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Norwegian Ambassador Shocked by Marchers' Chant "Lithuania for Lithuanians"

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A march through central Vilnius whose participants chanted "Lithuania for Lithuanians" shocked Norway's ambassador to Lithuania Steinar Gil. Speaking at a discussion held in the Lithuanian parliament Friday called "European and Lithuanian Values: Same or Different?" he said it was especially shocking when one realized that gay pride marchers had not been allowed to march along the same route. European Parliament parliamentarian from Lithuania Leonidas Donskis expressed surprise at the lack of response by "the political elite" and claimed that this was the result of a desire to impress voters and preserve their jobs.

"Every foreigner in Lithuania noticed this march. We were shocked," Gil said, angered that the Vilnius municipality gave gay rights marchers permission for a march of about 300 people in May but pushed them out of the center of the city to a parking lot and only allowed them a short route.

The ambassador was surprised that about 500 people were allowed to march through the center of Vilnius on March 11 [Lithuania's second Independence Day after February 16, marking the parliament's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1990] to a former Jewish cemetery while shouting "Lithuania for Lithuanians." The diplomat recalled that two years ago nationalists had shouted "Juden raus."

"The initiative to ban the gay march was born in parliament, about 50

people signed off on it ... How many parliamentarians are against these [nationalist] demonstrations?" Gil asked at the discussion.

"The gay parade is connected not with like or dislike, but rather with tolerance, with respect and rights that need to be honored. We respect every single person, so every country should condemn marches where there is chanting 'Lithuania for Lithuanians'," he said.

Leonidas Donskis said he was sorry that the voice of the "political elite" hadn't been heard from at the discussion. "One of the biggest problems is the the fear of confronting, of expressing feelings and opinions that might cause electoral losses and block the way to returning to parliament. Politics is not kowtowing to the hatred of the crowd, but education, responsibility for one's country and society. So far out political class have not understood their political responsibility," he observed.