



# AUSTRIA

## EurOMo Country Report 2025

Mariia Aleksevych, University of Salzburg,  
mariia.aleksevych@plus.ac.at

Josef Trappel, University of Salzburg,  
josef.trappel@plus.ac.at

DOI: 10.25598/EurOMo/2025/AT

Published by the Euromedia Ownership Monitor (EurOMo)  
Salzburg, December 2025

Report produced under the EC Grant Agreement LC-03617323 - EurOMo 2025, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology Media Policy. The contents are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

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## Introduction

This report supports the findings of the Euromedia Ownership Monitor database and risks assessment of Austrian media outlets relevant for news. It is part of the effort to provide systematic information on ownership and control in news media, assess transparency issues and risks in the dimensions of news production, distribution, and legal framework across the European Union Member States.

With around nine million inhabitants, among which every fourth has a foreign background (Foreign Background, 2025), Austria is a relatively small media market. Additional challenge to content providers presents competition with German media facilitated by geographical and lingual proximity of the two countries Germany and Switzerland (Sparviero et al., 2024). Still, in what concerns news, Austrian brands are placed on top by consumers among online and offline news producers although German public service ZDF is also named among used news brands by 14% of respondents in the Digital News Report (Gadringer et al., 2025). Another peculiarity of Austrian media landscape is a relatively solid, but constantly declining, print media readership: in 2025, 31,5% of Austrians has selected printed newspapers as their source of news in the last week and 10% consider printed newspapers their main news source (Gadringer et al., 2025, p. 17). Top-ranking main news sources, according to the report, are television (29,7%), social media (14,8%), radio (14,1%), and websites or applications of newspapers (11,3%).

Audiences' news brand preferences served as a basis for the outlet sample selection together with symbolic capital of the outlets. In total, ownership was traced for 30 news outlets in newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and online sectors as well as for additional 34 accounts on Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs). To trace ownership and control information, websites of outlets, official registries of the national regulator KommAustria<sup>1</sup>, Orbis database<sup>2</sup>, and Firmen ABC<sup>3</sup> database as well as secondary sources were researched. The information and analysis presented further are relevant as of the beginning of October 2025.

## Main media ownership patterns in Austria

As illustrated by Table 1, the sampled outlets cover all main media groups in Austria, including public service media ORF, private groups Mediaprint (publishers of *Kurier* and boulevard *Kronen Zeitung*), publishers of the biggest free daily *Heute* and the news website *heute.at*, Styria Media Group (publishers of *Kleine Zeitung* and quality newspaper *Die Presse*), media group "Österreich" (publishers of a newspaper, website, radio station and streaming tv channel under the brand Oe24), publishers of quality newspaper *Der Standard*, and magazine *Falter* as well as Red Bull Media Group (publishes TV channel *Servus TV* and a number of magazines) and German-based ProSiebenSat1 group (publishes TV channels Puls 4 and Puls 24). In addition, the sample covers nine regional information newspapers (*Bezirksblätter*) owned by Styria Media Group and Moser Holding except for *MeinBezirk – Voralberg*, which is owned by Reiner Kolb (59%) and Kempf family via Sophie Kempf-Russ private foundation (41%).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data.rtr.at/pages/open-data>

<sup>2</sup> Orbis Europe. Moody's Analytics. <https://orbiseurope.bvdinfo.com/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.firmenabc.at/>



**Table 1.** Main media groups active in news production in Austria and their sampled outlets

Media group	Main owners	Sampled Outlets	Outlet type
ORF (public service media)	Österreichischer Rundfunk (100%) – public foundation led by a board of 35 members and operationally managed by its General Director (Roland Weissman – tenure until July 2026)	ORF 2	Television channel
		Ö1	Radio station
		orf.at	Website
		Zeit im Bild	News programme on VLOP – TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube
Mediaprint Group	Raiffeisen regional banks (45,66%, through Raiffeisen Bank International AG and RH Finanzbeteiligungs GmbH; additional 4,4% are held by public shareholders); Private foundation of Benko family (16,2%); Petra Grotkamp (10,7%)	Kurier	Newspaper
		kurier.at	Website
		Kurier	VLOP accounts –Facebook, Instagram, YouTube
		Profil	Magazine
	Private foundation of Family Dichand (50%); Benko family* (16,3%); Petra Grotkamp (10,7%);	profil.at	Website
		Profil	VLOP accounts –Facebook, Instagram, YouTube
		Kronen Zeitung	Newspaper
		Krone.at	Website
Heute	Eva Dichand (as beneficiary of MARFA and PLUTO private foundations)	Heute	Newspaper
		heute.at	Website



	<p>holding 30% of Heute and 37% of heute.at);</p> <p>Wolfgang Jansky (holds 26% in heute.at and is a board member of Periodika private foundation with 34,8% in heute.at and 67,5% in Heute)</p>	<p>Heute</p>	<p>VLOP accounts –Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp</p>
<p>Media group "Österreich"</p>	<p>Ursula Reithofer (95%), Maximilian and Alexandra Fellner (5%)</p>	<p>oe24 (Radio Austria)</p>	<p>Radio station</p>
		<p>Oe24</p>	<p>Newspaper</p>
		<p>Oe24.tv</p>	<p>VLOP accounts –Facebook, Instagram, YouTube</p>
<p>Styria Media Group</p>	<p>Catholic church (100%, through affiliation with Catholic media association chaired by Dr. Othmar Ederer and Catholic media association private foundation)</p>	<p>Kleine Zeitung</p>	<p>Newspaper</p>
		<p>kleinezeitung.at</p>	<p>Website</p>
		<p>Kleine Zeitung</p>	<p>VLOP accounts –Facebook, Instagram, YouTube</p>
<p>Regional media group (Bezirksblätter)</p>	<p>Catholic church (50%, through Styria media group);</p> <p>Family Moser (37,5%, placed into trust);</p> <p>UniCredit Group (12,5%, owned by different banks that own each other)</p>	<p>BezirksBlätter Burgenland</p>	<p>Regional newspapers publishing news and advertising</p>
		<p>BezirksBlätter Niederösterreich</p>	
		<p>BezirksZeitung - MeinBezirk Wien</p>	
		<p>MeinBezirk Salzburg</p>	
		<p>MeinBezirk Kärnten</p>	
		<p>MeinBezirk Tirol</p>	



		(published in partnership with companies of family Döser and family Russ)	
	Advertising association „Einkaufsstadt Weiz“ (50%); Catholic church (25%, through Styria media group); Family Moser (18,75%, placed into trust); UniCredit Group (6,25%, owned by different banks that own each other)	MeinBezirk Steiermark	
	Family Moser (75%, placed into trust); UniCredit Group (25%, owned by different banks that own each other)	MeinBezirk Oberösterreich	
Standard	Family Bronner (98,5%)	Der Standard	Newspaper
		derstandard.at	Website
		Der Standard	VLOP accounts –Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp
Falter		Falter	Newspaper



	<p>Andante Privatstiftung (37,5%, beneficiaries: Siegmar Schlager and Daniel Schlager);</p> <p>Ateleia Privatstiftung (27,5%, beneficiaries: Irena Rosc and Armin Thurnher);</p> <p>Hannes Pflaum (12.51%);</p> <p>Sophie Piech (12.51%);</p> <p>Florian Kenk (10%)</p>	<p>falter.at</p>	<p>Website</p>
		<p>Falter</p>	<p>VLOP accounts –Facebook, Instagram, YouTube</p>
Red Bull Media	<p>Family Yoovidhya (49%);</p> <p>Mark Mateschitz (49%)</p>	<p>Servus TV</p>	<p>Television channel</p>
		<p>Servus On, Servus TV</p>	<p>VLOP accounts – YouTube, Facebook, Instagram</p>
ProSiebenSat1	<p>Public shareholders (62,3%);</p> <p>Renáta Kellnerová and family (15%);</p> <p>Marina and Pier Silvio Berlusconi (9%)</p>	<p>Puls 4</p>	<p>Television channel</p>

\*shares of Benko family are part of the bankruptcy estate. At the time of writing new ownership was not determined.

Several peculiarities of news media ownership in Austria could be identified. These are risks of political influence on public service media (PSM) ORF; presence of various type of owners – individuals, civil society organisations, public shareholders – with prevalence of rich family ownership; the church and banks as media owners; and presence of German, Italian, and Czech owners in the media landscape. These peculiarities are discussed below.

## ORF and political influence risks

Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF) is a public service media conglomerate with legal form of public foundation that operates a number of companies that broadcast television and radio channels and run regional studios, operate websites, and maintain the country's broadcasting infrastructure. PSM are financed mainly through license fees with advertising as an additional source. PSM enjoy high usage: its offline and online channels each are accessed for news by about third of the audience (Gadringer et al., 2025).

The governance of ORF has been reformed in 2025 following the Constitutional Court decision as of October 2023. The court decided that the composition of ORF governing bodies did not ensure pluralism and contradicted the constitution with overrepresentation of members appointed by the government (Kontrast Redaktion, 2023). In June 2025, the newly appointed Board of foundation, tasked with strategic management of the PSM, decision upon the level of the license fee and appointment (and dismissal) of the general director, started their four-year tenure. It consists of 35 members: six members appointed by the government (previously – nine), nine members appointed by each federal state, six members appointed by the government with proportional representation of the parties in the National Council (currently, Austrian People's Party – ÖVP, Social Democratic Party of Austria – SPÖ, The New Austria party – NEOS have one appointee each, and the Freedom Party of Austria – FPÖ has two appointees), nine members are appointed by the Audience Council, and five members are appointed by the Staff Council. Still, most of the members (N = 21) are appointed by authorities at different levels, and the appointment periods roughly coincides with electoral process. The current Chair of the Board, Heinz Lederer, had been working for the SPÖ party in the past (Fidler, 2025b). This architecture bears risks of political alignment and influence in the PSM, which is offset to some extent by clearly stipulated mandate in the legislation and the professionalized independent national regulator KommAustria, which oversees the execution of the mandate.

## Rich families, the church, financial institutions as media owners

Twelve out of 30 sampled outlets are fully or almost fully owned by families and individuals. This includes Der Standard, 98,5% of which are owned by family Bronner and 1,5% are in free float. Families with long-standing ownership history and asset inheritance placed their property in private foundations. Examples include PLUTO and MARFA foundations owning more than a third of *Heute* media brand, Andante foundation holding more than a third of *Falter* brand, and Sophie Kempf-Russ private foundation holding little over 41% of *MeinBezirk – Voralberg* newspaper together with Reiner Kolb. These foundations have defined beneficiaries – respective family members – or sometimes beneficiaries are defined by their boards of directors. The ownership structures of the sampled outlets include six private foundations, all of which were established in early 2000s before abolishment of inheritance tax in 2008. Since then, the most common reason for establishing a private foundation is considered to be safeguarding property against fragmentation (Hasch & Partner Anwaltsgesellschaft mbH, 2014).

Several media owning individuals and families are among the richest in Austria. Our sample includes Mark Mateschitz, the son of the late Dietrich Mateschitz who owns half of the Red Bull corporation, including *Servus TV*, and Dichand family that owns *Kronen Zeitung* brand and many other outlets not included in the sample. Another once very rich media owner is René Benko. He holds 16% of *Kurier*, *Profil*, and *Kronen Zeitung* through Signa Holding and family private foundation and is a large real-estate owner. Benko is undergoing a trial in corruption charges following insolvency of the Signa Holding (The Brussels Times, 2025). In summer 2025, shares of Signa

Holding in the sampled Austrian media as well as the shares of Funke group (Petra Grotkamp, Niklas Wilcke, Nora-Maria Marx, Julia Becker) that together owned half of *Kurier*, *Profil*, and *Kronen Zeitung* were sold to family Dichand (Fidler, 2025a; *Kronen Zeitung*, 2025). While the decision was made, it is subject to the national regulator KommAustria's approval and subsequent official changes in ownership which are anticipated later in 2025.

Another powerful media owner in Austria is the Catholic church. Through its foundation and association, it owns Styria Media Group – a publisher of *Kleine Zeitung*, and a co-owner of eight regional information newspaper (*Bezirksblätter*) in our sample. Additionally, the group owns a popular online marketplace *Willhaben*, and the quality news-brand *Die Presse*. However, overall the church owns a variety of assets, including real estate, and a bank (Mayr, 2013).

Additionally, Austrian media ownership is characterised by the presence of banks. Raiffeisen bank owns half of *Kurier* and *Profil* brands, whereas UniCredit Group holds shares through BTV Vier Länder Bank AG in eight out of nine regional information newspapers *MeinBezirk*. The ownership structures of both banks are opaque. Raiffeisen is owned by public shareholders (38%) regional branches of the bank in Austria where Viennese branch organized as a cooperative has the highest 25% share. BTV Vier Länder Bank AG belongs to UniCredit Group that is owned by the banks comprising the group, each of which owns a part of other banks.

Finally, *Puls 4* differs from the rest of the sample by the largest share of public shareholders (62,3%) and foreign family ownership represented by Renáta Kellnerová and family (15%), Marina and Pier Silvio Berlusconi (9%) – influential families from Czech Republic and Italy, the latter with known political ties (Vagnoni, 2024). Later in the year 2025, Berlusconi family's Media For Europe (MFE) is supposed to take control of ProSiebenSat.1 Germany, thereby taking control also of Austria's Puls4.

### Transparency issues in media ownership in Austria

Except for *Servus TV*, full ownership information can be accessed on the internet pages of the outlets, which in some cases refer further to dedicated pages. *Servus TV* publishes only the information about its direct owner Red Bull Media House GmbH and the company's other shareholdings around the world. The ultimate owners of the company cannot be verified without some research in company databases, even though the natural persons-owners – Mark Mateschitz and Thai family Yoovidhya – are commonly known. While almost all sampled outlets do publish detailed legal ownership information on their Imprint pages, several problems remain:

- 1) **The complex ownership networks may hinder clear inference of beneficial owners.** This is the case for all sampled outlets, but those belonging to Standard, Falter, and "Österreich" media groups. The situation is further complicated by the presence of private foundations, for which in some cases (e.g. Periodika), there is no indication of their board members in the Imprints. This could render the so-called opaque transparency characterized by "the dissemination of information that does not reveal how institutions actually behave in practice" (Fox, 2007, p. 667). Thus, levels and distribution of decision-making power among different owners may be unclear, especially when no owner has 51% of shares in media. This issue is especially relevant given that influence can be unevenly distributed in big, convoluted ownership networks (Alekseych & Tomaz, 2025).
- 2) **Banks in ownership structures further complicate the inferences about the level of their involvement** in their media asset management without information about governance over media companies. It is unclear whether the bank owners/representatives participate in

managers appointments, resource allocations, goal setting along with other owners and to what extent.

- 3) **Vague economic interests and political ties of some of the media owners are hard to verify.** Since many of the assets are held in private foundations, this obscures understanding of economic interests of the owners. Some owners such as Mateschitz and Dichand families are also venture capital investors (Pühringer et al., 2025). However, their interests beyond Red Bull activities and media ownership are not widely known. Similarly, Dichand family has several politically exposed persons within its network mapping their assets, according to the research by Pühringer et al. (2025). Still, apart from some biographical information of earlier careers as spokespersons for politicians or parties, there are no verifiable facts about ties of media owners and managers with politicians in discourse or publicly available information beyond large long-standing scandals, like advertising corruption scandal around actions of ÖVP politician Sebastian Kurz and “Österreich” newspaper in 2016<sup>4</sup>. Closeness of journalists and political figures and inclination towards political influences in newsrooms are features of Austrian media landscape (Balluff et al., 2024).
- 4) **Few outlets publish information on state advertising.** Following the mentioned scandal, the revised legislation on media transparency has introduced state advertising database operated by the KommAustria. Therefore, the information on state advertising by Austrian institutions is not lacking per se. However, only Kleine Zeitung, [kleinezeitung.at](http://kleinezeitung.at), and MeinBezirk regional newspapers publish the information on national state advertising as well as EU and third countries state advertising as per European Media Freedom Act requirements.

### Transparency of social media news accounts and non-linear news distribution

Thirty-four VLOP accounts were sampled in Austria to check for transparency of their ownership and control. The most popular news relevant accounts belong to established media brands. These are mostly Facebook, Instagram and YouTube accounts – platforms mostly used for news in Austria in 2025 (Gadringer et al., 2025).

All sampled VLOP accounts had links to their Imprint pages in the accounts’ descriptions. Therefore, the ownership issues of digital platform accounts coincide with the legacy media and websites ownership issues. Additional point worth mentioning is that in most cases, it is unclear whether a specific person is responsible for an outlet’s social media pages content and, if so, who the person is.

Non-linear distribution hinges on personalization algorithms that curate individual feeds. The basic information about how it works is available for users of the platforms in the dedicated section of YouTube or Meta Help Centre. Similarly, Google News aggregator used by 16% of Austrians (Gadringer et al., 2025) has simple explanations for placing news items higher in the feed (e. g. “Recommendation based on my interests”) and the overall criteria for displaying certain news items.

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<sup>4</sup> More information about the scandal see in Balluff, P., Eberl, J.-M., Oberhänsli, S. J., Bernhard-Harrer, J., Boomgaarden, H. G., Fahr, A., & Huber, M. (2024). The Austrian Political Advertisement Scandal: Patterns of “Journalism for Sale”. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 19401612241285672. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612241285672>

Additionally, in line with the Digital Services Act (DSA), the platforms also report information about all moderation decisions to remove and restrict content to the EU-wide database.<sup>5</sup> In support of the European digital services legislation implementation, the Austrian Regulatory Authority for Broadcasting and Telecommunications (KommAustria) was designated Austrian Coordinator for Digital Services (KDD-G, 2023). Thus, it is responsible for supervision and enforcement of the DSA.

In its first annual report in this capacity covering 2024, KommAustria explains that some provisions are yet to be fully implemented, especially in relation to the data access to researchers that must be provided by VLOPs due to the ongoing work on the respective delegated act (KommAustria, 2025). In 2024, the authority conducted a series of information and coordination events, certified five trusted flaggers of illegal content (by October 2025, there are six of them), and received 34 complaints against large platforms, according to the report. Sixteen of the complaints had to be directed to Irish counterparts – to a country where most big tech platforms of US origin are based.

In conclusion, Austria's VLOP accounts generally meet basic transparency standards through Imprint links. The platform-provided explanations for content display in users' news feeds provide some basic transparency for the interested users who click through pages to find the respective information. The evolving regulatory landscape and ongoing efforts to strengthen oversight are steps toward enhancing transparency in digital news distribution. However, the implementation takes significant time and in case of such platforms as Facebook or YouTube that have significant usage across the EU, their compliance oversight and systemic risks analysis are done at the Commission level.

### **Media ownership transparency legal basis and legislation gaps**

Austrian legislation ensures media ownership transparency through Article 25 of the Media Act (Mediengesetz, 1981). It stipulates that all periodical media (print, audiovisual, electronic media) must publish the information about their publishers defined as persons or companies defining the editorial policy of the medium, and all companies and persons participating in the media: direct and indirect ownership, holders of voting rights, founders and beneficiaries of foundations, boards and purpose of associations. Additionally, other media companies or media services in possession of the mentioned persons/entities must be published. Media's editorial policy and statute (if any) must also be made available in Imprints.

The failure to provide such ownership information or provision of incorrect information constitutes an administrative violation that is punishable by fines of up to EUR 20 000. However, the enforcement of the provisions is laid on the district authorities and police, not a media regulator with monitoring functions. While compliance with ownership transparency provisions is generally high, one case in our sample – *Servus TV* – did not provide full ownership information in its Imprint page.

Given the convoluted ownership structures that complicate inferences about beneficial ownership, there is a need to provide for easy identification of beneficial ownership by the public. Currently, all legal entities with some exceptions must provide information about their beneficial owners to the Beneficial Owners Registry once a year. However, it is accessible for the obligated parties - entities with obligations to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://transparency.dsa.ec.europa.eu/>

Additionally, media have upward transparency obligations towards the national regulator and must provide it with ownership information or any updates. The failure to comply may result in sanctions by the national regulatory authority (NRA). The national authority also issues its opinions on media mergers regarding their impact on media diversity and editorial independence. It publishes yearly reports that include information on audience market shares of audiovisual services based on data provided by the service providers.

A lack of provisions to safeguard journalistic independence constitutes another weakness. Although it is stipulated in the ORF law, there is no legislation to protect journalists from influences. At the self-regulatory level, journalist ethical code of the Austrian Press Council prohibits any outside pressure and misinformation or suppression of essential information in publishers' economic interests. However, the Press Council has not reported any such breaches of the code in the last year. Lack of formal legal protection for journalists who report ethical breaches within the newsrooms could potentially affect their employment or working conditions, discouraging media workers from challenging unethical practices in the newsrooms.

The NRA fulfils two other functions relevant to media ownership and control. First, it operates the database of state advertising, to which legal entities subject to audits by the Austrian Court of Audit must submit information on purchased advertising. While this information is available, third state advertising reporting is not ensured. Only a third of the Austrian sample publishes state advertising information as per the European Media Freedom Act requirements.

Second, it acts as a coordinator of digital services to implement DSA provisions since February 2024. Currently, its work has been focusing on informational activities, trustful content flaggers and out-of-court dispute resolution bodies certification, illegal content risks prevention during elections, and receiving complaints. However, the relevant platforms' compliance with content curation criteria transparency is monitored at the EU level, since they have significant portion of users across the Union.

To summarize, Austria has a solid legislation for media ownership and control transparency. However, there is room for improvement in relation to its enforcement. While ownership information is required and generally available, it could be made more comprehensible for the general public if beneficial ownership was clearly stated. Still, a more concerning legislative gap is weak legal protections for journalistic independence, which is to a certain extent addressed in the European Media Freedom Act stipulating editorial independence (EMFA, 2024 Art. 6). However, these protections might not suffice given that owners appoint responsible editors and, in the case of Austria, often the editors have close ties with owners.

## **Conclusion**

Austria's media landscape includes public service media, family-owned outlets, the church, and financial entities. While the country has a relatively strong legal framework for media ownership transparency, enforcement mechanisms remain a weakness. The complexity of ownership networks, especially involving private foundations and opaque banking structures, poses challenges to identifying beneficial owners and understanding their influence on editorial decisions. There is also a lack of robust legal safeguards for journalistic independence – what leaves media professionals vulnerable to external pressures. While state advertising information is widely available through the dedicated database, only few outlets publish the information on EU and third countries' advertising

Transparency in digital distribution and VLOPs curation of content is slowly improving following the DSA adoption. However, without widespread common understanding of algorithmic curation and digital literacy, the explanations of criteria for content curation provided by the platforms may not suffice. Additional future challenges may be posed by generative AI if the citizens adopt it as a tool to find information about current affairs.

To strengthen Austria's media ownership transparency, the following steps should be taken:

- Enhancing public access to beneficial ownership information to increase the audience's capacity to assess the potential conflicts of interest and biases in the provided content.
- Centralizing enforcement of requirements to provide ownership and other information to the media services consumers under a media regulator.
- Establishing legal protections as well as obligations for journalists to ensure independence and accountability.
- Ensure persistent activities to strengthen and measure digital literacy and to support citizenship in the digital age through enhancing understanding of importance of information and risks posed by digital platforms.

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