

PM plays down nationalist March 11 parade, finds Lithuania a tolerant state

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VILNIUS, Mar 23, BNS - Lithuanian Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius played down concerns about the nationalistic nature of the March 11 parade down the capital city's streets and said he believes Lithuania to be a tolerant, non-homophobic state.

"It is my personal conviction that in comparison with countries like Norway and Denmark, Lithuania is relatively tolerant, you couldn't say it's either nationalistic or homophobic," Kubilius on Tuesday told Lithuanian radio.

Over 500 youths of a nationalistic movement on the afternoon of March 11 marked the 20th anniversary of Lithuania's independence with a parade down central Vilnius streets chanting "Lithuania for Lithuanians." Norway's Ambassador to Lithuania Steinar Gil slammed the parade, saying he missed a reaction from Lithuanian officials with regards to the nature of the event.

Meanwhile, the prime minister played down concerns over the parade, saying that most countries have a neo-Nazi population, which is known to chant a thing or two every once in a while.

"There are skinheads and neo-Nazis in every country, and they sometimes take a walk or chant something. Most of the time nobody pays any attention to them. Sometimes such manifestations are used precisely to feel more important and veer attention away from the big celebration, but instead focus on what was being chanted on the side," Kubilius spoke.

According to him, even though the permit for the event was requested by conservative MP Kazimieras Uoka, the ruling Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrat Party had nothing to do with it.

"I really couldn't say that I like statements like "Lithuania for Lithuanians", I don't know if all the participants were chanting this or just a few isolated people. The march had nothing to do with the Homeland Union, and the fact that Kazimieras Uoka participated in it, is his own personal business," the prime minister said.

Asked whether he would attend the Pride Parade scheduled to take place in Vilnius this May in order to draw the public's attention to violations of gay, lesbian, transsexual and bisexual rights in Lithuania and around the globe, Kubilius said he sees no great merit in the event.

"I don't plan to attend, I don't see any great value in this - people want to gather and take a walk - let them. Some people want Lithuania to be associated with such parades through certain conflicts and scandals. Sometimes I think organizers of such parades are secretly working towards this end. I see nothing wrong with having the parade itself," said he.

According to him, the US started holding such parades as of the mid 70s. "We're behind them by a mere 30 years," Kubilius said.