[LT] Amended Act for Public Service Broadcaster Adopted

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Jurgita Iešmantaitė
Radio and Television Commission of Lithuania

On 22 December 2005, the Lithuanian Parliament adopted a new edition of the Act on the Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT). It contains a few essential amendments regarding the activity of the public service broadcaster.

The main change is the modification of the public service broadcaster´s financing model. According to Article 15 of the Act, the Lithuanian public service broadcaster is funded from the allocation of the State budget, advertising, publishing activity as well as from sponsorship and revenues obtained from commercial and economic activities.

Thus, the Lithuanian Parliament finally rejected the idea of introducing a licence fee for the public service broadcaster, which was envisaged earlier.

The idea of the licence fee emerged in 1996, with the adoption of the Act on the Provision of Information to the Public. That regulation could have enabled the Lithuanian public service broadcaster to gradually become independent of the influence of the Government and to remove advertisements from its programming. This model of financing of the LRT was to come into force in 1997, but it never did.

The Act on the National Radio and Television was amended several times and the date of coming into force of the initial funding model had been rescheduled yearly.

There are several more new provisions in the amended Act on the public service broadcaster: The previous edition of the Act read that radio and television broadcasts transmitted in another language had to be translated into Lithuanian. According to Paragraph 4 of Article 4, now the broadcaster is obliged to translate audio and video works into Lithuanian using dubbing, or presenting them with Lithuanian subtitles. From now on, it is in the competence of the Council of the public service broadcaster to determine which part of audio and video works have to be subtitled. In practice most of the Lithuanian radio and television broadcasts are being translated into Lithuanian using dubbing. The aim of the new amendment is to preserve the originality of works, to permit viewers to hear authentic sound of audiovisual works and to motivate the viewers to learn foreign languages.

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In accordance with Article 5 of the amended Act the public service broadcaster has to prepare programmes for national minorities as well as programmes for disabled persons. In the former law LRT had the right to do so, but not an obligation.

According to Paragraph 5 of Article 6 of the law, advertising time shall, with the increase of the LRT allocation from the State Budget, be progressively reduced to 10 per cent of the daily transmission time in accordance with the decision of the LRT Council. The requirement laid down in Paragraph 4 of this Article determines that the duration of advertising both in the National Television and in the National Radio programmes must not exceed 15 percent of the daily broadcasting time. The amended Act bans advertising on the second television channel of the public service broadcaster completely. Currently the Lithuanian public service broadcaster broadcasts two television programmes and two radio programmes. According to the law it is allowed to broadcast two television and four radio programmes.

The Act introduces some changes in the administrative structures of the public service broadcaster. Apart from the LRT Council and the Director General, an Administrative Commission is being introduced. It has to be constituted by 1 April 2006. The former law also contained a provision about the Administrative Commission. However, its function was to administer the licence fee revenues. As the revised law rejected the system of the licence fee, the Administrative Commission will control the overall financial activities of the broadcaster.

In view of the fact that the transparency of the public service broadcaster's financial activities is becoming a subject of public debate, more detailed requirements about the content and the presentation of the annual reports have been introduced. Thus, the LRT Council shall present its report annually by 1 July. It should contain detailed information about the revenues collected from the State budget, advertising and commercial activity and information about the utilisation of financial resources from each of these sources. The former law did not contain such strict requirements.

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Act on Lithuanian National Radio and Television

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