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*A Slice of Lithuania*

## M. Kluonis: Limits of the Conservatives' Tolerance and Lithuania's Image

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Signals the Western states are constantly sending that Lithuania isn't honoring human rights sufficiently haven't remained unanswered and finally forced Lithuanian politicians to look at the damage done by radical rightwingers to Lithuanian statehood. Last week MP Vilija Aleknaitė-Abramikienė addressed this topic at a meeting of the Lithuanian Christian Democrat Community. She said Lithuania is being portrayed as an intolerant state in order to destroy the support of Western European states for Lithuanian independence. The MP's statement, while avoiding recognizing the valid basis of the Western states' criticism, came out at a really good time and touches on a current problem. Observing what's going on in Lithuania at the current time, it's rather obvious that Lithuania and the EU are being made into enemies, and there is an effort to make Lithuanian EU membership questionable.

The efforts to sow dissatisfaction with the EU in Lithuania does not just include speeches by marginal politicians at meetings and in parliament about "rotten Europe" or "the European occupation of Lithuania," but also comes from

statements by officials occupying the highest posts, such as Parliamentary Speaker Irena Degutienė's that Lithuania needs to resist European values.

The Lithuanian parliament's adoption of resolutions on the European Parliament's interference in Lithuanian internal affairs can be seen as an aggressive attempt to sow animosity between Lithuania and Europe. It's no wonder against such a background, further fueled by mass hysteria over the march planned for May called "For Equality" and marches by ultranationalists through the center of Vilnius, that it might occur to the old traditional democracies in the EU that perhaps a mistake was made in letting Lithuania into the family of democratic European states. With these trends in mind, Aleknaitė-Abramikienė's statement is worth considering, especially since the MP attempts to name the forces who seek to marginalize Lithuania in Europe and damage her [Lithuanian] independence.

One force working against Lithuanian independence whom Aleknaitė-Abramikienė named is absolutely correct: radical rightists calling themselves "patriotic youth." Their chants, as the MP rightly observed, seem to have been written by the Kremlin because they serve perfectly to cultivate the image of "the fascist Baltics." Observing these "patriots," the feeling never leaves you that this group of under-educated and aggressive people is being manipulated by those who attempted to hinder Lithuanian accession to the EU by all means available and sought her [Lithuania's] "neutrality."

To think that Lithuania could be in no one's sphere of influence, especially keeping in mind that she [Lithuania] isn't all that significant to Europe, is only possible for a political illiterate. For any person even a little acquainted with geopolitics, it's obvious that so-called "neutrality" is nothing other than a pulling of Lithuania back into the space of the former Soviet Union. It's possible some group of skinheads fail to understand this, but their agitators from the "nationalist centers" should understand this perfectly. So it's no accident that political parties associated with Russia, such as Order and Justice [new name of Liberal Democrat Party of impeached president Rolandas Paksas], are rubbing up with these fringe [people, i.e. the fascist youth].

One can only thank the MP for such a helpful insight, but the question arises: what's stopping her, Vytautas Landsbergis and other Conservative leaders from openly condemning aggressive, pseudo-patriot marches damaging Lithuanian independence? What's stopping them from requesting State Security and law enforcement institutions to investigate and liquidate organizations that are

damaging Lithuanian independence? Is it perhaps uncomfortable [to do so] because Conservative Kazimieras Uoka requested the license for the march? In that case, isn't it appropriate to ask whether Lithuania's image isn't being destroyed by those very same Conservative hands that created the conditions for the shouting of Nazi-type slogans?

Aleknaitė-Abramikienė and Landsbergis should also look at the fact that one of the main political forces sowing animosity between Lithuania and the EU is their very own party, whose members and leaders talk about showing some backbone to Europe, opposing Brussels' interference in Lithuanian internal affairs and about going against the flow, and thus raising the chants of marginal people to the level of serious politics and forming a negative public opinion on the EU.

It was precisely Conservative Party members who voted for absurd laws for protecting minors that violate human rights, for the family concept and similar legal acts that have seriously damaged Lithuania's image. Conservative Mantas Adomėnas managed to introduce a resolution condemning the European Parliament for expressing a negative view on the [Lithuanian?] law for protecting minors, and it was namely Conservative votes that passed this odd resolution.

Stasys Šedbaras and other conservatives signed Petras Gražulis's letter to the prosecutor calling for a ban on the planned "For Equality" march. It's not surprising that Petras Gražulis wants to make Lithuania and the EU enemies because he belongs to a party associated with Almax and the famous Strekoza plan [propaganda used to drive Paksas from the office of president]. But why is Stasys Šedbaras sitting in the same rowboat with him, or for that matter with conservative Kazimieras Kuzminskas, who introduced legislation sanctioning punishment for "propogating homosexuality"? Is it possible the leaders of the conservatives do not understand that these kinds of legislation packages and statements negate all efforts to portray Lithuania as a democratic state recognizing human rights?

By the way, what's stopping Aleknaitė-Abramikienė from introducing so-called "sex change" legislation in order to implement the decision by the European Court of Human Rights, a decision whose implementation Lithuania has postponed for so long that Lithuania is soon to be the subject of a hearing at the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe? If the MP and her fellow party members are really concerned with Lithuania's reputation as a state fulfilling her obligations,

with creating a favorable image of Lithuania, why, instead of undertaking real actions to improve Lithuania's image, do Lithuania's representatives in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe conservatives Egidijus Vareikis and Aleknaitė-Abramikienė like much more to talk about "the mental afflictions of members of the European Parliament," "Darwinism" and "Brussels clerks who eat richly and think with difficulty"? Is it that they think these sorts of statements make EU states more favorable toward Lithuania and her independence?

The second part of Aleknaitė-Abramikienė's statement at the Christian Democrat Community can be called nothing other than damaging to Lithuania's image. Instead of condemning violations of human rights in Lithuania, she tried to accuse those who report these violations, and went so far as to say that the attempt to make use of constitutional rights is a provocation.

Aleknaitė-Abramikienė and conservative leader Andrius Kubilius would do Lithuania a much better favor if they recognized existing problems and began to solve them in essence, rather than talking nonsensically about how "Lithuania is tolerant like Scandinavia" and trying to present human rights and their defense as a problem.

The West isn't blind and sees perfectly how "tolerant" Lithuania is, and that the Parliament and Government [of Lithuania] led by the conservatives is encouraging rather than solving the problem of hate and intolerance. As long as the Lithuanian Government fails to consider the problem of intolerance seriously and responsibly, it will be impossible to form a positive image of the country in democratic states. And the negative image of the country has to be changed by real actions, not by throwing money at producing senseless propaganda about how wonderful, brave and tolerant Lithuania is. The deception won't be successful in any case.

If we really want to stimulate Western countries' interest in Lithuanian independence, it's now time for the conservatives to repeal the absurd laws on protecting minors and family conceptions, to withdraw all cooperation with and support for all sorts of "Grazulis" initiatives aimed against human rights, to adopt the laws the European Court of Human Rights required and, instead of hurling statements around about "provocations" and "mentally ill European Parliament members", to begin working to ensure human rights are heeded in Lithuania, to liquidate groups sowing social and ethnic hatred, and to make sure the

Constitution's provisions for freedom of assembly and equal rights under the law are implemented in practice.

The conservatives themselves must first stop compromising Lithuania in Europe by ensuring that initiatives by Adomenas, Kuzminskas, Uoka and similar marginal figures and absurd legislation don't reach the public, and, even more importantly, don't reach the parliamentary floor. And if it is difficult for these people to resist compromising Lithuania, is it not time to suggest they think about changing parties? They would surely find people of like mind on the political fringe and their opportunities for damaging Lithuania's image would be greatly reduced.

It also wouldn't hurt the leaders of the conservatives to consider their statements more carefully and to recognize existing problems. If they do not intend to do so, then there is no reason for the crocodile tears over Lithuania's poor image, or that the West is losing interest in Lithuanian independence. After all, it is no one other than the conservatives, by raising the ideas of politically marginal [figures] to the macropolitical level and implementing them, who are destroying that interest.