

## Hungary's new media regulation

In 2010, the Hungarian prime minister passed a series of laws, giving excessive control over all private media to the government, writes Peter Bajomi-Lazar, a senior research fellow at the University of Oxford.



Soon after its victory at the 2010 elections, Hungary's new Christian-conservative government, headed by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, passed a series of media laws resetting the country's entire media landscape. The new regulation, passed without consultation with either the opposition parties or professional bodies, established a media authority headed by a Media Council, whose members have all been delegated by the ruling Fidesz party; the chair of the council has been directly appointed by the prime minister. The authority now supervises all private media, including the print press, radio and television, and the internet. It has the power to allocate broadcasting frequencies, to impose fines, and to distribute funding.

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The new regulation also created a united Public Service Foundation to manage all public media, including Hungarian Television, Hungarian Radio, Danube Television, and the Hungarian News Agency. The chair of the foundation has been delegated by the media authority's council. All public broadcasters' news bulletins are now produced by the national news agency, and display a pro-government bias. Many of the former editors and managers of public broadcasters have been sacked, and Fidesz loyalists have been appointed to replace them. The new supervisory structure is constructed in such a way that the ultimate decision-making power lies with Annamária Szalai, the chair of the Media Council, herself directly appointed by the prime minister for a period of nine years.

Freedom House's [Nation's in Transit 2011 report](#) observes that the new media regulation "drastically curtailed the independence of public-service television and radio broadcasters, and established a new authority over broadcast media, print publications, and the internet", which it describes as an "alarming concentration of political power over the media". Under the pressure of international organisations, including the European Union, some of the controversial provisions of media regulation were amended. These amendments, however, did not affect the composition of the Media Council, nor did they change the newly established supervisory structure of public service broadcasters.

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