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## TEXTS ADOPTED

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### **P10\_TA(2026)0024**

#### **Attempted takeover of Lithuania's public broadcaster and the threat to democracy in Lithuania**

**European Parliament resolution of 22 January 2026 on the attempted takeover of Lithuania's public broadcaster and the threat to democracy in Lithuania (2026/2568(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Articles 2 and 7 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, in particular Articles 114 and 258 thereof,
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in particular Article 11 thereof,
- having regard to 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<sup>1</sup> (European Media Freedom Act – EMFA), in particular Articles 5 and 21 thereof,
- having regard to the case-law of the Court of Justice of the European Union and of the European Court of Human Rights on media freedom,
- having regard to Protocol (No 29) on the system of public broadcasting in the Member States<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to the case-law of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania on the constitutional status and independence

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L, 2024/1083, 17.4.2024, ELI:  
<http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1083/oj>.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 326, 26.10.2012, p. 312, ELI:  
[http://data.europa.eu/eli/treaty/tfeu\\_2012/pro\\_29/oj](http://data.europa.eu/eli/treaty/tfeu_2012/pro_29/oj).

of the national public broadcaster, in particular its rulings of 21 December 2006, 16 May 2019 and 3 November 2020,

- having regard to the updated Rule of Law Checklist of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the European Union's Rule of Law Toolbox,
  - having regard to the recent legislative developments in Lithuania that affect the funding model for the national public broadcaster and aim to simplify procedures for the dismissal of its director general,
  - having regard to the Commission's annual rule of law reports, in particular its 2025 Rule of Law Report, specifically the country chapter on the rule of law situation in Lithuania (SWD(2025)0915),
  - having regard to Rules 136(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas free, independent and pluralistic media constitutes one of the essential pillars of democracy, the rule of law and the protection of fundamental rights within the EU; whereas the weakening of national public broadcasters undermines standards of media freedom at a time when disinformation, foreign interference and political polarisation are increasing;
- B. whereas public service media providers play a key role in ensuring access to impartial information, safeguarding pluralism, scrutinising those in power, holding public authorities accountable, countering disinformation and enabling informed democratic participation; whereas these functions can only be effectively fulfilled when the institutional and editorial independence of the public service broadcaster is fully guaranteed;
- C. whereas reforms affecting public service media providers should be undertaken in a transparent and inclusive manner, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including journalists, civil society and media experts, and in line with EU law;
- D. whereas public service media providers play a particular role in the internal market for media services by ensuring that citizens and businesses have access to a diverse content offering, including quality information and impartial and balanced media coverage, and are therefore instrumental in upholding the fundamental right to freedom of expression and information, enabling people to seek and receive diverse information, and in promoting the values of democracy, cultural diversity and social cohesion;
- E. whereas the independent functioning of public service media providers requires robust national legal safeguards to protect their editorial and institutional independence and to ensure the impartial provision of a plurality of information and opinions; whereas under Article 3 EMFA, Member States must respect the right of citizens to

have access to a plurality of editorially independent media content, to the benefit of free and democratic discourse; whereas Article 5 EMFA gives effect to these principles by establishing binding safeguards for transparent and objective procedures for the appointment and dismissal of the head of management or members of the management board of public service media providers, including provisions ensuring that any early dismissal is exceptional, duly justified, subject to prior notification and open to judicial review; whereas Article 5(3) EMFA obliges the Member States to ensure that ‘funding procedures for public service media providers are based on transparent and objective criteria laid down in advance’, providing adequate, sustainable and predictable financial resources aligned with their public service remit and safeguarding their editorial independence; whereas under Article 21 EMFA, any national legislative, regulatory or administrative measures liable to affect media pluralism or editorial independence must be duly justified and proportionate;

- F. whereas in her 2025 State of the Union Address, the President of the Commission underlined that the decline of traditional and independent media in parts of the EU has created ‘news deserts’ in which disinformation thrives, posing a serious risk to democracy; whereas she stressed that independent media is essential for holding those in power to account and preventing corruption, and that its capture is often the first step in authoritarian playbooks, enabling democratic backsliding and corruption to occur without public scrutiny;
- G. whereas experience in several Member States and around the world demonstrates that attempts to capture public service media may constitute an early step towards broader democratic backsliding;
- H. whereas, under the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, the national public broadcaster is entrusted with a special public interest mission of ensuring that society is properly informed at national level in a manner that fosters constitutional and common human values; whereas, under the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, in carrying out this constitutionally entrusted mission, the activity of the national public broadcaster must be based on the principles of pluralistic democracy, objectivity, impartiality, and respect for human dignity and fundamental rights, including freedom of convictions and their expression;
- I. whereas the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania has held that the constitutional mission of the national public broadcaster implies its independence, and that any model of control must remain compatible with the broadcaster’s independence and must not amount to censorship or political interference;

- J. whereas following the 2024 parliamentary elections in Lithuania, a governing coalition was formed that includes the far-right populist party Nemunas Dawn; whereas on 25 April 2024, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania found that the leader of this party had committed a gross violation of the Constitution and a breach of the constitutional oath through making antisemitic and hate-inciting statements; whereas these findings were subsequently confirmed by a court of first instance; whereas neither the governing coalition nor the Nemunas Dawn party have distanced themselves from these actions; whereas the Nemunas Dawn party leader continues to play a prominent role within the governing majority and to actively promote a campaign targeting Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT);
- K. whereas the Lithuanian Prime Minister from this governing coalition had to resign in July 2025 following investigative journalism findings, including reporting by LRT, which raised serious concerns regarding his alleged involvement in corrupt practices; whereas later in 2025, legislative initiatives affecting LRT's funding and governance triggered domestic and international concerns regarding media freedom and institutional independence;
- L. whereas at the initiative of members of the ruling parliamentary majority, the National Audit Office of Lithuania was mandated to conduct a comprehensive performance audit of LRT, assessing its activities for 2021-2024 in terms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness; whereas in its conclusions, the National Audit Office found that the vast majority of LRT's strategic and operational performance indicators had been achieved at a level of at least 90 %, and that the planning and use of LRT's financial resources were substantiated and transparent, with some aspects that needed to be addressed, such as public procurement and staff recruitment procedures; whereas the audit recommendations aimed at further improving internal processes and did not recommend any changes to LRT's funding model, governance structure or leadership, or ask for any political or institutional action in that regard; whereas after these findings of the National Audit Office, further actions followed, including overlapping inspections, requests addressed to other state bodies to verify LRT's activities, and repeated public attacks against LRT's management; whereas some media and journalist organisations have warned that the audit findings have been publicly misrepresented and selectively used in political discourse; whereas neither the audit recommendations nor any other arguments can justify legislative measures that are contrary to the Lithuanian Constitution and the EMFA;
- M. whereas on 27 November 2025, the Lithuanian Parliament, the Seimas, adopted amendments to the Law on LRT, freezing LRT's budget for 2026-2028 at the 2025 level of EUR 79,6 million, and reducing its future share of tax revenues, resulting in a structural

and long-term reduction in public funding; whereas these amendments were introduced shortly before adoption and were adopted on the eve of a new financial year and without adequate deliberation, raising serious concerns among media freedom stakeholders as regards legal certainty, legitimate expectations and compliance with the principle of *vacatio legis* inherent in the rule of law;

- N. whereas draft laws were subsequently introduced, lowering the safeguards for the early dismissal of the director general of LRT by the LRT Council, two thirds of which (8 out of 12 members) are appointed by political authorities, namely the President and the Seimas, each of whom appoint four members; whereas these draft laws propose to replace the qualified majority necessary to dismiss the director general with a simple majority, removing the requirement of public-interest justification and introducing secret voting within the LRT Council;
- O. whereas these legislative initiatives were introduced and advanced under accelerated procedures, in the absence of objectively justified exceptional circumstances, thereby undermining transparency, inclusiveness and the meaningful participation of stakeholders and civil society, and falling short of EU and constitutional standards of responsible governance; whereas the Council of Europe, the European Broadcasting Union, international journalists' organisations, the Legal Department of the Seimas, the Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media, have all warned that these measures significantly increase LRT's vulnerability to political pressure; whereas the Special Investigation Service of the Republic of Lithuania – the national anti-corruption authority – identified corruption-related risks in its assessment of the proposed legislative amendments and concluded that the introduction of secret voting for the dismissal of the director general of LRT may be incompatible with the principles of transparency, openness and public accountability, which underpin democratic governance and the rule of law;
- P. whereas the proposed amendments appear to be targeted at the incumbent Director General of LRT, as evidenced by public statements made during the legislative process expressing dissatisfaction with her performance and explicitly indicating an intention to enable her removal from office; whereas legislation targeting a specific individual (*ad personam* legislation) is incompatible with the principles of the rule of law, including legal certainty, the generality of laws and the prohibition of the arbitrary exercise of power;
- Q. whereas the staff of LRT went on strike on 9 December 2025 to protest against these changes, which they warn would 'dismantle the

safeguards that protect LRT's independence'; whereas attempts to take over LRT triggered a wave of public mobilisation when tens of thousands of citizens demonstrated in Vilnius on 9 December and from 16 to 18 December 2025, and more than 140 000 citizens signed a public petition opposing the legislative initiatives, thereby demonstrating broad societal concern for media freedom and democratic standards in Lithuania;

- R. whereas the European Parliament has a responsibility to stand in solidarity with civil society defending democratic values, including freedom of expression, media and assembly, and to act decisively when systemic risks to democracy, the rule of law and media freedom arise within the EU;
- S. whereas, following the suspension of fast-tracked legislative initiatives, a parliamentary working group was established to examine LRT's governance model; whereas the Association of Professional Journalists and an initiative group of LRT journalists have refused to participate, citing a lack of dialogue, selective invitations and statements indicating that previously contested amendments would be reconsidered; whereas these organisations have warned that this process risks legitimising political interference under the guise of consultation and enabling renewed attempts at indirect censorship and weakened safeguards for editorial independence;
- T. whereas in the context of the ongoing legislative initiatives affecting LRT's governance, LRT was criticised for using airtime and resources for journalists' protest actions in defence of freedom of expression, including the broadcasting of minutes of silence; whereas such statements risk contributing to political pressure and may have a discouraging effect on editorial independence;
- U. whereas according to the Council of Europe's Safety of Journalists Platform, Lithuania's allocation of GDP-based funding to public service media is already one of the lowest in the EU, and LRT has warned that prolonged financial constraints would hinder its legally mandated role as the country's primary source of crisis and emergency communication, including its ability to maintain uninterrupted broadcasting during national emergencies;
- V. whereas in its 2025 Rule of Law Report, the Commission issued country-specific recommendations to Lithuania, calling for continued efforts to strengthen the independence, stable funding and transparent governance of public service media, including safeguards against political influence in appointment and dismissal procedures;
- W. whereas LRT requested that an urgent opinion on the pending amendments be issued by the Venice Commission of the Council of

Europe; whereas the Venice Commission has decided to prepare an urgent opinion on the relevant legislative amendments, underlining the gravity of the situation; whereas the Venice Commission visited Lithuania on 19 and 20 January to assess the situation;

1. Recognises and appreciates the essential role of public media, in particular national public service media providers, in upholding and promoting the values enshrined in Article 2 TEU, and in countering disinformation, propaganda and other forms of information manipulation, thereby safeguarding a pluralistic and resilient democracy; underlines that independent and trustworthy media is indispensable for democratic accountability, as it enables citizens to scrutinise those in power and to detect corruption and abuse of office; stresses that weakening independent media ecosystems significantly weakens democratic accountability, facilitates disinformation and corruption, and erodes citizens' ability to hold those in power to account;
2. Notes that attempts to polarise society, weaken trust in democratic institutions and undermine independent media ecosystems serve the objectives of the hybrid warfare waged by the Russian Federation and other hostile powers against the EU and its Member States, which is aimed at eroding democratic resilience; stresses that strong, independent public service broadcasters are a key line of defence against such hostile interference;
3. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to recognise investigative journalism as a core component of democratic resilience and to ensure that public service media is structurally and financially capable of supporting investigative journalism, including long-term and resource-intensive investigations, and that journalists are protected from any form of political pressure, intimidation or retaliation, whether direct or indirect, in response to the lawful exercise of their professional duties;
4. Expresses full solidarity with Lithuanian journalists, LRT and civil society actors defending media freedom, including the institutional and editorial independence of LRT;
5. Condemns all attempts to undermine the independence of LRT, including legislative and administrative measures and political pressure aimed at acquiring political control over LRT;
6. Considers that the freezing and reduction of LRT's funding, in the absence of objective economic necessity, constitute political pressure incompatible with constitutional guarantees and Article 5(3) EMFA;
7. Considers that the proposed amendments to lower the safeguards for the early dismissal of LRT's director general risk enabling arbitrary political interference and are incompatible with both constitutional

guarantees and EU standards for public service media independence, including Article 5(2) EMFA;

8. Strongly condemns any form of *ad personam* legislation and recalls that laws designed to target specific individuals because of the independent performance of their professional activities are incompatible with the principles of pluralistic democracy and the rule of law;
9. Underlines that the use of accelerated legislative procedures for these amendments lacks objective and constitutionally justified grounds, fails to ensure transparency, inclusiveness and the meaningful participation of key stakeholders and civil society, and falls short of the requirements of a transparent, accountable, inclusive and democratic lawmaking procedure inherent in the principle of the rule of law and European best practice for the lawmaking process;
10. Urges the Seimas to reject the pending amendments, including lowering the threshold for dismissing the LRT director general, removing the requirement that the dismissal be based on objective considerations of public interest, and introducing secret ballots, and to ensure that any legislative amendments, if needed, are only adopted after the Venice Commission issues its opinion, and to respect the EMFA and the recommendations of the Venice Commission and the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media;
11. Calls on the Seimas and the Lithuanian Government to minimise political influence in the formation of the LRT Council, including by reducing the number of seats allocated to the appointees of political bodies and establishing adequate professional requirements for the Council members; calls, further, on the Seimas and the Lithuanian Government to refrain from adopting and to repeal already adopted legislative measures and budgetary frameworks that undermine the independence of LRT and to ensure stable, predictable and adequate funding for it, consistent with EMFA requirements, particularly those violating Article 5 EMFA regarding the protection of public service media management from political dismissal and ensuring stable funding of a public broadcaster;
12. Requests that the Commission monitor any developments concerning media freedom and public service media independence in Lithuania, to assess the compliance of the adopted and pending amendments with the EMFA and the principle of the rule of law, to inform the Lithuanian authorities accordingly, and to use all tools, including infringement procedures and the EU's Rule of Law Toolbox, in the case of non-compliance;

13. Invites the Lithuanian authorities to reinforce broad and transparent consultations with civil society, media professionals and the European institutions on public service media governance and funding; invites political parties to consider carefully the proposed amendments to the Law on LRT and to ensure that any future legislative changes are subject to public consultation, including input from national and international journalists, media freedom organisations and LRT management;
14. Recalls that experience from other Member States and around the world demonstrates that attempts to capture public service media often constitute the first stage of broader democratic backsliding, leading to the erosion of media freedom, judicial independence and electoral integrity; notes with great concern that public service media and public broadcasters across Europe are increasingly subject to political and ideological attacks, smear campaigns, intimidation and attempts to undermine their editorial independence and stable funding by far-right actors seeking to weaken independent journalism and democratic checks and balances;
15. Recalls the important role played by public broadcasters in preserving media pluralism, as recognised in Protocol (No 29) to the Treaties; calls on the Member States to provide adequate financial and technical means to fulfil public broadcasters' social function and serve the public interest; calls on the Member States, further, to guarantee public broadcasters' editorial independence by protecting them, through clearly defined regulatory frameworks, from any form of governmental, political or commercial interference, while ensuring full management autonomy and independence for all public bodies and entities that exercise powers in the areas of broadcasting and telecommunications;
16. Emphasises that safeguarding the independence of public service media is a shared European responsibility and an essential condition for the credibility of the EU as a community founded on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights;
17. Welcomes the Commission's commitment to strengthening media resilience across the EU, including through increased funding and targeted support for independent, local and public service media; stresses that such support is essential for preventing democratic backsliding and safeguarding informed civic participation;
18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, the Seimas, the President and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, and the Council of Europe.