

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

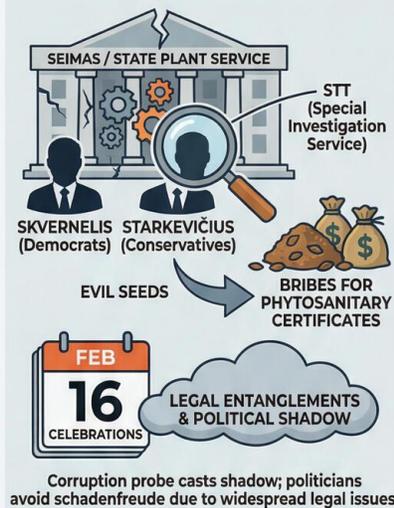
LRT

FEBRUARY 15, 2026

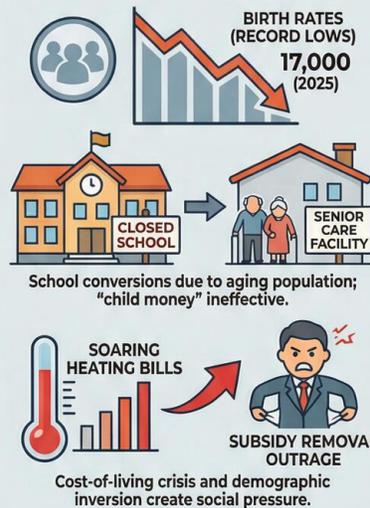
THE GDELT PROJECT

LITHUANIA: CORRUPTION PROBES, DEMOGRAPHIC DECLINE, & TRANSATLANTIC SHIFT (FEB 2026)

DOMESTIC INSTABILITY & CORRUPTION PROBES



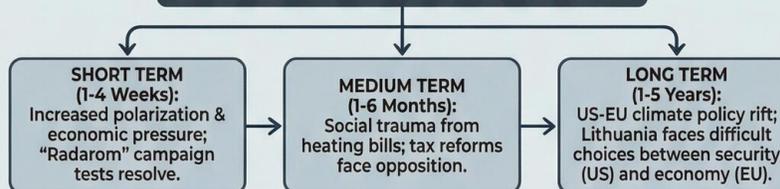
DEMOGRAPHIC & ECONOMIC CRISIS



TRANSATLANTIC SECURITY SHIFT (MUNICH MSC)



STRATEGIC FORESIGHT & IMPLICATIONS



RECOMMENDATIONS: DIVERSIFY SECURITY PARTNERSHIPS, PREPARE FOR REGULATORY CHANGES (MBs, SUPPLY CHAINS), FOCUS ON "SENIOR ECONOMY" OPPORTUNITIES.

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

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LITHUANIA GRAPPLES WITH HIGH-LEVEL CORRUPTION PROBES AMIDST DEMOGRAPHIC DECLINE AND A TRANSACTIONAL SHIFT IN TRANSATLANTIC SECURITY DOCTRINE

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

Lithuania's domestic political landscape was upended on February 15-16, 2026, as the Special Investigation Service (STT) executed high-profile searches involving prominent Seimas members, including former Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis and Conservative Kazys Starkevičius. The investigation, centered on systemic corruption within the State Plant Service, has uncovered a web of bribes for phytosanitary certificates, casting a shadow over the "Vardan Lietuvos" Democrats and the Conservatives alike. This domestic instability occurs as Lithuania prepares for February 16th celebrations, with political rivals largely refraining from "schadenfreude" due to the pervasive nature of legal entanglements across nearly all parties ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

On the international stage, the conclusion of the Munich Security Conference (MSC) has signaled a profound shift in US-European rela-

tions. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio presented a "national interest" doctrine, distancing the Trump administration from traditional "shared values" rhetoric in favor of a transactional alliance focused on the "great civilization" of the West. While Rubio attempted a more diplomatic tone than his predecessors, the underlying message of European self-reliance—particularly regarding the war in Ukraine—left EU leaders anxious. Simultaneously, a coalition of five European nations confirmed that Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was poisoned with epibatidine, further hardening the European stance against the Kremlin despite US pressure for rapid negotiations ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

Socio-economically, Lithuania is facing a burgeoning demographic and cost-of-living crisis. Birth rates have hit record lows, with the country losing approximately 2,000 residents annually to natural decline, leading to the physical conversion of former schools and kindergartens into senior care facilities. This is compounded by public outrage over soaring January heating bills following the government's removal of subsidies, a move critics label as "pushing people into beggary" ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **High-Level Corruption Probe in Seimas:** The STT conducted searches of the offices and homes of Saulius Skvernelis (Democrats) and Kazys Starkevičius (Conservatives). Both have been named "special witnesses" in a case involving the State Plant Service, where officials allegedly took bribes to facilitate "evil seeds" (illegal/unregulated plant shipments) through phytosanitary cordons. Former PM Gintautas Paluckas has also been questioned as a special witness in a separate abuse of power case ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Rubio's "Vested Interest" Doctrine at Munich:** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio declared that the US and Europe must be together not because of abstract "liberal order" values, but because they are "children of Europe" with a shared civilizational destiny. He criticized European dependence on social welfare at the expense of defense and signaled that the US interest in European security is contingent on European burden-sharing ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Demographic Collapse and Birth Rate Crisis:** Lithuania recorded 1,600 fewer births in 2025 compared to 2024, with total births dropping to approximately 17,000. Experts warn that financial incentives (child money) are failing to counteract the "family creation calendar shift" and digital isolation. Infrastructure is already pivoting, with regions like Pakruojis converting closed schools into senior nursing homes due to the aging population ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

- **Navalny Poisoning Confirmed by European Labs:** The UK, France, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands concluded that Alexei Navalny was poisoned in prison with epibatidine, a toxin 200 times stronger than morphine. This scientific evidence contradicts earlier Russian claims and complicates any US-led efforts to normalize relations with the Putin regime ([Source](#)).
- **Ukrainian Skeleton Athlete Disqualified for Protest:** Vladyslav Heraskevičius was removed from the Milan-Cortina Olympics for refusing to remove images of fallen Ukrainian athletes from his helmet. The IOC cited the Olympic Charter's ban on political propaganda, a decision the Ukrainian team called a victory for Russian propaganda ([Source](#)).

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

- **Geopolitics:** US pressure on Ukraine for territorial concessions in exchange for security guarantees remains a central point of friction. Zelenskyy warned that Russia is intentionally stalling Geneva peace talks to reboot their military efforts. Meanwhile, the US is pressuring Denmark regarding Greenland, which Danish officials call "unacceptable" ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Corruption & Governance:** The State Plant Service scandal highlights vulnerabilities in Lithuania's regulatory agencies. The involvement of Agnė Silickienė (former advisor to Skvernelis) suggests deep-rooted patronage networks that bypass official phytosanitary controls ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

- **Economic Statecraft:** Lawmakers are debating the abolition of "Small Partnerships" (MB) and "Business Certificates" to end what they call a "tax arbitrage" or "animal farm" where different legal forms pay vastly different taxes for the same work. Critics argue this will drive the small business sector into the shadow economy ([Source](#)).
- **Critical Infrastructure:** LTG Link introduced new battery-powered trains produced by Stadler, capable of traveling 100-120 km on a single charge. These are slated for non-electrified routes like Kaunas-Šiauliai starting this autumn ([Source](#)).
- **Legislative Updates:**
 - **Archers' Union Act:** Proposed changes would mandate stricter reliability and loyalty checks for members to prevent infiltration by hostile actors. Under the changes, the union would automatically become part of the armed forces during wartime ([Source](#)).
 - **Tax Reform Phase 2:** Ongoing debate to reduce the number of legal business forms from 49 to roughly three (Joint Stock, Closed Joint Stock, and Mini-Enterprise) ([Source](#)).
 - **Reproductive Health Act:** Advocacy for expanding access to assisted reproduction for unmarried couples to mitigate the birth rate crisis ([Source](#)).
- **Domestic Stability:** Protests by farmers in Šakiai against the 2.5x expansion of the Panemunių Regional Park indicate growing tension between environmental conservation goals and agricultural/industrial development ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

LEGISLATION/POLICY

Lithuanian governance is currently dominated by attempts to streamline the tax code and

tighten internal security. Key legislative efforts focus on the professionalization of volunteer defense forces and the radical simplification of the business environment to increase tax revenue from the self-employed.

- **Small Partnership (MB) Abolition Proposal:** A move to eliminate the MB form to force transitions into standard corporate structures, aiming to close tax loopholes used by ~70,000 entities ([Source](#)).
- **Archers' Union (Šaulių sąjunga) Reform:** Legislation to integrate the union into the military hierarchy during martial law and impose VSD (State Security Department) vetting on all members ([Source](#)).
- **Reproductive Health Expansion:** Proposals to state-fund fertility treatments for a wider range of family structures to combat the birth rate record lows ([Source](#)).
- **AI Guidelines for Education:** The Ministry of Education has issued formal recommendations for the use of ChatGPT and other tools in schools, emphasizing teacher discretion and training ([Source](#)).

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Transactionalization of the Transatlantic Alliance

The "Rubio Doctrine" presented at Munich marks the end of the "Values-Based" era of NATO. By framing the US-Europe relationship through "vested interest" and "civilizational survival" rather than democracy promotion, the US is signaling a more ruthless prioritization of resources. For Lithuania, this means that the presence of US troops is increasingly tied to the country's military spending and its willingness to follow US leads on China and trade, rather than a blanket guarantee based on shared democratic ideals ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

Demographic Inversion and the "Senior Economy"

The conversion of schools into nursing homes in Pakruojis is a physical manifestation of a systemic trend. Lithuania's "demographic death spiral" (1.1 children per woman) is rendering traditional social contracts unsustainable. The government's reliance on "child money" is proven ineffective, and the economy is shifting toward providing services for the elderly, which requires a different type of infrastructure and labor force (often imported via migration, which remains a sensitive political topic) ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

The Fragmentation of Political Trust

The corruption probe into the State Plant Service is strategically damaging because it touches on "evil seeds"—a metaphor for the corruption of the literal and figurative foundation of the country. With the Democrats' leader (Skvernelis) and a key Conservative (Starkevičius) implicated, the "all are thieves" narrative is gaining ground. This cynicism is a fertile ground for "bot farms" and "trolls" (discussed in detail by a self-described "recovered bot") to influence public opinion and disrupt state capacity ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

- **Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Expect increased polarization following the February 16th independence celebrations as legal proceedings against Skvernelis and Starkevičius progress. The "Radarom" campaign for Ukraine will likely reach a crescendo on February 24, serving as a litmus test for Lithuanian public resolve despite domestic economic pressure ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

- **Medium Term (1-6 Months):** The removal of heating subsidies will lead to a "social trauma" period as households receive record bills. This will likely force the Social Democrats to reconsider coalition arrangements or reintroduce some form of energy relief. Tax reforms targeting MBs will face fierce lobbying from the tech and service sectors ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Long Term (1-5 Years):** The US-Europe rift over climate policy will impact Lithuania's energy security. If the US abandons emission standards, American cars and industrial goods may become cheaper but lose access to the EU market, forcing Lithuania to choose between its primary security guarantor (US) and its primary economic regulator (EU) ([Source](#), [Source](#)).

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy:

- **Security:** Diversify security partnerships within Europe (e.g., the UK-France-Germany "Navalny Coalition") as US commitments become more transactional and less value-driven ([Source](#), [Source](#)).
- **Diplomacy:** Monitor Rubio's upcoming visits to Slovakia and Hungary; these represent a US attempt to bypass the Brussels center and deal directly with EU "internal critics," potentially isolating Lithuania if it remains purely pro-Brussels ([Source](#)).
- **Ukraine Strategy:** Brace for US-brokered peace terms that may include territorial concessions, which would necessitate a fundamental redesign of Baltic defense plans ([Source](#)).

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Regulatory Risk:** High risk for "Small Partnership" (MB) structures. Business owners should prepare for a transition to Closed Joint Stock (UAB) status or anticipate a significantly higher tax burden by late 2026 ([Source](#)).
- **Opportunity:** The "Senior Economy" is the most stable investment sector in regional Lithuania. Real estate developers should look at school-to-care-home conversions as a government-subsidized growth area ([Source](#)).
- **Supply Chain Standards:** The State Plant Service scandal implies that existing phytosanitary and import/export certificates may face retroactive audits. Companies dealing in agricultural products should tighten compliance immediately ([Source](#)).

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Today's Media Trends is a public interest experiment in applying deep thematic trend analysis to television news coverage from around the world to explore how responsibly applied advanced AI can help journalists and scholars better understand the overarching trends, themes and patterns of our global world.

No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

Each morning, in collaboration with the Internet Archive's TV News Archive, we apply Google's Gemini 3 to deeply examine yesterday's coverage from each television news channel to tease out the overarching themes and trends of its news coverage into a richly annotated thematic analysis. Each high-level insight is connected back to the original broadcast, allowing journalists and scholars to understand the dominate themes and trends and instantly click out to the underlying sources for details.

By helping journalists and scholars see the broader trends and patterns of global news coverage, this analysis helps them identify relevant stories and coverage they might not otherwise have encountered and uncover connections, emphases and narrative shifts that enable more comprehensive reporting and deeper, evidence-based research.

This report is entirely machine generated using Gemini 3 and may include errors and omissions. Please verify all findings. No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

For questions or suggestions, please contact kalev.leetaru5@gmail.com. You can also learn more about the GDELT Project at <https://blog.gdeltproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.