



STUDY VISIT LITHUANIA

June 7-8, 2011
Vilnius, Lithuania



Introduction

The study visit has been organized within the framework of the project “Breaking Stereotypes - Building Tolerance”.

The project is co-funded by the European Union’s Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme.



European Commission
Justice

The main objectives of the study visit were as follows:

- to examine and exchange experience and good practise of combating racism and xenophobia,
- to examine and analyse situation in Lithuania with anti-discrimination policy, anti-racist education and actions.

The programme of the study visit

June, 7

10.00	The house of Polish Culture in Vilnius
11.00	Vilnius City Municipal Government Administration
14.00	Russian Culture Centre
15.30	Vilnius University Students' Representation
17.00	Vilnius University Cultural Communities Study Centre

June, 8

10.00	The Ministry of Culture
11.30	Human Rights Monitoring Institute
14.00	Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, Committee on Human Rights
15.30	Naujoji Vilnia Culture Centre

Information from ENAR Shadow Report 2009/2010 Racism and Discrimination in Lithuania was used during preparation of the report.

Participants of the study visit

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Dmitrijs Bočarovs and Natalja Mickeviča (Culture. Tolerance. Friendship., Latvia)
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Ethnic composition of Lithuania

Latest census of population provides data about 109 nationalities that lived in Lithuania at the time. Non-Lithuanians are dispersed throughout the entire territory of the country. However, they concentrate for the most part in the eastern and south-eastern Lithuania, as well as in the cities of Vilnius, Klaipėda, Visaginas. There is unequal distribution according to their nationality as well. For example, the majority of Polish-speaking population (approximately 90 percent) lives in Vilnius and in the neighbouring regions. Russians, Ukrainians, and the Jewish population reside for the most part in large cities in the south-eastern Lithuania. Due to historical reasons, South-Eastern Lithuania (Vilnius region) and eastern Lithuania (city of Visaginas) have become multinational and multicultural regions. Persons of Lithuanian origin are in the position of a national minority there.

The most important national minorities are presented in the table below:

	Number	%
Lithuanian	2907200	83,4
Polish	234900	6,7
Russian	219700	6,3
Byelorussian	42800	1,2
Ukrainian	22400	0,65
Jewish	4900	0,12
German	3200	0,09
Tatar	3200	0,09
Latvian	2900	0,08
Roma	2500	0,07
Armenian	1400	0,04
Other nationalities	6100	0,18
Not specified	32900	0,94
Total	3483900	100

About 16,6 % of the people do not have a Lithuanian background. Nationalities, such as the Polish and Byelorussian, are autochthonous and have been living within the borders of present-day Lithuania since times immemorial. This holds for instance for the Karaims who came to Lithuania 600 years ago. There they found a new motherland and were able to preserve their national identity, faith and customs. In later times, representatives of many other nationalities came and in this way, Lithuania always was a multinational state.

Attitude towards to minorities

Stereotypes and prejudice are particularly persistent with some minority groups. The potential vulnerability of particular communities can be estimated while analyzing the data from surveys in the opinion of society towards various minority groups.

Public opinion surveys reveal that the “hierarchy of intolerance” remains the same - Roma, Chechens and refugees are the least tolerated thus the most vulnerable groups to discrimination in Lithuania.

In 2010, the Centre of Ethnic Studies (Institute for Social Research) carried out a public opinion survey, which showed that more than half of Lithuanians would not want to live near Roma. A large part of the Lithuanian population did not want their neighbours to Chechen (40.5%), Muslims (38.8%) or refugees (38.3%). One-third of survey respondents tend to avoid neighbourhoods with Pakistanis, Hindus, Buddhists, dark skinned people and Chinese. Every fourth Lithuanian citizen did not want to live near Jewish, Kazakh, Turkish or other ethnicities.

Anti-discrimination

Lithuania is the party in most international agreements related to the protection of human rights and rights of national minorities. In 2000, the government ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe. However, for some reason the Charter for Minority and Regional Languages has not yet been ratified.

At the beginning of 2009, the government adopted a National Anti-discrimination Programme for 2009 – 2011, which is the continuation of the previous programme, aimed at tackling discrimination.

Although the programme does identify a lot of major issues, concerning discrimination on various grounds (including ethnicity and race), the scope of the programme was very modest. It aimed to carry out new research in the field of discrimination, to raise awareness among society, to organise social-campaigns and trainings aimed at tackling discrimination, to support the activities of non-governmental organisations, who are dealing with discrimination and to review and amend (if necessary) existing legislation on anti-discrimination.

It is rather obvious, that none of the previously mentioned aims could be reached during 2009, because of the obvious reason – only slightly more than 10% of the initial budget, planned for 2009, was actually allocated to the programme.¹

¹ ENAR Shadow Report 2009/2010 Racism and Discrimination in Lithuania



Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania (Seimas), Committee on Human Rights

Presentation by Valerij Simulik, Deputy Chairman of Committee on Human Rights

Members of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania are elected for a four-year term in seventy-one single-member constituencies and one multi-member constituency on the basis of universal and equal suffrage, by secret ballot in direct, mixed-system elections.

The Committee on Human Rights

Trends of activities of the Committee on Human Rights shall be:

- to prepare and consider drafts of laws and other legal acts as well as proposals on the issues related to the guarantees of civil rights and the regulation of relations of the nationalities living in Lithuania;
- to present recommendations and proposals to ministries, State institutions, and other organisations, as well as Seimas committees on issues concerning the protection of civil rights and the improvement of relations of the nationalities;
- to submit proposals in a prescribed procedure concerning the structure, staff and funding of the Seimas Ombudsmen Office;
- to consider opinions, proposals and complaints lodged with the Seimas concerning the work of the Seimas Ombudsmen;
- as necessary, to prepare a draft resolution on the vote of non-confidence in the Seimas Ombudsman, and to submit it to the Seimas for consideration, as well as to submit conclusions on draft resolutions which are prepared by other committees;
- to consider the material submitted by the Seimas Ombudsman concerning the breach of law made by ministers and other officers accountable to the Seimas, and to submit conclusions to the Seimas for consideration;
- to consider and prepare drafts of laws and other legal acts relating to the affairs of the Lithuanians residing abroad;
- to exercise parliamentary control of the institutions which settle the issues pertaining to the ensuring of human and civil rights.

Powers of the Committee on Human Rights when Exercising Parliamentary Control

The committees shall, due to their competence, have the right to control how laws are observed and recommendations and proposals of the committees are taken into consideration; on their own initiative or upon the instruction of the Seimas; to carry out parliamentary scrutiny of separate problems; on their own initiative or upon the instruction of the Seimas, to consider annual reports of the state institutions accountable to the Seimas.

If a committee decides that, it is necessary to hear the information of a Government member or the officer of any other state institution (except courts), the committee Chairman shall notify the Government member or the head of any appropriate state institution of this. In this event, the Government member or any other officer must, not later than within two weeks (unless otherwise requested by the committee), participate in a committee sitting; if the said person fails to attend the sitting - the committee Chairman shall inform the Seimas of this.

The committees shall have the right to demand from state institutions (except courts) and officers documents, conclusions in writing, as well as reports and other necessary material.

We also learned about work of Seimas Ombudsmen's Office.



Seimas Ombudsmen's Office

Following the practice of many European and world countries, the Seimas Ombudsmen's Office was established in Lithuania on 8 December 1994.

The Seimas Ombudsmen are appointed for the term of 5 years from the candidates nominated by the Chairman of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. All of them are law graduates. The ombudsmen have equal rights and duties and each of them function independently when investigating complaints. One of the Ombudsmen is appointed Head of the Office.

Purpose of the activity of the Seimas Ombudsmen is to protect a person's right to good public administration securing human rights and freedoms, to supervise fulfilment by state authorities of their duty to properly serve the people.

The Seimas Ombudsmen investigate complaints about the abuse of office by and bureaucracy of officers or other violations of human rights and freedoms in the sphere of public administration.

Complainant means a natural or a legal person who applies to the Seimas Ombudsmen's Office filing a complaint about abuse of office by or bureaucracy of officers.

The activities of the President of the Republic, members of the Seimas, the Prime Minister, the Government (as a collegial institution), the State Controller and judges of the Constitutional Court and other courts, municipal councils (as collegial institutions) are outside the Seimas Ombudsman's powers of investigation.

The legality and validity of procedural decisions of the prosecutors, pre-trial investigation officers also are outside the Seimas Ombudsmen's powers of investigation, however, complaints about the actions of the prosecutors, pre-trial investigation officers, which violate human rights and freedoms fall within the investigative jurisdiction of the Seimas Ombudsmen.

The Seimas Ombudsmen also do not investigate complaints arising from the labour legal relations and about the legality and validity of court decisions, judgements and rulings.



The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania

Presentation by Kastytis Minkaukas, Chief Officer

The Ministry of Culture was established in 1994, when the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture was divided into two ministries.

The administration of the cultural affairs of Lithuania is on two levels; central (the Ministry of Culture) and local (the districts and municipalities). The main task of the Ministry is to ensure the historical continuation of Lithuanian culture and to create conditions for its development and expression.

The Ministry is responsible for formulating and implementing state cultural policy of national majorities as well as national minorities in the spheres of libraries, museums, ethnic culture, theatre, music, art, cinema, literature and publishing, cultural centres, and copyrights and related rights.

On 1 January 2010, Ministry of Culture took the functions related with formation and implementation of the policy of national minorities and cultural discrimination.

According to the regulation, one of the tasks of the Ministry is coordination of policy of national minorities as well as creating cultural integration. Therefore, Ministry of Culture is responsible for the legislation, long lasting programs ensuring identity, historical continuation of national minorities' culture as well as creation cultural conditions for different national minorities of Lithuania.

Section of „National Minorities“ was established for implementation of the task. The main program of the section is „Development of national minority's culture“. It gives financial support for the projects developing different cultures all over the Lithuania.



Vilnius City Municipal Government Administration, Municipal Development, Public Relations and Public Order Committee

Presentation by Indre Jakaityte, Vilnius City Councillor, Deputy Chairman of Municipal Development, Public Relations and Public Order Committee

The main spheres of the committee are community dealings; national minorities and religion dealings; prevention of crime and public order.

The committee implements Strategic Plan of Vilnius City. In the Strategic Plan of Vilnius City, four characteristics for integration and tolerance of national minorities are singled out:

- conditions for the development of an information-based society,
- creation of a safe social environment,
- improvement of dwelling housing;
- living environment, development of the social-cultural infrastructure.

The creation of tolerant and advanced society requires a safe social environment. Most of national minorities of Vilnius, just as all of the inhabitants of post-communist countries, are experiencing great changes and feel socially insecure. Social insecurity can be described as feeling a real or imagined threat to your own life or the lives of your relatives, a threat to health, property, the future, psychological and spiritual comfort, quality of life in general. Lower levels of crime, lower sickness rates, fewer cases of mental disease, decreasing the number of drug addicts and homeless people all serve as indicators for the implementation of this goal.

In the Strategic Plan, it is planned not to fight with the consequences of social differentiation, insecurity and crime but to put all efforts into eliminating its causes. This requires appropriate primary education, organization of leisure activities, working with children and youth who are at risk. Suggestions are made about how through methods of social care, trusteeship and primary health care, national minorities could be integrated into society, how separate actions could strengthen the sense of community and help to determine the sources of social conflicts.

Integration of different national minorities

The main tasks for the integration of different national minorities:

- to develop conditions and forms of effective social training of children and youth;
- to make the protection of children rights and prevention from asocial behaviour and crime more effective;
- to determine the sources of social tension and to actively address problem areas with high levels of crime;
- to develop social support services for high risk groups and seek means for their integration into society;
- to foster social partnership and a sense of community that promotes cultural, educational, health and social protection systems.



Human Rights Monitoring Institute

Presentation by Dovile Sakaliene, Programme Director, Natalija Bitiukova, Legal Director, Jurate Guzeviciute, Programme Coordinator

The Human Rights Monitoring Institute (HRMI) is a non-governmental organization based in Lithuania. It has been founded in 2003 with the mission to promote an open democratic society through the consolidation of human rights and freedoms.

The goals of the Institute are:

- to develop the capacity of the civil society to follow and influence the governmental human rights policy and practice;
- to encourage Lithuanians to exercise their rights and, in certain cases, to assist in defending those rights;
- to develop a culture respectful of human rights in Lithuania

In order to reach their goals the Institute:

- raises awareness of human rights violations, their causes and consequences;
- stimulates public discussions and dialogue between civil society and state institutions concerning human rights;
- motivates state institutions and officials to bring about tangible improvements in legislation, programmes and services, intended to ensure and consolidate the protection of human dignity and human rights;
- increases governmental accountability in policies and practices affecting human rights.

HRMI conducts daily monitoring of public institutions' activities, publicly reacts to human rights abuses or potential violations, carries out research, prepares conclusions and recommendations, initiates strategic litigation, presents alternatives reports to international human rights institutions, implements awareness-raising and educational campaigns.

HRMI is a member of the EU Fundamental Rights Platform, which is a network of NGO cooperation under the auspices of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, and UNITED - network of European NGOs against nationalism, racism, and fascism.

HRMI Board and staff members have been working in numerous national and international human rights bodies, such as UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (HRMI Chair of the Board - member) and National Judicial Selection Committee (HRMI Executive Director - member), and serve as experts for the Council of Europe, OSCE and other international intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations.



Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights

Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) has been working in the field of human rights for more than a decade. Since foundation by private natural persons in 1994 LCHR focused on human rights education and implemented numerous projects and activities in the field. The recognition of equality of persons and principle of non-discrimination has always been the core values of LCHR philosophy.

Today the goals of the LCHR are aimed at:

- Dissemination of knowledge about international and European Union human rights standards, promotion of tolerance and respect to diversity;
- Capacity building and awareness raising on issues of vulnerable groups and minorities;
- Observance of human rights standards at national level, providing suggestions and consultations to the government and the legislator;



A web-project on tolerance and non-discrimination (www.manoteises.lt)

Since 2005, LCHR is managing a web-project on tolerance and non-discrimination. The website, dedicated to equality, non-discrimination and human rights issues encompasses articles on diversity, minorities' cultural heritage and human rights, quizzes. The web-project encompasses useful information about international and national human rights protection mechanisms (e.g. guidelines on the application to the European Court of Human Rights, UN HR Committee, etc.).

The web site also has a photo gallery "Diversity gallery: all different all equal".



Educational project „Tackling xenophobia: the raising profile of human rights education in major Lithuanian universities“

Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights, in cooperation with Royal Embassy of Netherlands is implementing human rights education project „Tackling xenophobia: the raising profile of human rights education in major Lithuanian universities“. Project was implemented from October 2008 to March 2009. During this project, students of Law and Public administration discussed current human rights issues and participated in moot court competition.



The House of Polish Culture

Presentation by Artur Ludkowski, director and Bożena Mieżonis, project manager

The House of Polish Culture in Vilnius was founded in February, 2001. The House of Polish Culture belongs to the Charity and Support Fund, called „The house of Polish Culture in Vilnius“, registered in 2 of February, 2001. The organization was established according to decision of Senate of Polish Republic. Its founders are „Polish coalition in Lithuania” department of Vilnius and association „Wspólnota Polska”.

The main target of Polish institution in Lithuania is organization of cultural life of local Polish community. Important directions of our activities are cultural education, promotion of polish literature and art in Vilnius area, support for local artistic and cultural initiatives. Other outstanding goal is also the cultivation of local traditions and folklore, the nurturance of values that were making influence on polish ethnic identity in Vilnius down the ages.

The realizations of these tasks are possible just with the help and cooperation of various public organizations that are settled down in the building of „The House of Polish Culture“. In the very moment, „The House of Polish Culture“ provides working space for 30 public organizations.



Russian Culture Centre

Presentation by Jonas Laniauskas, director and Valentin Charitonov, manager of bureau

The Russian Culture Centre was established in 1988. The main organ of board of administration is the Assembly of RCC, which elects the board of 11 members. The RCC board elects the director.

The main projects of the Centre are:

- Russian Language Courses
- Exhibitions in RKC
- Guitar Courses
- The festival of Russian Language and Culture
- Youth Information Bureau
- Russians of Baltic States

Last two of them are mostly related with the topic of tolerance and anti-racist education.

Youth Information Bureau

The main aims of Youth Information Bureau are to:

- attraction of Russian speaking young people to social life
- informational support of Youth Organizations in Lithuania and Russian speaking young people
- creation of international network of Russian speaking European Youth Organizations

The methods of achieving aims are: different kinds of research, carrying out seminars and debates, participation in European projects concerning European citizenship, preservation of identity, youth policy, etc.

Russians of Baltic States

Russians of Baltic States is a cycle of conferences and seminars devoted to the analysis and solution of problems that arise for the people of Russian nationality living in the Baltic States. The Russian Culture Centre initiated the cycle of conferences and seminars in 1990.

The Russian Culture Centre together with the culture societies from Latvia and Estonia organised regional conferences in Vilnius in 1990, 1992, 1996, 1999 and 2009. During the first conference, the decision was made to organize the regional conferences in the capitals of the Baltic States. The main organisers of the conferences were the 3 already mentioned public and cultural unions which are close in their spirits, objectives and tasks. The conferences of 1991 and 1998 took place in Tallinn, in 1997 in Riga. An international colloquium "Russian National Minorities in the Baltic States" was organized in Germany in 1996. The 9th "Russians of the Baltic's" seminar took place at the House of National Minorities in Vilnius in 2009.



Vilnius University Students' Representation

Presentation by Domininkas Jakaitis, representative

Vilnius University Students' Representation (VU SR) is a public non-governmental non-political organisation representing the students of Vilnius University.

The mission of VU SR is to represent and protect academic, social, and cultural rights and interests of the students of Vilnius University both within and outside the University.

VU SR is a member of Northern and Baltic States' universities student self-government conference, Union of Vilnius Youth Organisations, Erasmus Student Network and Politea - an international network promoting youth involvement in active social life.

The programme “Without Labels”

In 2009, VU SR started a new program Without Labels. The main aim of it is to promote toleration within University, fight against any kind of discrimination (xenophobia, homophobia, racism, etc.), promote gender equality, etc.

The main partners are Association of Tolerant Youth, Human Rights Monitoring Institute, National Social Integration Institute.

The methods of achieving aims are communication with young people, carrying out social events concerning main topics of the project, promotion of tolerance and anti-racism.

Vilniaus universitetas Kultūrinių bendrijų studijų centras



Vilnius University Center for Stateless Cultures

Presentation by Grigorijus Potašenko, director

The Center for Stateless Cultures at Vilnius University is perhaps the world's first university center dedicated exclusively to cultures that have no army or navy, no military power or sovereign status anywhere on earth.

The Center was founded in 1999 as a joint venture between Vilnius University (the oldest in Eastern Europe) and the Open Society Foundation of Lithuania.

The biggest attention is paid on Lithuanian Tatar, Karaim, Old Believers, Roma and Yiddish cultures.

The main aims of the Centre are:

- To create proper educational programs to study these ethnical groups
- Initiate and carry out regional interdisciplinary projects
- To acquaint community with result of the research
- Promote international communication on topic of cultural communities studies

The Center is dedicated to establishing serious programs of academic study, research and training.

Every academic year since 1999 the Center for Stateless Cultures is offering university accredited courses in five stateless cultures that have a long and proud tradition over large areas of Europe that cut boldly across the political and military frontiers of the past and present. All five are native to the Vilnius area. Each course is the nucleus of an evolving PROGRAM dedicated to the relevant culture, in some cases linked to wider disciplines.



Naujoji Vilnia Culture Centre

Presentation by Irina Budko, Programme Coordinator, Youth's Initiatives' Club

Naujoji Vilnia Culture Centre implement culture policy of Vilnius City in accordance with the City Strategic Plan and its priorities as well as represent culture in local, national and international projects, festivals and other events.

The community of Naujoji Vilnia is multicultural. Apart from Lithuanians Russian and Polish national minorities play an important role. Concerning the fact Naujoji Vilnia Culture Centre is involved not only in the development of Lithuanian stage arts (dance, video, music) but in the stage arts of other nations as well.

Naujoji Vilnia Culture Centre implements socialisation policy of children, youth and all other community members with the choreography and other stage arts being the basis for it. That is the language of the dance, which unites the multicultural society into a unanimous community and is comprehensible for all the nations.

Mission of Naujoji Vilnia Culture Centre is to enrich public life, to bring together representatives of various creative activities, to involve the society into creative world and to develop leisure culture.

Naujoji Vilnia Culture Centre aid young people to realise their culture and leisure needs by providing the following services:

- promotion of the culture and customs of Lithuanian nation as well as other nations and countries;
- promotion and development of art amateurs' movement;
- taking care of citizens' culture recreation and entertainment as means of satisfying human leisure needs.

Naujoji Vilnia Culture Centre is gaining the trust and respect of the community every year over and over. The significance of the institutions is justified by active involvement of the citizens into mass events and cultural activities which are complemented by the variety of styles and genres of amateur arts groups: workshops (choreography, music, theatre), clubs (amateurs of stage arts and sports), amateur arts groups representing diverse cultures of the city and classes (the piano, the accordion, the English language).

The project "Minority in Majority"

The project related with national minorities and majorities is called "Minority in Majority". Young people (16-25 years), representing ethnic minorities in six EU's big cities (Birmingham, Antwerp, Vilnius, The Hague, Liepaja and Riga), took part in Vilnius, 2011 February 5-14.

The exchange program theme was the integration of young immigrants and the preservation of national identity in the big European city.

The main axis of the project is a role game, consistent with the main theme and adopted for children and youngsters. The game challenged conversation about cross-cultural differences, promoted discusses the situation, provoked to share views. A role game was the basic technique to this meeting.



Participants also were involved in different workshops where they taught each other ethnic and youth games and crafts. This was one of the “homework” that each group prepared in advance.

Of course, the participants were acquainted with Lithuanian national minorities and their opportunities for self-expression and the Lithuanian context.

An integral part of the project was the artistic side of working methods - musical accompaniment, songs or choreographic elements or the musical instruments used. Therefore, the games (or rounds) and songs used during an exchange program appeared in the final show.

Conclusions

In a total population of the country only about 16,6 % of the people do not have a Lithuanian background.

The share of minority population is the smallest in comparison with Estonia and Latvia.

Lithuania avoided two sharp issues: non-citizenship and lack of knowledge of Lithuanian. All population automatically received citizenship after Lithuania restored its independence in 1991.

The legislation preserving rights of national majorities in Lithuania: the Lithuanian constitution, the Law on the State Language, the Law on Citizenship, the Law on Education, the Law on Equal Opportunities. Nonetheless, national minorities still need new Law on Ethnic Minorities – the old one is invalid now.

Processes of integration, discrimination, rights of national minorities and immigrants as well as cultural identity are controlled by the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania (Seimas), Ministry of Culture, and local government administrations. These organizations have special departments, committees, sections appointed to the human rights, national minorities.

Although fighting racism and discrimination had never been a priority in the governments political agenda, due to pressure from international organisations, it was at least present.

Specialized organizations (culture centres of different nationalities) create conditions for different national minorities to save their culture, traditions, national identity. The main financial sources of these organizations are governmental programs for national minorities coordinated by Ministry of Culture or local governmental administrations.

As in Latvia and Estonia school curriculum in Lithuania also do not include any anti-discrimination or anti-racist subjects.

Despite the fact of existence of cultural organizations for minorities there are only few non-governmental organizations which are engaged in racist, discrimination and minorities issues on professional basis.