



THE BALTICS

MISSION TO TALLINN & VILNIUS

Report on the January 2018
Joint EFJ-ECPMF Mission



EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR
PRESS & MEDIA
FREEDOM



European
Federation of
Journalists

The Baltics

Report on the January 2018 Joint EFJ-ECPMF Mission to Tallinn (Estonia) + Vilnius (Lithuania)

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Report Author:

Renate Schroeder, Director, European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

Participating Organisations:

European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)
European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)
Estonian Association of Journalists (EAL)
Lithuanian Union of Journalists (LŽS)

About this report:

This report summarises the findings of a January 22-24 2018 fact-finding mission to two Baltic states, Estonia and Lithuania, led by the EFJ in close cooperation with its affiliates in Estonia and Lithuania and together with the ECPMF.

Over the course of the mission, delegates met with around 30 individuals, including journalists, editors, CEOs, academics, representatives of public service media, government officials and representatives from journalists' organisations, to evaluate issues related to media freedom, independence, and the status of journalists in the two former communist, now EU member states. The fact-finding mission has the financial support of the European Commission.

Layout:

Andreas Lamm – ECPMF



Abbreviations used in this report:

ECPMF: European Centre for Press and media Freedom
EFJ: European Federation of Journalists
EER: Estonian Public Broadcaster
EAL: Estonian Association of Journalists

LŽS: Lithuanian Union of Journalists
LRT Lithuanian National Radio and Television
CMPF: Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom

Introduction:

Abstract by ECPMF

ECPMF Fact-Finding Missions are sent to troubled areas and to investigate complicated cases. Their task is to discover facts in an impartial and comprehensive manner. Fact-Finding Missions are an important tool to gather relevant information and bring it to the attention of the public. This tool is used pragmatically and decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. Previous action-research-based Fact-Finding Missions were conducted in Hungary, Croatia, Poland, Germany, France and Macedonia. The following fact-finding mission was organized by the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) in co-operation with the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF),

The Baltics were chosen in the wake of a wave of disinformation spread by Russian specialists during the US election campaign. The question, whether the comparatively small societies of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania could be polarized and destabilised by so-called fake news, was on the table. This seemed to be even more likely as all of them have Russian-speaking minorities in their countries, the largest in Estonia, which reaches approximately 30 percent of the population. Could this minority be undermining the democratic discourse on the outskirts of Europe? How does the media system – highly concentrated and operating within a very liberal framework – react to this threat?



In the rankings of Reporters without Borders (RsF), Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF) and Freedom House, the Baltic states are doing comparatively well - Estonia is performing best among the three. To get a more comprehensive picture it was decided to compare two Baltic states: Estonia and Lithuania.

The mission participants included EFJ director **Renate Schroeder**; EFJ vice president **Nadezda Azhgikhina**, and ECPMF managing director **Lutz Kinkel**. EFJ affiliates **Helle Tiikmaa**, president of the Estonian Association of Journalists, and **Dainius Radzevičius**, President of the Lithuanian Journalists' Union (LŽS), helped to organise and accompany the mission.

Estonia

BACKGROUND

Media laws and regulations

The constitution provides for media freedom and freedom of speech and good legal regulation regarding access to information. Freedom of expression and high-speed internet connections ensure that the population has a plurality of choices. Libel is not a criminal offence, but journalists can be sued for civil defamation. There are two press councils in the country: Avaliku Sõna Nõukogu (ASN), the original press council and Pressinõukogu (PN, Press Council), the latter enjoying a high reputation among journalists. The Estonian Public Broadcaster (ERR) is supervised by the Public Broadcasting Council (RHN), whose members—by law, four media experts and one representative from each parliamentary faction—are elected by Parliament. After the 2007 Bronze Soldiers Riots in Tallinn and in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, there was considerable debate in Estonia about politically motivated journalism by Russian pro-government outlets. The Estonian public broadcaster provides the almost 30% Russian-speaking minority with Russian-language media now, but it works on a comparatively small budget and enjoys less investment and prestige.

“**Journalism is journalism and media is media**” Postimees CEO Sven Nuutmann

“**Regulatory approach is de-regulated market**” Audio-visual advisor Mati Kaalep

These are two quotations which deliver a clear headline to media and journalism in Estonia: liberalism with side-effects. While some journalists are committed to follow ethical and professional guidelines - for instance those working in the public service media ERR or the daily newspaper Postimees - a lot of content in other media outlets is provided by so called media workers following a pure business strategy, mixing advertisement and journalism.

In the first meeting the delegation had with the Ministry of Culture's **audio-visual adviser Mati Kaalep** and **Government Office Strategic Communication adviser Martin Jashko**, the government officials said that media concentration does not fall under the auspices of the culture committee but is purely based on competition law.

"I do not believe that media or journalism deserves any additional protection", said Mati Kaalep. On the question why journalists are not considered as creative workers, he admitted that within the EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) journalism is indeed regarded as cultural product, but when it comes to regulation, the Estonian state takes another approach and views journalism as a business.

The Cultural Endowment of Estonia, ("Kultuurkapital"), founded in 1925 and re-established in 1994 - a legal body with the objective to support the arts, folk culture, sport and the construction and renovation of cultural buildings by the accumulation of funds and distribution thereof for specific purposes - formed an expert group to

investigate the need for additional funding for journalism, and whether there should be a subgroup within the Cultural Endowment. It is not a new idea: before World War II, there was an endowment for journalism under this organisation. When "Kultuurkapital" was re-established after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a shared understanding in parliament that journalism as a profit-generating business did not qualify for subsidies, like literature, music, audio-visual art, folk culture, architecture, or even sports. Besides, public financing was also seen as jeopardising media freedom. This reflects the view of stakeholders interviewed by the delegation who said that there was no need to support journalism. So, the proposal was dropped.

The EFJ-ECPMF delegation noted that in Estonia, there is no official body dealing with journalism, press and media. The only level is through the audiovisual field: both the Public Service Broadcasting Act, and the Media Services Act, in force since 2010. There is a small exception – a few cultural outlets (a weekly publication, some journals) are financed indirectly by the state, via the foundation SA Kultuurileht. This however, only recognises journalism as a means to introduce and popularise culture, but not as a creative cultural activity in itself.

CEO Sven Nuutmann and Postimees Editor in Chief Lauri Hussar from Eesti Meedia Group said that they are against public support for media. At the same time, they defined a list of recommendations to (financially) improve the situation while acknowledging that their media business is doing surprisingly well:

- Reduction of VAT for digital outlets (now 20%) while print is at 9%;
- Regulation of municipal media which dominates the local advertising markets;

- Improvement of postal delivery of newspapers and magazines;
- Raise transparency and tax contributions of internet giants, Google, Facebook etc.
- Reduction of sponsorship in TV and online commercial ads in public service media.

Private and public service media guaranteeing pluralism?

Two media corporations dominate the media market: the [Ekspress Group](#)¹ and the Eesti Meedia Group². The [Center for Press and Media Freedom \(CMPF\)'s Media Pluralism Monitor \(MPM\) 2016](#) rates media ownership concentration (oligopoly/cross-ownership) as high risk.

Andres Joesaar, a media researcher from Tallinn University: "It is difficult to talk about media concentration in such a small market. In economic terms it does not make sense to invest in media here."

Anvar Samost, head of the news and sports department at ERR notes in the questionnaire that "Media concentration is one of the biggest problems. The two media houses tend to copy each other in most developments. The risk is that a bigger economic crisis wipes one of them out and thus further weakens competition and diversity."

¹ Ekspress Grupp owns the leading online media portals in the Baltics, the Delfi news website, and publishes Estonia's most widely read daily and weekly newspapers, in addition to seven out of the top ten magazines in Estonia. The group is vertically integrated with everything from content to printing and distribution carried out by its own companies.

² Eesti Meedia covers all media categories – print, online, radio and TV broadcaster, also implying content management across various media channels.

"I do not see a problem with such high cross-ownership. Only that allows us to finance our investigative journalism flagship Postimees", says CEO Sven Nuutmann. "Yes, we are lucky that local newspapers are merged into one company and they are profitable. Subscriptions are growing and that is amazing. Indeed, some remaining other local newspapers are dying after our invasion", he admitted.

Andres Konno, a researcher at University of Tartu and current MPM (2017) contributor believes that Eesti Meedia has done a lot to reduce the imbalance between cities and regions.

At the same time, given such a small and divided language market there is still little experience in new business models, crowdfunding or other digital ways of funding independent journalism, he acknowledged.

The third player in this concentrated market is the Estonian Public Broadcaster ([ERR](#)) – in theory, having a key role guaranteeing independent journalism. ERR runs 3 TV channels (of which one is in Russian), 5 radio stations (of which one is also in Russian). ERR is financed wholly from the state budget, and has been entirely free of commercials since July 1, 2002. In 2007, ETV merged with the Estonian Radio Service (ER) to form Estonian Public Broadcaster or Eesti Rahvusringhääling, ERR.

"We, as public service media, are number three in the concentrated Estonian market. We work according to a specific law adopted about 10 years ago with the great limitation that the law does not include the online sector and thus there is no extra budget for it," said ERR CEO **Erik Roose**. "The representatives of the political parties form the supervisory body, which has - though no direct influence on the content - , influence on the budget, and elects the management board.

But in the daily work there is hardly any pressure from the political side", he said. According to him, the ERR would need to be able to use advertisement on their website to generate some revenue on this ever more important platform.

"We do real journalism and offer journalists such a professional niche, but in order to survive the main challenge is the need to reach out to the digital audience ..." said **Erik Roose**. This was confirmed by the journalists working at ERR. They do feel privileged there.

The status of journalists

The majority of journalistic jobs in Estonia are located in three companies: Eesti Meedia, Ekspress Group and the Estonian national broadcaster. There are only collective agreements in the public service media ERR.

According to the CMPF Media Pluralism Monitor 2016, the influence of the two media groups on the Estonian job market is remarkable. Both companies dominate the country's journalistic work and periodically influence decisions on staff and editorial work.

"Thank god we do not have any collective agreements, we need to have freedom to do very quick changes. We do not believe in fixed employment solutions. Flexibility comes first," said **CEO Sven Nuutmann**, of Eesti Meedia which employs about 250 journalists in Estonia, including 100 at the daily quality newspaper Postimees.

Later, during a separate meeting with some heads of departments within Postimees, the journalists remained silent for a while when asked about working conditions and collective agreements. Apparently the interviewees had difficulties expressing themselves on the issue. **Oliver**

Kund, a reporter in the investigative department in Postimees, said: "This is a good question, but I have not really thought about it. Collective agreements may be good or bad, probably good for young journalists."

The mission was informed about a letter (3/2017) by journalists to the management of Postimees criticising a decline of editorial independence and in particular the pressure to praise in-house TV programs. The journalists interviewed seemed unwilling to react to this. However, they criticised the lack of time and the pressure of securing clicks in the online department. In particular, the two women journalists working for online admitted at the end: "We are not free at all: too much work and complete focus on clicks".

"The media organisations sometimes prefer to employ students who have not finished university. We call them 'baby journalists', as they tend to ask fewer questions", said **Urmas Loit**.

The Estonian Association of Journalists (EAL), an EFJ affiliate, is rather weak with about 300 members including freelancers and faces great challenges in recruiting younger journalists. **Helle Tiikmaa**, EAL chair, said that solidarity is missing among journalists, since they are divided by owners with individual working contracts and tend to follow their individualist survival instincts. Many journalists lose their jobs and go into PR. There is no real freelance tradition in Estonia.

Young journalist **Anna Põld**, board member of the Young Journalists Association, writing for the daily Postimees, expressed her frustration when working online comparing her tasks with assembly line workers doing purely mechanical work (cut and paste). Burn-out is a phenomenon among journalists and the Young Journalists' Association offers training and courses on this issue. The Association also helps young journalists to

negotiate better contracts. In Nuutman's paradigm, these young journalists are purely media workers even though working for the "journalists' flagship" Postimees".

Russian-speaking journalists earn less and, in particular, face the problem of too much work. **Olesja Lagasina**, head of Russian Postimees, which for economic reasons is online only, says it is difficult to recruit good Russian-speaking journalists. "We get less salary in the Russian team as we earn less for the owners."

All journalists interviewed who work for the Estonian Public Broadcaster (see list in annex) agreed that working at ERR is a privilege, but fear and work overload, in particular in Russian-speaking programmes, are present, especially since the new CEO (who comes from the private sector) arrived. A problem regarding the lack of pension regulation was also outlined: "Some journalists stay in the job till old age and thus do not create working opportunities for the younger generation" said one of them.

“ **Journalism mixed with entertainment and high economic influence is the real danger. That leads to self-censorship**” said **Andres Joesar**.

Ethics and self-regulation

“ **Self-regulation is working well. This is what keeps me in journalism.**” **Neeme Korv**, Head of Opinion department in Postimees, and member of the Press Council.

MPM's current contributor **Andres Konno** believes that the press council (PC) is very effective. It shows a transparent record of all complaints

on their website, while media put the complaints visibly in their news. He proposes that commercial communication, entertainment and advertisement should be labeled and differentiated from journalistic work. Journalists, he also observes, are often called "media workers" with the job of chasing clicks.

In Estonia, there are two self-regulatory bodies since 2001. The first one (ASN- Avaliku Sõna Nõukogu) was founded in 1991 covering publishers, broadcasters, consumer organisations and journalists and the second Press Council (Pressinõukogu PN) was formed in 2001, founded and financed for by the Estonian newspaper association after disagreements within the first one. The latter is the most powerful organisation representing ERR; local papers, but also some other, non-press organisations like lawyers and state institutions. "These two press councils have improved the national code of conduct with competing viewpoints", said Urmas Loit, a Professor at the University of Tartu and member of the ASN press council. For the mission, it seemed less efficient to have two press councils though recognizing the comparative lack of significance of the ASN.

"We do not have ethical problems; we are all bound to ethical guidelines by the press council (PN)", agreed all journalists interviewed who were working in higher position at Postimees.

"Hate speech is under control by a good self-regulating body." The problem is again the click philosophy: "Clicks go to all problems, be it refugees, immigrants or minorities" said a journalist from Postimees.

"At the public broadcaster editorial statutes are used, based on a code of conduct for journalists, and they protect us", said a journalist working for ERR.

Fake news and Russian media

On the question of whether "fake news" and the impact of Russian media is a concern for the Estonian government, Martin Jashko, government office strategic communication advisor, said that this is not specific for his country or region. "Key is media literacy, government transparency. It takes a lot of time; debunking myths are urgent to protect our democracy."

"Our biggest newspapers are doing a good job exposing such stories. At the same time, the government decided to increase the budget for strategic communication, including training. Here we have good examples from Finnish colleagues in cooperation with Finnish journalists."

"Regarding the Russian minority, we decided to establish a third Russian-language TV channel (ETV+) in 2014. We are against banning any Russian TV in our country. The problem has been with us since we gained our independence in 1991 but we do not regard the Russian minority as one group; there are different subgroups, all in all about 300.000 Russian-speaking inhabitants."

He recognised the slow disappearance of the Russian language print media.

With a younger internet driven generation, the Russian-speaking minority speaks three languages. For Jashko support in training and access to documents are important steps to fight "fake news" and support Russian-speaking media, but he excludes any financial support.

Lauri Hussar, the editor in chief of the daily Postimees, agrees that "fake news or Russian propaganda is not a real problem. "For us, more problematic are hackers' attacks."

This view is shared by ERR CEO Erik Roose: "Blurring and pressure from advertising are more threatening than fake news."

Postimees is setting up its own fact-checking team and publishing the corrections of other fact-checking teams.

Postimees' CEO Sven Nuutmann says that there is a need for local (Russian language) news in the east of Estonia, noting the recent closure of two small Russian language weeklies and a daily and taking into account that Eesti Meedia is the exclusive representative working with the independent Russian news agency Interfax.

CEO Erik Roose from the Estonian Public Broadcaster (ERR) said that the Russian-speaking minority is difficult to reach as they are very fragmented. For him ETV+ is a unique niche without Russian propaganda, but he admits that finances are too limited to compete with the budget of Russian state controlled TV. Nevertheless, he is optimistic about the integration of the Russian minority. According to Roose's analysis, the younger generation, those up to 25 years old, is already integrated, while the older ones, 55 and over are "lost" to President Vladimir Putin. So the "information battle" over opinion leadership concerns mostly the 100,000 women and men in the middle.

"There are problems within the Russian language media, such as lack of finances and resources", said Maksim Komasko, one of five Russian-speaking journalists at the Estonian national broadcasters' Narva studio, a town on the Russian border. "But there are no restrictions from the Estonian government", he insisted. He said that the main problem of Russian-speaking journalists is the low knowledge of journalistic ethics and principles, the deficits in training and lack of young journalists. Aleksandr Zukerman, a TV

journalist, news editor in channel PBK owned by the Latvian-based Baltic media alliance agreed that there is a lack of information in Russian and Russia has taken advantage of this. "The Russian-speaking programme of the Estonian public broadcaster is ok but the budget is too low to produce interesting news programmes. (...) When it comes to trusted information, Estonian Russian language TV is at the end of the sources of information for the Russian-speaking minority." He added that click-based journalism is not helping to bring both communities closer together. In order to generate clicks "using stereotypes is a simple answer".

He added that in order to reach the Russian-speaking public, an understanding of different culture "codes" is needed. For example, it is not advisable to talk about the "occupation" of Estonia during Soviet times. "Sometimes I'm thankful that Estonians don't understand Russian and vice-versa", he concluded with a big smile.

Natalja Kitam, a journalist and communication expert, worked for ETV's news department for Russian language news until she was dismissed due to economic pressures in 2009. Only in 2014, with the crisis in Ukraine, was there a political need to reintegrate the Russian community and the public service broadcasting channel ETV+ - a small channel only servicing a minority within the Russian minority - was established with her support. Natalja Kitam established a platform of citizen journalism for minorities, mainly Russians, to exchange and have dialogue at a multicultural level. She also launched a popular radio programme involving young media professionals.

The delegation was impressed by her success in producing a simple TV show that illustrates, how people with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds work and live together. There is no specific storyline, only the portrait of daily life.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, the smallness of the domestic market, the division in to two language units and the side-effects of deregulation and overemphasis on "free media", highlights the main threat to journalism and democracy. High concentration, the cheapness of journalistic content and the blurring between journalism and other forms of commercial communication are the main issues. The mission was concerned by the differentiation between journalists, who are entitled to work professionally, and media workers who serve in commercial media and are more PR specialists, content providers and information shifters than

journalists. Though Estonia ranks very high when it comes to media freedom with press freedom organisations, the delegation noted that press freedom itself does not guarantee journalists' independence and the quality required to fulfil its role. The mission believes another approach is needed to guarantee journalists' independence and professional integrity in the fast changing eco-system of a small country. The mission also expressed concern against the phenomenon of municipal news or "pseudo papers" distorting the local market and undercutting quality journalism.

The mission proposes the following recommendations:

Recommendations:

To the government:

- Consider how best to invest in media literacy and how best to integrate journalists in the field of culture and assume their watchdog function and special needs;
- In this respect, consider the establishment of an expert group covering all actors in the media to draft a media and journalism strategy in order to retain professional journalists in their crucial task for democracy.
- Consider full transparency rules on journalistic content to fight the increasing blurring of news media and infotainment with commercial text;
- The Cultural Endowment Foundation should work in full transparency when considering grants for journalists;
- Regulate municipal media which in particular at regional and local level dominates the advertising market. Local newspapers are facing the unfair competition from the pseudo newspapers published by the municipalities and delivered to local residents free of charge.
- Support mechanisms for local radio in particular.

On the ERR:

- For the public service broadcaster (ERR) to remain effective, the broadcasting law should be revised to include the online sector into the remits of ERR.

On the Russian-speaking minority:

- For the Russian-speaking minority there should be more journalistic programmes in Russian and support for Russian-speaking media in Eastern Estonia. There should also be more cooperation and dialogue between both Russian-speaking and Estonian journalists.

“ Nadezda Azhgikhina: **“Both Estonian and Russian language journalists confirmed that they**

would like to be more involved in European education and mid-career programmes including training on diversity and tolerance.”

“ **That actually would help us, the association, to get new and younger members. There should also be governmental decision to support such aspirations”** agreed Helle Tiikemaan.

Lithuania

Background:

Media laws and regulations

Lithuania's constitution provides for freedom of speech and the press. Lithuanian law prohibits some categories of speech, including incitement to hatred and denial of Soviet or Nazi crimes. In March 2014, on the basis of the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public, Lithuanian authorities suspended retransmissions of some programming by the Russian-language television channel NTV Mir for three months. The suspension was based on findings by the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission (LRTK) that a historical film aired by NTV Mir about the Soviet army in Lithuania contained untruthful and offensive content. Similarly, in April, the LRTK suspended rebroadcasting of some programmes by the Russian-language RTR Planeta for three months. The commission found that the outlet's coverage of the Ukraine crisis contained biased and tendentious information that justified violence and military aggression. Defamation is punishable by fines or imprisonment. The country's media freely criticise the government and express a wide variety of views. Journalists have faced retaliatory pressure from authorities for publishing state information. Media ownership remains concentrated, with a small number of firms —both domestic and foreign — owning the majority of the market. Ownership is not transparent, as disclosure is not strictly mandated or enforced. Like in Estonia the CMPF rates media ownership concentration as high risk.

Introduction

The mission immediately felt a very different atmosphere in Lithuania compared to the more Scandinavian-like Estonia. While the mission felt among the people interviewed in Estonia a rather strong loyalty to the state and to the media employers, in Lithuania the interviewees were more outspoken and critical. The political polarisation in Lithuania is reflected by the recent election of a new coalition headed by Ramunus Karbauskis, the biggest land owner, oligarch and leader of the conservative Farmers and Green Party.

Some issues of course are the same: high media concentration, not enough jobs for journalists and a blurring between journalism and economic activities.

There is much more tension around the public service media, Lithuanian national radio and TV (LRT), concerning the establishment of a parliamentary committee (see below).

And there is much more concern about the potential influence of Russian media in Lithuania, in particular by the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission (LRTK), which suspended broadcast of the Russian language channel "RTR Planeta" .

A lack of access to parliament's documents and records, problems around data protection regulation and the need for clear exceptions for journalists are severe problems for (investigative) journalists.

Political campaign against public service media?

On 15 January, the Lithuanian parliament headed by the Farmers and Greens Union's leader Arvydas Nekrosius established a special parliamentary committee to investigate the financial transparency of the public service media, the Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT). LRT is required to submit documents and evidence for a four years period 2013-2017. LRT operates three national televisions, three radio channels and television podcasts. On this issue the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) also organised a fact-finding mission to Vilnius on 14 February.

Several journalists including Dzina Donauskaite, Director of the Lithuanian Journalism Centre, expressed concern that this parliamentary committee might be used to put political pressure on journalists and weaken the public broadcaster.

The delegation was told that several Members of Parliament from the opposition refused to participate in the Committee, claiming that the main objective is political control over LRT.

"Indeed there is a lack of transparency when it comes to the 40 million Euros budget but this by no means justifies the establishment of a parliamentary commission with politicians who are not experts on public service media", said Dzina Donauskaite. "There are certainly some sins within the national broadcaster: lack of transparency and lack of independence of some anchors".

Audrius Matonis, TV news director of LRT also stressed that such an inquiry should not be led by politicians. He added that he had been openly criticised by Naglis Puteikis, member of the ruling Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union. Puteikis said in parliament, Matonis would misuse his

position to privately sell his influence to political clients. Matonis reported this attack to the police who started a criminal investigation of verbal attacks against Audrius Matonis.

He said the request by this committee to submit "an immense number of documents in a short period" is paralysing the work of the national broadcaster.

He said that the new government is not used to critical news as shown on the LRT. "I am afraid that they wish to copy the Polish model".

Suprasti Akimirksniu, journalist at the investigative web portal 15 minutes said that the ruling Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union is creating "fake news" against public service media, starting a battle against them before next year's elections.

The establishment of a parliamentary committee to scrutinize LRT is unique within Europe according to the EBU and threatens its independence. It can have a chilling effect on critical and investigative journalism and influence public opinion.

Note: In February (after the EFJ-ECPMF mission) Members of the European Parliament expressed their concerns over the setting up of a commission in Lithuania to scrutinize the public broadcaster LRT. The undersigned members of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group (ALDE) of the European Parliament wrote in the open letter to the Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite, the Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis and the Speaker of the Seimas (Lithuanian parliament) Viktoras Pranckietis, that "this is in contradiction to the European standards on public service media (PSM) independence set by the Council of Europe".

Digital and global challenges for a small media market

Mantas Martisius, vice chairman of the Radio and Television Commission: member of the European Regulatory Association (ERGA) responsible for regulating frequencies said for him the major threat to national media and national identity comes from global – that is American and Russian – competitors, given the enormous speed and internet penetration into all households. “We now also deal with national security issues to prevent Russians from buying channels. We have a different policy to Estonia, who - given their Russian-speaking minority - do not dare to ban anything” he said. “But we are also afraid of international players like Google and Facebook buying a licence for sports and re-allocating advertising and audiences from national media”, he added.

According to him, online media’s pursuit of a larger audience has a negative impact on content, which includes personal insults and racist comments. While social networks have contributed to a certain diversification of information space, these tendencies have resulted in an increasing uncertainty about the quality of distributed news.

Both, Martisius and Donauskaite recognise the ‘slowly decreasing space’ for professional journalism’ as a fundamental problem. This is also the case in local media, where - almost like in Estonia - “the regional and also news media portals are linked with local municipalities and thus with different financial contracts (see response from Aukse Balčytienė, CMPF contributor, 2016).

“In the early 90s there was a very high belief in free journalism. But commercial greed changed the image and now only about 30% of the public support journalists. And the lack of trust, partly caused by bad working conditions, has ‘helped’

politicians to attack journalists, often with public support” said Mantas Martisius.

For Dzina Donauskaite the main challenges in Lithuania are also the blurring line between editorial content and advertising; corrupted media owners and lack of journalists’ ethics as well as the lack of respect of politicians for transparency rules and access to documents and records. “For example, transparency declarations of MPs are not respected, and this is demanded by journalists. Parliament has refused to give recordings of parliamentary meetings” she told the delegation.

Another problem is the lack of transparency when it comes to advertising revenues, in particular from EU funds which amounted in 2012 to about 9 Million Euros.

On the positive side, she highlighted the excellent work of 15min and another web-portal Delphi, two successful investigative journalism portals, read by many.

The delegation met with Suprasti Akimirksniu, an investigative journalist at 15min, one of the largest news web portals in Lithuania, owned by Estonian media company “Eesti Meedia”. In 2016, 15 min also introduced a paywall to ad-blockers. 40 journalists work at 15 min.

Suprasti Akimirksniu defined several problems for investigative journalists today noting recent attempts of the ruling party to silence the media including business media in Lithuania:

- Disrespect for protection of sources;
- No whistleblower protection;
- Not sufficient access to parliamentary registries and documents;

- No journalists' exception on data protection;
- No understanding by state officials on the role of journalists.

Several journalists' protests together with the Lithuanian Union of Journalists have taken place in recent months; the Lawyers Bar Association has also cooperated with the journalists.

Regulation, support by the state: What is in the pipeline?

In a meeting with Deividas Velkas, Head of Public Information policy of the Ministry of Culture, the delegation learned about the Ministry's recent "strategic guidelines on public information policies" including content diversity and media concentration; quality and media literacy. Part of the strategy is to establish a register of Lithuanian publishers and producers by 2019 to have more transparency in the media market, including among PR agencies. The information shall include funds received from state or municipal budgets. This register will be public. A media council was established in November 2017 to consider these strategic guidelines. Media stakeholders including journalists and the journalists' union, the association; publishers, internet media, universities, press council, NGOs are part of this media council.

"Content quality is very important for us. Fake news of course is one of the reasons behind our strategic guidelines. Political influence is another reason. Political leaders are allowed to own shares in media, in particular in the regions", said Deividas Velkas.

Conclusions and recommendations

The mission in Lithuania was overshadowed by the threats around the establishment of the special parliamentary committee to investigate the financial transparency of the public service media. Journalists have expressed concern about the lack of respect of the Farmers and Greens Union towards journalists.

Many problems such as the blurring line of journalism and advertising, the high level of media concentration are similar to Estonia.

The mission encourages the government (Ministry of Culture) to pursue the initiative to establish a media council with all media stakeholders, including those from universities and journalists' unions, to discuss media literacy, transparency of ownership, diversity of content, media concentration and "fake news" – something potentially very constructive and unheard of in Estonia.

While the EFJ and the ECPMF appreciate the efforts to create more transparency at the national broadcaster, both organisations warn the government not to misuse such a parliamentary committee for political purposes to harm the public service broadcaster. The delegation notes that the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) had already warned in December 2017 that "the requirement to disclose confidential information raises concerns about the independence of LRT" and the recent fact-finding mission by the EBU to Vilnius expressed concern and recalled the special role of public service media to provide unbiased information to its citizens. "The implementation of the majority rule of the leading coalition is contrary to European standards as provided CoE CM Recommendations No 2012 (1) on PSM governance and CoE CM Recommendation No 96 (10) on Inde-

pendence of PSM both underlining the importance of institutional and editorial independence of PSM.

Recommendations:

To the government:

- To organise, instead of a parliamentary committee, a public hearing with experts from the EBU, the Council of Europe, UNESCO and debate how to improve transparency and other reforms with LRT;
- To allow full transparency, stability of funding and independence of the media council;

To government and media:

- Encourage professional training for journalists and editors-in-chief to better deal with fake news (information disorder), hate speech and ethical journalism.

Key points from EFJ and ECPMF for Estonia and Lithuania

The expectation originally motivating the fact-finding mission to the Baltics was that Russian propaganda and fake news stir up severe conflicts within the Baltic states. This expectation was not met. Our collocutors in Estonia and Lithuania argued the younger generation of the Russian-speaking minorities would already identify with the state they live in, the middle age generation at least would tend to do so, because it is widely known that living conditions in Russia are worse. Only the older generation fully believes what is coming from Russian media.

Nevertheless, the media situation is fragile. Both states, in particular Estonia, face the side-effects of their ultra-liberal policy regarding journalism and media only as business factors. This led to a highly concentrated market and a shady separation in media production: "journalists" are entitled to do journalism, "media workers" only pretend to do journalism, while in fact do content marketing without letting the user know. Of special concern is the situation of print media in rural areas, which is dried out by a new and unbeatable competitor named "municipality news". These papers are PR tools of local and regional elites.

ECPMF's managing director Lutz Kinkel says: "Estonia and Lithuania provide a high level of press freedom. But press freedom alone does not guarantee quality journalism. This makes independent public service media even more a necessity. We will closely observe the conflict in Lithuania between the new government and the public broadcaster. The development in Poland should be a warning, not a role model for Lithuanian politicians."

EFJ's director Renate Schroeder says: "For me it was extremely interesting to look deeper into the challenges for journalists in two smaller countries, which have -besides its similarities- very

different approaches to media and journalism. Considering the rapid growth of internet penetration and the business model of high clicks, one can expect that quality of content will further deteriorate. Training for all journalists from both language communities, investment in media literacy and support for diversity and pluralism are essential for the future of journalism and journalists in this region."

Thanks

The delegation thanked, in particular, Helle Tiikmaa from the Estonian Association of Journalists and Dainius Radzevičius from the Lithuanian Union of Journalists who both were most efficient in organising all meetings on the ground. The delegation also thanks the European Commission for the financial support.

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Annex

- Press Releases
- List of meetings and bibliography of speakers
- Questionnaire and responses



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Press Release

30.1.2018

ECPMF and EFJ fact-finding mission to the Baltics: no fake news but blurring lines between journalism and advertising

Journalism is under tremendous economic pressure in the Baltics. This opens the door to political influence and PR. The governments of Estonia and Lithuania answer to this with very different approaches.

The European Federation of Journalists and the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom investigated the media situation in Estonia and Lithuania from January 22nd to 24th and interviewed almost 30 experts, among them representatives of the government, academia, press councils, public service media, journalists' organisations, investigative journalists, editors-in-chief and CEOs.

Good news first: concerning media freedom and pluralism, Estonia and Lithuania are doing respectively well. Considering the small populations - Estonia 1.3 million, Lithuania 2.8 million inhabitants - both media markets show a variety of opinions, outlets and media ownership though media concentration is rather high. In addition, both states provide strong public broadcasting that stands for quality journalism and enjoys broad acceptance.

"Journalism is journalism and media is media"

Partly due to special services of the public broadcaster the Russian speaking minorities of both countries seem to integrate more and more, experts claim that the younger generation up to an age of 25 to be already well integrated. According to the mission's findings the biggest problem is neither fake news nor Russian propaganda but the economic pressure on media that opens the door to "paid articles".

In Estonia, media policy is officially formulated as a liberal one and the mission lacked a vision of how to support professional journalism in a small country with immense commercially driven media. "Our regulation is deregulation", said Audiovisual Adviser Matt Kaalep during a meeting with the delegation in the Ministry of Culture. From the governmental side media is regarded as an industry, not a culture or a good that needs protection.

The management of East Media, the largest media group in Estonia, formerly owned by Schibsted, said that they run their daily "Postimees" as a journalistic flagship, which produces financial deficits while all other services follow a strict business model. "Our cross-ownership model allows real journalism to be financed. Journalism is journalism and media is media", East-CEO Sven Ruutland said.

The lack of profitability of quality journalism has severe consequences when it comes to local and regional media. In particular in Estonia so called "municipal news" compete with what is left of local and regional media. This means more or less PR newspapers owned by local economic and political elites, which are disseminated for free. Nevertheless the Estonian government sees no reason to intervene.

In contrast, in Lithuania the new government coalition which includes the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union, seems to seek more control over the media sector, in particular the Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT). Without prior reason the ruling party installed a parliamentary committee to investigate the financial transparency of the public broadcaster. The Ministry of Culture in Lithuania is launching a media council with all media stakeholders including academia, journalists' unions etc. to discuss media literacy, transparency of ownership, diversity of content, media concentration and fake news, something potentially very constructive and unheard in Estonia.

Concerns about the independence of LRT

While EFJ and ECPMF appreciate the efforts to create more transparency at the national broadcaster, both organisations warn the government not to misuse such a parliamentary committee for political purposes to harm the public service broadcaster. EFJ and ECPMF note that the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) had [strictly warned in December 2017](#) that „the requirement to disclose confidential information raises concerns about the independence of LRT“.

Also in Lithuania, the delegation could not detect any dangers that the public sphere might be distorted by propaganda and fake news. The Russian minorities in both countries are divided into the younger, quite integrated generation in Estonia or Lithuania while the older generation is still more focused on Russia and Russian media. EFJ and ECPMF do believe that Russian minority media and journalists in Estonia should be more integrated and better supported.

Mission participants were Renate Schneider, EFJ director, Nadezda Azhgikhina, EFJ Vice President and Lutz Kinkel, Managing Director of ECPMF. Local partners are Helle Tikmisa, President of the Estonian Association of Journalists, and Dainius Radzevicius, President of the Lithuanian Journalists' Union (LŽS).

A detailed report about the findings of this fact-finding mission with a set of recommendations for each country will be published soon. This project is supported by the European Commission.

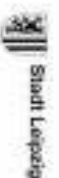
For more information or press enquiries please contact [Sophie Aigner-Ber Chambi](#)



The European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) unites journalists associations, publishing houses, academic institutions, trade unions and media rights experts to achieve the application of the European Charter on Freedom of the Press throughout Europe. Founded in 2015, it is about to be registered as European Cooperative Society and headquartered in Leipzig with member/partners in 16 countries. The ECPMF provides events, analyses and tools on media freedom issues, coordinates its member organisations' activities and helps individual journalists under threat, for example through a residence programme and petitions.

The ECPMF is supported by: [European Commission](#), [Media Foundation of Romania](#), [Leipzig Free State of Saxony](#), [Saxony-Lusatia](#)

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Stadt Leipzig

Fact-finding mission to the Baltics: no “fake news” but blurring lines between journalism and advertising



News / 29-01-2018 / Tag: BALTICS, ECPMF, ESTONIA, LITHUANIA, MISSION



Journalism is under tremendous economic pressure in the Baltics. This opens the door to political influence and PR. The governments of Estonia and Lithuania answer this with very different approaches.

The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) and the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) investigated the media situation in Estonia and Lithuania from 22-24 January 2018. They interviewed almost 30 experts, among them representatives from the government, academia, press councils, public service media, journalists' organisations, investigative journalists, editors-in-chief and CEOs.

First, the good news: concerning media freedom and pluralism, Estonia and Lithuania are doing comparatively well. Considering the small populations – Estonia with 1.3 million and Lithuania with 2.8 million inhabitants – both media markets show a variety of opinions, outlets and media ownership, though media concentration is rather high. In addition, both states provide strong public broadcasting that stands for quality journalism and enjoys broad acceptance.

Partly due to special services of the public broadcasters, the Russian speaking minorities of both countries seem to integrate more and more into the native populations. Experts claim that the younger generation, up to the age of 25, are already well integrated. According to the mission's findings, the biggest problem is neither fake news nor Russian propaganda, but the economic pressure on media that opens the door to “paid articles”.

In Estonia, media policy is officially formulated as being liberal, and the mission lacked a vision of how to support professional journalism in a small country with immense commercially-driven media. “Our regulation is deregulation”, said audiovisual adviser **Mati Kaalep** during a meeting with the delegation in the Ministry of Culture. From the governmental side, media is regarded as an industry, not as part of culture or a good that needs protection.

The management of Eesti Meedia, the largest media group in Estonia, formerly owned by Schibsted, said that they run their daily “Postimees” as a journalistic flagship which produces financial deficits while all other services follow a strict business model. “Our cross-ownership model allows real journalism to be financed. Journalism is journalism and media is media”, said Eesti Meedia CEO **Sven Ruutland**.

The lack of profitability of quality journalism has severe consequences when it comes to local and regional media. In Estonia in particular, so called “municipal news” compete with what is left of local and regional media. More or less PR-newspapers are owned by local economic and political elites, and are disseminated for free. Nevertheless, the Estonian government sees no reason to intervene.

In contrast, in Lithuania the new government coalition – which includes the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union – seems to seek more control over the media sector, in particular the Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT). Without prior reason, the ruling party installed a parliamentary committee to investigate the financial transparency of the public broadcaster. The Ministry of Culture in Lithuania is launching a media council with all media stakeholders, including those from universities and journalists’ unions, to discuss media literacy, transparency of ownership, diversity of content, media concentration and fake news – something potentially very constructive and unheard of in Estonia.

While the EFJ and the ECPMF appreciate the efforts to create more transparency at the national broadcaster, both organisations warn the government not to misuse such a parliamentary committee for political purposes to harm the public service broadcaster. The EFJ and the ECPMF note that the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) had already warned in December 2017 that “the requirement to disclose confidential information raises concerns about the independence of LRT.”

Also in Lithuania, the delegation could not detect any dangers that the public sphere might be distorted by propaganda and fake news. The Russian minorities in both countries are divided into the younger, quite integrated generation, and the older generation which is more focused on Russia and Russian media. The EFJ and the ECPMF do believe that the Russian minority media and journalists in Estonia should be more integrated and better supported.

The mission participants included EFJ director **Renate Schroeder**, EFJ vice president **Nadezda Azhgikhina**, and ECPMF managing director **Lutz Kinkel**. EFJ affiliates **Helle Tikmaa**, president of the Estonian Association of Journalists, and **Dainius Radzevičius**, President of the Lithuanian Journalists’ Union (LJSJ), helped to organise and accompany the mission.

A detailed report about the findings of this fact finding mission with a set of recommendations for each country will be published soon. This project is supported by the European Commission.

Photo credit: Dainius Radzevičius



EFJ and ECPMF embark on fact-finding mission to the Baltics



The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) along with the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) will embark on a Fact-Finding Mission to Estonia and Lithuania from 22-30-24 January 2018. In close cooperation with its affiliates, the Estonian Association of Journalists (EAJ), and the Lithuanian Journalists' Union (LJU),

the mission delegation will investigate the state of media freedom and journalists' rights and working conditions in Estonia and Lithuania, meeting with journalists, government representatives, and public and private media organisations including Russian-speaking media and researchers. The issue of Russian "propaganda" and the need for ethical journalism, but also the need to invest in a very weakened local media, will only be a few of the themes highlighted.

In Estonia, the delegation will meet with the employees and chiefs of Estonian media and the public broadcaster ERR, as well as Russian journalists, the audio-visual adviser from the Ministry of Culture, and press councils.

In Lithuania, the delegation will meet with representatives from the public broadcaster and the Lithuanian Journalists' Centre, as well as the Ministry of Culture and the Radio and Television Commission.

Research has highlighted concerns in terms of media concentration, working conditions for journalists, political influence and social inclusiveness of the media in the Baltics. Recommendations for future action will follow the mission.

Mission participants are **Renate Schroeder**, EFJ director, **Naderza Azhgikolina**, EFJ vice-president and **Lutz Kinkel**, Managing Director of ECPMF.

Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons

People in the meetings:

Mati Kaalep – Audio-visual adviser of Ministry of Culture. His tasks in a broader sense include ensuring the development of the audio-visual and media fields and preparing draft legislation. He also represents Estonia in the work of the EU sectoral working groups and committees, and organises the establishment of the positions of Estonia. Mati Kaalep has studied law at the University of Tartu and Tilburg University. He received his Master's Degree in Law with a specialisation in IT law from Tilburg University. He has previously worked as an Advocate at law office Varul.

Martin Jaško – Strategic Communication Adviser of the Government Communication Unit. His tasks include planning the communication on state activities and forwarding the information to the society. Prerequisites for strategic communication in Estonia are democracy and freedom of speech, meaning that government communication is only one of many competing voices beside opposing parties, business organisations, citizens' associations, and foreign communication. He has previously worked as government's media adviser and in communications department in Defence Ministry and Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, also in Tallinn municipality; as communications adviser in Ukraine and Moldova.

Sven Nuutmann - CEO and Chairman of the Management Board of Estonian Media. Has a long-term experience in media and telecommunications. Has served as a Member of the Management Board at UP Invest OÜ, the Chairman of the Board of USS Security Eesti AS, the Chairman of the Management Board and Chief Executive Officer of AS Delfi since December 2009, Vice President of Rambler Media Ltd and as Chief Operating Officer of Rambler TV and Tele2 in Russia, the Chief Executive Officer of MTG Radio in Eastern Europe (part of Modern Times Group MTG AB), Member of Supervisory Board at Delfi UAB, Lithuania and Member of Supervisory Board at Delfi AS, Latvia. He holds a B.A. in International Business from Estonian Business School.

Lauri Hussar – Editor-in-chief of daily Postimees. In 1998–2006 he worked as reporter, editor and news anchor in TV3, 2006–2016 in Estonian National Broadcasting (mainly Vikerraadio channel) as anchor and presenter. In March 2016 started working in Postimees as deputy editor-in-chief and from June became the editor-in-chief. He has graduated the University of Tartu Theology department.

Oliver Kund – journalist in the investigative department in Postimees. Graduated the University of Tartu, majoring in journalism.

Neeme Korv - Head of the opinion department in Postimees. Has been in Postimees since 1995, previously worked in Estonian Radio regional office in Tartu and daily Hommikuleht. He is also a member of Press Council (affiliated with the Estonian Newspapers Association). He has graduated the University of Tartu Philology department (majoring in theatrical studies, minor journalism)

Olesja Lagašina – Head of the Russian Postimees. Has worked as editor-in-chief in Russian Postimees and Den za Dnjom until their closure in 2016, since then heads the online Postimees.ru. Previously has worked as translator and journalist in portal Delfi. She studied Russian literature the University of Tartu and done doctoral studies in Tallinn University.

Kristi Malmberg - head of the economy topics department in Postimees. Has worked as economic topics journalist and editor in economic paper Äripäev and dailies Eesti Päevaleht and Postimees. She has published a book on motivating work environment Tahte tekitajad.

Joint EFJ-ECPMF Mission to Estonia + Lithuania (2018)



Natalja Kitam – journalist, communication expert, journalism lecturer and trainer. Worked previously in Estonian TV and Estonian Public Broadcaster (ERR) as reporter, presenter, anchor, producer, also led creation of ERR's Russian language news page. Trained Russian language youngster in journalism. Has Master Degree in psychology.

Aleksandr Zukerman – TV journalist. Has worked as journalist in Estonian Radio and as special correspondent for Deutsche Welle. Since 1996 an author and presenter of tv-show Subboteja in Kanal 2. From 2003 has been news editor and presenter in channel Pervõi Baltiiski Kanal (PBK). Studied theatre production in Moscow Cultural Insitute.

Maksim Komaško – journalist in Estonian National Broadcaster's Narva studio.

Andres Kõnno – has been a researcher and analyst in University of Tartu, Baltic Media Monitoring Group, AS Corpore media research department, ETA News Service OÜ. Now works as lecturer in Tallinn University's Baltic Film, Media, Arts and Communication School. Defended doctoral thesis in University of Tartu 2016.

Andres Jõesaar – is the Associate Professor of Media Policies in Baltic Film, Media, Arts and Communication School and in TU Centre of Excellence in Media Innovation and Digital Culture and Vice-Rector for Creative Activities and Cooperation in Tallinn University. Previously has worked in Tele2 Eesti AS as media services and corporate customer director; AS TV3 vice-president, chairman of the board and general director; business manager in Reklaamiteleviisioon AS, head of advertising department in Estonian TV and in Estonian Radio. Studied in Tallinn Polytechnic Institute, MA and PhD in media and communications from University of Tartu.

Urmas Loit – media researcher and lecturer in University of Tartu. Has worked previously in Estonian Radio as reporter, editor and special correspondent; project manager in AS Trio LSL; managing director in the Estonian Broadcasting Association. Is member and managing director of press council Avaliku Sõna Nõukogu (ASN).

Alo Raun – head of the opinion department in Eesti Päevaleht (which belongs to the second big media organisation in Estonia, Express Group). Previously has worked in Postimees, as head of the online service in Estonian National Broadcaster and as communications adviser in Ministry of Social Affairs.

Anna Põld – reporter in news department in Postimees. She is a board member of the Estonian Association of Young Journalists. Graduated from University of Tartu.

Madis Vaikmaa – journalist in the weekend addition of Postimees, Arter. He is a board member of the Estonian Association of Young Journalists. Graduated from University of Tartu.

Erik Roose – Chairman of the board of Estonian Public Broadcasting since June 2017. Has worked previously as sales manager in Trio LSL radio group; CEO, business manager and sales manager in Estonian Media/Postimees; CEO on daily Eesti Ekspress; lector in economic school Mainor. He has graduated Tallinn University of Technology.

Anvar Samost – head of the news and sports department in Estonian Public Broadcaster. Previously worked as head of online services and as deputy chief of news department of Estonian Public Broadcaster. Has also worked as journalist in Postimees and economical paper Äripäev. Started as journalist in news agency BNS, where moved up to board and finished as chairman of the board. Tried hand in politics, but did not get elected and returned to journalism.

Meelis Süld – shop steward for the Estonian Association of Journalists in Estonian Public Broadcasting and editor and journalist in ERR's channel Vikerraadio. Has previously worked as journalist for Postimees and Pereraadio. 2014-2017 was the chairman of EAJ. Has studied journalism, communications and theology in University of Tartu.

Ene-Maris Tali – shop steward for the TV creative employees in Estonian Public Broadcasting and TV journalist and editor-producer. She has also published fiction. In 2004 she was elected chairperson of the board of Estonian Union of Journalists. She has graduated University of Tartu majoring in journalism.

Marju Himma-Kadakas – editor and journalists of Estonian Public Broadcaster's science page Novaator. She is a member of the board of Estonian Association of Journalists. Previously has worked as editor-in-chief of ERR web pages, lecturer in University of Tartu and reporter in daily Postimees. She has MA in journalism from University of Tartu and is doing her doctoral studies there now.

Alice Rahuoja – head of the Russian language news department in Estonian Public Broadcaster. Has previously worked as reporter in ERR.

Questionnaire responses (Estonia + Lithuania)

What poses the biggest threat to press and media freedom in Estonia and Lithuania and why? (Please vote on the following topics, whether or not they are important – 10 being very important, 1 being not important at all. Please add a few sentences explaining your vote).

Respondent: Andres Konno, Media Law Consultant, Estonia

Topic	Rating	Comments
Economical constraints and pressures	6	it may vary, but in general journalists get an average salary, that is not necessarily the most inspiring income
Political pressure	3	There may be occasional influence from the political sphere, especially in what concerns regional media at the smaller cities. However, the political pluralism is well present and also the market competition among the stakeholders is what reduces the fear that someone's voice could possibly be silenced
Tension with Russian media, "Russian propaganda"	6	It is the public consensus, that channels such as RT and Sputnik should not be banned, because that would turn them into the objects of cult. Otherwise they are to be considered just ridiculous, as the common sense among the audiences prevails (including Russians). There may be some rhetorically generated fear over the influence of Russian propaganda (especially from the right wing conservatives) among the Estonian audience (the next parliament is to be elected in March 2019). The real problem among the policymakers seems to be the lack of knowledge how to legitimize the Russian-based PSM-media among the Russian-speaking audience of Estonia (especially in what concerns ETV+; also state funded Radio 4 has no problems with legitimacy among local Russians).

Media concentration	7	ask over the concentration on your meeting together with Sven Nuutmann and Lauri Hussar. Btw, mr Nuutmann published an interesting article in the Business Daily of 04.10 2017 „The national media needs the support of the state while competing with the big international giants“ (basically this is about the lack of funding to produce quality journalism; >> https://www.aripaev.ee/arvamused/2017/10/04/sven-nuutmann-rahvuslik-meedia-vajab-gigantidega-voitlemisel-riigi-tuge
Weak local media and imbalance between the capital and the regions	5	Actually Eesti Meedia (Postimees Group) has done quite a lot in order to reduce the imbalance between cities and regions; Postimees Group owns the regional newspapers from the most vital regions of Estonia (except eastern Estonia, that is Narva, Sillamäe, Jõhvi). Ask Nuutmann!
Legal protection for journalists	1	I think there is no problems with that
Working conditions for journalists and precarity	5	in general, what concerns Postimees and ERR, the working conditions are good; I have no information about the other stakeholder in the market.
Self-censorship	7	Self-censorship is the most difficult issue to address. In general, journalists can talk about anything and if someone breaks some silent barrier, then its like there has been an elephant in the room – how didn't we notice? Of course, there are issues that are more sensible than others, and then its just about how to find the right expert who would talk about it? And that may be hard sometimes.
Other		No answer

Respondent: Head of Russian-language news, Postimees, Estonia

Topic	Rating	Comments
Economical constraints and pressures	9	As a commercial media we often publish articles which have more chances to reach the audience (accidents, „light» information, entertainment) while production of really good content (investigations, cultural and scientific news) needs more resources. Usually Russian editorial teams have smaller stuff and less possibilities.
Political pressure	6	Sometimes politicians try to manipulate media by offering financial assistance (for example, bying ads) to the loyal media channels. On the other hand a journalist may be stigmatized as „unloyal» to Estonia if his political opinions seem unusual to Estonian establishment.
Tension with Russian media, „Russian propaganda”	10	Russian media is always under suspicion and it is really stressful to represent Russian minority. Sometimes Estonian media is not ready to accept another point of view especially when we talk about specifically Russian problems (citizenship, language issues, education, relationship with Russia etc.).
Media concentration	2	Estonia is a small country and we have our local paper or news-portal almost everywhere. The market seems full at the moment.
Weak local media and imbalance between the capital and the regions	5	It is not really weak, professionally it is ok. But certainly those in Tallinn are more affluent. Maybe there are some problems with Narva because only Estonian broadcasting can afford to have many reporters there. Private media tries to cover Ida-Viru news, but we are more concentrated on Tallinn.
Legal protection for journalists	2	The system is regulated so that the pressure (when there is) is mainly psychological. In case of such pressure is more probable that a journalist decides to leave an editorial team himself, not asking any protection. We have also Press Council who deals with all complaints against journalists, but it is not really legal protection.

Working conditions for journalists and precarity	8	The salaries are not good enough to hold a professional. So there is always a turnover and editor cannot concentrate on his work as he is always in the search of a new reporter. You always have to teach a young journalist and when he becomes a professional he is not motivated anymore and continues his career in PR.
Self-censorship	7	There are some topics where Estonian and Russian journalists do not agree. It seems that Russian journalists try to avoid conflict and prefer to cover other topics while Estonian journalist, especially when we talk about columnists, feels free to write about Russians even if it makes his Russian colleagues furious.
Other: Representation of Russian-language columnists in Estonian media	6	No chance that Estonian-language media will translate Your opinion into Estonian if they do not agree with it. Those who represent Russian-language columnists in Estonian media are mostly critical towards Russian minority. Often they have no slightest idea of what they are talking about and exploit stereotypes. As a result the dialogue cannot begin.

Respondent: Estonian national broadcaster's head of news and sports departments

Topic	Rating	Comments
Economical constraints and pressures	8	Estonia is a small media market with limited revenue potential. Large part of the new advertising revenue is taken out of the market by Facebook and Google. Also the financing of public media could be better ensured and with more long term perspective.
Political pressure	4	
Tension with Russian media, "Russian propaganda"	4	
Media concentration	9	This is one of the biggest concerns. There are just two major media houses who tend to copy each other in most developments. The risk also is that a bigger economic crisis can wipe one of them out and so substantially weaken the competition and diversity.
Weak local media and imbalance between the capital and the regions	5	
Legal protection for journalists	3	
Working conditions for journalists and precarity	2	
Self-censorship	2	
Other:		

Lithuania

Topic	Rating	Comments
Economic constraints and pressures	10	<p>In my vote here I am taking several aspects into consideration. One of those is linked with economic constraints as direct pressures on media content coming from media owners (and in some media sectors, predominantly in the regional media, these are indeed highly pressing: I even would say that regional media is in the hands of oligarchs); the leading national news media have strong brands and their editorial decisions are less affected by pressures from owners (which, again, might be international owners or even divisions of the international media groups); economic constraints I see also as pressures coming from the editorial staff since the issue of news financialization (or 'financialization of journalism' in general) appears to be a critical issue; related to this issue is another matter which is the obvious need to re-examine the system of public subsidies (Lithuania has a good model which was quite innovative in times of its establishment in 1996, but now this model is completely outdated and doesn't take into respect novel – digital – working conditions and pressures related to the arrival of the global digital platforms which critically affect economic conditions of small national news markets)</p>

Political pressure	10 (high importance; but this factor is highly interlinked and interrelated with economic factor)	<p>political and economic pressures are highly interrelated; I would even say that these two pressures cannot be analyzed or anyhow otherwise assessed separately: they come 'hand-in-hand' so to say, since politics in Lithuania is also highly dependent on economic aspects; in other words, political thinking of elites in the country is highly determined by the economic factor: Lithuania is a democracy which is acted and performed in economically weak conditions (which is determined also by a number of various local and international factors: effects of recent economic crisis, unfavorable demographic situation and high levels of emigration, high levels of corruption and effects of 'grey economy', international political climate and restrictions and sanctions imposed on Lithuanian business groups by Russia, and also others); I would stress that 'oligarchization of politics' is highly visible in the current parliamentary coalition – the leading political party Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union is lead by one of the richest men in the country; but, at the same time, the activities of the party and the leader himself are under high scrutiny of the media, which, quite paradoxically in such political climate, can expose all the scandalous wrongdoings of politics (in other words, 'political oligarchization' hasn't yet succeeded in 'direct putting of a hand' into leading news media matters); still, this might be only a situation for a moment since there already is evidence that political pressures are commissioned to affect the management of the public service broadcaster LRT</p>
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Tension with Russian media, "Russian propaganda"	8 (the issue is of high significance, but not so pressing)	This issue is of high importance but it is already taken care of (through different public actions and initiatives also performed by media groups and individual journalists); Russian propaganda related matters are discussed almost on a daily basis: this is a popular issue and runs in public discourse for a number of years already – also different government institutions (Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Culture, and other organizations) have included the issues of disinformation, fake news, information wars and propaganda, cyber wars and cyber attacks in their strategic programs. Media and journalists also play a significant role in the upholding of such issues in their daily agendas
Media concentration	10	media concentration is indeed high in Lithuania and this is affected also by legal conditions (media regulation which does not pose restrictions on cross media ownership and defines dominant position in media as in other sectors)
Weak local media and imbalance between the capital and the regions	10 (highly important)	National media channels dominate in the country: all these are based in the capital city of Vilnius (where daily politics is made – and where is the main focus of daily news); the imbalance is indeed very obvious and can be detected in all possible aspects (such as payment for the work produced, professional freedom and independence and professional motivation and ambitions of journalists and editors); it can be said that imbalanced situation is even critical in the country: for example, in the second biggest city of Kaunas (which is a city of around 350.000 inhabitants) does not have free media – its regional daily and also news portals are linked with local municipality (through different financial contracts)
Legal protection for journalists	8	legally, situation in Lithuania is quite good; I would say that other (economic and political) pressures are more pressing currently
Working conditions for journalists and precarity	9	-

Self-censorship	9	<p>I would indicate here that the vote depends on who is asked about self-censorship practices – highly experienced political news journalists and especially those who have established professional reputations (and even ‘brands’- because they are publicly seen on national TV in their own political programs or analysis, they comment on social media) are free from self-censorship (my studies suggest that these journalists are highly professionally motivated, they are highly experienced and their working practices and conditions correspond with practices of journalists in other – predominantly Nordic – countries); however, as I indicated in earlier remarks, regional media (newspapers, local TV stations) are mainly in the hands of local (or even national) oligarchs which makes professional operations indeed difficult if not impossible at all – those regional news media journalists are also less professionally ambitious and motivated, they are also less experienced.</p>
Other: media analysis and research and training and education of journalists	9	<p>there is too little attention on media and journalism related matters; it is seldom that these are publicly discussed (almost never); reputation of journalists is also quite critical – my impression is that, in general, public knowledge of journalism’s role is quite confused (this is also determined by journalists themselves who shift their roles from being investigative journalists and suddenly moving into PR or political spokespersons)</p>

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