[LT] New law regulating the national broadcaster enters into force

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Indre Barauskiene
TGS Baltic

On 1 January 2021, a new version of the Republic of Lithuania Law on the National Radio and Television (*Lietuvos Respublikos Lietuvos nacionalinio radijo ir televizijos įstatymas*) that regulates the status, rights, obligations and activities of the Lithuanian public broadcaster – *VšĮ Lietuvos nacionalinis radijas ir televizija* (LRT) – came into force.

One of the novelties introduced by the amendments is that the law establishes not only the requirements for LRT programmes, but also the requirements for the contents of the LRT website. According to the amended law, people with different beliefs shall have the right to participate in and express their opinions on LRT programmes and on the LRT website. Human dignity and rights, as well as moral and ethical principles, must be respected on the LRT website and in its programmes.

Furthermore, a variety of topics and genres must be ensured in LRT programmes and on the LRT website; the content of the programmes broadcast by LRT and its website must demonstrate the diversity of the history and present-day reality of the nations of Europe; audiovisual works broadcast in a language other than Lithuanian must be translated into Lithuanian, or shown with Lithuanian subtitles; etc.

However, a major “reform” was introduced in respect of the property rights of LRT. Prior to 1 January 2021, the law had established that all LRT assets were property of the state and could be privatised. The new version of the law changes the regime and ownership of LRT assets by providing that: “LRT also manages, uses and disposes of the assets owned by it.” The assets that LRT manages, uses and disposes of as the legal owner are: (i) property invested by the state; (ii) incomes received from the commercial and economic activities of LRT; (iii) funds and other assets received as support; (iv) other monetary funds, except for state budget funds; (v) assets acquired from the state budget funds and from the other aforementioned funds; (vi) donated property; (vii) inherited property; (viii) property rights arising from the results of the intellectual activity of LRT; (ix) incomes, assets or other benefits received from the management, use and disposal of the funds or other assets specified above.

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Thus, from the beginning of this year, all assets, rights and other benefits that LRT acquires from its activities (including, for instance, intellectual property rights), will be owned by LRT itself, and not the state. This means that LRT will now be able to join the content creation process and will be able to further market itself, something that was very problematic before the introduction of the amendments.

Change also affects the management of LRT. The Council and the General Director of LRT will remain the main bodies of LRT. The formation of the Council will not change substantially (as before, the highest collegial body, which performs the management and supervision functions and represents the interests of the society, consists of 12 persons – public, scientific and cultural figures, appointed for a term of six years). However, the functions and responsibilities of the Council were supplemented and/or specified.

The law also introduces two new positions in the management of LRT: Ethics Controller and Internal Audit Service Manager. It is the position of Ethics Controller that is generating the biggest debate now, because the new amendments to the main media legislation – the Law on Provision of Information to the Public of the Republic of Lithuania (*Lietuvos Respublikos visuomenės informavimo įstatymas*) –, which are currently being debated in parliament (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas), propose to exempt LRT from the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics (*Žurnalistų etikos inspektoriaus tarnyba*). Therefore, there might be further changes, depending on how the legislation process related to the Law on Provision of Information to the Public of the Republic of Lithuania will be finalised.

2020 m. gegužės 20 d. Lietuvos Respublikos Lietuvos nacionalinio radijo ir televizijos įstatymo Nr. I-1571 pakeitimo įstatymas

https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/legalAct.html?documentId=1fd390409beb11ea9515f752ff221ec9

The Law amending the Republic of Lithuania Law on the National Radio and Television No. I-1571, dated 20 May 2020

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