

Italy: MFRR flags ongoing media freedom erosion

Media freedom in Italy has continued its overall downward trajectory in the past two years, amidst the car bomb attack on one of the country's most famous journalists, new spyware attacks on reporters, politicisation of the public broadcaster, legal harassment of journalists by governing politicians, and continued concerns over media pluralism, partner organisations of the [Media Freedom Rapid Response \(MFRR\)](#) said today.

The findings of the MFRR consortium, shared at a press conference in Rome following a follow-up advocacy [mission](#) on 9-10 March, conclude that since our organisations' [previous visit to Italy in 2024](#) the climate for press freedom and independent journalism has faced serious pressures under the coalition government of Prime Minister Georgia Meloni.

MFRR organisations stress that key reforms such as the transposition of the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive lack ambition, are limited to a minimal transposition of the Directive, and appear unlikely to be implemented by the May 2026 deadline. Italy also appears to be in active violation of the new European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) regarding the political control over Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI).

Although Italy continues to have strong constitutional protections for the freedom of the press, several negative developments in the last year - combined with the lack of implementation of key reforms - have contributed to a further weakening of the landscape for press and media freedom.

RAI and EMFA

Since the EMFA came into full effect in August 2025, the continued government influence over the management, politicised appointments, and the subsequent axing of shows and exodus of journalists from RAI, has been in our view a clear violation Article 5 of EMFA, which obliges Member States to guarantee the independence of public broadcasters.

While RAI has long faced politicisation under successive administrations, MFRR partners stress that the scale and intensity of the current government's overhaul stands out in modern Italian history. This overt effort to shift the editorial line at RAI has utilised the same tactics on show in the EU's worst media freedom offenders. This political influence over RAI is permitted due to flaws in the legislation, which cements the control of the governing majority over the Board of Directors and other key positions.

Coupled with this undue political influence, in the past year RAI has also faced additional budget cuts, undermining the need for stable and sustainable funding outlined

under Article 5 of EMFA. Meanwhile, the paralysis of the parliamentary oversight committee of RAI, and its ongoing inability to oversee the public broadcaster's compliance with independence and pluralism, is weakening democratic scrutiny of the broadcaster and causing additional institutional instability.

A bill currently being debated in parliament which would reform the governance system of RAI to remove board appointments by the executive branch and instead switch to a simple parliamentary majority, effectively the governing coalition, is likely to entrench political influence over the RAI board. If passed in its current form, MFRR partners do not believe the bill would align Italy's public broadcasting system with Article 5 of EMFA.

Spyware

In 2025, Italy was the only country in the [EU to experience new cases of spyware](#) surveillance of journalists, according to MFRR monitoring, making it a European flashpoint for the abuse of spyware-for-hire technology against the press. So far, no accountability has been secured for these illegal violations of journalistic privacy and source protection. During a meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Justice, no clarity was provided on the ongoing judicial investigations into the known spyware attacks on at least three Italian journalists.

Our organisations welcome the [recent breakthrough](#) in the prosecutorial investigation which has confirmed that the Graphite spyware sold by Israeli firm Paragon Solutions was illegally used to hack into the mobile device of Fanpage.it director Francesco Cancellato. Traces of the Graphite surveillance tool, known to be used by the intelligence services AISI and AISE, were confirmed on the devices of Cancellato and two activists, with meaningful correspondence of the date and time of the deployment of the intrusive software. The prosecutors stress that questions remain over who is behind this illegal surveillance of the journalist, and that the investigation continues. Two other cases of spyware attacks on Italian journalists in 2025, [Ciro Pellegrino](#) and [Roberto D'Agostino](#), remain unresolved.

These worrying cases are a reminder of the urgency of the application of the provisions contained in the Article 4 of the European Media Freedom Act, and the necessary harmonisation of the Italian legal framework to the highest standards in terms of protection of journalistic confidentiality and transparency on access of personal data.

SLAPPs

In the legal sphere, Italy also remained the country in Europe with the highest number of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) in 2025, [according to the CASE Coalition](#), which multiple MFRR organisations are part of. Combined with ongoing existence of criminal defamation laws that rank among the strictest in Europe, and a phenomenon in which SLAPPs are too often initiated by high ranking public officials, MFRR partners conclude that journalists in Italy face acute legal risks compared to colleagues in other EU countries.

A parliamentary bill has set the framework regarding the transposition of the EU anti-SLAPP Directive. However, the delegation understands that the government will only address cross-border SLAPPs, rather than also domestic SLAPPs, as outlined in the [April 2024 Council of Europe Recommendation](#) on countering SLAPPs.

The likelihood of the EU's anti-SLAPP transposition being completed by the deadline in May 2026 appears increasingly remote, leaving journalists exposed to legal threats. Full decriminalisation of defamation in Italy, combined with comprehensive reform of the civil code, including strong anti-SLAPP provisions for both domestic and cross border SLAPPs, remains the only acceptable outcome.

Pluralism and safety

During the mission, MFRR partners also discussed the approved sale of the media assets of GEDI. The deal, which will reportedly see La Stampa sold to Gruppo SAE and La Repubblica sold to Greek-owned Antenna, has raised alarm from its staff over potential job losses and potential threats to its editorial independence. To address these concerns, MFRR calls on the Italian media regulator, AGCOM, to request a media merger assessment from the new EMFA-created European Board of Media Services, which should take up the case and assess it through the lens of media pluralism and editorial independence. Given the importance of La Repubblica and La Stampa in the Italian media ecosystem, MFRR partners believe AGCOM has a responsibility to request European scrutiny and ensure the deal will not negatively impact the news outlet's editorial freedoms.

Regarding the safety of journalists, the near-miss [car bomb attack](#) on Report presenter Sigfrido Ranucci in October 2025 was a shocking attack on the journalistic profession in Italy which, if successful, would have been the most high-profile killing of a journalist in Europe in decades. The attack serves as a chilling reminder of the threats faced by journalists conducting investigative journalism in Italy. So far, no perpetrators have been identified or prosecuted and impunity for this case continues.

Overall, despite almost two years of political pressures on RAI, the Italian government has yet to face any serious pushback from the European Union over what MFRR partners consider a clear violation of the EMFA. While the EU Commission has signaled some concern over media freedom and specifically RAI in the annual [Rule of Law Report](#), there has been no meaningful scrutiny or major EU pushback.

Mission partners thank all stakeholders that met the delegation in Rome and remain open to further exchanges with national stakeholders, particularly from the governing parties, on media freedom in Italy. A full report of the findings of the mission will be published in the coming weeks.

The mission to Italy was led by the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) and was joined by partners of the MFRR consortium: European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the International Press Institute (IPI), and Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT).