



# LITHUANIA

## EurOMo Country Report 2025

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## Introduction

In Lithuania, media ownership-related questions have been addressed in various analyses and research studies (Balčytienė & Lauk, 2005; Juraitė, 2008; Jastramskis, 2008; Jastramskis, 2015; Jastramskis et al., 2017; Jastramskis & Plepytė-Davidavičienė, 2021), and mostly in the comparative frameworks of media concentration and media influence. As revealed, very small media markets (such as the Baltic countries) are confronted with enduring risks of media concentration (Balčytienė, 2009). In Lithuania, there are rules set to regulate who can be an owner of the means of public information provision. However, there are no standards to regulate media ownership concentration, which is now regulated according to general market concentration limits applicable to all business forms.

Although there are research studies with results about the enduring trends in media (ownership) concentration and degrees of possible risks, the EurOMO analysis reveals evident shortages in availability and public accessibility of information and data about media owners and ownership types. For Lithuania (2014-2025) the Media Pluralism Monitor (2025) analyses have also consistently shown heightened risks in the dimension of ownership: it outlines deviations within the areas of political influence and insufficiencies in the procedures set to assure media ownership transparency.

The requirement to report on media ownership changes is listed in the Law on Provision of Information to the Public (2025); however, this requirement is fulfilled only partially. There are instruments to penalize those media organizations that ignore this obligation, but they are not actually used in practice. On the other hand, the law does not specify the timeframe within which organisations must provide updated information on changes in ownership. Both the current EurOMo and the most recent MPM measurements (Jastramskis, 2025), as well as other sources (Jastramskis & Plepytė-Davidavičienė, 2021), identify the lack of comprehensive data on media owners as a persistent risk factor in terms of two anticipated outcomes: the development of sustainable media policy and the democratic performance of the media.

## Outlets and owners

### Who owns what?

Fourteen media organizations (news market participants) with distinctive outlets were selected for the ownership transparency analysis. All these are described as representing leading news media for public opinion formation: TV and radio channels, websites, newspapers, magazine, as well as YouTube channels and Facebook accounts. The mainstream media has established itself on social networks and sharing platforms. The top five news outlets with the most Facebook followers are all comprised of mainstream media accounts. However, on YouTube there is fiercer competition for audience (subscribers) between mainstream media and channels founded by journalist activists (Laisvės TV and Skirmantas Malinauskas). The majority of commercial private media is controlled by local Lithuanian residents. Four of the companies in the sample (Delfi, All Media Lithuania, Lrytas, and Verslo žinios) have their capital assets (all or most of them) in foreign countries. The largest number of foreign investors is in the news website market.

### Main ownership patterns

In Lithuania, the media outlets analyzed are founded in the form of 'limited liability company' (in Lithuanian: Uždaroji akcinė bendrovė, UAB), with the exception of the public service media (Lithuanian Radio and Television, LRT – in Lithuanian: Lietuvos nacionalinis radijas ir televizija) and

the private start-up (Laisvės TV), both of which are founded as ‘public institution’ (Viešojo įstaiga, VŠĮ), which is a non-profit body.

### **Types of information missing**

Traditionally, most information is available about the first-generation media owners. Only two private commercial companies (15min and Žinių radijas) list all their relevant natural-person shareholders on their websites. Many other media owners are listed in the Lithuanian state register VIRSIS, except for the four companies (Delfi, All Media Lithuania, Lrytas, and Verslo žinios), whose parent companies are registered abroad or where the owners reside. However, the names of the owners of Delfi, Lrytas, and Verslo žinios are in other freely accessible, official sources, and some information about the owners of All Media Lithuania can be found in credible secondary sources.

### **Main risks to transparency**

In most cases, it seems that the private media themselves (except for 15min and Žinių radijas) do not make an effort to provide information on their websites about all significant beneficiaries. On the other hand, starting in 2023, all media organisations are required to provide such information to the Lithuanian state register VIRSIS, where information about media owners and the finances of organisations is publicly available. Among the potential risks of ownership in the process of forming public opinions, it is important to mention that no information is publicly available about affiliations of natural persons with external institutions (political parties, business interests, etc.). Another risk area for transparency assurance is public funding. Although media organizations are required to provide information to VIRSIS about publicity contracts with state institutions, media policy decision-makers must establish rules to provide clarity for publicity funds distributed to state institutions/municipalities, which is also required by EMFA.

## **Distribution**

### **Role of linear vs. non-linear distribution**

The distribution system of newspapers and magazines consists of the state-owned company Lietuvos Paštas and private distribution organisations, which operate mainly in cities. The Lithuanian Government subsidises the service of distribution of periodical press to rural areas by paying compensation to Lietuvos Paštas.

Wholesale radio distribution services are provided by the state-owned company AB Lietuvos radijo ir televizijos centras, whose services are used by the majority of national radio broadcasters, as well as by regional radio stations. However, some private radio stations have their own radio transmitters. The digital radio network has not been developed in Lithuania.

In 2024, there were 39 economic entities in the distribution market of television services in Lithuania. The market for pay-TV services is relatively concentrated, with the leading participant, AB Telia Lietuva, holding a 48% market share as of 2024 (Communications Regulatory Authority of the Republic of Lithuania, 2025).

### **Relevant non-linear distributors**

In Lithuania, the top popular digital intermediaries are YouTube, Facebook, and Google. Lithuanian residents spent the most time on these three platforms in 2024 (the audience share of Facebook – 25,6%, YouTube - 7%, and Google – 6,5%) (Gemius, 2025). Social media (Facebook, YouTube,

Instagram, etc.) were regularly used as a news source by 65% of the population in Lithuania in 2023 (Eurobarometer, 2023).

Most media channels have social media accounts to distribute content and attract users to their channels. There are also significant news content creators operating solely on social media platforms. Activist journalists pose a particularly serious challenge to mainstream media channels on the YouTube platform.

### **Main risks to transparency**

With ongoing digital transformations in the media sector, Lithuanian citizens are increasingly drawn to and rely on digital media and social media channels. Another tendency is revealed in changed forms of distribution (and ownership) when, next to established types of ownership, new actors such as start-ups (as is the case with Laisvės TV) are founded by journalists/civic activists and funded through crowdfunding models, advertising, and subscriptions.

With new types of digital ownership on the horizon, transparency in who owns what and the potential ways to influence public opinion becomes even more important. Obviously, assuring digital ownership transparency is an issue of regulation. Nonetheless, this is also a media and information literacy (MIL) policy-related matter: there is particularly little knowledge on how digital information is arranged and what businesses can influence it. With the proliferation of information disorders and disruptions, MIL definitions and policies must be broadened to acknowledge the types of businesses/corporations that own media and exert decision-making power in hybrid communications. In short, digital ownership transparency needs to be broadened to take into account these issues: (a) accessibility of data, (b) extent and public meaningfulness of data collected and provided, and (c) corporate accountability and reliability of data provided.

## **Legal framework**

### **Which laws concern transparency in media ownership and control**

Lithuania adopts a liberal approach to regulating media concentration. Lithuania has no specific legislation restricting the concentration of ownership or market share of media organisations. The media business is regulated, like all other economic areas, in line with the dominant position statement, which is considered when the market share of the entity exceeds 40 percent. Media concentration regulation is governed by general rules outlined in the Competition Law of the Republic of Lithuania (2025). The Competition Council is responsible for the mergers of all economic entities.

According to the Law on Provision of Information to the Public (2025, Art. 24), Lithuania requires media organizations to disclose their owners and any changes to them by reporting to the state register VIRSIS (search for producer and/or disseminator of public information), controlled by the Ministry of Culture. The same law imposes certain restrictions on the control of media ownership. The state and municipal institutions, as well as legal persons whose founders or shareholders are the state/municipality, may not be producers of public information, except for research and study institutions. Political parties and banks are also prohibited from owning media outlets in Lithuania. Other obvious limitations to ownership are statements in the law that a broadcasting (retransmission) license shall not be issued to an applicant if the person who can directly or indirectly control the outlet was convicted for a crime against the independence of the State of Lithuania, the integrity of the territory, and the constitutional order, if the person poses a threat to

national security or is affiliated with, or maintains contact with, organised crime groups, foreign special services, or groups affiliated with international terrorist organisations.

### **Correspondence to normative expectations**

As a tradition, different countries apply diverse legislative measures towards media ownership. For small markets like Lithuania, media concentration in the hands of just a few powerful owners is considered a justified threat to pluralism, as it may lead to a reduction in content diversity and a decline in the plurality of voices. The situation can be even more problematic when the concentration of media companies is carried out in a non-transparent manner. Ekspress Grupp, which owns the market-leading website Delfi.lt, acquired its competitor Lrytas.lt in 2022 without notifying the Competition Council. However, in 2025, after a long investigation, the Competition Council ordered Ekspress Grupp to sell one of the two websites it owned (Balčiūnienė, 2025).

In Lithuania, as implied by the media policy, the purpose of instilled regulation is to increase the publicity, transparency, and accountability of the activities of producers and disseminators of public information by ensuring the possibility for the public and competent state institutions to monitor, analyze, and evaluate data on media producers, disseminators, and their activities specified by law. Although the Law on Provision of Information to the Public (2025, Art. 24) requires the disclosure of detailed data on media owners, data is not always disclosed, especially when the ultimate owners reside in foreign countries.

### **Main risks**

Public policy documents in Lithuania take into account the characteristics of the geopolitical context by stressing requests to strengthen media literacy, digital competencies, and digital resilience of groups of people (children and youth, minorities, seniors, professionals); prioritising the need for media support; indicating but insufficiently addressing problems of media in the regions (Ministry of Culture, 2025). In addition to requests for economic transparency of media ownership and media performance, a stronger emphasis needs to be placed on the transparency of (political) interests and influence. Also, one of the primary risks is the implementation of media policy in the area of transparency of ownership and financial activities, as legally guaranteed transparency is not always achieved in practice.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

Knowing who (physical persons and entities) are active players and own/control information production and distribution, and what potential spheres of influence might arise from these varying forms of ownership, has always been listed as an issue of heightened significance. Nonetheless, with accelerating digital transformations, intensified information disruptions (an influx of disinformation and misinformation), and growing malign information campaigns, such as instigations to conflict, the upswings towards radical and populist politics, hate speech, etc., knowledge of who (which interest groups, businesses, and countries) controls digital media infrastructures becomes of primary significance in today's Europe.

Although there was a moment in time when it seemed that restrictions imposed on media ownership in Lithuania might have limiting effects on political diversity in the country, from today's perspective, such a regulatory constraint and imposed safeguards towards (political) ownership are considered an advancement, and there are no mainstream media owned by hostile influences. Nevertheless, there are cases when private owners may have opaque interests and connections, making them the

subject of fact-checking and investigations for journalists. There are extensive journalistic fact-finding analyses (Čeponytė et al., 2022) that expose persistent campaigns of Kremlin propaganda in Lithuania, which are organized via networks of natural persons (including politicians) and local organizations spreading false and conspiracy information on social networks and pseudo-media outlets registered in the country.

To conclude, drawing an extensive picture of media ownership is a demanding and time-consuming matter. As specified, a well-coordinated plan to establish the state registry VIRSIS was announced in Lithuania as early as 2019. This integrated database would contain information on all public information producers and distributors, including all media owners and their economic activities (e.g. beneficial owners, turnover, profit, and profit from direct and indirect sources such as government support and advertising). This register has been in operation since 2023 and contains data on many media owners, as well as the financial statements of media organizations. The missing data primarily concerns media owners residing abroad.

It can also be stated that there is a lack of a systematic approach to media ownership transparency assurance in Lithuania. There is also a lack of a detailed analysis of the diverse factors (regulatory framework and effectiveness/performance analyses) influencing the situation, which calls for a definition of limited efficiency.

Finally, there is one more issue that attracted our attention. In academic analyses, the 'ownership transparency' problem has been mostly addressed within the framework of ensuring higher standards for economic/business transparency among media entities. Yet, new requests are arising from a rapidly changing communications arena and persisting uncertainties in the European geopolitical context, so a number of new questions linked to information/communication disruptions must be considered and, possibly, also addressed in the context of 'ownership transparency'.



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