is reasonable suspicion that they had allegedly committed a criminal offense (section 46 (1) of Act No. 73/1998 Coll.).

<sup>73</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Office for the Protection of Whistleblowers. See also the Office for the Protection of Whistleblowers (2025).

<sup>74</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended to Slovakia to “introduce proposals to regulate lobbying [...]”

<sup>75</sup> Slovak Government (2023c).

Parliament different amendments to the legislation on non-governmental organisations (NGOs), first to increase transparency of foreign-funded NGOs<sup>76</sup> and, at a later stage, to regulate NGO lobbying activities<sup>77</sup>. The amendments raised public criticism for their exclusive scope on lobbying by NGOs<sup>78</sup> and for failing to take into account international and European standards on lobbying<sup>79</sup>. These amendments were ultimately withdrawn<sup>80</sup>. The Ministry of Interior reports to have begun drafting a lobbying regulation law and first expert consultations have taken place with representatives from the Government, Parliament, non-governmental and academic sectors, and the European Commission<sup>81</sup>. Overall, initial steps have been taken, but since no legislation is proposed, there has been no progress yet on the recommendation.

**There has been some progress to reform Slovakia's conflicts of interest rules<sup>82</sup>.** Conflicts of interest rules remain fragmented with some aspects being regulated in sectoral acts, ethical codes and guidelines for judges, prosecutors and members of the financial administrations<sup>83</sup>. For high-level public officials, some regulations are in place<sup>84</sup>. In 2024, the Government Office in cooperation with the Council of Anti-Corruption Coordinators prepared a draft Code of Conduct for persons in high executive Government functions, which it expects to present in July 2025<sup>85</sup>. No such Code of Conduct currently exists for members of Parliament<sup>86</sup>. While some general post-employment restrictions exist to prevent conflict of

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<sup>76</sup> Amendments were proposed for: Act on non-profit organisations providing generally beneficial services, Act on foundations; Act on non-investment funds; Act on associations of citizens; Act on the conditions of activity of organisations with an international element in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic; and Act on the Registry of Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organisations.

<sup>77</sup> The amendments were supported by the Government, see Opinion of the Government Office on the proposal to regulate lobbying in the National Council (2024). Slovak Government (2024); (2025), written input, p. 54.

<sup>78</sup> Council of Europe (2025); Via Iuris (2024a).

<sup>79</sup> Council of Europe (2017); OECD (2024). The amendments lacked comprehensive legal definitions for all interest representatives regardless of their nature and legal status, as recommended also by European Parliament (2024a) resolution of 17 January 2024 on transparency and accountability of NGOs funded by the EU budget (2023/2122(INI)). Similarly, the European Commission (2023) proposal for a Directive on interest representation carried out on behalf of third countries. They also did not provide for definitions of lobby activities and targets, effective sanctions for undue lobbying, a mandatory transparency register or a legislative footprint.

<sup>80</sup> On 16 April 2025, Parliament ultimately adopted a law which concerns financial transparency of NGOs. See pillar IV below for details on this law.

<sup>81</sup> Ministry of Interior (2025).

<sup>82</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended Slovakia to '[s]trengthen the legislation on conflicts of interest [...] for members of Parliament, judges, prosecutors, public officials, and civil servants.

<sup>83</sup> See, for public officials, Constitutional Act no. 357/2004; for civil servants, Act no. 55/2017; for the police, Act no. 73/1998; for judges, see Act no. 385/2000. Detailed recommendations, including on expanding the definition of conflicts of interest and the scope of incompatibilities also in UNCAC (2023), p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> The Constitutional Act No. 357/2004 Coll. applies to the president, members of Parliament and Government, heads of central state administration bodies, state secretaries, general secretaries. The Code of Ethics for Civil Servants is not obligatory for all ministries and central authorities as to vulnerable high-level positions. A methodology to identify positions at risk is provided for by the Government Office, but it is not mandatory, while institutions identify their own risks in their own way. See 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 24.

<sup>85</sup> Aimed at covering Government members, heads of Cabinets, political advisors and secretaries of state. See Government commitment, Slovak Government (2023).

<sup>86</sup> UNCAC (2023), p. 4. Cf. 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 23.

interests, specific regulations on revolving doors for high level officials are not comprehensively in place<sup>87</sup>. There has therefore been some progress on the recommendation.

**There was no progress to strengthen Slovakia's asset declaration system, whereas restrictions to public access to asset disclosures are being considered<sup>88</sup>.** The system of asset declarations for members of Parliament, judges, prosecutors, public officials, and civil servants remains decentralised and fragmented<sup>89</sup>. The Government reports current budgetary constraints for not yet having advanced further on the commitment to introduce single rules for all public officials' asset declarations and an electronic submission system<sup>90</sup>. In view of security concerns, the Government is considering restricting access to currently publicly available asset declarations system, including access upon request only<sup>91</sup>, reducing transparency and monitoring opportunities. Therefore, there has been no progress on the recommendation.

**Amendments to the political party finance law are at an initial stage with a draft law submitted for public and inter-ministerial consultation<sup>92</sup>.** The Government intends to modify the main law regulating the financing of political parties to ensure that public funds earmarked for political party operations are used exclusively for this purpose<sup>93</sup>. Since such a new legal obligation would be open to legitimate and independent audit controls, it carries the risk of excessive access by the Government to information on the internal operations of political parties, when comprehensive transparency requirements on political parties' finances are already in place<sup>94</sup>. The reform is envisaged for the end of 2025. For these purposes, a proposal has been put forward by the Ministry of Interior for an inter-ministerial consultation procedure on 30 June 2025 and a public consultation has been launched<sup>95</sup>. As to campaign finance, stakeholders continue to flag the lack of effective control, enforcement and oversight, including due to political appointments<sup>96</sup>. Also for 2024, incidents of

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<sup>87</sup> They are partially covered under Constitutional Act no. 357/2004 Coll. but not covering all top executives. Slovak Government (2025), written input, p. 53. See also GRECO (2024), recommendation ix, p. 5, paras. 24-27, on the introduction, proper monitoring and enforcement of a Code of Conduct for persons with top executive functions (i.e. ministers, states secretaries, political advisors and senior civil servants closely associated with decision-making).

<sup>88</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended Slovakia to “[s]trengthen the legislation on [...] asset declarations.”

<sup>89</sup> There are eight different norms in legislations for different categories of obliged persons, all requiring different information and disclosure levels. 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 24, reported since 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Government Office. Slovak Government Programme Statement (2023). An electronic asset declaration system would necessitate several amendments, including the Constitutional Act No. 357/2004 Coll., requiring a 3/5 parliamentary majority. Two Government studies have been conducted since 2021, see 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, pp. 24-25.

<sup>91</sup> Slovak Government (2025), written input, p. 55. Legislative amendments are also planned for the Cadastral Act, restricting access to cadastre real estate ownership information by mandatory authentication obligations.

<sup>92</sup> Act No. 85/2005 Coll., on Political Parties and Movements, largely reflecting GRECO recommendations. Donations to political parties of up to EUR 300 000 per calendar year are permitted, while donations from foreign entities and anonymous donors are banned. Failure to comply can result in a fine by the State Commission on Election in the amount of double the income from the donation or the gratuitous service.

<sup>93</sup> Slovak Government (2023).

<sup>94</sup> Parties are already required to report their finances annually to the State Commission for Elections and Control of Funding for Political Parties. The publicly available reports are overseen by Parliament and must reveal financial information on election campaigns and donors' identity (section 22(5) Act on political parties and political movements).

<sup>95</sup> Slovak Government (2024), p. 16.

<sup>96</sup> Decision of the Bratislava District Office. Transparency International (2024a).

circumvention of the transparency obligation in party campaign finance have been reported<sup>97</sup>, with non-transparent campaign funding channelled through party-affiliated companies<sup>98</sup>.

**Legislative amendments to prevent corruption in agriculture are still ongoing**<sup>99</sup>. Overall, agriculture continues to rank among Slovakia's high-risk corruption and fraud areas<sup>100</sup>. The criminal proceedings covering significant fraud, bribery and money laundering associated to EU funding from the Agricultural Paying Agency are still being heard at court<sup>101</sup>. The practice of publishing lease contracts signed by the Land Fund has increased transparency allowing to monitor free and leased land. This progress is counterbalanced against the inoperability of the systems to geolocate leased parcels and to link lease contracts with the cadastre.

**New public procurement rules lower requirements and safeguards, while corruption presents a high risk for businesses.** The Flash Eurobarometer on Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU shows that 49% of companies in Slovakia (EU average 25%) think that corruption has prevented them from winning a public tender or a public procurement contract in practice in the last three years<sup>102</sup>. Companies report that there are increasing levels of businesses' dissatisfaction for the perceived lack of prosecution of corruption by the competent authorities as one of the main factors, as well as an overall worsening of the business climate, including a negative trend of the economic policy conditions impacting their operations<sup>103</sup>. The Single Market and Competitiveness Scoreboard on access to public procurement in Slovakia reports 33% of single bids for 2023 (EU average 29%). Amendments to the Public Procurement Act and the related law on emergency measures for strategic investments have been adopted to simplify public procurement rules<sup>104</sup>. However, by excluding in practice approximately half of the tenders from the scope of the Public Procurement Act, and thus from the reach of criminal law, they risk undermining effective corruption prevention and oversight<sup>105</sup>. The lack of prior publication requirements for the tender notice raises concerns about transparency<sup>106</sup>, and as such about effective

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<sup>97</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Zastavme Korupciu/ Transparency International. Also Dennik N. (2024b).

<sup>98</sup> Supreme Audit Office (2024b) stating that finances entering party budgets through fictitious donors undermine democratic principles. The National State Commission for Elections considered that legislation (section 15 Electoral Campaign Act) is in principle satisfactory, see also 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 26.

<sup>99</sup> Amendments to the Act on Land Modifications, Arrangement of Land Ownership, Land Offices, Land Fund and Land Communities; the Act on the lease of agricultural land, agricultural enterprise and forest land; to Government Regulation on the conditions of lease, sale, exchange, and acquisition of real estate by the Land Fund.

<sup>100</sup> In 2024, the EU Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) concluded extensive casework on agricultural payments. Since 2019, OLAF issued financial and administrative recommendations to correct EU budget fraud and irregularities and to highlight weaknesses in the administration, monitoring and control of the relevant funds.

<sup>101</sup> NAKA detained several high-ranking Land Fund officials allegedly involved in corruption schemes between 2016 and 2020, see 2024 Rule of Law Report, p. 26.

<sup>102</sup> Flash Eurobarometer 557 on Businesses' attitudes towards corruption in the EU (2025). This is 24 percentage points above the EU average.

<sup>103</sup> Country visit, Rule of Law Initiative/ National Union Employers/ American Chamber of Commerce, reporting that companies consider moving abroad due to worsened business environment.

<sup>104</sup> Act No. 179/2024 Coll., amending Act No. 343/2015 Coll., on public procurement, and Act No. 142/2024 Coll., Extraordinary Measures for Strategic Investments and for the Construction of the Trans-European Transport Network.

<sup>105</sup> Contracts with a value up to EUR 50 000 are now excluded. 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 28.

<sup>106</sup> Authorities would only be obliged to publish contracts awards ex-post. Zastavme korupciu (2024). Country visit Slovakia, Transparency International. For tender data, OpenTender Slovakia, <https://opentender.eu/sk>.



safeguards against corruption and favouritism that risk impacting a fair and competitive market. While only 31 % of companies perceive the level of independence of the public procurement review body (the Public Procurement Office) as very or fairly good<sup>107</sup>, the law on strategic investments has raised questions as to the Public Procurement Office's independence and effective controls, as previously reported<sup>108</sup>. Government procurement in the infrastructure, construction, IT and health sectors feature amongst the highest corruption prone areas in Slovakia<sup>109</sup>, providing for an uncertain business and investment environment. According to stakeholders, the two new pieces of legislation do not address the challenges observed in practice, such as the systemic misuse of tenders and the level of professional expertise affecting the quality of public tenders<sup>110</sup>.

### **III. MEDIA PLURALISM AND MEDIA FREEDOM**

**Draft amendments to the Media Services Act aims to expand the competences of the national regulator.** The draft Media Services Act seeks to align Slovak legislation with the European Media Freedom Act. It would expand the competences of the regulator, update the rules on ownership transparency, introduce rules on the allocation of state advertising and adapt the obligations of providers of audience measurement systems. Under Chapter 12 of the Media Services Act, the Council for Media Services performs a market analysis of the media landscape with a view to assessing risk of disruption to media plurality. It can withhold its consent to a market operation if it concludes that a particular operation would lead to a 'decisive interference' with media plurality in the country. Based on the current situation, the Media Pluralism Monitor 2025 considers the independence of the regulator and the allocation of state advertising to be areas presenting, respectively, very low and low risk<sup>111</sup>.

**There has been no progress on the recommendation to enhance the autonomy of public service media**<sup>112</sup>. Following the entry into force, in July 2024, of the Act on Slovak Television and Radio (STVR), which dissolved the previous entity, some stakeholders continue to raise concerns about the implications for the independence of the public service broadcaster<sup>113</sup>. Under the Act on STVR, five Council members are elected and may be dismissed by Parliament following nominations made by a parliamentary Committee for Culture and Media, while four members are now appointed and may be dismissed by the Minister for Culture (one of whom is proposed by the Minister for Finance). According to the new law, the Director-General of STVR is elected directly by the STVR Council. The Act establishes the professional requirements and qualifications of its members and establishes an

<sup>107</sup> Figure 59, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard.

<sup>108</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 28. This is due to the newly created possibilities to exert direct political influence over large-scale investment procurements through the creation of a new post of Vice-Director in charge of such specific procurements.

<sup>109</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Government, Transparency International, Zastavme Korupciu. The Ministry of Finance's Value for Money Unit will no longer assess all strategic assessments. For projects that are designated as strategic by the cabinet, accelerated procedures will apply. Euractiv (2024b). Country visit Slovakia, Rule of Law Initiative/ National Union of Employers/ American Chamber of Commerce, highlighting that, according to data, the same firms tend to win state procured contracts.

<sup>110</sup> See 25 CSOs (2024).

<sup>111</sup> Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), pp. 15 and 26.

<sup>112</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended Slovakia to '[s]trengthen 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.'

<sup>113</sup> International Press Institute (IPI) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF), written input, and ECPMF (2024).

advisory Ethics Commission whose task is to ensure adherence of all employees and collaborators of STVR with a statute drawn up by this body. It may issue non-binding opinions and recommendations subject to approval by the Council. Funding for STVR is pegged by the Act to a specific amount which is guaranteed independently from political decisions. The Media Pluralism Monitor 2025 concludes that these developments taken together represent increased politicisation and a regression in the overall independence of the public service broadcaster, confirming its high-risk analysis for this area<sup>114</sup>. Overall, no progress has been made on the recommendation.

**The Freedom of Information Act has been amended, raising criticism from stakeholders as regards potential restrictions<sup>115</sup>.** These amendments, which came into force in March 2025, provide that fees may be charged for certain access to information requests, namely in the case of ‘exceptionally extensive searches for information’<sup>116</sup>. Stakeholders have pointed out that the amendment lacks clear definitions, raising concerns in relation to the discretion left to officials and the possibility of erecting paywalls in relation to critical information. The standard time limit established for responding to citizens’ requests has been extended from 8 to 12 days. The amendments have been challenged before the Constitutional Court by the Public Defender of Rights and a group of MPs. The Court has suspended the application of the said provisions until a final decision is pronounced<sup>117</sup>. The Media Pluralism Monitor nonetheless still considers this to be an area presenting low risk overall<sup>118</sup>.

**There has been no further progress to improve the safety of journalists<sup>119</sup>.** The Government has confirmed that previous plans to amend the Criminal Code to reform the institute of defamation, and the Constitution to introduce additional guarantees for media freedom, have been abandoned<sup>120</sup>. The Platform for the Support of Press Freedom and the Protection of Journalists established by the Government in 2023 and bringing together representatives from ministries, the police, other public institutions, journalists, media owner associations and self-regulatory bodies has not been operational, due to disagreements among the representatives<sup>121</sup>. A separate independent platform dedicated to the safety of journalists in Slovakia published its second report in 2024, documenting various forms of attacks and intimidation of journalists<sup>122</sup>. A website established by the Ministry of Culture provides information on SLAPPs including information on defences under civil procedural law and a focal point<sup>123</sup>. Since July 2024, the Council of Europe’s Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists published five new alerts which relate, respectively, to the Prime Minister lodging a SLAPP-like case against an author and publisher; the PM’s

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<sup>114</sup> Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), pp. 13-14.

<sup>115</sup> Act No 401/2024 Coll., amending Act No 211/2000 Coll., Freedom of Information Act.

<sup>116</sup> According to the Government, the amendment was inspired by the Czech Act on Free Access to Information. According to the explanatory memorandum, the amendments intend to introduce a mechanism that will enable obliged persons to manage the process of providing information more efficiently and to ensure reimbursement of the costs associated with the extensive search and disclosure of information.

<sup>117</sup> Decision No. PL. ÚS 6/2025 of 12 March 2025.

<sup>118</sup> Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), pp. 26-27.

<sup>119</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended Slovakia to “[a]dvance 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.”

<sup>120</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Justice.

<sup>121</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Jan Kuciak Investigative Centre.

<sup>122</sup> ICJK (2025).

<sup>123</sup> Ministry of Culture (2025).

harsh criticism of journalists at a press conference; the attack on a journalist while on assignment; an injunction against a news outlet and concern over a proposed bill on the right of reply<sup>124</sup>. Stakeholders point out that the environment for journalists has been rendered increasingly hostile with an increase of verbal attacks<sup>125</sup>. The 2024 Mapping Media Freedom monitoring report flags thirteen new alerts which include other cases of politicians singling out media outlets, verbal threats and harassment of journalists, and concerns in relation to the possible establishment of specialised tribunal to hear cases against journalists and media outlets<sup>126</sup>. Referring to the increase in threats, intimidation and physical attacks on journalists and challenging work conditions overall, the Media Pluralism Monitor 2025 concludes that this remains an area presenting medium-high risk<sup>127</sup>. Overall, there has been no progress on the recommendation in relation to improving the safety of journalists and their working environment.

#### IV. OTHER INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES RELATED TO CHECKS AND BALANCES

**There has been no progress on the recommendation to ensure effective public consultation, including by avoiding excessive fast-track procedure in the law-making process<sup>128</sup>.** Last year's Rule of Law Report noted the lack of systematic involvement of stakeholders in the legislative process, as well as frequent use of the fast-track legislative procedure<sup>129</sup>. Whereas the Government adopted new Legislative Rules of the Government to align it with the rules of Parliament and strengthening the role of local governments in the legislative process<sup>130</sup>, which is a positive development, lack of effective public participation, including in accelerated procedures, and the use of such accelerated procedures remain an issue. In 2024, 58 of the 131 laws enacted were adopted under circumstances that limited public participation<sup>131</sup>. Out of these 58 laws, 28 were adopted in fast-track procedure<sup>132</sup> and 30 were adopted based on a proposal of a member of Parliament, which requires a more limited consultation process<sup>133</sup>. Stakeholders reported that in numerous cases, they have no means to effectively express their views in the law-making process<sup>134</sup>. Stakeholders also report that this lack of consultation of key stakeholders extends to significant pieces of

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<sup>124</sup> Council of Europe, Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists (2025).

<sup>125</sup> International Press Institute (IPI) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) (2025), written input, and ECPMF (2024).

<sup>126</sup> European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (2025).

<sup>127</sup> Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), pp. 14-15.

<sup>128</sup> The 2024 Rule of Law Report recommended Slovakia to “[e]nsure effective public consultation and stakeholder involvement in the law-making process, including by avoiding excessive use of the fast-track procedure.”

<sup>129</sup> 2024 Rule of Law Report, Slovakia, p. 3.

<sup>130</sup> Slovak Government (2025), written input, pp. 84 et seq. Government Resolution No. 561 of 25 September 2024.

<sup>131</sup> Parliament (2024); Country visit Slovakia, Public Defender of Rights.

<sup>132</sup> Parliament (2024).

<sup>133</sup> While the initiation of the legislative process by a member of Parliament is not contested, the overuse of such procedure results in limiting stakeholder consultation, which can lead to less transparent and inclusive laws. Such practices were used for example for the introduction of important amendments to the Act on NGOs.

<sup>134</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Via Iuris, Zastavme korupciu, Transparency International, Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, the Public Defender of Rights, American Chamber of Commerce, and Republiková únia zamestnávateľov.

legislation<sup>135</sup>, and note a lack of substantial justification for the use of the fast-track procedure<sup>136</sup>. Overall, there has been no progress on the recommendation.

**Discussions on amendments to the constitution, which could raise certain concerns related to the principle of primacy of EU law, were postponed.** On 9 April 2025, Parliament adopted, in the first reading, a Government proposal to amend the Slovak Constitution. The amendments introduce, among others, provisions which, if adopted, could raise certain concerns related to the principle of primacy of EU law<sup>137</sup>. Discussions in Parliament have been postponed. The Commission has been engaging in an intensive dialogue with the Slovak authorities since the initial drafts, communicating its position and recommending reconsidering their adoption.

**Less than half of the companies surveyed in Slovakia express high levels of confidence in the effectiveness of investment protection.** 36% of companies are very or fairly confident that investments are protected by law and courts<sup>138</sup>. The main reason among companies for their lack of confidence is the unpredictable, non-transparent administrative conduct, and the difficulty to challenge administrative decisions in court (50%)<sup>139</sup>. 40% of companies perceive the level of independence of the national competition authority (The Antimonopoly Office) as very or fairly good<sup>140</sup>. There are no judicial mechanisms in place at the level of the Supreme Administrative Court to ensure the implementation of administrative court judgments<sup>141</sup>.

**On 1 January 2025, Slovakia had 31 leading judgments of the European Court of Human Rights pending implementation, an increase of 2 compared to the previous year<sup>142</sup>.** At that time, Slovakia's rate of leading judgments from the past 10 years that had been implemented was at 41% (compared to 47% in 2024; 59% remained pending), and the average time that the judgments had been pending implementation was 3 years and 9 months (compared to 3 years and 3 months in 2024)<sup>143</sup>. The oldest leading judgment, pending implementation for more than 12 years, concerns the excessive length of civil proceedings<sup>144</sup>. As regards the respect of payment deadlines, on 31 December 2024 there were 4 cases in

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<sup>135</sup> Amendments to the disciplinary proceedings submitted without prior consultation of the Supreme Administrative Court. Country visit Slovakia, Supreme Administrative Court. Adoption of the consolidation package without consultation of business associations. Country visit Slovakia, American Chamber of Commerce. Amendments to the Criminal Code adopted without proper public consultation, Slovak Bar Association (2025), written input, p. 17. Amendments to several acts related to the functioning of NGOs adopted without proper public consultation and while limiting the time of the parliamentary debate.

<sup>136</sup> Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), p. 880. Act on the Rules of Procedure of the National Council, section 89 stipulates that fast-track legislative procedure is conceivable "in exceptional circumstances, where fundamental human rights and freedoms or security may be threatened or where the State is threatened with significant economic damage". Slovak Bar Association (2025), written input, p. 17; Association of Judges (2025), written input, p. 14.

<sup>137</sup> Parliamentary Bill No. 733, proposed amendments to Article 7(6-7) of the Slovak Constitution.

<sup>138</sup> Figure 54, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard.

<sup>139</sup> Figure 55, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard. 49% and 47% of the surveyed investors, respectively, perceive the frequent changes in legislation or concerns about quality of law-making process, and the quality, efficiency or independence of justice, respectively, as a reason for the lack of confidence in investment protection.

<sup>140</sup> Figure 60, 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard.

<sup>141</sup> Figure 49, EU Justice Scoreboard 2025.

<sup>142</sup> For an explanation of the supervision process, see the [website](#) of the Council of Europe.

<sup>143</sup> All figures calculated by the European Implementation Network (EIN) and based on the number of cases that are considered pending at the annual cut-off date of 1 January 2025. EIN (2025), written input, p. 8.

<sup>144</sup> Judgment of the ECtHR, 44482/09, *Maxian and Maxianova v. Slovakia*, pending implementation since 2012.

total awaiting confirmation of payments (compared to 24 in 2023)<sup>145</sup>. On 16 June 2025, the number of leading judgments pending implementation had increased to 33<sup>146</sup>.

**The civil society environment faces further pressure, and a recent legal framework introduced new reporting and information disclosure obligations.** The civil society space in Slovakia is considered as ‘narrowed’<sup>147</sup>. A law amending several acts related to the functioning of NGOs was adopted on 16 April 2025, laying down annual reporting obligations and information disclosure obligations for NGOs, introducing additional burden for civil society organisations<sup>148</sup>. Stakeholders reported on increased administrative control and burden on NGOs during the reporting period<sup>149</sup>. Since 5 March 2025, ministers and heads of public bodies are obliged to inform the Government of any contracts they plan to conclude with NGOs. Some NGOs active in certain fields, especially advocating for human rights, lost funding under state-supported grant schemes awarded in previous years<sup>150</sup>. Polarisation of public debate has increased, with statements by politicians attacking NGOs and media<sup>151</sup>. The Slovak National Centre for Human Rights<sup>152</sup> continues in its efforts to strengthen the rule of law culture through various initiatives and activities<sup>153</sup>.

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<sup>145</sup> Council of Europe (2025), p. 157.

<sup>146</sup> Data according to the online database of the Council of Europe (HUDOC).

<sup>147</sup> CIVICUS (2024).

<sup>148</sup> The amendments of 27 March 2024, reported on in 2024 Rule of Law Report, p. 35, originally intended to introduce foreign agent labelling, were altered in December 2024 by a proposal seeking to establish lobbying regulation and reporting obligations for NGOs, and amended shortly before the parliamentary discussion by leaving out the aspect of lobbying. According to the Government, the transparency of civil society was increased by creating a unified framework of reporting and information disclosure obligations for civil society organisations.

<sup>149</sup> Namely extensive or repeated audits. Country visit Slovakia, Slovak National Centre for Human Rights; ENNHRI (2025), Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), p. 891.

<sup>150</sup> ENNHRI (2025), p. 8. According to the Government, while some NGOs lost funding, other NGOs received it (changes in the list of supported NGOs happen every year), and the overall volume of financing in this subsidy scheme remained unchanged.

<sup>151</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Transparency International Slovakia and Zastavme korupciu. ENNHRI (2025), p. 8; Civil Liberties Union for Europe (2025), p. 890; UN OHCHR (2025).

<sup>152</sup> Mandated as National Human Rights Institution and equality body accredited with B-status.

<sup>153</sup> Country visit Slovakia, Slovak National Centre for Human Rights.

## Annex I: List of sources in alphabetical order\*

\* The list of contributions received in the context of the consultation for the 2025 Rule of Law report can be found at [https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2025-rule-law-report-targeted-stakeholder-consultation\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2025-rule-law-report-targeted-stakeholder-consultation_en).

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Act No. 432/2021 Coll., on Disciplinary order of the Supreme Administrative Court of the Slovak Republic.

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## **Annex II: Country visit to Slovakia**

The Commission services held virtual meetings in February 2025 with:

- American Chamber of Commerce
- Association of Judges
- Association of Television Broadcasters of Slovakia
- Association of Radio Broadcasters of Slovakia
- Chamber of Non-Governmental Organisations
- Constitutional Court of Slovakia
- Government Office – Corruption Prevention Section
- Investigative Centre of Jan Kuciak
- Judges For Open Judiciary
- Judicial Council
- Ministry of Culture
- Ministry of Interior
- Ministry of Justice
- National Centre for Human Rights
- National Union of Employers
- Office for the Protection of Whistleblowers
- Parliament administration (replies received in writing)
- Praesidium of Slovak Police Force
- Prosecutor General’s Office
- Public Defender of Rights
- Regional Prosecutor’s Office
- Rule of Law Initiative
- Serious Organised Crime Unit (UBOK)
- Slovak Bar Association
- Slovak Council for Broadcasting
- Slovak Land Fund (replies received in writing)
- Slovak Print and Digital Media Association
- Slovak Public Procurement Office
- Slovak Syndicate of Journalists
- Supreme Administrative Court
- Supreme Audit Office
- Supreme Court
- Transparency International Slovakia
- Via Iuris
- Zastavme korupciu (Let’s stop corruption foundation)

\* The Commission also met the following organisations in a number of horizontal meetings:

- Amnesty International
- Araminta

- Civil Liberties Union for Europe
- Civil Society Europe
- European Civic Forum
- European Partnership for Democracy
- European Youth Forum,
- International Commission of Jurists
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- JEF Europe
- Philea – Philanthropy Europe Association.
- Transparency International