

MFRR ITALY MISSION REPORT

**GROWING POLITICAL PRESSURE
ON RAI, CONCERNS OVER MEDIA
PLURALISM, AND ESCALATING LEGAL
HARASSMENT AND DIGITAL THREATS**



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INTRODUCTION

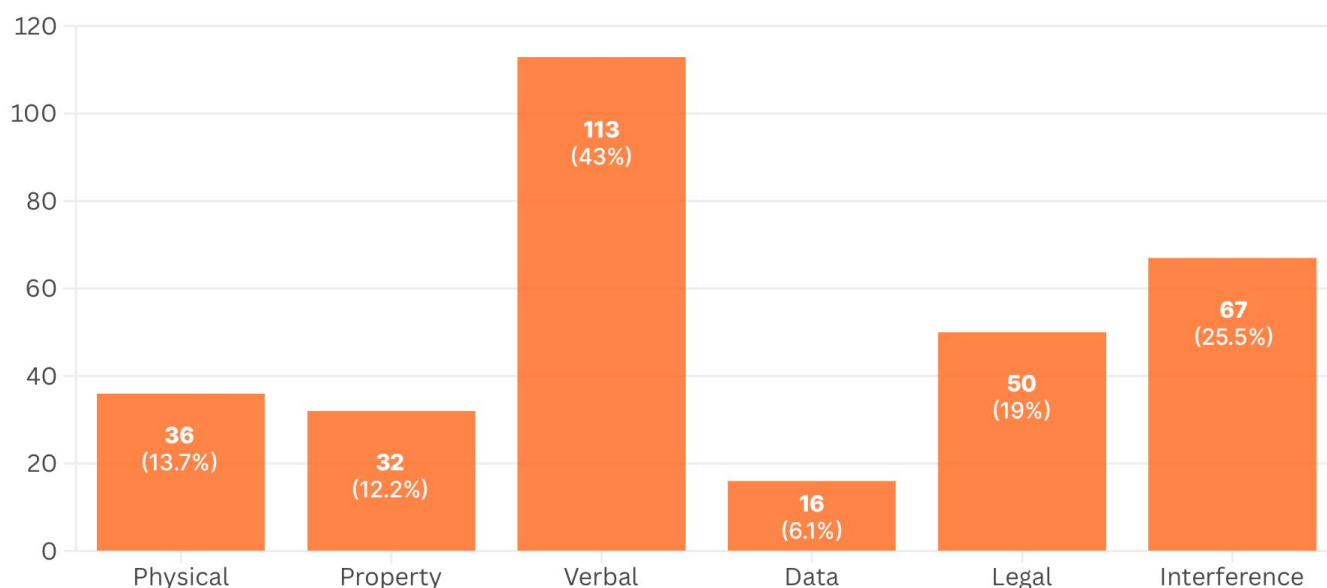
On 9-10 March 2026, the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) consortium conducted its third visit to Rome in five years. The mission was joined by the following MFRR organisations: European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF); European Federation of Journalists (EFJ); Free Press Unlimited (FPU); International Press Institute (IPI); Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso. The local partners were: Amnesty International Italia; Federazione Nazionale Stampa Italiana (FNSI), and Unione Sindacale Giornalisti Rai (UsigRai). A press conference was held at the premises of the Consiglio Nazionale Ordine dei Giornalisti, on 10 March.



MFRR delegation at the headquarters of the Federazione Nazionale Stampa Italiana (FNSI)
Credit: MFRR

The purpose of this mission was to build on previous engagements with Italian stakeholders and to engage in discussions with institutional and political actors on media freedom issues. This visit was preceded by a series of online fact-finding meetings with media experts, trade unions, journalists' associations, and media representatives, which aimed to build a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of the landscape for press freedom in Italy in the last two years. Before the mission, the MFRR made a concerted effort to reach out to a broad range of media outlets to ensure the gathered evidence was representative of the Italian media ecosystem.

Since the last visit, the data collected by the MFRR's [Mapping Media Freedom](#) (MapMf) and the evidence that the delegation gathered during its fact-finding meetings suggest that Italy has continued on a negative trajectory, resulting in a further erosion of media freedom. Serious incidents, including sustained political interference in the public service media Rai, threats concerning media market concentration, legal intimidation, physical and verbal attacks on journalists, as well as spyware attacks on journalists, are the recurrent patterns identified by the MFRR in Italy. Such a situation is reflected in the [263 alerts from Italy](#) which have been recorded by the MapMF over the past two years.



MapMF Main type of incidents over the period of June 2024 - May 2026, MapMF registered 263 alerts related to Italy.

Mapping Media Freedom alerts between 2024-05-02 and 2026-06-26 based on the documentation status of 2026-07-08T07:59 UTC. Filtered by Countries: Italy. One incident and thus alert can include multiple types of attacks (e.g. verbal and physical attack performed within the same incident) with more than one journalist or media actor being attacked and being performed by more than one type of actor. Especially legal incidents where journalists or outlets receive multiple related or similar legal threats, are currently recorded as one alert.

The persistent political interference in Italy's public broadcaster Radiotelevisione Italiana (Rai) epitomises the most concerning trend in the Italian media sector, particularly in light of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), which entered into full force in August 2025. The governance and funding models of Rai fail to comply with EMFA standards, jeopardising its independence and financial sustainability. The lack of independence at Rai has been a focal point of [political tensions](#), with the Rai union USSiGRai repeatedly denouncing political interference in the [broadcaster's editorial independence](#). Notably, the parliamentary committee responsible for overseeing public media duties (Rai Oversight Parliamentary Committee, *Commissione parlamentare per l'indirizzo generale e la vigilanza dei servizi radiotelevisivi*) has been effectively paralysed by a boycott by the majority party for two years, leading to the resignation of the President of the of Committee and mass resignations from opposition parties, eventually followed by the resignation of majority members in July 2026.

The recent sale of GEDI Group's media assets has raised significant concerns about the future of editorial independence in Italy's media landscape. Specifically, the sale of two prominent newspapers, La Repubblica and La Stampa, to Greek-owned Antenna and Gruppo SAE, respectively, has sparked alarm about potential threats to editorial autonomy. This development also highlights broader issues of media pluralism and concentration in Italy, where the media market is already characterised by high levels of concentration.

The prevalence of legal threats also testifies to the general drift of the state of media freedom in the country. Legal incidents account for 19% of all documented MapMF cases featuring Italy during the past two-years, with [50 legal alerts](#) issued. Combined with the ongoing existence of criminal defamation laws that rank among the strictest in Europe, and a trend in which SLAPPs are often initiated by high-ranking public officials, Italian journalists face acute legal risks compared to colleagues in other EU countries. A government decree directed at transposing the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive introduced in July 2026 falls short of addressing the European Commission and the Council of Europe Recommendations, failing to cover the largest number of SLAPPs, which are filed domestically rather than cross-border.

Physical safety of media professionals remains a concern in Italy, where the MapMF registered [113 verbal attacks](#) from May 2024 to June 2026, of which [15 took the form of death threats](#); [36 physical attacks](#); [four arson and bomb attacks](#). Recent incidents, such as the car explosion targeting Rai journalist [Sigfrido](#)

[Ranucci](#), and threats against Domani's investigative journalist [Nello Trocchia](#) from organised crime in Rome, demonstrate that even in established democracies, journalists' lives can be at risk.

The online space has become increasingly hostile: in the past two years, MapMF documented [16 cases of digital attacks](#) against journalists in Italy. A particular concern is the growing use of spyware, which poses severe risks to the protection of journalistic sources. In Italy, [three notable cases have been identified](#): [Ciro Pellegrino](#), [Francesco Cancellato](#), and [Roberto D'Agostino](#).

The negative trajectory identified by the MFRR is further corroborated by evidence from other international reports that examine the state of media freedom and freedom of expression in Italy. The [2026 V-Dem Institute Democracy Report](#) labels Italy as an "autocratising country," highlighting media self-censorship and media bias favoring the ruling party as two particularly concerning features of Italy's democratic backsliding.

The [2026 Media Monitor](#) also highlights significant market concentration and a further decline compared to previous years in the independence of the public broadcaster, characterising the current state of media pluralism in Italy as problematic. The [2025 annual report of the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe](#) (CASE) once again assigned Italy the negative distinction of having the highest number of reported SLAPPs among European countries. The [2026 Reporters Without Borders Index](#), which measures press freedom across 180 countries, further highlights a decline in Italy's ranking, dropping from 49th to 56th place in its annual assessment.

Similarly to the 2024 MFRR mission to Rome, the delegation encountered sustained reluctance from Italian institutions to respond to the consortium's requests for meetings. The MFRR requested meetings with official government and institutional representatives, including the Minister of Justice; the Deputy Minister of Justice; the Undersecretary of State to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers; the Chairwoman of the Senate's Justice Committee; the President of the Parliamentary Committee for the Security of the Republic; the two vice-presidents of the Rai Oversight Parliamentary Committee; members of the Data Protection Authority. This continued refusal to engage in dialogue with the MFRR on the challenges facing media freedom has been a unique trait of Italian institutional stakeholders over the course of MFRR's six-year advocacy efforts across Europe. These efforts have involved missions to both EU member states and candidate countries.

The mission met with the now former Chair of the Rai Oversight Parliamentary Committee, Barbara Floridia (Movimento 5 Stelle); Elisabetta Piccolotti, opposition member of the Chamber of Deputies (Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra); Vincenzo Vita, Responsible for Information and Digital Culture, (Sinistra Italiana); Piero De Luca, opposition member of the Chamber of Deputies (Partito Democratico); and the head of the technical secretariat to the Deputy Minister of Justice. While it was not possible to schedule a meeting with the State Under Secretary for News and Publishing, he submitted a written input addressing part of the delegation's concerns. Finally, the delegation also requested a meeting with the public broadcaster's Board of Directors. This request was initially downgraded to a lower-level meeting, and it ultimately proved impossible to schedule. The delegation met with Rai board opposition member Roberto Natale.

RAI AND THE EUROPEAN MEDIA FREEDOM ACT

KEY FINDINGS

- Italy's Rai governance and funding models do not meet EMFA standards, risking politicisation and financial instability. Urgent reforms are needed to ensure independence and sustainability. Rai board nomination procedures do not ensure independence, as required by EMFA Article 5(2). The current system allows the ruling majority to control the board and, indirectly, the CEO and president.
- The funding framework is unstable and politically dependent, violating EMFA's sustainability requirements. The financing model in Italy, largely based on the Rai licence fee, currently does not comply with EMFA requirements for adequate, sustainable, predictable and multiannual financial resources. It lacks clear, pre-established, objective transparency criteria, and it does not ensure stable multi-year funding.
- In September 2024, the board was renewed, with Giampaolo Rossi (CEO) and Simona Agnes (President)—both seen as politically aligned with the ruling parties. However, despite the ruling coalition's backing, Simona Agnes' nomination to the presidency failed to secure the necessary qualified majority within the Rai Oversight Parliamentary Committee. In response, the Committee has been prevented from functioning due to majority obstructionism resources for the past two years.

European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) and Article 5 (Safeguards for the independent functioning of public service media providers)

A major piece of EU legislation, the [European Media Freedom Act](#) (Regulation (EU) 2024/1083) that aims among other to guarantee political independence and future financial sustainability of Europe's public service media organisations, came into force at national level in all EU member states including Italy on 8 August 2025. While the MFRR mission in May 2024 already referred to the needed reform changes to guarantee that Italy is in line with the EMFA, the follow-up mission shed light on the existing challenges and political stalemate when it comes to such needed and urgent reforms not only to be in line with the EMFA as national legislation but also to offer the Italian public access to independent and plural information. To prevent the politicisation of public service media management structures, the EMFA requires Member States to ensure that the “procedures for the appointment and the dismissal of the head of management or the members of the management board (...) aim to guarantee the independence of [public service media]” (Article 5.2). The EMFA stipulates in this respect that appointments of the head of management or management board members must be made on the basis of clear criteria laid down in advance. Only extraordinary circumstances, which also need to be clearly defined in advance, may result in their dismissal prior to the conclusion of their term of office.

Composition of the Board of Directors

As defined by Law 220/2015, [the Board of Directors](#) consists of seven members (two elected by the Chamber of Deputies; two by the Senate; two appointed by the Council of Ministers upon the proposal of the Minister of Economy and according to the current praxis one of them takes the role of president; and one by the Rai employee assembly). The mandate of the board is set to last for a period of three years. The law stipulates that those elected by Parliament must be selected through a public procedure. This system links the composition of the Rai's Board of Directors to the parliamentary majority, raising significant concerns regarding compatibility with democratic principles.

In 2023 Roberto Sergio, as new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Rai entrusted Giampaolo Rossi – known for his affinity with the far right and for controversial public stances – with the role of Corporate General Manager.

On September 26, 2024, the Board of Directors (Cda) of Rai was renewed through a nomination process involving various Italian institutions. The Italian Parliament elected four members to the Board: Federica Frangi, Roberto Natale, Alessandro Di Majo and Antonio Marano. The Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) nominated Simona Agnes as a member of the Board. The new Board officially took office on October 1, 2024, for a three-year term.

Political Divergences over Rai

The Rai shareholders' plenary assembly confirmed Giampaolo Rossi as CEO and Simona Agnes as chairwoman, both of whom are considered politically aligned with the ruling parties. The appointment of Agnes requires approval from a qualified majority of the Rai Oversight Parliamentary Committee, but the ruling coalition, unable to secure the necessary majority, has boycotted the committee for two years. This obstructionism has blocked the committee from carrying out its oversight functions and undermined the normal functioning of Rai's governance. As for the presidency of the Rai board, the position has been temporarily filled by Antonio Marano, the oldest member of the board.

When the delegation met Barbara Floridia, the now former President of the Rai Oversight Parliamentary Committee, she voiced her frustration over the prolonged political stalemate and disclosed that she had been unsuccessful for several months in arranging a meeting with CEO Rossi.

Adding to this assessment was also the voice of Roberto Natale, member of the Rai board of directors, who the consortium talked to online prior to the mission, who argued that it is "vital for the public service" to have, as soon as possible, a law implementing the EMFA. "Not only," he explained in a statement, "to have the indispensable autonomy of the executives from the government of the day, without which Rai has for years paid a very heavy price of legitimacy in public opinion, but also because the EMFA requires guaranteeing 'adequate, sustainable and predictable financial resources... such as to safeguard editorial independence.'



MFRR with Senator Barbara Floridia
Credit: MFRR

Further, he added: "A misleading phrase is doing the rounds in the Italian debate: 'freeing Rai from politics'. Even EMFA is not calling for Rai to be freed from politics, but for it to have a relationship that is not subordinate to politics. Rather, it is a question of freeing Rai from its dependence on the government of the day". The financial allowance of Rai depends on a yearly decision of the government. The uncertainty of their budget and the direct dependence on the government can jeopardise the independence of the public media organisation. According to the center-right draft law, the budget could be reduced to more than 5% per year, in opposition to the criteria of EMFA. According to Natale, a major problem regarding the autonomy of the public service is the fact that the majority shareholder of Rai s.p.a., the Minister of Economy and Finance controls 99,56 % of the shares: on this basis, he claims to appoint two members of the Rai board.

With the 2026 Budget Law, the government proposes an overall reduction of €30 million over the next few years (2026-2028) in Rai licence fees paid by commercial businesses to the public service media. If implemented, this measure would result in a material reduction in the resources allocated to Rai.

Reform Proposals for Rai

Florida informed the delegation about a bill aiming at reforming Rai ([draft bill no. 162](#)) proposed by Forza Italia Senator Maurizio Gasparri, currently being discussed by the Italian Senate. The bill's objective is to align Rai's board's appointment structures with the EMFA. According to Florida the proposal has several flaws.

Some [parts of the bill](#) can be seen as positive. Such as the extension of the Board of Directors' mandate from three to five years. The provision regarding the elimination of a direct involvement of the government in the appointment mechanism, is also positive (three of the seven members of the Rai board to be elected by the Senate; three by the Chamber of Deputies; and one the Rai employees). Yet, these elements are not sufficient to properly protect the PSM from undue interference by the executive.

Two issues remain problematic. First, the bill proposes lowering the quorum required for appointing members of the Board of Directors and confirming the President. Under the proposal, from the third round of voting for Board members, and after the second vote on the Rai Oversight Parliamentary Committee's opinion regarding the President's confirmation, an absolute majority would replace the current three-quarters qualified majority. This change would strengthen the influence of the governing coalition over the appointment of key leadership positions within Rai. Second, the proposed reform does not sufficiently strengthen the procedures governing the appointment and dismissal of the Board of Directors and the President. It continues to lack objective and transparent criteria directed at safeguarding the public service media from political interference.

Furthermore, with regard to funding, the bill provides that any reduction in the licence fee should be justified only by "exceptional motivations" and, in any event, should not exceed 5% of the previous year's amount. While this represents a positive limitation, it does not provide adequate safeguards against a gradual year-on-year erosion of Rai's funding. Such a scenario would seriously compromise the broadcaster's financial sustainability, editorial independence, and ability to fulfil its public service mission.

According to USIGRai (Unione Sindacale Giornalisti Rai, the union of journalists of the public service), the bill proposed by Gasparri provides that the majority emerging victorious from the elections can in fact extend its full powers over the public broadcasting service with the direct appointment of the large majority of the board of directors and, indirectly, of the CEO and president.

According to Vincenzo Vita, Responsible for Information and Digital Culture, (Sinistra Italiana), a major challenge is the fact that in case of no consensus a simple majority is proposed for the Board of Directors,

which would give the governing parties full power. This has been refused by all opposition parties in Italy. Main opposition parties have drafted joined amendments focusing on three issues:

1. Rai is a public service and needs to be continued with a sustainable budget as today's contract will expire in 2027;
2. The Board of Directors need to be appointed by a qualified majority.
3. Candidates should send their application to a competent independent committee and they should include civil society organisations, trade unions and journalists organisations.

Conclusion of the two-year stalemate in the Rai Oversight Committee

After two years of stalemate at the Rai Oversight Parliamentary Committee, the situation escalated in early July 2026 with the resignations of both the Chair and all opposition members, followed by the withdrawal of the ruling coalition members as well. On her resignation, Barbara Florida informed the MFRR that:

*"After almost two years in which the work of the supervisory committee was blocked by the majority, I have resigned. And all the opposition members have done the same. This is an **unprecedented situation** in the history of our Republic. I have had to acknowledge that neither the appeals of the President of the Republic nor any other attempts have been of any use. Meanwhile, the government has effectively taken control of Rai, pushing out independent voices or sidelining them. Meanwhile, the work on the public service reform mandated by the Media Freedom Act has stalled for a year. My resignation is an act of protest, not of surrender. **The situation is extremely serious.**"*

PLURALISM AND MARKET CONCENTRATION

KEY FINDINGS

- Media concentration threatens pluralism: Italy's media market remains highly concentrated, especially in the audiovisual sector.
- Political influence on private media: The level of political influence on private media outlets is a significant challenge to media pluralism in Italy. This influence can result in biased reporting and limit independent journalism, reducing the diversity of voices in the media landscape.
- AGCOM's role in safeguarding independence: AGCOM continues to operate with a degree of independence from political forces, playing a crucial role in regulating the media market and promoting pluralism. Its functioning is seen as a positive factor in the media ecosystem, but more efforts are needed to address the broader structural challenges of media concentration and political influence.

GEDI sale

During the visit to Rome, MFRR partners put a major focus on the sale of the media assets of GEDI, one of Italy's leading media groups. GEDI published flagship newspapers like La Repubblica, the country's leading daily, and La Stampa. Both newspapers are historically left-leaning and critical of the current Meloni government, raising concerns about the potential impact of the sales on media pluralism and editorial independence. Ahead of the mission, the Federazione Nazionale Stampa Italiana (FNSI) and the Ordine dei Giornalisti had urged the government to intervene in the deal under special rules regarding protection of strategic national assets. The same call had been made by government and opposition MPs. At the time of the mission, the sales of GEDI's media assets had not been fully confirmed and staff were raising alarm over potential job losses and threats to editorial independence.

Following the mission, in late March 2026 it was **confirmed** that Greek-owned Antenna Group would take control of GEDI from EXOR, the holding company of the Agnelli family. This saw Antenna acquire La Repubblica, as well as HuffPost Italia and National Geographic Italia, as well as other media websites, radio stations and an advertising agency. Antenna is an international media conglomerate owned by the Greek Kyriakou family. The family has cross-ownership interests in industries including shipping and finance and has been identified as having political connections in Greece and the Middle East. Since the sale was confirmed, Antenna has sought to allay concerns and pledged that jobs and editorial independence would not be affected. It has expressed its intention to position GEDI as a Mediterranean media hub and has planned investment and international expansion for La Repubblica. However, staff at La Repubblica strongly opposed the sale, citing sustained fears for editorial independence, foreign ownership, job security, and Antenna's opaque finances. In December 2025, strikes were held, and repeated in January 2026. Further concerns were also raised about the potential impact of the conservative Kyriakou family's influence on La Repubblica's liberal editorial line.

La Stampa was separated from the deal and instead **sold** to Italian Gruppo SAE. The acquisition is being handled by an investor group from north western Italy, where the Turin paper is based, and is awaiting confirmation. Completion of the deal and the new corporate structure is **expected** by the end of May 2026. La Stampa staff had opposed the sale to Antenna. However, the announcement of the sale to Gruppo SAE has been covered positively in its own reporting. Gruppo SAE is an Italian publishing group founded in 2020 which has so far specialised in regional newspapers. While no concerns have been raised about threats to editorial independence, concerns linger about the potential impact of the sale on jobs. An early retirement programme has reportedly been agreed as part of the deal, which will see around 60 journalists leave the company in the coming years.

The GEDI ownership changes reshape the country's media market, end Italian ownership of the historic La Repubblica newspaper, and cement the position of Antenna Group as a major new player in the Italian media landscape. So far, no indications have been observed regarding the approach of new management appointed by Antenna or shifts in editorial line. No intervention was made by the government or by AGCOM. Media freedom organisations remain alert about future signs of potential editorial changes.

To address outstanding concerns, the MFRR calls on AGCOM to formally request a media merger assessment of the GEDI sale to Antenna Group from the new EMFA-created **European Board of Media Services**, which should assess it through the lens of both media pluralism and editorial independence. As AGCOM has not yet implemented criteria in its rules for assessing the impact of media mergers on editorial independence specifically, as required by EMFA, the assessment by the Media Board would provide the necessary scrutiny of this sale. Given the importance of La Repubblica in the Italian media ecosystem, MFRR partners believe AGCOM has a responsibility to request European scrutiny from the Media Board.

Market plurality

The sale of GEDI shone a spotlight on the wider challenges facing media pluralism and media concentration in Italy. Overall, the country's media market continues to be characterised by high levels of concentration, particularly in the audiovisual sector, as well as sustained political influence within some major media groups. Despite the large number of media outlets, these factors undermine real media pluralism. News consumers across the political spectrum are served by numerous media outlets across the print, TV and digital sectors, with new digital media players emerging in recent years.

One long-term issue that particularly undermines media pluralism in Italy is the level of influence of political forces in some private media. This entwinement of particular media houses with political connections and

family ownership structures continues to result in their vulnerability to editorial pressures. In particular, the Berlusconi family maintains strong ties to media through Fininvest, which oversees Italy's largest private broadcaster MFE-MediaForEurope. This one group controls 40% of the private TV audience, particularly through channels Italia 1, Canale 5 and Rete 4. The family also holds major stakes in print media, including Il Giornale. This empire continues to play a major role in the broadcasting and publishing sectors, controlling a significant portion of the market.

The potential conflict of interest which had been discussed during MFRR previous mission to Rome, specifically regarding the sale of the Italian news agency AGI to [Lega member Antonio Angelucci](#), has been resolved as the agreement has faded. Nevertheless, Angelucci's 2024 endeavour underscores the complexities of Italy's media landscape, as evidenced by his extensive editorial holdings.

In fact, Angelucci entered politics in the 2000s with Forza Italia. Since 2022, he has been a deputy in the parliament representing Lega. Like most investors in the Italian media sectors, his primary business lies elsewhere, specifically in the healthcare sector. However, since 2001, he has also invested in the print newspaper industry, acquiring three major publications such as Libero, Il Tempo and Il Giornale. This has positioned him as a key reference for right-wing readership.

While the EU Commission's 2025 Rule of Law report section on media freedom and media pluralism was positive about the role and independence of AGCOM, and its new merger assessment rules, the mission concludes that the wider issue of media concentration and pluralism is inadequately addressed in the EU's report. This is despite the fact that the [Media Pluralism Monitor report for Italy for 2026](#) clearly identifies that Italy has a high risk level regarding media market plurality, which is concluded is the "most critical" area. Despite these challenges, Italy does have a small but active independent investigative media community which probes crucial public interest issues. These media outlets are well networked and receive international grants for investigative work. These media fill to some extent the reporting gaps left by major private print media and TV channels, and have unearthed major revelations regarding issues such as corruption and spyware abuses.

Media regulation

During the mission, no major concerns were raised by stakeholders about the functioning of the country's main media regulator, the Communication Regulatory Authority (AGCOM). The mission concludes that AGCOM continues to function adequately and independently from political forces, playing an important role in the country's media ecosystem. The independence of media regulation in Italy was flagged as "low risk" in the 2026 Media Pluralism [report](#). Although the selection process remains political in nature - with parliament selecting its president and commissioners - this process has remained professional and non-politicised. To ensure this practice continues, the mission calls on the government to amend the legislation to guarantee that the appointment process for the AGCOM members is more transparent and that the professional experience required for members is strengthened within the appointment criteria. The integrity of this process remains a core pillar in the framework for media pluralism freedom in Italy.

Changes in 2024 to the rules on media market concentrations in Italy has seen AGCOM assume a wider mandate, particularly in the digital sector. The regulator also adopted a new set of guidelines (Resolution 66/24/CONS) on the criteria to be used while making assessments of media mergers and acquisitions which could have a potentially significant impact on media pluralism. While these new rules partially align with Article 22 of EMFA, they [lack specific guidelines](#) on also assessing acquisitions through the lens of their impact on editorial independence. This requires reform to align fully with EMFA rules on media merger

assessments. AGCOM consultations have examined this issue but as of yet no concrete progress has been made on this specific element of EMFA alignment.

During a press conference in Rome following the mission, partners called for these new rules, including editorial independence, to be swiftly implemented as part of an assessment of the potential takeover of GEDI. It is essential these new EMFA-related criteria are utilised by AGCOM to more effectively assess and address media market concentrations which could have a detrimental effect on citizens' access to pluralistic information. It should be noted that while Italy has made some partial progress in implementing Article 22 of EMFA, the editorial independence assessment rules are sorely lacking, and overall the country lags behind other EU Member States in its alignment of national laws and regulations with EMFA, particularly on Article 4 and Article 5.

Media ownership transparency

The mission concludes that media ownership transparency in Italy should be further strengthened, in line with Article 6 of EMFA. Currently, media ownership transparency is enshrined in the constitution and AGCOM does maintain a register of all media companies and their ownership structures. However, in clear contradiction with Article 6 of EMFA, this registry is not transparent, open and easily accessible to the public. Instead, requests must be made to AGCOM about ownership details, which are then released selectively by the regulator, in line with its rules. While new requirements were added in 2023 which strengthen information on beneficial ownership, this is undermined by the lack of public access to this information. Currently, while the information gathered by AGCOM on media transparency is relatively robust, the access of this information to Italian journalists, news consumers and citizens is unacceptably low. The creation of a new, transparent public database for media ownership should be a priority for the government for EMFA alignment.

LEGAL THREATS

KEY FINDINGS

- **Vexatious lawsuits on the rise:** The number of vexatious lawsuits against journalists in Italy has been consistently increasing, with legal bullying emerging as a widespread practice predominantly initiated by political and economic elites targeting independent journalism.
- **Targeted harassment by high-ranking figures:** A distinctive feature of the Italian phenomenon is high-ranking public figures using legal harassment to silence investigative journalism, undermining journalism's role as a public watchdog.
- **Insufficient institutional response:** Despite the urgency of the issue, institutional actors in Italy appear to focus primarily on a minimal, symbolic transposition of the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive, leaving over 90% of SLAPP cases unprotected.

Characteristics of the SLAPP phenomenon targeting journalism

The number of vexatious lawsuits against journalists in Italy has been consistently rising, with legal bullying emerging as a widespread practice predominantly initiated by political and economic elites targeting independent journalism. A distinctive feature of this Italian phenomenon is high-ranking public figures using legal harassment to silence investigative journalism. This practice poses a significant challenge to the rule of law and undermines journalism's role as a public watchdog. Despite the urgency of the issue, institutional actors in Italy appear to focus primarily on a minimal, symbolic transposition of the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive, leaving over 90% of SLAPP cases unprotected.

Recent data from Mapping Media Freedom confirms a concerning trend highlighted in previous MFRR reports: media professionals, particularly investigative journalists, remain a primary target of legal harassment. This trend underscores a recurring pattern of legal measures being systematically used to intimidate or silence journalists who criticise powerful interests, often political figures and high-level public officials, further confirming MFRR's previous concerns about a worrisome erosion of media freedom in Italy. The SLAPP phenomenon in Italy is alarmingly prevalent, as underscored by the CASE annual reports, which have consistently ranked Italy as the European country with the highest number of SLAPP cases in both [2024](#) (21 cases) and [2023](#) (26 cases).

MFRR data reveal the characteristics of legal harassment in Italy. From June 2024 to June 2026, the MapMF platform registered [46 legal incidents](#) in Italy. Of these, 43% were defamation lawsuits, 26% were legal warnings, and 13% were complaints. Regarding the perpetrators, political actors were responsible in 41% of the cases, while corporations or businesspeople were implicated in 19%.

Since the current legislature began in October 2022, the [MFRR has recorded 40 legal incidents](#) initiated solely by political actors, including opposition leaders and local politicians. However, a significant portion of these lawsuits were either threatened or formally initiated by key figures within the current government, including the [Minister of Education](#); the [Minister of Enterprises and Made in Italy](#); the [Minister of Infrastructure](#); the [Minister of Economy](#); former [Minister of Tourism](#); the former Ministry of Culture; the [President of the Senate](#); the Parliamentary [Antimafia Commission President](#). Figures from the entourage of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, including [Gaetano Caputi](#), Meloni's chief of staff, and undersecretary [Giovambattista Fazzolari](#), have resorted to legal harassment tactics on multiple instances, while Meloni's party Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) has filed a defamation lawsuit against [Report's investigative team](#). And indeed, for the past two years, according to data from the MapMF, [Report](#) and [Domani](#) have been among the newsrooms most frequently targeted by legal harassment in the country.

The employment of legal intimidation tactics by government figures fosters the normalisation of a practice that is increasingly prevalent at the local level, as evidenced by legal actions initiated by mayors (and former mayors) across the political spectrum in [Venice](#), [Avezzano](#), [Viterbo](#) and [Milan](#) against various news outlets and investigative journalists, often accompanied by campaigns aimed at delegitimising these outlets and undermining press freedom.

According to MapMFdata, while the Italian economic elite is less likely to engage in legal intimidation than their political counterparts ([13 alerts](#) issued over the past four years), the substantial damages sought in the cases they do initiate risks posing a threat to the very survival of independent journalism, as demonstrated by the two recent lawsuits initiated by Italian businessman Giuseppe Cipriano against Il Fatto Quotidiano, seeking damages for [\\$250 million](#) and €5 million. An unprecedented compensation claim, accompanied by a comment made by the plaintiff in an interview with Corriere della Sera (published on June 4th), which raised a red flag for freedom of expression advocates: "More than damages. I think they should shut down the newspaper".

Against this backdrop, last April, the Italian judicial system issued [a landmark ruling](#) in the case involving Matteo Salvini (current Minister of Transportation, then Minister of the Interior, suing as the defendant) and Italian journalist and writer Roberto Saviano. The Criminal Court of Rome acquitted Saviano of criminal defamation, rejecting both the public prosecutor's request for a €10,000 fine and the additional €100,000 in damages sought by Salvini's legal team. This ruling confirmed that public figures should tolerate a higher degree of criticism and scrutiny due to their prominent position in society.

Italy's Transposition of the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive

Despite the seriousness of the legal harassment problem in the country, the transposition of the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive (EU 2024/1069), commonly known as the 'Daphne Law', has not been high on the agenda of the government, against the backdrop of the transposition deadline having expired in May 2026.

Last March, the Italian Parliament approved the European Delegation Law (Law No. 36/2026, on European delegation 2025), delegating to the Government the task of transposing the Directive into national law. The text of the delegation law appears to aim for a minimal transposition of the European text, with no explicit mention of the need to extend the Directive's scope to the internal legal proceedings, assigning it to the government to define what it considers "transborder". This formulation, along with the position expressed by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni during a press conference last January, suggests that the government intends to limit the transposition to a purely formal and minimal one. As repeatedly emphasised by CASE, more than 90% of SLAPP cases in Italy, as well as across Europe, are domestic in nature.

Member of the opposition party Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra, Elisabetta Piccolotti, criticised the government's handling of press freedom legislation, which she argued failed to fully address her party's proposed amendments to the EU Delegation Law, meant to align with EU standards and extend protections to counter SLAPPs. Piccolotti emphasised that while cross-border vexatious lawsuits are a concern, the majority party's response was vague and failed to adequately address the prevalence of domestic SLAPPs in Italy.

Piero De Luca, a member of the opposition party Partito Democratico, acknowledged that the SLAPP phenomenon is indeed a serious concern in Italy. He regretted, however, that the government's approach to transposing the Directive seems to involve a mere copy-paste exercise, which may fall short of effectively protecting vulnerable individuals and groups from legal harassment.

Unfortunately, during the delegation's meeting with the Ministry of Justice's delegates, the interlocutors were unable to engage with questions and could not provide any clarifications regarding either the timing of the transposition or the scope.

The latest developments concerning the Directive's transposition appear to validate the opposition MPs' concerns. On July 2, 2026, a [draft proposal](#) for transposition was presented to the Council of Ministers, which will subsequently be submitted to the relevant parliamentary committees for non-binding advisory opinions. The proposed law is designed to only address crossborder cases.

DIGITAL THREATS AND SURVEILLANCE

KEY FINDINGS

- 30 violations targeting journalists occurred in the digital domain in the January 25 June 26 period;
- Italy emerged as one of the most worrying cases of state surveillance against journalists following the Graphite spyware scandal;
- Other forms of media freedom violations include, among others, DDoS attacks, phishing attempts;
- Institutional action aimed at improving or enforcing the protections for journalists and their sources proved insufficient, while the national legal framework requires urgent reform in line with the European Media Freedom Act;

The contemporary landscape of media surveillance in Italy presents an increasingly pressing concern for press freedom and journalistic security. According to mapping conducted by the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR), at least **30 significant violations** targeting journalists occurred in the digital domain in the last 18 months¹, including **10 severe incidents** affecting journalistic sources, communications and data. These incidents included cases of surveillance, data and equipment theft, DDoS attacks, phishing attempts, reputational attacks through deepfakes, and spoofing.

This pattern of incidents reflects broader institutional deficiencies. Italian authorities have demonstrated reluctance in establishing effective protective mechanisms for media professionals. Moreover, the extant legal architecture appears structurally incapable of assuring adequate safeguards against unlawful surveillance practices. Compounding these concerns, Italy's implementation of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) substantially lags behind prescribed timelines. In particular, during meetings convened with the MFRR delegation, competent authorities either lacked the capacity or declined to articulate a definitive roadmap for fulfilling provisions stipulated under Article 4 of the EMFA. Similarly, the parliamentary committee overseeing intelligence services (COPASIR) declined the delegation's request for dialogue on the Graphite surveillance scandal, while remaining notably silent regarding its developments, notwithstanding emergent information in the public debate despite written commitments recorded in its June 2025 report. These cumulative indicators suggest systemic gaps in accountability and transparency surrounding state surveillance operations targeting the press.

Early alarming cases and recent scandals

In 2021, among the earliest documented instances of unlawful surveillance targeting Italian journalists were that of Nancy Porsia and Lorenzo Tondo, subject to unlawful monitoring by the Prosecutor's Office of Trapani. Their case represented one of the most recent and worrying instances wherein state prosecutorial authorities conducted intrusive surveillance measures against press professionals, breaching confidentiality of sources and communications as enshrined in the national law. Again in 2021, the international Pegasus Project investigation identified two Italian journalist victims among the telephone numbers selected for surveillance targeting; their specific identities remained undisclosed in available documentation.

Multiple incidents of illegal surveillance and breaches of journalistic sources occurred throughout 2025. In early 2025, disclosures revealed that at least seven individuals, including journalists and activists such as Fanpage reporters Francesco Cancellato and Ciro Pellegrino, had been monitored during 2024 through military-grade spyware Graphite² deployment. These revelations precipitated substantial concerns regarding potential state surveillance overreach. In response, the National Federation of the Press and the National Order of Journalists lodged formal complaints with the Rome Prosecutor's Office against unidentified perpetrators.

The parliamentary committee responsible for overseeing Italian intelligence services (COPASIR) issued an investigative report in June 2025. The report ostensibly denied direct involvement of Italian actors in the surveillance operations against journalists³, while suggesting foreign intelligence services might bear responsibility. Subsequently, no conclusive remedial measures have been enacted by competent authorities.

1 From January 2025 until June 2026

2 Graphite is a spyware produced by Paragon Solutions, a company that claims to sell its products only to governments and state authorities committed to democratic standards.

3 The report acknowledged the surveillance activities of Italian secret services targeting migration activists.

Two judicial proceedings remain pending in Rome and Naples. In March 2026, prosecutors investigating the surveillance scandal independently verified that Fanpage editor-in-chief Francesco Cancellato and two immigration activists had been compromised simultaneously in late 2024, indicating coordinated execution within a single infection campaign. This development generated additional scrutiny directed at the Italian government, which maintained its denial of involvement in the journalist hacking incident. The investigation by judiciary authorities on this matter continues.

Overall scenario

According to the [Media Pluralism Monitor 2026](#), Italy currently has "no measures exist preventing illegal surveillance of journalists or media service providers and any persons maintaining regular or professional affiliations therewith".

Under Italian law, journalists, among other professional categories, receive legal protections against intrusive surveillance. In accordance with Law 124, professional journalists qualify for special safeguards against surveillance activities. This protective framework does not extend to non-professional journalists or individuals that lack formal recognition as journalists under Italian statutory provisions, which consequently receive no defensive status against state surveillance intervention.

Preventive wiretapping constitutes a particular concern within this regulatory environment. The operational mechanism governing this interception category involves intelligence services acting under delegation from the President of the Council of Ministers, subject to prior authorisation from the Public Prosecutor General at the Court of Appeal of Rome.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Media in Italy face multiple challenges, including political interference in the public service media, the widespread use of legal intimidation to silence investigative journalism, threats to media pluralism, and growing digital risks, as well as increased tensions between political parties over the reform of Rai. Despite these democratic challenges, the ruling coalition has remained reluctant to engage in meaningful discussions on the state of media freedom in Italy.

In light of the upcoming 2027 general elections in Italy, safeguarding press freedom is more important than ever, as it often becomes particularly critical during periods of political transition. Ensuring an independent and robust media landscape is essential for informed public discourse, transparent governance, and the health of democratic processes.

The MFRR has identified an urgent need to align Italy's media laws with EU and international standards. Specifically, this includes the European Media Freedom Act (Regulation EU 2024/1083), the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive (Directive EU 2024/1069), and the 2022 European Commission's Anti-SLAPP Recommendation (Commission Recommendation EU 2022/758), as well as the 2024 Council of Europe Recommendation on countering SLAPPs (Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)2). To ensure media freedom in Italy is protected, the MFRR delegation strongly urges the Italian Government and the Italian Parliament to consider the following recommendations. The MFRR remains available for future communication and cooperation with relevant institutional stakeholders.



Press Conference at the premises of the Consiglio Nazionale Ordine dei Giornalisti
Credit: MFRR

Recommendations on Rai with regard to the EMFA

- The Italian government should show a credible commitment to urgently reform the legal framework governing public service media to bring it into compliance with Article 5 of the EMFA. More specifically, it should revise the appointment procedures for Rai's board of directors and CEO to avoid undue political influence and ensure that the nomination procedures are based on transparent, objective,

non-discriminatory, and proportionate criteria established in advance at the national level, as also required by Article 5(2) EMFA; and that the length of the board members' terms of office are adequate to guarantee their independence.

- The government should work on ensuring Rai's long-term financial sustainability and autonomy by defining adequate and stable funding in the long term.

Recommendations for media market

- AGCOM should swiftly update its rules to include explicit criteria for assessing media merger impacts on editorial independence, aligning with Article 22 of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA). This would ensure that future mergers are scrutinised comprehensively, considering not only pluralism but also the potential for editorial control and influence.
- The Italian government should reform the legislation governing the appointment of AGCOM members to ensure the process is more transparent and merit-based. This includes strengthening the criteria for professional experience and expertise in media regulation and independence to safeguard AGCOM's integrity and capacity to act impartially in media regulation.
- AGCOM should implement changes to ensure the media ownership registry mandated by Article 6 of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) is fully transparent, open, and easily accessible to the public.

Recommendations for the transposition of the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive

The MFRR's position is based on the need to align Italian legislation with international standards protecting freedom of expression. In this context, we advocate for the full decriminalisation of defamation. Civil law offers more effective and proportionate mechanisms for protecting individual reputation, including appropriate remedies such as compensation for harm suffered. At the same time, alongside the decriminalisation of defamation, a comprehensive reform of civil defamation legislation is necessary to ensure full compliance with international standards on freedom of expression and to effectively incorporate the provisions of the EU and Council of Europe's Anti-SLAPP frameworks.

As such, the consortium calls for the [effective transposition of EU Directive](#) 2024/1069 on SLAPPs, in line with the highest standards set out in the EU Anti-SLAPP Recommendation and the Council of Europe framework. Effective transposition of the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive should include:

- extending procedural safeguards to all SLAPP cases, whether domestic or cross-border, and covering civil, criminal, and administrative vexatious proceedings;
- introducing a cap on the maximum amount of financial compensation that may be claimed;
- ensuring compensation for both material and non-material harm suffered by SLAPP targets;
- establishing effective and proportionate sanctions to discourage repeat perpetrators of abusive litigation;
- ensuring that the burden of proof lies with the claimant rather than the target of the abusive proceedings.

The consortium also calls on the Government to implement a series of extra-legal measures on SLAPPs, as recommended by the European Commission in Recommendation (EU) 2022/758. These measures should include:

- establishing a comprehensive system of financial and legal assistance for defendants in SLAPP cases;
- promoting anti-SLAPP training for legal professionals, including judges, prosecutors, and lawyers;
- carrying out awareness-raising initiatives and information campaigns on SLAPPs, with particular attention to potential targets;

- strengthening the collection, monitoring, and reporting of data on SLAPP cases. Such data should be made publicly available and included in reporting to the European Commission.

Any reform aiming at merely copy-pasting the EU anti-SLAPP Directive and failing to incorporate the complementary EU Anti-SLAPP Recommendation and the Council of Europe Recommendation on countering the use of SLAPPs will remain incomplete and will not adequately address the challenges posed by SLAPPs against Italian journalists in Italy.

Recommendations on digital threats and surveillance

Italy currently needs substantive legislative reform to achieve alignment with standards established under the Article 4 of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), with particular areas of intervention that include:

- Genuinely commit to the principles of non-interference and influence in the editorial processes (Article 4.3 EMFA)
- Effective judicial oversight and transparent, verifiable decision-making processes of surveillance activities targeting journalists (Article 4.6 and 4.8 EMFA)
- Transparency obligations regarding the notification to journalists subjected to surveillance measures encompassing their personal data processing (Article 4.7 EMFA).



**MEDIA FREEDOM
RAPID RESPONSE**