

[LT] New Information Law

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An information bill is at present under discussion in Lithuania. This is intended to provide a legal basis for the collection and dissemination of information and also to regulate the rights and duties of the persons and institutions concerned. It guarantees freedom of information and opinion and prohibits censorship. All those involved in collecting and disseminating information are required to work in a tolerant and humane way and help to promote democracy. The dissemination of material which glorifies war or fomenting religious and racist tensions is forbidden. The bill uses the concept of "publisher", which it defines as any publishing house, radio or television station, agency, corporation or individual who collects and disseminates information. It defines a journalist as a person who collects information for a publisher, in the exercise of other duties or as a member of the Journalists' Association.

Publishers may be owned only by Lithuanian nationals or corporations. This is not wholly in keeping with the earlier definition, which says that a publisher may also be an individual. Publishers must be registered. Unregistered publishers may disseminate no information, unless it comes from a foreign source.

The bill also regulates the rights and duties of journalists. It gives them the right to collect and disseminate information, and to record information of all kinds, unless expressly forbidden to do so by law. The information they disseminate must be correct and impartial. Non-public events may not be filmed or recorded without the organiser's consent. Foreign journalists must be accredited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and this gives them the same legal status as their Lithuanian counterparts. The bill provides for the preparation of ethical rules for journalists and the setting-up of an authority to ensure that these rules are respected.

Government authorities must supply official information concerning the activities of government. Publishers and journalists have unlimited access to official documents issued by government bodies and political parties. If false or defamatory information is disseminated, the person concerned is entitled to a retraction and to compensation for non-material damage.

Finally, the bill contains anti-concentration provisions. It requires the government to ensure that no one has a monopoly in disseminating information. When a monopoly exists, the matter is settled in accordance with the law on competition.

Foreign investments in the information sector are governed by the general regulations applying to foreign investment.

Lithuanian Information Bill.

