



MALTA

EurOMo Country Report 2025

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By comparison to its other European counterparts, the Maltese media landscape is quite a distinctive one due to the island's small population, the bilingual environment and the highly concentrated media market. Media outlets in Malta operate within a small advertising market, which limits revenue diversification and reinforces dependence on a limited number of funding streams, including state and private sources.

Malta's media ecosystem consists of a combination of publicly funded outlets (e.g. Public Broadcasting Service), political party-owned outlets (ONE – Malta Labour Party; Net – Malta Nationalist Party), institutional media tied to important socio-political actors (Newsbook Malta – Malta Catholic Church and L-Orizzont – General Workers' Union), commercial corporate media groups (e.g. Times of Malta, Malta Independence) and independent digital platforms (LovinMalta, Malta Daily, SideStreet Malta). The most influential actors operate across multiple channels, reflecting cross-platform integration that is typical of small states.

Although freedom of expression is constitutionally protected, the scale of the media ecosystem and the prominence of politically owned entities have raised serious concerns about media transparency, independence, and the sustainability of journalism.

However, in recent years, Malta has seen a rapid increase in the number of smaller digital media outlets. These are primarily English-language outlets, though some also publish content in Maltese and are available on leading social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Compared with existing media outlets, especially the party-owned media, these new digital media enterprises tend to be significantly more transparent about ownership.

A notable recent development in the Maltese media market is the emergence of foreign ownership of a domestic media outlet, marking a departure from the historically insular, locally controlled media landscape. In 2025, a foreign investor acquired a majority stake in LovinMalta (Malta Today, 2025), a significant shift in a sector previously dominated by domestic interests, political entities and institutional ownership. This move signals the beginning of media internationalisation in Malta, potentially reshaping market dynamics through new funding models and capital sources.

This being said, the Maltese media landscape remains dominated by party-owned media, especially in terms of Maltese-language content and though the two political parties have transitioned more towards the digital sphere through the strengthening of their social media presence (especially on the Meta platforms), the lack of transparency in terms of individuals and revenue sources has remained concerningly high.

Among the English-language media, traditional outlets such as the Times of Malta maintain a dominant position. However, they are increasingly challenged, especially among younger audiences, by emerging digital outlets such as Lovin Malta, Malta Daily and SideStreet Malta.

Though conventional broadcast streams, such as TV and radio, remain important, especially for political influence, the latest statistics show an increase in news consumption on digital platforms, especially Facebook (Times of Malta, 2025). In fact, audience measurement introduces yet another layer of concern about structural transparency. In Malta, audience measurement and media influence remain predominantly assessed through surveys by the Broadcasting Authority. Despite recent efforts to capture online consumption (Broadcasting Authority, 2024), it is likely that due to the methodology employed (e.g. traditional survey tools rather than platform analytics), these figures likely underrepresent actual digital consumption. (LovinMalta, 2025).

Similarly, there is also an absence of reliable, independently verifiable data on print-newspaper circulation and readership. While the major legacy outlets continue to publish physical editions, no

legal requirement exists for Maltese print media to publicly disclose circulation figures, audited sales, or subscription numbers, and no audit body tracks how many copies are printed, sold, or returned unsold (CMPF, 2021). As a result, estimates of print reach rely primarily on informal industry understanding or self-reported numbers, rather than systematic measurement (The Shift, 2024).

Though Maltese media outlets must register ownership under company law, there is no statutory obligation for broadcasters to disclose ultimate beneficial owners, funding sources, or major advertisers to the BA or the public. Therefore, while formal records exist in company registries and shareholding databases, public information on the ultimate beneficial owners and management structures (e.g., names of editors and board members) remains scarce for many traditional outlets (e.g., The Malta Independent). That said, the small size of the community often makes beneficiaries' names known within informal local networks.

The country's small size is also reflected in how ownership and influence interact within the Maltese media landscape. For example, party media do not merely mirror political agendas; they also serve as strategic mobilisation tools, particularly during elections. Similarly, the Catholic Church remains an influential media actor, retaining ownership or control over successful outlets such as Newsbook Malta, enabling it to disseminate its institutional worldviews grounded in ideology and value-based positions. Additionally, the small talent pool results in frequent movement of journalists between outlets and government positions (particularly in party-owned media), raising concerns about permeability between journalism and political communication and the difficulty of sustaining clear boundaries of editorial independence (CMPF, 2022).

Moreover, editorial independence in Malta remains vulnerable to both direct and subtle forms of pressure, particularly within media outlets owned or closely aligned with political institutions. A frequently cited example is the case of journalist Victor Vella, who was removed from the newsroom of L-Orizzont after publishing stories critical of the government, including coverage of migration issues. At the time, reports indicated that the editor was sidelined as part of a retaliatory editorial intervention linked to political sensitivity (The Shift News, 2020). Thus, experts have suggested that political control over the media, coupled with issues of financial instability, especially in the context of the government being the leading advertising client for local media organisations, can act as a strong deterrent against editorial autonomy (CMPF, 2023).

The most concerning dimension, however, remains the total absence of information on public advertising revenue. While media advertising expenses of Ministries are somewhat available from Opposition queries in Parliament – albeit such queries are inconsistent and do not always cover all Ministries – they are reported only as a general sum and not per outlet. Almost no outlet, including the public broadcaster PBS or party-owned media, provides accessible breakdowns of how much public money they receive, under which ministries, or for what type of content. In this context, The Shift News stands as the only Maltese media organisation that proactively publishes annual financial statements (The Shift, 2024), donor listings, and breakdowns of funding sources, including reader support and crowdfunding contributions.

Moreover, under Maltese company law, media companies are required to file annual financial statements with the Malta Business Registry (MBR). Still, in practice, financial documentation uploaded by outlets is often incomplete, significantly delayed, or overly concise to allow meaningful scrutiny of their financial position or funding streams. This problem is acute among party-owned media outlets, where publicly available financial reports are either outdated (e.g. several years old) or released in highly abridged formats that do not detail revenue sources, advertising income, loans, debt exposure, donations, or support from affiliated organisations.

Although technically compliant with minimum legal filing requirements, such minimal disclosures do not provide adequate insight into the financial sustainability of these media organisations, nor into how party financing or commercial sponsorship may influence editorial output.

Even basic information, such as editors' names, is sometimes missing, and there are often long delays in updating information when personnel change. The only source of information that can be, at times, found on the composition of management boards – including for state-owned media outlets - is through media reporting and even there it is difficult to know how complete and accurate it is due to the lack of cross-validation.

When it comes to the state-owned media, the situation is no better due to multiple concerns about a lack of transparency in expenditures and in political appointments within its management bodies (Borg, 2022).

Another significant shortcoming is linked to the legal framework on media funding transparency in Malta. The existing regulatory framework (e.g., the Broadcasting Act, the Media & Defamation Act) sets the formal operating environment for media actors; however, transparency, funding accountability, editorial independence, and enforcement capacity remain areas of systemic weakness. This is mainly due to fragmented regulation, narrow institutional remits and the small size of the media market.

The Broadcasting Authority, the primary supervisory body responsible for ensuring that broadcasting services uphold standards of impartiality and pluralism, faces structural and functional limitations. First and foremost, the Authority's core remit is primarily editorial balance rather than structural transparency. Secondly, it only oversees traditional broadcast media, which means it currently lacks authority over online news outlets, digital livestreams, and on-demand content. Thirdly, there are concerns about the independence of the Broadcasting Authority, particularly in enforcing rules against politically controlled broadcasters, given that its Board members are all politically appointed. Lastly, although the Authority has enforcement powers, these are limited in scope (e.g., relatively modest fines relative to commercial revenue) and in deterrent value. Although this last shortcoming is expected to change once the new EU media ownership legislation is transposed, there remain concerns about the Authority's capacity, in terms of both independence and resources, to effectively monitor its implementation.

Furthermore, self-regulation mechanisms within the media industry have often been described as weak in preventing political or corporate interference, particularly when media concentration and cross-ownership are high. Therefore, as the digital media sphere expands, it is expected to face even more challenges arising from regulatory lag and increased opacity in non-linear media distribution.

All in all, media ownership in Malta remains shaped by a unique blend of party-controlled broadcasting, legacy media outlets, and value-based institutional actors, with only recent signs of diversification through foreign investment and digital-native outlets. Despite legislation requiring basic company disclosure, transparency gaps persist in funding sources, circulation figures, beneficial ownership, and public advertising allocation. The absence of comprehensive regulatory oversight, combined with limited audience-measurement data, creates an environment where influence is difficult to trace, and accountability remains uneven. Strengthening ownership and funding transparency, expanding regulatory coverage to non-linear media and developing independent audience and circulation auditing systems would improve media pluralism and public trust. Ultimately, addressing these shortcomings is essential to safeguarding democratic discourse in a small and politically embedded media ecosystem.

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