

Addressed to:

**THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

**PACE Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media**

**Ms. María Concepción de SANTA ANA, Chairperson of the PACE Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media**

**Mr. ALEXANDER DUNDEE (United Kingdom)**

**REQUEST**

*regarding the noncompliance of the activities of the Radio and Television of the Republic of Lithuania with the principles of a democratic state*

11 of February, 2019

Vilnius, Lithuania

It has come to the knowledge of the public of Lithuania that on January 24<sup>th</sup> of 2019, at a meeting of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), hearings regarding the independence of public media were held. In these hearings the question of autonomy and independence of Radio and Television of the Republic of Lithuania (LRT) was discussed. In reviewing the current situation of media in Lithuania at the meeting, LRT Director General M. Garbačiauskaitė–Budrienė spoke of supposed political attempts to restrict the freedom of media in Lithuania, and to deteriorate the management of LRT, the functioning of which she considered to be of adequate quality.

We would like to clarify that M. Garbačiauskaitė–Budrienė is not authorized to represent the public of Lithuania, and that the capacity of her participation at the aforementioned meeting was limited to representing LRT only, as its Director General. Due to this, her assessment of the attempts at restricting activities and management of LRT cannot be considered to be objective.

First and foremost, LRT Director General M. Garbačiauskaitė–Budrienė failed to inform the PACE Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media of the Lithuanian public's prevalent dissatisfaction with and distrust of LRT activities conducted currently. LRT is not adhering to the Law of the National Broadcaster, which regulates the activities of LRT, pursuing its intended mission, or obeying the guidelines for the activities of Lithuanian National Radio and Television approved by the Council of LRT. Programmes broadcasted on LRT are severely lacking in objectivity, their producers and hosts are often biased, and frequently demonstrate poor self-control and indecency of the language employed. LRT's television and radio shows regularly violate the presumption of a person's innocence, display legal nihilism and disrespect for human rights. At the present time, programmes broadcasted on LRT are essentially unwelcoming to people who are critical of the cracks in the country's justice system, or vocal about corruption in the judicial and legal structures of the state.

As early as 2016, societal organizations have begun to express their dissatisfaction with LRT's activities through public statements, exhortations and petitioning, drawing attention to the fact that the national broadcaster (LRT) has lost its touch with the public, abandoned its mission, and became a tool of various political and business groups, used to ensure their narrow interests.



In 2018, a parliamentary investigation was conducted, regarding LRT's management and its financial and economic activities. It revealed a large extent of corruption and misuse of national funds, especially in the area of public procurements <sup>(1)</sup>, as well as financial machinations that implicated the involvement of several political and business groups. This investigation caused the resignation of A. Siaurusevičius, the former Director General of LRT. Along with him, several other programmer hosts, suspected of involvement in the financial machinations, lost their jobs. As a result, M. Garbačiauskaitė-Budrienė was assigned as the new head of LRT.

Despite that, there were no essential changes in the national broadcaster's activities. Former employees of LRT, suspected of financial machinations, soon found new positions of employment within the former workplace of LRT's Director General M. Garbačiauskaitė-Budrienė (who is the former head of a popular media portal "delfi.lt"). Some LRT employees, potentially connected with the aforementioned business groups and financial machinations, are still working there. The former subordinate of M. Garbačiauskaitė-Budrienė at their old workplace (G. Oganauskas) is currently assigned as her deputy at LRT. In this way, by formally shuffling the discredited persons suspected of financial machinations, the situation at LRT has remained the same.

On October 22<sup>nd</sup> of 2018, a rally of civic organizations was held in front of the LRT headquarters. Demonstrators expressed a demand for essential reforms of LRT to be initiated, i.e. to eliminate the ridicule and constant violations of the presumption of a person's innocence, to remedy the unprofessional conduct of media workers violating the principles of journalist ethics, to terminate the employment of incompetent programme hosts, to ensure the conditions necessary for people to express alternative opinions that aren't contrary to ideals of democracy and human rights, and to analyse issues that are actual and relevant to the public, instead of artificially constructed topics. Participants of the rally were especially dissatisfied with the lack of diversity in broadcasted opinions concerning the most important issues of societal security and public life. Despite all that, the management of LRT did not pay any heed to these demands.

In 2018, Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania drafted a law which provided a reform for LRT's financial activities' control, together with increased LRT's independence from the country's political parties and greater public accountability. Unfortunately, the draft wasn't without faults. To this end, Lithuanian civic organizations, unrelated to the country's government or political parties, offered to aid the legislator. This gesture of good will went completely ignored, however, thus making it evident that both the ruling majority in Lithuania and the higher management of LRT are not at all interested in the citizens' concerns or legitimate expectations regarding the state of LRT, the national broadcaster maintained from taxpayers' money, and are not prepared to enter a dialogue with the public.

Paradoxically, the government's disregard of the civil society has provided an opportunity for the business and political groups influencing LRT to accuse the legislators of attempting to restrict the freedom of media, i.e. by in order to avoid liability for the financial scandal, the laid off employees of LRT, supported by M. Garbačiauskaitė-Budrienė, have begun to disseminate information regarding supposed efforts of certain political forces to hound the journalists working at LRT, and to infringe upon freedom of speech. To aid in this endeavour, Lithuanian Union of Journalists was employed, as well as various international organizations tasked with supervising journalistic activities.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p\\_r=119&p\\_k=1&p\\_t=262204](https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=119&p_k=1&p_t=262204)



It is important to note that EU institutions have informed the EU member states about the threats of hybrid warfare, part of which is the information war currently waged by Russia against the democratic world. There is no doubt that statements made by M. Garbačiauskaitė-Budrienė regarding the supposed threats to the freedom of speech in Lithuania do well to serve the efforts of this war against societies of democratic countries.

In disassociating ourselves from the efforts of political parties to influence the national broadcaster and in spite of the fact that neither the legislator the Republic of Lithuania, nor the country's government are considering the civil society's opinion on the undemocratic activities of LRT, we have the obligation to inform you that the information provided by LRT Director General M. Garbačiauskaitė-Budrienė regarding restrictions of media is not reflective of reality. This information is purposefully biased, and the facts presented were picked selectively, concealing the critical circumstance of LRT's management essentially seeking independence not only from the country's government (which in itself is a good thing), but also from the country's public, i.e. LRT's management aims to use the funds provided to them from the national budget in whatever way they see fit, with not governmental or societal supervision. Lithuanian civic organizations believe that this is completely unacceptable, and incompatible with the principles of a democratic society.

Taking all of this into consideration, we request the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the PACE Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media to thoroughly analyse the conclusions of the parliamentary investigation into LRT's management and financial and economic activities, which will confirm that there is no persecution of journalists on the basis of their views taking place in Lithuania, that no restrictions to the freedom of media were enacted there, and that the government of Lithuania is merely seeking to ensure the transparency of LRT's financial activities, as well as greater responsibility and accountability to the Lithuanian public (English translation of the investigation's conclusions can be provided per request by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania).

We also request you support in order to ensure that the suggestions of Lithuanian civic organizations regarding the increased responsibility of the media to the public would be taken into consideration not only by the heads of LRT, but also the government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Lithuanian legislator.

Signed:

**National Forum of Lithuania** (*Tautos forumas*)

**Club of the Movement's Initiative Group** (*Sąjūdžio iniciatyvinės grupės klubas*)

**Vilnius Chapter of the Lithuanian Movement** (*Lietuvos Sąjūdžio Vilniaus skyrius*)

**Youth assembly "Pro Patria"** (*Jaunimo sambūris "Pro Patria"*)

**Lithuanian Human Rights Association** (*Lietuvos žmogaus teisių asociacija*)

**Lithuanian Association for the Protection Human Rights** (*Lietuvos žmogaus teisių gynimo asociacija*)

**Lithuanian Helsinki group** (*Lietuvos Helsinkio grupė*)

**Civil Defence Fund** (*Piliečių gynimo paramos fondas*)

*Request has been accepted by agreement of the organizations listed:  
Civil Defence Fund director Stasys Kaušinis*

