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<http://www.lrytas.lt/-12707866101268527541-tolerancij%C4%85-atmetantys-lietuviai-m%C4%97gaujasi-aukos-vaidmeniu.htm>

Rejecting Tolerance, Lithuanians Enjoy the Role of Victim

by Monika Bončkutė

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Christine Beresniova: After joining EU, Lithuanians became more politically correct, but not more tolerant (photo from personal archive)

“Lithuanians enjoy engaging in suffering contests and like to stress that they are victims. Instead of taking joy in [how they] brought down the Soviet Union, they wallow in self-pity. This is especially seen in relations with Jews, but also includes other areas,” Christine Beresniova, an American studying the Lithuanian educational system, told lrytas.lt.

For some time in Germany, she researched the history of the Holocaust, and is now working towards a doctorate in education at Indiana University.

She Painted Over the Swastika on a Building

Beresniova spent the entire summer of 2009 in Kaunas collecting material for her research. She didn't limit herself exclusively to theory. Through the windows of the apartment where she stayed, she was forced to see a swastika painted on the wall of the next building over, and decided to set an example: “If something isn't right in the world, we ourselves must make sure that the bad thing doesn't remain.”

One day, ignoring the surprise and skepticism of those around her, she bought spray paint and painted over the Nazi “art.”

“Neighbors predicted that a swastika would be repainted by the next morning. Almost eight months have gone by, but no one has done it,” the academic said with visible joy.

Ninth Fort Bad Venue for Suffering Contests

After viewing the Ninth Fort museum exhibits, the American was surprised that the restoration of Lithuanian independence and deportations of Lithuanians to Siberia were a constant theme in a museum dedicated to remembering the horrors of the Holocaust.

“As I understand it, people were not deported to Siberia from the Ninth Fort. Neither was Lithuanian independence restored there. What’s the point of confusing these events?” the academic asked critically.

She says she believes Lithuanians and citizens of the Baltic states in general often justifiably complain to the West that their suffering hasn’t been fully understood by the world. But, she thinks, it’s not necessary to engage in “contests” over who suffered more, or at least it’s [inappropriate] to demonstrate these contests in a Holocaust museum.

Hurried to Join EU

Beresniova says once our country became an EU member, Lithuanians became politically more correct, but not more tolerant. People still view the traditions of democracy and tolerance celebrated by EU countries with skepticism, while “top-down” reforms by politicians haven’t taken root in Lithuanian society.

At the beginning of March at a conference of the Comparative and International Education Association in Chicago, Beresniová delivered a report on the theme “Education and the Creation of the Post-Soviet Lithuanian: [Primary] School Reform in the Context of the European Union.” In the report, she posed the theory that many reforms connected with building tolerance were carried out hastily in Lithuania, and possibly only in order to join the EU.

Regulating Morality by Law is Dangerous

Beresniova's report and the entering into legal force of the Lithuanian parliament's globally controversial law on the protection of minors were separated by a single day. She included discussion of the law in her final redaction.

She says criticism by the global media of Lithuania for the law is deserved. She told Irytas.lt that many questions arise in all circumstances when the government of any country tries to regulate the morality of society through law.

"Why do minors need to be protected from speech about homosexuality? Is it really true that this topic is so actively discussed in Lithuanian schools and the media, that suddenly there needs to be a law to stop this? I doubt it..." the American who has spent much time with Lithuanian pedagogues said, not hiding her surprise.

She said that the Lithuanian parliament, in the name of protecting children is actually propagating the world-view of a specific social group which is really harmful to minors. "How will pupils learn to live in contemporary society if politicians are sending the signal that certain people are unwanted members of society, essentially that they are not even people?"

Lithuanians Consider Themselves More Tolerant than Swedes

Beresniova says that reforms coming "from above" have taught people to declare western values, but they don't necessarily believe in them. The academic was especially surprised by the results of a Eurobarometer poll showing Lithuanians considered themselves most likely the most tolerant EU country.

She was surprised that in the same survey Swedes, known for democracy and a well-developed social system, were much more critical of themselves, and much more frequently perceived different forms of discrimination [at work] in society.

Further, asked which values the EU represents, Lithuanians called tolerance one of the three primary values.

“Sadly, according to a survey initiated by Vilnius University, 22 percent of Lithuanians would not like to live in the same neighborhood with Jews or immigrants,” Christine Beresniova said , contrasting the difference between declared values and real feelings.

TRANSLATED BY GEOFF VASIL