

Brussels, 1 December 2025

To the attention of:

The European Commission

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michael.mcgrath@ec.europa.eu,

Concerning: developments affecting the independence of the national public broadcaster of Lithuania

Dear President Ursula von der Leyen,

Dear Vice-President Henna Virkkunen,

Dear Commissioner Michael McGrath,

An independent and pluralistic media is fundamental to any democracy, ensuring that citizens have access to diverse and reliable information. We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the recent legislative and policy developments in Lithuania, which pose a serious and accelerating threat to the independence of the national public broadcaster, Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT).

As you may be aware, following the last year parliamentary elections in Lithuania an unconventional ruling coalition was formed by the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (member of the S&D family) as a leading political force, which was joined by the far-right populist party *Nemuno (aušėja)* analogous to the Hungarian Fidesz and the German AfD. From the very beginning and to this day, the coalition has been supported by the President of the Republic *Gitanas Nausėda*.

The party *Nemuno (aušėja)* is ~~led by the~~ Member of the Lithuanian Parliament *Remigijus Žemaitis* by the Constitutional Court to have recently grossly violated the Constitution due to antisemitic and hate-inciting statements¹ and now faces similar criminal charges in ordinary courts. Moreover, the pre-trial investigation is going on regarding the possible illegal financing of this party.

When the coalition was launched a year ago, on 29 November 2024 the leaders of two political groups of the European Parliament – the EPP and the Renew Europe – Manfred Weber and Valerie Hayer made the Political Statement on Rejection of Anti-Semitism in Government Coalitions, whereby they called on all democratic political parties to reject any alliances that allow anti-Semitic forces to participate in government coalitions and urged the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party to immediately eject the *Nemunas Dawn* party from the newly formed coalition. Regretfully, this appeal has not been heard and the Lithuanian socialdemocrats have only strengthened their ties with the *Nemunas Dawn* party carrying out the political agenda of the latter.

¹ See the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania. Conclusion of 25 April 2024, no KT37-I2/2024. Available at : <https://lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta3018/content>.

This year the populist component of the coalition was even strengthened when the coalition was partly restructured with accession of a new partner – the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (analogous to the ECR), with whom the Nemunas Dawn is initiating changes. This unconventional, though unstable, coalition of a far right nature is bringing the respective results. Among them, a consistent and persistent campaign against media freedom, in particular the increasing attacks against the national public broadcaster LRT. From the very beginning, the deal between the Social Democratic and Nemunas Dawn parties included the demand of the latter to carry out the audit of the LRT activities and pressure on the change of the LRT broadcasting content. With the full support of the socialdemocrats, the leader of the Nemunas Dawn is leading this anti-LRT campaign openly declaring his dissatisfaction with the LRT activities and the aim to change the head of the LRT, without hesitating to make personal attacks.

The attacks against the LRT and its head culminated last week (27 November) in the adoption of one law reducing the financing of the LRT and the introduction of another draft law that aims to simplify the dismissal of the head of the LRT. The latter is noticeable also due to a high speed planned for its adoption (mid of December), regardless all the critical opinions regarding its blatant unconstitutionality and contradiction to the European standards expressed by a political opposition, civil society and national journalist organisations, the Council of Europe, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and international journalist organisations, and even the Legal Department of the Seimas (Parliament of Lithuania).

Therefore, the situation is constantly worsening and requires our urgent reaction. Civil society in Lithuania has consistently protested against the coalition with the populist Nemunas Dawn party and its antisemitic leader as well as against the corruption and criminal environment surrounding the former Prime Minister socialdemocrat Gintautas Paluckas, who is a close friend of the leader of the Nemunas Dawn party. Massive demonstrations and other acts of public protest against the ruling coalition have become regular, they particularly increased at the end of September – beginning of October when the cultural sector community rose up against the appointment of the Minister of Culture nominated by the Nemunas Dawn party (he had to resign in a week). Now the civil society again is preparing a massive demonstration (on 9 December) against the attempt by the ruling coalition to seize the LRT with the perspective to take further actions of civic disobedience and resistance against the unconstitutional activities of the authorities. More than 100 thousand signatures of the Lithuanian citizens have been already collected in support of the public petition against the initiatives jeopardizing the LRT. There is a clear understanding among the civil society that the existing conspiracy of the Social Democratic Party with the Nemunas Dawn party, with the tacit support of the President of the Republic, can lead Lithuania down the path of Hungary. The indifference of the President to the demands of civil society makes the situation even more complicated.

This makes timely action by the European Commission essential.

These developments in Lithuania must be assessed in the context of Lithuania's obligations to safeguard media influence and uphold European standards governing media. They also reflect a broader European pattern of democratic backsliding, in which governments employ well-known methods to weaken institutional checks and balances. One of the earliest signs of such backsliding is the gradual politicization and capture of the national public broadcaster – a pattern already observed in Hungary and Slovakia. Experience shows that once these processes take hold, they advance incrementally and become extremely difficult to reverse.

First, we must not allow to proceed with the adoption of the above-mentioned draft Law on simplification of the dismissal of the head of the LRT, introduced on 27 November (the draft law amending Article 5 of the law on the Lithuanian National Radio and Television, no XVP-1052²). It would allow the LRT Council (the governing body consisting of 12 members, 8 of

²Lietuvos nacionalinio radijo ir televizijos įstatymo 5 straipsnio pakeičiamasis įstatymas (XVP-1052). Available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/1b978a90c8fe11f0a842b0e89767e3dc?ifwid=-s0cxa548j>.

them are appointed by the political authorities – the Parliament and the President) to dismiss the head (Director General) of the LRT by a simple majority (more precisely, by a half of the Council members as literally stated in the draft) of the Council members and by secret ballot, while removing the existing legal requirement that dismissal has to be justified on public-interest grounds and supported by a two-thirds majority in the Council.

This draft Law manifestly contradicts to the Constitution and the relevant provisions of the EU law. The Constitutional Court of Lithuania has repeatedly underlined the constitutional principle of the institutional independence of the public broadcaster³. The European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)⁴ likewise requires that early dismissal of public service media leadership be exceptional, objectively justified, and compatible with the independence guarantees afforded to public service media providers (Art. 5)⁵. As mentioned, the ruling majority in the Seimas (Parliament) passed the draft law after the first reading, completely disregarding the warning of the Legal Department of the Parliament that the proposed amendments may conflict with both the Constitution and EU law⁶, as well as the opinions of international and domestic organisations, including the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which have emphasised that the proposed minimal safeguards for the dismissal of public service media leadership are highly unusual among the Council of Europe member states and may significantly increase the broadcaster's financial burden. On the contrary, the parliamentary majority rejected the attempts by the opposition to seek a throughout consideration of the draft Law by initiating a corruption-risk assessment or referring the draft to the Human Rights Committee or the Committee on Legal Affairs.

Second, the above-mentioned law **on the reduction of the LRT's financing** (the Law amending Article 11 and Article 19 of the Law on the Lithuanian National Radio and Television, no XV-618⁸, adopted on the same date of 27 November) should also not be left unnoticed as one more attempt to infringe the LRT's independence. The restructuring the methodology for calculation of the LRT's budget from 2026 onwards and amendment would reduce LRT's share of personal income tax and excise tax revenue (from 1.3% to 0.8%) in 2029 and freezes LRT's annual budget at 2025 level for three years regardless of inflation. Taken together, these measures constitute a structural reduction of long-term public funding for the LRT.

This raises acute constitutional concerns. In its 3 November 2020 ruling⁹, the Lithuanian Constitutional Court held that, under the Constitution, the funding mechanism for the LRT must ensure the broadcaster's independence. When the LRT is funded from the state budget, the mechanism must be designed in such a way that neither the Government nor the Seimas can exert political pressure on LRT when preparing and approving the state budget, including pressure related to its activities or its broadcast programmes (see para. 69.4). By deciding to freeze the LRT's budget at 2025 level and to reduce the percentage of excise tax and personal income tax revenues allocated to the LRT, the Seimas has effectively reduced LRT's funding. There is no funding if there is no fiscal necessity to review the tax in the absence of a scheme of

³ See rulings of 21 December 2006 and 3 November 2020. Available at: <https://lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/rulings-conclusions-decisions/171/y2025>.

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 establishing a common framework for media services in the internal market and amending Directive 2010/13/EU.

⁵ Article 5 EMFA provides that: "Member States shall ensure that the procedures for the appointment and the dismissal of the head of management or the members of the management board of public service media providers aim to guarantee the independence of public service media providers. "It further specifies that: "Decisions on dismissal of the head of management or the members of the management board of public service media providers before the end of their term of office shall be duly justified, may be taken only exceptionally where they no longer fulfil the conditions required for the performance of their duties according to criteria laid down in advance at national level, shall be subject to prior notification to the persons concerned and shall include the possibility of judicial review. "

⁶ Available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/afd206b0caaf11f0a842b0e89767e3dc?ifwid=-s0cxa548j>.

⁷ <https://fom.coe.int/en/alerte/detail/107643286:globalSearch=false>.

⁸ Available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/921b2b44cc4111f0a842b0e89767e3dc?ifwid=13apvwy4nd>. For more information see: https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35403&p_k=1&p_t=293355.

⁹ Available at: <https://lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta2348/content>.

any exceptional circumstances, such as an economic or financial crisis in the country, such changes may be regarded as a form of political pressure and an attack on LRT. The initiator of the Law, the above-mentioned leader of the Nemunas Dawn party, openly stated that the rationale behind the Law is his personal dissatisfaction with the LRT activities. The LRT has repeatedly warned that sustained financial constraints would undermine its legally mandated role as the country's principal source of crisis ability to ensure uninterrupted broadcasting during national emergencies.

It is worth noting that the Council of Europe has recently expressed its concern regarding both legislative initiatives – the lowering safeguards against the dismissal of the LRT Director General as well as the freezing and subsequent reduction of the LRT's public funding. According to the Council of Europe, these measures pose serious risks to the independence and effective functioning of the national public broadcaster¹⁰.

Third, other attacks against the LRT independence form the general context of above-described legislative initiatives. In December 2024, the LRT Council - the 12-member body that oversees the Lithuanian national public broadcaster - announced that it had decided to commission an audit to examine how journalists comply with the principles of political neutrality in their reporting. As mentioned, the LRT Council is appointed by the President (four members), the parliament (two members by the ruling majority and two by the opposition), as well as the Research Council of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Council of Education, the Lithuanian Artists Association, and the Lithuanian Bishops Conference (one member each). This audit has raised strong objections among Lithuanian journalists, media professionals, and civil society groups, who perceive it as a potential threat to press freedom and editorial independence. The main international organizations monitoring media freedom in Europe have also issued a statement saying that such censorship of journalists and limit their independence.

Shortly thereafter, the parliamentary majority instructed the National Audit Office to carry out a state audit of the LRT. In October 2025, the National Audit Office concluded the state audit of LRT (2021–2024), finding no serious violations of legal acts. Nonetheless, recommendations were issued regarding the accessibility of programme content and improvements to public procurement and programme procurement processes, none of which indicated any systemic problem or justified extraordinary intervention.

Despite of these findings, the LRT continues to be subjected to an overwhelming volume of information requests, inspections, and inquiries initiated by various institutions, first and foremost the head of the Audit Committee of the Parliament Artūras Skardžius (member of the Nemunas Dawn party) and other individual Members of the Parliament belonging to the ruling majority, as well as other State bodies upon their request, including the Special Investigation Service, the State Labour Inspectorate, the State Tax Inspectorate, the Government Chancellery, the Ministry of Culture. According to the Director General of the LRT, these demands have already consumed substantial administrative resources and are increasingly paralysing the LRT's leadership and daily operations.

These developments must also be viewed in light of the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court of Lithuania, which has consistently held that external supervision of the LRT may be exercised only by independent bodies established under the Constitution or by law and capable of operating free from political influence¹¹. Parliamentary scrutiny is constitutionally permissible only in exceptional circumstances, such as when competent oversight bodies identify legal violations that call into question whether such circumstances currently exist.

In a recent public statement, the Director General of the LRT warned that the pressure on LRT is neither incidental nor isolated, but forms part of a broader and ongoing attempt to exert control over the public broadcaster. She stated that this pressure is being applied through

¹⁰ Available at: <https://balticnews.com/council-of-europe-warns-of-risks-to-lrt-over-politicisation-attempts/>.

¹¹ See Ruling No. KT14-N6/2019 of 16 May 2019. Available at: <https://lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta1942/content>.

both political and institutional means, involving not only political actors but also a significant portion of the LRT Council. She also published a detailed chronology of events from December 2024 to November 2025 documenting repeated political attacks, overlapping audit initiatives, contradictory actions by LRT Council members, unexpected inspections, and large-scale information demands. Taken together, these developments reveal a sustained, escalating, and systemic press operational capacity and ready poses a direct threat to public service media independence in Lithuania.

For all these reasons, it is essential that the legislative processes now underway in Lithuania be assessed within the EU's framework for safeguarding public service media independence. What is unfolding is not merely a national issue. It carries implications for the integrity of the European Union as a whole. Any erosion of independence of the national media broadcaster in a Member State threatens the democratic and rule of law foundations of the European Union.

We are also concerned that the ongoing attacks against the independence of the national public broadcaster LRT and the rule of law can have a serious negative impact for the Presidency of the Council of the European Union by Lithuania, scheduled for the first half of 2027. The democracy and rule of law backsliding can hardly be imaginable with the priorities of the presidency, such as strengthening the EU and its values, common security and defense, and the EU's strategic autonomy.

Considering the seriousness of these developments and the potential incompatibility of the adopted and proposed amendments to the Law on the Lithuanian National Radio and Television with European and constitutional standards, we respectfully request that the European Commission take all the necessary urgent actions, including the following:

1. Assess the compatibility of the above-mentioned two Lithuanian laws (on dismissal of the LRT's head and Law on amending the Law on the Lithuanian National Radio and Television with the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) and EU rule of law standards.
2. Initiate dialogue with the Lithuanian authorities with the aim of ensuring that the recently adopted amendments restricting LRT's functions are not adopted. This dialogue should seek detailed explanations regarding the rationale, necessity and proportionality of the measures, while firmly emphasising the obligations arising from EU law and the need to halt any legislative steps that undermine the independence of the national public broadcaster.
3. Use relevant tools of the EU Rule of Law toolbox, including targeted requests for information and reasoned opinions under Article 258 of Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).
4. Communicate publicly on the European Commission's commitment to safeguarding public media independence in all Member States and signalling that any steps toward politicisation or institutional capture will not be tolerated and lead to legal consequences, such as infringement procedures.
5. Monitor and document the cumulative pressures on the LRT, including administrative burdens, audits, information demands and the actions of the LRT Council, as part of the broader assessment of risks to media independence under the annual Rule of Law Report.
6. Request for an urgent opinion from the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission)¹². An independent assessment by the Venice Commission would provide authoritative guidance on whether these legislative changes comply with the European principles of media independence, institutional autonomy, and the rule of law, as

¹² The European Commission has on several occasions invited the Venice Commission to provide opinions on matters relating to the rule of law and institutional independence. See, for example: Venice Commission, Opinion on Legal Certainty and the Independence of the Judiciary in Bosnia and Herzegovina, adopted at the 91st Plenary Session (Venice, 15–16 June 2012); and Opinion on the Laws on the Disciplinary Liability and Evaluation of Judges of "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", adopted at the 108th Plenary Session (Venice, 18–19 December 2015).

protected under the Lithuanian Constitution, EU *acquis* and the Council of Europe's standards. Such an opinion would be instrumental in safeguarding the structural protections necessary for the functioning of an independent public service media system.

Thank you for your attention to these important issues. We appreciate the European Commission's continued commitment to the rule of law across the European Union. We are also looking forward to the Commission addressing our concerns and request for action.

Sincerely,

Members of the European Parliament

D a i n i u s Ž a l i m a s

P e t r a s A u š t r e v i i u s

R a s a J u k n e v i i e n

L i u d a s M a ž y l i s

Paulius Saudargas

V i r g i n i j u s S i n k e v i i u s

Public statement by the Director General of the LRT, Monika Garbačiauskaitė Budrienė, posted (27 November 2025) media

"These days we are experiencing how the public broadcaster uses various tools and methods - some hidden, others open. Involving (Nemunas Dawn) and the Social Democrats, but first and foremost the majority of the LRT Council.

These processes are far more important than just my position; it is no longer only about that - it is about democracy and freedom of speech. That is why I say: I will not allow the LRT to be strangled behind closed doors or in any other way; I will not be part of it. I have never been a controlled or compliant leader - I have always defended the LRT's interests and freedom of speech, and I will defend it.

Recently, the LRT has been facing enormous institutional pressure. State institutions are also being used for this: the National Audit Office (VK), the Special Investigation Service (STT), the State Labour Inspectorate (VDI), the State Tax Inspectorate (VMI), the Government Chancellery, and the Ministry of Culture.

The work of the LRT management has been largely paralyzed. We are unloading data and responding to inquiries. Meanwhile, in the Seimas, amendments that would enable the takeover of LRT are being fast-tracked.

I present the chronology of events.

2024

December 17 — The LRT Council instructs the Internal Audit Service to ensure its neutrality.

2025

January 8 — Remigijus Žemaitaitis:

"My job will be to make sure ~~that when I look at the Seimas, it must know~~ *she will be dragged out of there. That will truly be my biggest job. I will definitely do that. Because what I see in the LRT and what is happening...*"

January 15 — At Žemaitaitis' initiative, the Seimas collects signatures to conduct an audit of the LRT.

February 20 — The Chairman of the LRT Council, Eugenijus Valatka, states that he did not support the decision to conduct an audit of the LRT's political content. The LRT's Internal Audit Service head reports that she had not recommended it.

March 5 — Remigijus Žemaitaitis raises the issue of a foreign audit.

March 12 — The LRT Council Chairman Eugenijus Valatka resigns.

March 18 — Mindaugas Jurkynas becomes the Chairman of the LRT Council.

April 17 — The LRT Internal Audit Service head Laura Saviienė resigns.

April 17 — The Seimas votes in favor of the LRT audit; in May, the National Audit Office begins the audit. Over five months, the LRT answers nearly 1,300 questions.

September — Provisions are added to the Government Programme regarding the LRT: to "ensure freedom of speech and diversity of opinions in the activities of the public broadcaster" and to ensure impartial diversity of opinion and high-quality content that educates society.

September 16 — 230 LRT employees sign an appeal to the Seimas, asking them to abandon these provisions, which threaten editorial independence. Two members of the LRT Council also sign it.

September 25 — The LRT Council Chairman M. Jurkynas issues a statement saying he sees no threat to the LRT's independence.

October 31, Friday, 7:30 p.m. — The LRT receives a press release from the National Audit Office for coordination. The LRT comments that the title does not correspond to the content of the audit report, but the National Audit Office stands by it and on Monday releases the report.

November 3 — The LRT audit findings are presented; the Seimas Audit Committee holds an extraordinary meeting in the Constitution Hall.

Communication on November 3: the LRT assesses the audit positively and promises to implement the recommendations; Artūras Skardžius makes false claims about the audit.

Office comment moderately. The Social Democrats bid communication contracts, fat salaries for executives.

November 4 — The LRT Council Chairman Mindaugas Jurkynas tells the media about whether the LRT audit could serve as grounds to dismiss the LRT Director General.

November 4 — Algirdas Sysas registers a bill to reduce the LRT's funding.

November 11 — The LRT Council Chairman Jurkynas says he is in no hurry to assess the proposed LRT funding model: the figures may still change.

November 11 — The LRT audit is presented to a plenary session of the Seimas — an extremely rare occurrence in the history of the Seimas.

November 12 — The Seimas Committee on Budget and Finance rejects model.

November 13 — The Council members Rada Brandišauskienė, Laura Matjė, unannounced visit to the Audit Committee and meet with Artūras Skardžius on other issues, they discuss easier possibilities for dismissing the LRT Director General.

November 13 — Artūras Skardžius, without an Audit Committee decision, demanding detailed information on seven topics. Some of the audit.

November 18 — The National Audit Office comments on calls for additional investigations into LRT: "we will not find anything very new."

November 18 — The LRT Council instructs the LRT administration to provide an assessment of the National Audit Office compliance with legal acts and to indicate who is responsible. This is also made public.

November 18 — A request arrives from the State Labour Inspectorate to provide information.

November 19 — The Seimas Committee on Budget and Finance votes in favour of the LRT budget.

November 21 — At the request of the Audit Committee, the Special Investigation Service issues an anti-corruption assessment regarding the LRT staff selection procedures. Like the National Audit Office, it argues against selection exemptions.

November 24 — The LRT Council Chairman Mindaugas Jurkynas and Council member Jonas Staselis meet with Artūras Skardžius and other members of the Council.

November 24 — The LRT requests a consultation from the State Tax Inspectorate (VMI), but on November 25 VMI sends a letter on "activity monitoring" requesting various information.

November 26 — A proposal is registered in the Seimas to simplify the procedure for dismissing the LRT Director General.

November 26 — A meeting of the Seimas Anti-Corruption Commission is held, at which LRT representatives are invited to explain the former possibility for employees to charge electric cars.

Today, November 27 — The LRT Council Chairman issues a statement supporting the retention of the qualified-majority requirement — that a decision on dismissing the Director General should require the approval of two-thirds of the Council members — but agreeing to secret voting and the removal of the requirement of public interest for the dismissal of the Director General.

Today, November 27 — The Seimas votes on the LRT budget and on simplifying the dismissal of the LRT Director General.

UPDATED — We have just received 17 questions from the Seimas Anti-Corruption Commission.

UPDATED II — We have just received a letter from MP K. Neimantas:

" (I request that you submit the information listed below related to the selection of guests and the broadcast schedules of LRT television and radio programmes of a political nature. "