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EFJ Criticises Lithuania for Violation of Media Freedom

The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) today has criticised the raid at the Baltic News Service (BNS) office in Vilnius on 7 November by the Lithuanian Special Investigation Services (SIS) as a political attempt to muzzle press media in the country.

The SIS has accused BNS and its journalists of having illegally obtained a leaked document that shows evidence of a smear campaign against the President of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaite.

During the raid, six journalists were questioned and computers were confiscated. Meanwhile, the BNS editor's home has also been raided and searched.

"We strongly condemn the heavy-handed raid at BNS and the Lithuanian court order to demand journalists to reveal their confidential sources," said Mogens Blicher Bjerregård, EFJ President.

"It is ridiculous that the court has chosen to protect the interests of political elites on the basis of national security instead of the public interest to freedom of information."

According to media reports, the Lithuanian court has also ordered BNS to reveal its sources. This has led to public outcry and a rally attended by journalists and civil society organisations outside the SIS on 11 November in Vilnius calling for press freedom in the country.

The EFJ affiliate, the Lithuanian Journalists' Union (LZS), has also joined the rally demanding that the rights of journalists to freedom of expression and the rights of the public to information shall be reinforced.

"This is a blatant violation of journalists' rights to protection of confidential sources, " said Ricardo Gutiérrez, "Journalists cannot function as watchdogs of democracy if such rights are violated or overridden by the rights of political elites in this case."

According to the **case-law of the European Court of Human Rights**, the rights to protection of confidential sources contribute an essential part of freedom of expression; such rights are also protected by many national laws in Europe. The EFJ backs LZS's call on the Lithuanian government to bring its law on protection of sources to European standards.

For more information, please contact the EFJ at +32 2 235 22 08.

The European Federation of Journalists represents over 300,000 journalists in 39 countries.

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