



OPERATING EUROVISION AND EURORADIO

DATE

13 March 2018

BY EMAIL

Mrs. Dalia Grybauskaite

President of the Republic of Lithuania

Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania.

COPY TO

REFERENCE

SUBJECT

Lithuanian Radio and Television (LRT)

Dear Madame President,

I am writing on behalf of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) to express our concern about the increasing political pressure on Lithuanian Radio and Television (LRT). Parliament's Resolution No XIII-1022, dated 12 January 2018, which establishes an ad hoc investigative commission on the management, financial and economic activities of LRT, creates an excessive burden for LRT, literally preventing the broadcaster from carrying out its activities.

The EBU strongly supports the importance of accountable and transparent operations of public broadcasters and, while we acknowledge parliament's authority to be duly informed about LRT's financial, managerial and economic operations, we would recommend that an appraisal on these operations be pursued by competent, specialized professional bodies, such as the Supervisory Council, the internal and external Audit, or the national State Audit.

Setting up a parliamentary investigative commission would only be justified if there had been grave violations by the public broadcaster, for which there are apparently no substantive indications. The creation of an investigation commission could, therefore, be interpreted by the public as signifying that grave violations have taken place, which could gravely damage the reputation of LRT.

Having a political body conduct a detailed and comprehensive assessment of the financial and economic operations of LRT creates a high risk that the assessment would be political rather than professional, with the danger that professional requirements for the special treatment of confidential and personal data may not be respected. A political assessment of the financial and economic operations of LRT would *de facto* interfere in the institutional autonomy and editorial independence of LRT, in breach of European standards.

The EBU, the European Union, and the Council of Europe (CoE) have all recognized the role of independent public service broadcasting in fulfilling the democratic, social and cultural needs of society.

In 2006, the CoE Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the guarantee of the independence of public service broadcasting specifically called on member states "to provide the legal, political, financial, technical and other means necessary to ensure genuine editorial independence and institutional autonomy of public service broadcasting organizations, so as *to remove any risk of political or economic interference*".

EUROPEAN BROADCASTING UNION

L'Ancienne-Route 17A
PO Box 45
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva, Switzerland

Tel. +41(0)22 717 21 11
Ext. +41(0)22 717 20 17
Email: president@ebu.ch
www.ebu.ch

The Guidelines attached to the 1996 Recommendation No. R (96) 10 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the guarantee of the independence of public service broadcasting, provide that "the legal framework governing public service broadcasting organizations should clearly stipulate their editorial independence and institutional autonomy, especially in areas such as (...) the organisation of the activities of the service, the purchase, hire, sale and use of goods and services, the management of financial resources, the preparation and execution of the budget (...)." In addition, the Guidelines provide that, "The provisions relating to the responsibility and supervision of public service broadcasting organisations and their statutory organs should be clearly defined in the governing legal framework."

The European Parliament, in its Resolution of 21 May 2013 on the EU Charter: standard settings for media freedom across the EU, stressed that public service media "shall be independent of external pressures and private or political interests".

EBU experts recently participated in a parliamentary hearing of the Commission on Culture at the Seimas and expressed their concern to Members of the Commission, while exchanging information and best practices.

On 21 February, we received a letter from Mr Nekrošius, the Chair of the Ad Hoc Parliamentary Commission investigating LRT, inviting EBU representatives to participate as observers in the work of the ad hoc commission. While we appreciate being invited to participate in the work of the commission, we regret to inform you that we will not be able to take part in this work for the reasons outlined above.

We reiterate however our readiness to share and exchange information and best practices and to participate in informal meetings. We are also willing to organize a joint mission to Lithuania, alongside other organizations, with the aim of ensuring the best possible support to the democratic institutions in Lithuania.

In conclusion, we urge you to refrain from any action, which would impede LRT's ongoing operations, and to safeguard the institutional and editorial independence of the broadcaster. Independence is an indispensable precondition for LRT to fulfil its role as a public watchdog, which is necessary for each democratic society.

For your information, I am also sending similar letters to Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis and to Speaker Viktoras Pranckietis.

Sincerely,

Noel Curran
Director General