

A Significant Vote for Human Rights

A report of the monitoring of the public space
during the political campaign of election
to the European Parliament

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

On March 1, 2014 the association Lithuanian Gay League and the Lithuanian Human Rights Centre started the campaign “A significant vote for human rights”. During this campaign the candidates to the European Parliament were encouraged to promise to act for the sake of human rights and voters were asked to choose responsibly whom to vote for.

The campaign was aimed at emphasizing that even ordinary voters have the power to influence European politics and at the same time try to make a change, so that there would be more equality and justice in our lives. Everything could be achieved only if everyone took responsibility by voting in the election.

Thanks to this project for the first time in the history of Europe the anti-racist movement and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) organizations united in their efforts to send politicians a clear statement: “We speak on behalf of thousands of organizations and our message to the future Members of the European Parliament is simple as this: you cannot turn us against each other, because we are united.”

On March 19, 2014 some of the largest political groups in the European Parliament signed an obligation to run political campaigns without any discrimination or intolerance. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, the Greens/European Free Alliance and the European United Left – Nordic Green Left pledged to run their political campaign respecting ethnical and religious minorities as well as LGBT communities. The same obligation applied to the following Lithuanian parties and their members: The Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats, the Liberal Movement Party, the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party and the Labour Party. Candidates who prioritized equality and human rights on their political agendas were invited to sign the Human Rights Pledge. At the same time voters were asked to cast a conscious vote. It was emphasized that every vote was significant.

During the project a monitoring of the public space was conducted. The aim of the monitoring was to record any instance of political campaign of candidates to the European Parliament that infringed the principles of respect and human rights. This report reflects the results of the monitoring process. The report will be especially interesting to those who are interested in the situation of human rights in Lithuania.

The project, which encompassed the whole territory of the European Union, was implemented by the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) and the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe).

THE RECORDED INCIDENTS

Petras Gražulis (party “Order and Justice”)

On May 15 the association Lithuanian Gay League received information about a balloon promoting the candidate to the EP and Member of the Lithuanian Parliament Petras Gražulis. The balloon depicted P. Gražulis in a comic superhero suit, the slogan “For Lithuania, comrades!”, the electoral list number of party “Order and Justice” and the number of the politician on this list. The balloon also showed two roosters in red-bordered circles crossed with a red line. The tails of the roosters were painted in rainbow colors.

The word “rooster” in spoken Lithuanian language is used to refer to homosexual, bisexual and transgender individuals in an offensive way. The rainbow flag has been recognized for quite a long time as one of the symbols of the LGBT rights movement. Considering these circumstances and the fact that Mr. Petras Gražulis is famous for his public anti-LGBT rants and initiatives, we can conclude that this election campaign was deliberately aimed at encouraging efforts to restrict the rights of certain groups of Lithuanian citizens, referring to them in a disrespectful way.

Later on photos appeared on the social network Facebook. The photos depicted Mr. Gražulis distributing his election campaign leaflets that reflected disrespect towards LGBT persons and their rights. The leaflets depicted Mr. Gražulis posing with jeans that had a zipper on the rear. The note on those leaflets said “window to European values”. We remind that MP Gražulis personally delivered and presented a similar pair of jeans to the office of the LGL as a gift “for contribution to tolerance”. Ironically, the Member of Parliament has done so during the conference of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights “Combating hate crime in the EU”, which gathered more than 300 EU and national level decision makers and politicians, representatives from international organizations, national governments and parliaments, law enforcement institutions and members of the civil society.



The leaflet also presents information about a legislation initiated by candidate Gražulis. Some of the examples of these initiatives:

- MP Gražulis introduced amendments “that banned foreign pervers from adopting Lithuanian children”;
- Proposed “administrative penalties for propagation of non-traditional relationships”;
- Proposed that “organizers of gay prides and their participants would pay for their protection, but not tax payers.”

Those campaign leaflets were also distributed during the conference “Human rights in modern society: the present and future perspectives” organized by MRU and VU institutes of International and EU law and the Parliament’s Human Rights Committee.

Furthermore, during his election campaign MP Gražulis also travelled around Lithuania in a car which was painted with the already mentioned symbols and notes. Additionally, the car was also painted with the image of the Eurovision song contest winner Thomas Neuwirth’s stage role Conchita Wurst. The character was depicted in a red-bordered circle crossed with a red line.

It should be noted that on the May 11 an [article](#) on the news website lrytas.lt described P. Gražulis as outraged by Eurovision: “Europe has gone mad”. MP Gražulis, talking about Neuwirth’s stage character, stated: “Europe has gone mad. It’s tragedy. If almost all countries gave their highest points to some hybrid, what’s left to say here. Even Lithuania gave 10 points. I don’t know where we are heading”. The Member of the Parliament also added: “We cannot be tolerant to that kind of things. The same with larcenies, narcotics and alcohol.” In addition to this Mr. Gražulis issued an official [statement](#) saying that the head of the national television is “summoned to the nearest plenary session to explain about the instances of information detrimental to minors that occurred during the broadcast of the Eurovision song contest.”

5 Partija Tvara ir teisingumas

Petras Gražulis

„Langas į Europos vertybes“

Esu vienas aktyviausių Seimo narių – per metus užregistravau daugiau kaip 100 teisės aktų:

1. Seimas PRITARĖ mano Nutarimui ir pasmerkė E. Estrelas rezoliuciją legalizuojančią mažamečių vaikų tvirkimą.
2. Pateikiau įstatymo pataisus, UŽDRAUSIANČIAS užsieniečių iškrėpėliams [SIVAIKINTI Lietuvos vaikus.
3. Siūliu, jog netradicinių santykių propagavimas užtrauktų administracinę nuobaudą.
4. Siūliu, jog gėjų eitynių organizatoriai ir dalyviai už savo apsaugą susimokėtų PATYS, o ne mokesčių mokėtojai.
5. Pateikiau Konstitucijos pataisus, įtvirtinančius, kad šeima yra laisvas VYRO ir MOTERS susitarimas.
6. Užregistravau Konstitucijos pataisus numatančius, jog referendumui surengti užtenka 100.000 piliečių parašų.
7. Siūliu įtvirtinti žiauriams ir ciniškiems žudikams Laisvės atėmimą iki gyvos galvos.
8. Užregistravau įstatymo pataisus, panaikinančius teisėjų DVIGUBAS PENSIJAS, kurios siekia apie 10 000 Lt.
9. Pataisus numatančius, jei pardavus įkeistą daiktą varžytinėse gaunama mažesnė suma, nei priklauso kreditoriui, bankas NETURI teisės reikalauti išieškoti iš kito skolininko turto.
10. Pasiūliu, jog stambių žemvaldžių, valdančių daugiau kaip 500ha žemės ūkio paskirties žemės perviršis būtų parduotas viešo aukciono metu
11. Pateikiau PRIVALOMĄ Neeilinės teisėjo veiklos vertinimą korumpuotiems ir nekompetentingiems teisėjams.
12. Kreipiausi į susisiekimo ministrą, kad užsienyje atliktos techninės apžiūros būtų PRIPAŽINTOS Lietuvoje.
13. Užregistravau pataisus, kurios riboja atlyginimų dydžius su visais priedais valstybės tarnyboje ir valstybės kontroliuojamose įmonėse.



The Member of Parliament asked the following questions:

- ① Why was the act of the bearded transvestite from Austria Conchita Wurst during the broadcast of the Eurovision song contest not marked accordingly to the regulations of the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information?
- ② How does the broadcast of the Austrian transvestite Conchita Wurst on national TV enshrine national culture, national self-esteem, and strengthen national identity?
- ③ What was the role of the director of the national television in forming the Eurovision commission which gave the bearded transvestite from Austria a first place?
- ④ Is it appropriate for a modern national broadcaster which is responsible for the consolidation of Lithuanian society and is financed from the Lithuanian budget to despise values that are embedded in the Lithuanian Constitution?

According to MP P. Gražulis, “The National broadcaster has to obey all the laws and cannot allow the bearded hybrid from Austria Conchita Wurst to be broadcasted without consideration of existing regulations. I could not grasp how a commission formed by the national television, which has an obligation to strengthen national self-respect and identity, gave the bearded creature from Austria the highest points.”

Mr. Gražulis also actively commented against T. Neuwirth in the [media](#): “This is absolute madness. Normal people will not be able to participate in the Eurovision soon. When are we going to stop? When are going to put an end to those whores?”

We shall pay attention to the fact that the election campaign based on homophobia and transphobia allowed Mr. Gražulis to rise from a 9th position on the party list to the third place. The party “Order and Justice” got two seats in the European Parliament, so the candidate was not elected to the EP.



The fact that such methods of electoral campaigning still help politicians gain significant political benefits shows that Lithuanian society is deeply homophobic, biphobic and transphobic, and it does not respect human rights and freedoms. In a mature democracy this kind of incidents would not only be severely punished by the law, but also condemned by a large part of society, which would prevent politicians from being elected to any position.

Nationalist Union

An incident occurred on May 6 in Vilnius near the building of the Parliament during the [demonstration](#) “For national language” organized by “Vilnija” society, the Lithuanian Union of Freedom Fighters and Lithuanian Movement. The participants of the demonstration were protesting against the legislation initiative that would allow records in foreign languages in official Lithuanian identity documents and the plans to allow geographical places and street names in Vilnius region to be written also in Polish language. During the demonstration the leader of the political party “Nationalist Union” Julius Panka hold a banner which said “You could write a W on your tombstones.”

On May 14 at 8:40 am the news website lrytas.lt posted a [publication](#) of Martynas Černiauskas “New election trick: gays and Conchita Wurst”. The article was illustrated with a photo showing a grey-coloured car which had a note on its doors: “Don’t like faggot parades? Vote for Nationalist Union!” An image of the Austrian singer Thomas Neuwirth’s stage role Conchita Wurst on one of the vehicle’s door window can be seen. The character was depicted in a red-bordered circle crossed with a red line.

The article claims that the Nationalist Union hides who is driving the car, but the leader of the party sees nothing wrong with the advertisement. He said “We support traditional family, traditional values <...> We think those parades shall not take place on the Lithuanian streets.” The politician argues “This [homosexuality] is a disorder, which has to be called in international scientific terms. <...> We support the idea that all phenomena should have their name and if it’s offensive to someone, maybe they should think about changing their lifestyles.”

On May 22 the website meslaisvi.lt published the [article](#) “J. Panka spoke without hesitation in Pagėgiai”. The article claimed that the chair of the Nationalist Union Julius Panka arrived in Pagėgiai on May 2 on a car with the same advertisement.



On May 19 the Lithuanian Gay League, in association with the Lithuanian Human Rights Centre, addressed the Central Electoral Commission, Prosecution Service, Equal Opportunities Ombudsman's Office and the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics with a request to investigate whether such instances of political campaign did not contradict the Lithuanian Constitution, the Penal Code of Lithuania, the Law on the Election to the European Parliament, the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information, and also if they did promote discrimination towards homosexual, bisexual and transgender persons and other violations of human rights and freedoms. On May 28 the Vilnius District Prosecution Office refused to initiate a pretrial investigation because of the lack of attributes of the body of a crime which is described in article 170 of the Lithuanian Penal Code. According to the Prosecution Office, "There are no other objective data except for claimants' subjective opinion that would prove features of scorn, harassment and incitement of hatred towards a particular group of people. That sort of notes on the vehicle can be considered only as an incorrect, unethical realization of one's freedom of expression and right to spread information. However such behavior does not match the degree of danger of criminal acts defined in article 170 of Lithuanian Penal Code."

On May 29 the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsman informed that, according to the regulations of the Laws on Equal opportunities of women and men and Equal treatment, the investigation of the problems described in the complaint is not within the competence of the Office of Equal Opportunities. Therefore the complaint was returned to the claimants without consideration.

MES UŽ ŽEMĘ !

MES UŽ LITĄ !

MES UŽ TRADICINĘ ŠEIMĄ !

MES UŽ LIETUVĄ – LIETUVOS VAIKAMS !

NORI, KAD TAI IŠGIRSTŲ BRIUSELIS ?

PASIRAŠYK !



TAUTININKŲ SĄJUNGA

On June 9 the Lithuanian Human Rights Centre received a call from a representative of the Office of the Inspector of Journalist Ethics Rasa Zdanevičiūtė. The representative requested specific information on suspicions of the violation of article 4, section 17 of the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information. On June 10 the Lithuanian Human Rights Centre, in association with Lithuanian Gay League specified their complaint. The Lithuanian Human Rights Centre was informed that the complaint was being investigated.

No response from the Central Electoral Commission was received.

It should be noted that the Nationalist Union had declared its negative position towards LGBT rights before the representatives of the party started collecting voters' signatures for the party's nomination to the election of Lithuanian representatives to the European Parliament. On its website and on the posters at the signatures collecting places the party declared its exclusive support to a traditional model of the family, which excluded same-sex couples.

In addition to this, the leader of the party Julius Panka, together with members of other 25 political parties, signed a manifest for comprehensive and effective European policies in favor of the Family which states that "A registered same-sex partnership is a different form of union than marriage between a man and a woman." The signatories of the manifesto committed to "oppose any interference of the European Union in this area through community policies."

Human rights pledge

The Human Rights Pledge was a part of the project "A significant vote for human rights" implemented by Lithuanian Gay League and the Lithuanian Human Rights Centre. The draft of the pledge was prepared by the international non-governmental organizations ILGA and ENAR, and consisted of 8 items. Candidates to the European Parliament could sign the Human Rights Pledge from April 8 until the end of the official political campaign time on May 24. All candidates were invited to sign the Pledge by e-mail. The signatories were published on www.manoteises.lt/ep2014.

The human rights pledge was signed by all major political groups of the European Parliament. The political group of the European People's Party, which included the Lithuanian political party Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats did not sign the pledge, although they expressed support for the demands of ENAR and ILGA-Europe that were reflected in the pledge. The party also made a commitment to run a political campaign without any rhetoric that would incite racism, homophobia, transphobia or other discriminatory manifestations. You can download the statement of the European People's Party [here](#). Read more about the situation on the website "My rights".

EP 2014 RINKIMAI

UŽ ŽMOGAUS
TEISES

REIKŠMINGAS
BALSAS

On April 8 the organizers received an e-mail from Skirmantas Tumelis (Liberal Movement Party) who expressed his willingness to sign the Human Rights Pledge. He also wanted to add some comments under his signature that contradicted basic human rights and the principle of their indivisibility (universality). Mr. Skirmantas Tumelis argued, “Some black [African American] districts in the US (I haven’t been there, but it’s said that is true) are awful because angry blacks [African Americans] live there. Probably they get some allowances from the state and they are angry that those allowances harm their dignity. <...> Gipsy residential places where the dominant notion of traditional lifestyle contradict human rights.”

The candidate was reminded about item number 4 of the Human Rights Pledge (Responsible and respectful rhetoric). Skirmantas Tumelis was not approved as a signatory of the pledge.

On May 7 the Lithuanian Human Rights Centre received a letter from a candidate representing the Lithuanian Greens’ Party Saulius Lapienis. The candidate expressed a willingness to sign the pledge but only with certain reservations:

“Comments are needed under my signature:

- ① I oppose (it doesn’t mean I would blindly ban it) same-sex marriages in my country (Lithuania).
- ② I oppose sexual “equality” of adults and children, should the European Union want to introduce such a legal norm anytime.
- ③ I don’t think that equality (e.g. as it is defined in item no. 7) should be pursued with the help of imported collective and massive organizational means (e.g. the parades of other sexes etc.). I think we should resort to more aesthetical and modest means such as media, internet and so on.”

It was explained to the candidate that in accordance with the rules that were added to the human rights pledge and with the pledge itself, and also with the Lithuanian Constitution, the Law of Equal treatment and other international legal documents the signature of the candidate could not be approved, nor his comments be posted on the website.

The Disapproval of one item of the Pledge contradicts the other items of the Pledge, primarily the principle of human rights indivisibility and universality. The text of the pledge says: “I pledge to follow the principles of indivisibility, universality, transparency, non-discrimination and accountability during my work in the EP. Human rights is indivisible value which must be guaranteed to all individuals.”

The candidate also mentioned “The march for equality” that took place in the summer of 2013 (“the parade of other sexes”). Saulius Lapienis was reminded that freedom of association and freedom of assembly are two of the most basic human rights and freedoms. The European Court of Human Rights has concluded that society may not like a certain opinion or public action but the people have a right to represent their legitimate interests. The Lithuanian Human Rights Centre expressed hope that the candidate would support those rights, however the politician eventually refused to sign the Pledge.



Manifest of Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe

The Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE) initiated the campaign “Family, Europe’s Treasure!” so that they could ensure that the European Parliament would make decisions favorable to the family, and that families would be able to participate more actively in forming the policies in spheres that are important to them. The candidates to the European Parliament were called to sign the [manifesto](#) that consisted of 12 items. You can read the manifesto here. 26 Lithuanian candidates to the European Parliament signed the document.

The manifesto included propositions such as:

1. Acknowledging the complementarity of woman and man

The notion of “gender” has no legal basis in the Treaty.

I recognize the complementarity between man and woman, and refuse gender ideology that seeks to erase sexual differences in public policies. <...>

3. Respect for human dignity from beginning to natural end of life

I pledge to respect life at all its stages, including the unborn, namely through the implementation of the criteria contained in ECJ the judgment C-34/10 and the European Citizens’ Initiative “One of us.” <...>

We can conclude that signatories of the manifesto have strong negative attitudes against particular groups of people, are against abortion and against women’s right to make their own decisions related to their pregnancy.

On May 22nd the Lithuanian Parliament hosted a conference organized by national forum “The future of Lithuanian families and children”. The candidate to the European Parliament, the member of political party the Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats, the signatory of the Manifest of Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe, Member of Lithuanian Parliament Vilija Aleknaitė Abramikienė was one of the participants of the conference.

The candidate during the conference commented about the concept of family, gender ideology. MP Aleknaitė Abramikienė noted that Lithuanian children were not only sought to be sexualized by shattering their confidence in their parents, but also Lithuanian Health ministry was involved in the process. The politician criticized legislation initiatives which would finance contraceptives and legalize abortions for youth under the age of 20. She said she saw a willingness to allow children to live sexual life without parental knowledge, allow them to make their own decisions on having an abortion without parental consent as it would be fully finance by the state.

The Member of Parliament also expressed her views on opposition. She said, “Serious scientists claim that contemporary European left-wing politicians and socialists, especially in the European Parliament, initiate various directives, rewrite the content of human rights. New groups emerge whose rights are being defended. Those are clients. The more clients there are, the higher are the chances to be remain in power. The Istanbul convention is yet another tool to create more of such clients.”

Mrs Aleknaitė Abramikienė also mention Austrian singer Conchita Wurst. She claimed that “Conchita Wurst is cultural disease and the result of particular policies.” You can read more of comment the politician [here](#) (only in Lithuanian).

The member of Lithuanian parliament was not elected member of the European Parliament, although she got enough votes to position 8th on the final rotation.

CONCLUSIONS

To summarize the above-mentioned information it's fair to conclude that politicians infamous for their radical views could be observed and noticed in Lithuanian public space. Various rhetorical and visual methods of expression were used by those politicians to attract the attention of civil society. This could be viewed as traditional public relations marketing tactics used to attract media attention and therefore make one's political campaign visible.

However, the vast majority of politicians expressed their negative attitudes towards particular human rights issues in more moderate ways, like signing the manifest of Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe, or writing personal e-mails to the organizers of the campaign "A significant vote for human rights".

It should be noted that the appropriate institutions did not respond to this offensive and discriminatory rhetoric. It means that electoral campaigns that include such rhetoric can be run without any restrictions. Freedom of expression in Lithuania is not restricted even when it degrades vulnerable societal groups.

It's reason of concern that politicians who make disparaging comments towards particular groups of people are still supported by voters during the elections. This shows that Lithuanian society is still deeply homophobic, biphobic and transphobic, and shows disrespect to human rights and freedoms. Politicians who express such comments would not get voters' support in mature democracies. The fact that hateful tactics succeed is one of the reasons why intolerance persists in some political campaigns.

The LGBT community received most of the negative political campaigning.