

Article

## Relationships of the Trade Unions with the Media: The Lithuanian Case

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**Abstract:** The various practices of different countries show that, in order to achieve trade unions' goals, working relationships with the media are very important, especially in terms of influencing public (stakeholder) opinion, as well as instilling confidence in trade unions. This paper presents some examples and empirical research results that prove the significance of such relationships. The situation in Lithuania is analyzed based on qualitative research results. The results reveal that Lithuanian trade unions do not have effective tools at their disposal for the promotion of their activity. Moreover, their notion of their relationships with the media is limited to a narrow understanding such as “the article or broadcast in media”. Due to this and other reasons, the promotion of employers' concessions is weak. Different situations can be noticed by analyzing the independent trade unions which use other practices and systems.

**Keywords:** trade union; media; relationships; stakeholders

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### 1. Introduction

Trade unions have long been an object of interest for scholars in different branches of science. Trade unions are explored by scientists in the fields of sociology, economics, management, politics psychology, anthropology, history and philosophy. The majority of current research on trade unions is of an economic and managerial nature.

In management science a trade union is understood as an administrative institution or a social partner endeavoring to achieve the goals of its members. Management science highlights two directions of analysis. One of them is related to the management issues and strategies of trade unions (as an individual organization or a sector in general) and administrative practices, and the other is related to the relationships between trade unions and business (or public sector) as well as to social dialogue and management of partnership issues. The latter trend requires special attention. Unions are involved in a conflict management mechanism, associated with formal or informal relations in content similar to the negotiating. On the other hand, the unions are the participants of the country's economic, institutional and social relations system, representatives of workers, and are characterized by distinct identity and strategic choices. The development of the trade unions' relationships with different groups can acquire different importance. Usually, everyday work of the union involves representation of its members' interests in negotiations with the employers. Therefore, the scientists focus their research on the relationships issues among interest groups/stakeholders [1–3], between stakeholders and the state [4,5], between organization's executives and trade unions [6]. The issues on executives' attitudes and reactions [7] are the field of interests for the researchers as well. Less attention is paid to the relationships with other stakeholders, which could be able to handle unions' goals. Assuming that fruitful union activity is inseparable from democracy, openness and transparency, this article aims to reveal the relationship between unions and the media, and identify the problem areas.

It is regrettable that there is little truly significant research carried out on the relationships of trade unions and the media. Although there is a considerable amount of research on how the media influence elections, there are few professional studies about media and interest groups. The academic literature particularly lacks studies on trade union treatment in media. Some time ago, Glasgow University (1976, 1980) found that there is a strong relationship between the media and the activities of trade unions. In other countries (e.g., US), a lack of adequate research can be noticed too [8]. Many academic works that at least partially touch on the relationship issues introduce research results of the last decades of the 20th century [9–12]. It is not clear how the results are valid today.

The latest scientific works focus on the electronic media [13–17]. Electronic media includes new forms of information production and dissemination, and extends the functions and the concept of traditional media. Driven by rapid development of technological possibilities, different communication problems emerge and they require attention and discussion. In view to the fact that a number of new communication forms emerges, the need for more social skills is evident and only increases (blogs, messaging, e-mail, web sites, *etc.*). Therefore, the relations between trade unions and media representatives are becoming more and more important and can ensure the smooth reach of wider public at large (particularly the youth).

Regardless of the form, the media will maintain the role of trusted news provider in future. This insight enables us to explain scientists' interest in media content [8,9,11,18,19]. Various research results reveal the dominant nature of communications and image of trade unions in the media, which explains the trends of public opinion formation. For example, Flynn [20] and Martin [21] investigated media reports about strikes. It was argued that media attention could be used to predict the duration of the strike. The media's influence on the direction of strike was explored, and how the reports about strikes could affect public perception of labor movements was investigated. By presenting a specific result (e.g., trade unions image in press) it is important to understand the preconditions of the result.

Negative/positive opinions and public (or its groups) support is a result of the work and relationships with the media. In order to develop focused and effective communication activities that promote the confidence in trade unions and increase in number of new members, and facilitate negotiations of various issues, it is vital to know the current relations of trade unions and media. Such knowledge could disclose the peculiarities of the Lithuanian Trade Unions relations' development with the media, and could create preconditions for implementation of corrective actions in targeted areas. Moreover it could reveal the nature of the prevailing messages and the image of trade unions in the media, and explain the direction of public opinion formation. This direction is the main focus of our research.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

Globalization effects have a significant impact on different organizations. Trade unions are not an exception. In many countries, trade unions are going through an institutional decline. This is due to the structural changes in economy and labor force, unemployment caused by new technologies, demographic changes in the labor market, and aging population [22,23]. According to Scheuer's [24] estimates, these factors, in the absence of additional measures, encourage more intensive unions' decline. For a long period, institutional capacity served as safe shelter for trade unions and currently it declines in many countries due to economic challenges. Therefore, the usual role of unions is insufficient for meeting the interests of organization and its members.

Historically, unions devoted much effort to the consolidation of a diverse workforce. The same or close residence and place of work, and similar social activities after work unified/consolidated the people. Post-Fordism has changed the situation substantially. Consequently, it became difficult to aggregate heterogeneous employees' and members' interests and to talk to the government in favor of trade unions [25]. Furthermore, it uncovered a growing threat of employees' vulnerability in the relationships with employers [24].

Signs of a communist past and dysfunction as well as a path dependency have had a great influence on the Lithuanian Trade Unions. After the collapse of post-communist regimes, it was considered that trade unions would be replaced by the Western collective pluralistic negotiation model and applied to independent trade unions and employers' organizations. However, this did not happen. After the changes, the old trade unions remained, transformed, or adapted to the situation and in many countries they took over the former communist trade unions' assets. Therefore, the basis for marginalization of trade unions was determined by the reverse effect of the compulsory membership, identity crisis and their behavior in the first post-communist years. The above-mentioned factors can be important reasons for the employees' indifference to the trade unions' activities.

Trade union responses to the challenges of current situation are depicted through "revitalization" concept by various authors. Revitalization involves several steps including attraction of new members, internal union reforms, coalitions with social movements, as well as the enhancement of partnerships with the employers, qualitative agenda, and the development of solidarity [25,26]. Faced with a stressful situation, trade unions, along with other interest groups/stakeholders, must recognize that media cannot be ignored.

The media often presents the fastest way to inform the trade union members about important attitudes, positions, and circumstances [27], to introduce to the negotiation requirements and to

organize public debates [28]. It is important to note that publicity can grant public support and achievement of pursued objectives. After the usage of public open debate in the media, modern, media-driven societies and idealistic stakeholders gain bargaining power in the negotiations with the industry. Discussions and announcements in the media can change the power ratio and give “moral rights” for the weaker stakeholders or diminish the legitimacy of the decisions made by other stakeholders [29].

Having analyzed employers’ reactions to the activity management of trade unions, Heery and Simms [7] noted that trade unions’ efforts to mobilize their support usually received the employers’ resistance. Sometimes, suppressive, intimidating, and bullying policies on trade unions are applied, invoking a wide range of legal and political measures, that make the work of trade unions unattractive for employees. Sometimes, the fake campaigns for damaging the reputation of trade unions are organized. Media reports can serve as an effective tool in preventing a disproportionate criticism and reducing the resistance of employers. The latter assertion is confirmed by Cockfield [13] in the case provided in his article and demonstrates media potential to act as a lever during the dispute and as an assistant in dealing with the trade unions issues. In the described case, the online media reports have contributed to the development of the negative attitude of potential customers towards the company. As a result, the company turned its attention to the Union and agreed to pay the outstanding debts. These insights are important, especially taking into account that most of the information (on the basis of which public opinion is formed) is indirect, being derived from secondary sources.

In order to engage the audience, the media uses different methods, such as: selects the news, controls the information content, chooses presentation style and affects the conveyed information. In this way, a certain number of events or issues can be overemphasized. To a certain extent the media can manipulate the minds of the audience, can have the power of persuasion and be institution of elite power and dominance. In particular, in cases where the information from the interest groups is limited or non-existent, the role of the media in shaping public opinion and highlighting priorities is really great.

Research results show that public opinion about the trade union as a group of various interests depends on the available information about its activity in the society [8]. Positive media messages can enhance the capacity of trade unions to gain the support from the public, maintain or increase the number of members, raise financial support and influence policy makers [9,18]. Hence, it is understandable that trade unions must externally convey clear and accurate information to its members, to the media and public at large, and follow closely how they are communicated to the public [30]. Well-meaning and long-term relationships influence objectives and accurate coverage of trade unions’ activities and reduce the risk of message distortion. The formation and development of the relationships with the media provide trade unions with the opportunity to respond to environmental challenges, consolidate and protect their interests, and play an important role outside labor relations.

Published studies suggest that unions tend to initiate relationships with the media and to use them [27,31]. Most of them (60 per cent) look for contacts/communications with the media by themselves. A much smaller amount (36.9 per cent) waits until the media will contact the unions. Trade unions accepted mass communication as a routine, and did not treat it as an important tool [27]. However, the fact that 49.2 per cent of the respondents, before the interview with the media, looked for the approval of their messages with the Head Office, implies a more responsible attitude of union leaders towards the contacts with the media. In communication, trade unions pay greater attention to

the press (newspapers, magazines), blogs, radio and TV. These tools are considered a priority, because they help the unions in their fight for better working conditions, higher wages and in reinforcement of democracy in every country [32].

Qiao [31] notes that unions concentrate their efforts towards the work with the local media. For example, trade unions (19.5 per cent) observe and study the local media, and look for important supporting news for their work there. Work with local media requires fewer resources than working with a national one. The latter observation reveals the unions' local coverage of interests. Furthermore, their experience with the national media can be evaluated as negative.

Focusing only on the local media, lack of contact initiatives and unfavorable unions' public image suggests that the relations with the media are still an untapped potential. This may be one of the reasons why there is a growing number of reports on strikes and narrow coverage of union activities. Consequently, this leads to a negative attitude towards trade unions and has a negative impact on the overall image of unions. Negative attitude towards trade unions and their activities contributes to the reduced number of allies in society [18,33]. In most cases, a dismal image of unions provides a basis for initiatives necessary to improve public image and enhance the work with the media. The latter proposal can be tricky to implement. As Jamieson points out [34], media cannot be separated from profit motives, and almost all of its sources of income are advertising. In any business organization this is not a problem, but when the main product is information, the threat arises to breach democracy in a society. The main problem is that the commercial media broadcasts well-targeted, appropriately tailored messages taking into account the interests of the financial owners and/or advert customers [34,35]. It is assumed that the following trends are amortized by electronic broadcasting opportunities of information. In other words, the forms of e-communication enable a wide range of interactive and prompt exchange of information and interactive comments, and also allow you to quickly find the information and to compare different sources of information.

So the assumption can be posed that trade unions' attitudes towards the journalists as the promoters of popular opinions of the day, which are rarely supposed to approve trade unionism, is not an obstacle in developing relations between the Union and the media. There is insufficient research that would reveal a permanent or systematic media behavior and allow us to develop generalized motives of relations between the unions and the media by focusing on the private interest. Bethell [36] noticed that journalists follow the principle of solidarity in their activity, *i.e.*, journalists as members of trade union are less critical to union activities. This fact underpins another possible assumption: journalists as union members become more familiar with the union activity and therefore can describe the situation more objectively and accurately. With the intention to strengthen the trade union organizing power, the activity direction of various trade union members should involve the promotion of intensive cooperation with journalists in order to convey timely and objective information, and demonstrate openness and transparency in the organization.

In summary it can be said that environmental (social, economic, demographic) challenges imply the unions to re-consider their relationships with the interest groups/stakeholders. The media as an architect of public image and opinion is, so far, not a tool for trade unions in responding to today's challenges. Most opportunities that could lead to an increase of new members and public support are unused for quite a long time due to the lack of pro-active unions' relationship development with the media. Scientists debate about the future of trade unions and point out that the creation of the

relationship strategies with the media must be a priority. Furthermore, this would help to focus the unions' efforts in the right direction.

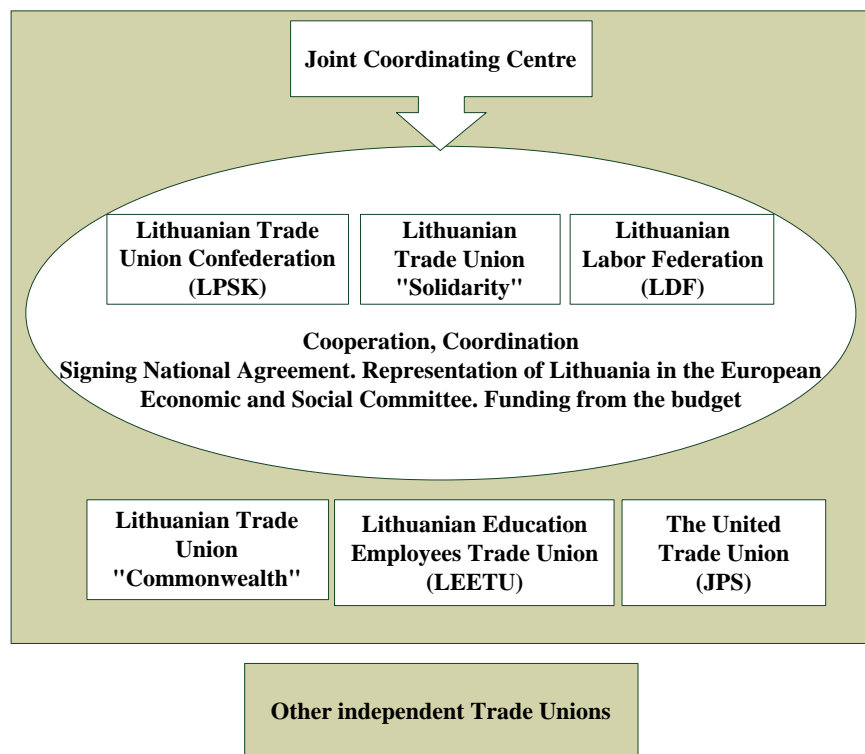
### 3. Empirical Research Design

In 2011, Lithuanian Trade Unions were by far the largest organizations with voluntary membership and had 108.9 thousand members. In 2012, 146 trade unions functioned in the country [37]. These indicators should be seen as indicative, because there is an obvious accessibility problem on the number of trade unions and its membership, and on the accuracy of the data in the country, which stems from several causes, as follows:

- part of the trade unions of the Republic of Lithuania ignore the Law requirements on statistics and do not provide data to the Department of Statistics;
- part of the trade unions provide State authorities with inaccurate data, *i.e.*, manipulate the data.

The Lithuanian trade union sector is clearly split into two parts: the national centers and so-called independent trade unions (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Structure of the Lithuanian Trade Union sector.



In Lithuania, there are three national trade union centers: the Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation (LPSK), Lithuanian Labor Federation (LDF) and the Lithuanian Trade Union “Solidarity”. They represent the employed workers in a formal social dialogue at national and local institutional levels and participate in shaping labor relations policy. In 2007, the Joint Coordinating Center of Lithuanian National Trade Unions was established and integrated LDF, LPSK, and “Solidarity”. Lithuanian national trade union centers have the largest red-tape. They employ many people in their centers. These centers together have more than 78,000 members (about 70 per cent of all members in

Lithuania). At a national level, all three national centers, the LDF, LPSK, and “Solidarity” links, supports, and coordinates the work of second-level (branch) trade unions and their associations. It is clearly seen that they form umbrella organizations.

In Lithuania, there are a number of independent trade unions as well. The independent trade unions are independent of the national centers. They implement their own policy and act autonomously. According to the various activities, these four stand out: The National Association of Officers’ Trade Unions of the Republic of Lithuania (NPPSS), Lithuanian Education Employees Trade Union (LEETU), the United Trade Union (JPS). They were formed in 2002 after the split of the Lithuanian Trade Union “Commonwealth” and the Lithuanian Medical Trade Union (LMPS). According to different data sources, the independent trade unions may be composed of more than 30 per cent of all the Lithuanian Trade Union members.

In view of the lack of reliable data on trade unions and the low level of the Lithuanian Trade Union investigation, the qualitative nature of the study has been chosen. In the case of scarce knowledge about the object, such an approach is the most suitable one. In the empirical research, the following data collection methods were applied: structured interviews and analysis of documents/sources including legislation, Web pages of trade unions, the reports of trade unions, the documents of the authorities, official arrangements, media articles about labor unions’ campaigns, data from the Department of Statistics of Lithuania and interviews. Semi structured interviews and qualitative analysis of documents were applied.

The main areas of analysis are as follows: the media focus on trade unions, the understanding of relations with the media (in terms of the leaders), the audience of trade unionists media and the image of trade unions in the media.

Non-probability, target sampling of respondents was applied for the interview. It should be noted that the sampling of interview respondents in this survey was carried out after performing a pilot study in 2011 during which three national trade union centers and leaders of one independent trade union were interviewed. The following aspects were concluded from this study:

- The Lithuanian trade union sector is clearly split into two parts: the national centers and so called independent trade unions.
- Both national centers and independent trade unions call each other “they” and often distance themselves from other unions’ positions and actions.
- Such separation from others is characteristic to both external and internal relations of the national centers and the independent trade unions as well.

During the interview the leaders of two trade union centers indicated that some of their branch trade unions are formal, just relicts from Soviet-era. During one interview it was mentioned that one branch of trade union has only about 15–20 members.

Hence, while this study attempted to reflect the diversity of the sector, the aim is achieved only partly: formally existing trade unions were eliminated from the planned sample.

In the survey, the following independent centers and branches of trade unions were sampled taking into account their activeness in society, their organized campaigns and that they were referred in the media:

- (1). National Association of Trade Unions of Officers (NPPSS). It was founded in 2008; the NPPSS brings together institutions of pre-trial investigation, police and border officers, fire-fighters

- and rescuers, the employees of border environmental systems. This is the only trade union which consistently publicizes membership and activities results. Headquarters is in the city of Vilnius;
- (2). The Lithuanian Education Employees Trade Union (LEETU). It was founded in 1990. It is one of the largest and most active Associations of independent trade unions of education workers. The approximate number of its members is more than 8000. Headquarters is in the city of Vilnius;
  - (3). The United Trade Union (JPS). It was established in 2002 after the split of Lithuanian Trade Union “Commonwealth”. JPS activities focus mainly on the public sector and services. It unites culture and transport workers. It does not publish any data about membership, collective agreements, and activity reports. Headquarters is Kaunas City;
  - (4). The Lithuanian trade union of medical workers (LMPS). It was founded in 1992. It resides in Vilnius. The union brings together different level and specialization of the LMPS medics; however, most of the members are medical emergency personnel. LMPS does not publish activities and membership data.

During the research, a total of 10 Lithuanian national trade union centers and their leaders were interviewed as follows:

- (1). Leaders of the Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation (LPSK) and its five branches. LDF was set up on 1st May 2002, and is the largest trade union center both in the number of members and branches. Headquarters is in the city of Vilnius. The Trade Union publicizes activity report of 2006–2010; however, it provides only limited membership and activity data;
- (2). Leaders of the Lithuanian Labor Federation (LDF) and its two branches. LDF was founded in 1919, restored in 1991. The Web page publishes only an estimate number of members that significantly decreased over the past years;
- (3). The leader of the Lithuanian Trade Union “Solidarity”. The union’s declared branches are more formal than real. The union was founded in 1989. Until 2002 it was called the Lithuanian Workers’ Union. Membership and activities reports are not available. Office is in the city of Vilnius.

#### 4. Results of Empirical Research

Trade union relationships with the media are assessed from several aspects. One of them is how these relations and communication are understood by trade union leaders, the other one is how the unions are visible in the media.

Results of the qualitative study lead to the conclusion that there are two distinct trends in the relationship development. According to several leaders of independent organizations, trade unions are full of media attention and are one of the most frequently mentioned topics in the media. Some representatives of the independent trade unions describe their relations with the media as brilliant and requiring no-financial resources:

*“Reporters publicize all the stories <...>. We do not have money and no desire to book the articles. I am very grateful to the reporters that they understand that we are not doing something for ourselves.” “I cannot complain as the head of the organization or as a public figure. I never paid*



*a penny unless for the preparation of the information. Problems...that we want to...the media presents.”*

As mentioned above, there is another opinion that is supported by the greater part of interviewed trade union leaders. In their opinion, the media attention is minimal, because the media “*needs show elements*” and the trade unions lack financial resources for more active promotion of their activities and achievements. These statements are true. Lithuanian market has a tendency for distribution of paid information. This means that organizations pay fees according to the advertising space and then publish their information. The goal for the journalists is to provide the audience (readers, listeners) with the credible and accurate information that is needed to function in the society. Reporters are looking for the news that could be interesting and important to the public. Trade unions find that, in their relationships with the employers and public institutions, there are abound of scandals, cases that might be of interest for the media and its audience. So naturally the question arises: why aren't these cases publicized? A number of possible causes are observed in the interpretation of qualitative results.

It is possible that the leaders, facing media attention deficit, can be characterized by a rather narrow conception/notion of relations with the media, which is limited to the understanding as “cash for the order of an article or broadcast in the media.” According to one of the independent trade union leader, “*<... among the leaders there is a perception that the information will be published when you make an order. Other perceptions on how otherwise to convey the information, they do not have. <...> I realized that there is a part of the public figures that have made no attempt to communicate otherwise.*” It should be noted that, in positively assessed communicative practice, specialists seek benevolent relationships with journalists. In this way they ensure that their ideas and news get the media attention and they can relatively handle news content, highlighting the organization's news from the desirable point of view. Furthermore, there is evidence suggesting that part of the trade unions' representatives do not use offered communication opportunities as they do not see the need for this. Some unions still see themselves as the sole and exclusive representatives of employees' interest, “*Frankly speaking, everybody wants contacts with us very much ... Author: And don't you want contact? No, I do not. I do not have time.*”

Seeking transparency in the activities of the trade unions, representatives of the independent unions proposed to change trade union law in the way that trade union representatives at national level and national trade unions should be open in declaring about their activities, number of members, territorial coverage, funds received from the state budget, and financial statements. This proposal did not receive the support of national centers. Such reaction illustrates that the leaders of trade unions are not sufficiently familiar with the media opportunities and underestimate their significance.

Attracting attention of the media as well as the attention of the public, communication skills are very important. They determine the preparation, presentation, and the final result of the communicative message, which is normally associated with the greater public or their groups' awareness, opinion formation and certain behavioral incentives. Interview interpretations provide us with the insight that only a few trade union leaders have sufficient communication and managerial skills.

According to the survey, unions did not and do not carry any greater project on promotion of membership, organization of trade unions, publication about their activities or/and formation of their positive image. “*Instead they strengthen the regions, the regional co-ordination, and coordinators*

*seeking to make them loyal to the authority.*” There is a lack of strategically planned, continuous, targeted communication activities, which can ensure the long-term results and help in shaping a strong relationship with stakeholders.

On the other hand, according to their opinion, the projects that were carried out by the trade union leaders (e.g., enhancing social partnership in the region) did not reach good results and had only a momentary effect. Interview data indicates that leaders are often not sufficiently involved in public affairs activities and important communication functions are hierarchically transferred to lower level representatives. Thus, it can be said that there is a lack of a continuing coordinated communication activities. The need for technical communication skills development is apparent and can be illustrated by the fact that part of the messages prepared by the trade unions are “deposited” in news agencies and are not disseminated. It may be that some trade unions are faced with the quality problem in preparation of press releases.

Attempts to communicate on their own are not very successful. National centers and some of their branch organizations have small circulation newspapers, but almost all editions are distributed among the members of the organization. In this way, they perform the informative function for members but do not seek to attract potential members by forming positive image or informing external public. Lithuania also has an online page “Trade Union News” [38], which accumulates and publishes information on country’s trade unions’ issues and problems concerning social and labor relations as well as social partnerships, and provides unions with word processing, editing and other services. The mass media is not widely known among external audiences. It contains information and opinions on various issues and practically circulates only in trade union sector, and contributes little to the trade union objectives, such as development of the membership or the formation of their image. Identified observations trigger the question on the expediency of communication efforts. A limited understanding of the relationships with the media and the lack of communication skills of trade union leaders lead to irresponsible working with the media and to negative results (negative image of unions, lack of trust in them).

The media has strongly contributed to the negative image about unions and this is understandable as former division of Soviet Union property was far from transparent. For example, in various media reports, articles, and comments unions often are called “money laundries”. Fund raising, its usage and transparency deficit may be the most important reasons for fairly low confidence in trade unions. On the other hand, little information is spread about the activities of trade unions, their goals and accomplishments: *“But what is the problem? We ourselves are silent. The media will not know this from the air.”* The education deficit relating to trade union activities or a general information vacuum is being especially felt in the social group of young people.

Unattractive image of the unions and failure in the development of “other”, “new” identity of trade unions in the media and society did not give the desired result: *“First of all—there is no place to enter”, “ People attitudes need to be changed and the unions themselves have to become stronger. Then people would feel more secure and maybe then would join the trade unions.”* Evaluating the image of trade unions in the context of the literature, a negative image about them is observed. In contrast to Western European countries, where a negative image was formed by the intense media reports on strikes, Lithuanian trade unions gained a negative image in particular due to the lack of transparency and public accountability. It is not likely that the situation will change dramatically in the

near future. There is not enough initiative from the side of trade unions and journalists in collaboration and relationships development. Such circumstances occur due to several reasons. It is found that there are no journalists systematically writing on union issues, and there are cases when the information is distorted or, due to the negative image of the unions, the information emphasizes only negative aspects. *“We do not talk about Scandinavian trade unions activities, although they are very active, there are a lot of strikes, especially at this time when the negotiation of collective agreements takes place. Somehow our media highlights the French, the Greek versions, where people go to the streets, break machines.”*

Another reason for complicated relationships can be that a significant part of the media is owned by the private capital. It is believed that the media is still often used to spread biased information on trade unions, to marginalize them, to form public opinion representing certain interests. It is noted that *“you will not hear or see on TV or radio dealing with the problematic issues not only related to trade unions but also to working relationships. Moreover, during the coverage, representatives from the trade unions are usually absent.”*

Such opinion, as Marsh and Hall [27] noted, lacks reasoning but it is assumed that it influences the cooperation initiatives. So far, complicated relations between the trade unions and the media more hinder than help the implementation of their functions. However, it is believed that in future these relations will have a tendency to improve. Startup of independent organizations and proactive development of their work with the media can be considered as stimulus for change and a good example for other organizations, which have failed to make their problems open to the public so far or to successfully pursue other objectives through the media. Moreover, the leaders of the trade unions notice a change of journalists approach from the negative or neutral towards the positive one: *“Due to the fact that the journalists themselves felt that they can be hurt, that their rights are being violated or are very fragile, they started to consider trade unions more positively”*.

In summary, it can be said that behavior of trade unions in the relations with the media, with the exception of some independent unions, is not pro-active. It can be treated as passive and reactive. Due to the lack of initiatives, the relations between trade unions and media are not yet exemplary. Both parties, *i.e.*, the trade unions and the media, have untapped opportunities in the development of a targeted and continuous relationship. The existing examples of good practice, as well as the changing attitudes of journalists may be the additional stimulus for the trade unions to begin the more intense development of their relations with the media and to pursue more actively the objectives through the use of media tools.

## 5. Conclusions and Discussion

The institutional decline of trade unions, which was determined by the changing social, economic and political conditions, promotes qualitative revision of the relationships with the stakeholders addressing such important issues as coalitions with the social movements, partnership development with employers, *etc.* Dealing with the challenges and safeguarding the role of trade unions in representation of members' interests and/or fulfillment of their objectives, the unions cannot be viable without supportive public opinion, positive public image and the ability to respond to criticism. The media, as a source for the information dissemination, is an important tool in shaping public

understanding because it has the power of persuasion. The overview of academic works indicates that the relations between the trade unions and the media, as the object of knowledge, are limited. Many of the previous works reflect the situation of the last decades and more recent works have only concentrated on specific issues related to the identification of the opportunities of electronic communication forms. In this sensitive field, a qualitative study has been carried out. The aim was to figure out the image of trade unions in the media and to describe the union's relations with the media by identifying problematic areas.

On the basis of qualitative considerations, it can be noted that a large part of the trade union leaders has a narrow understanding of the relationships with the media and of overall importance of communicative work. In addition, the leaders lack both managerial and communicative skills, and have no direction or plan. Consequently, this leads to short-term and hard-to-measure results on union publicity. In the Lithuanian Trade Union discourse, there are apparent issues of confidence in trade unions and identity. Leaders understand that the media has heavily contributed to the negative image formation of trade unions, but they are not making sufficient efforts to change the existing situation, and thus indirectly contribute to the decline of institutional power.

Such a situation is not static and is prone to change to a positive direction. It was found that independent organizations successfully work with the media. They may be examples of good practice for other organizations. Another important indicator of positive change is gradual shift of journalists' opinion towards the constructive approach. However, untapped opportunities of trade union relations with the media and lack of union leaders' initiatives in this direction are still apparent.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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