

HATE SPEECH AND EUROSCEPTICISM

IN LITHUANIA

NATIONAL REPORT

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2022



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The research is conducted in the framework of the project “Active European Citizens Against Hate Speech”. The aim of the project is to raise awareness of the new generation of European citizens about the impact of hate speech on democratic participation and European values. The project is implemented by the “Latvian Centre for Human Rights” (project coordinator), “Participation for All” (Latvia), “Estonian Human Rights Centre”, “Human Rights Monitoring Institute” (Lithuania), “Multi Kulti Collective” (Bulgaria), “Human Rights House Zagreb” (Croatia), “Peace Action Training and Research Institute of Romania - PATRIR”. The project is co-funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia.

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FOREWARD

The following national report presents, in detail, the findings of a research undertaken in six EU member states - Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania.

Hate speech is often used as a tool to target different vulnerable groups, especially minorities, immigrants and refugees. It causes their alienation and exclusion which leads to marginalisation. Such narratives weaken democracy and strengthen the positions of far right and radical right populists and Eurosceptics. Each national report aims to analyse the hate speech phenomenon in the six participating countries and looks at the links between Euroscepticism and hate speech. The authors of the reports map the levels of intolerance and hate speech among the general population and young people in particular. The reports analyse the policies and law that address hate speech, outline trends, targets, and the actors of hate speech. The reports map the presence of Euroscepticism in each country, its forms, public attitudes and actors, and outline parallels between Eurosceptic discourse and incitement to hatred. The reports also map different initiatives which can be seen as constructive practice in the fight against hate speech and different forms of intolerance. Each report ends with conclusions and recommendations on measures for combating hate speech.

All reports are based on desk research of existing data, reports and research about intolerance, hate speech and Euroscepticism, analysis of relevant political documents, programmes of political parties, and media sources. The desk research is complemented by semi-structured interviews with representatives of NGOs working with youth and vulnerable groups and a survey of young people aged 16-25 on their experiences of hate speech.

The research “Hate Speech and Euroscepticism” was conducted in the framework of the project “Active European Citizens Against Hate Speech”, co-funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia. The aim of the project is to raise awareness among the new generation of European citizens, about the impact of hate speech on democratic participation and European values. The project consortium comprises the following organisations:

- [Latvian Centre for Human Rights](#) (Project Coordinator, Latvia),
- [Network “Participation for All”](#) (Latvia),
- [Estonian Human Rights Centre](#) (Estonia)
- [Human Rights Monitoring Institute](#) (Lithuania),
- [Multi Kulti Collective](#) (Bulgaria),
- [Human Rights House Zagreb](#) (Croatia),
- [Peace Action Training and Research Institute of Romania - PATRIR](#) (Romania).

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Introduction

The aim of this study is to research the relationship and possible overlap between hate speech and Euroscepticism in Lithuania. The time frame is the last 10 years (2010 - 2020). However, some events from 2021, that were relevant for the research, were also included.

Hate speech is understood as “the advocacy, promotion or incitement of the denigration, hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatization or threat of such person or persons and any justification of all these forms of expression - that is based on (...) “race”, colour, language, religion or belief, nationality or national or ethnic origin, as well as descent, age, disability, sex, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation”¹. It is an affront to European values.

Euroscepticism is formed from the different visions of Lithuania’s integration into the European Union and differing evaluations of the development of the EU. However, as Ingrida Unikaitė-Jakulevičienė (2014) sums up in her study “Eurosceptics in Lithuania: On the Margins of Politics”, “Euroscepticism might be not only opposition to the EU as a supranational organisation but also a critique of some developments, integration processes, policies, etc.”² One of its possible manifestations is a critique or rejection of some European values which are human dignity, freedom, democracy, rule of law, human rights and equality. It is in this manifestation that there might an overlap between Euroscepticism and hate speech.

The following Lithuanian case analysis is based on a review of the institutional responses to hate speech, analysis of the most targeted groups and of the actors spreading discriminatory and hateful content. The second part of the research is focused on the forms and manifestations of Euroscepticism in Lithuania.

The report uses the results of research based on qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The basic methods are a desk research, qualitative interviews, and a survey of young people. The desk research involved document analysis (academic publications, international and national reports, policy documents, political party agenda’s), articles in the media, opinions posted on social media, and relevant statistics. The desk research was conducted before the interviews or the survey in order to identify the main issues and stakeholders. In all, 7 qualitative semi-structured

¹ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. (2016), ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on Combating Hate Speech, adopted on 8th December 2015, ECRI Council of Europe, Strasbourg. p9.

² Unikaitė-Jakuntaviciene, I. (2014), Eurosceptics in Lithuania: On the Margins of Politics?, European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities. 3(4), 1-21. p3.

interviews were conducted: 1 with a policy maker, 2 with representatives of NGOs working on hate speech, 3 with young people from the groups targeted by hate speech (1 LGBTQI+ person, 1 Jewish person and 1 Syrian refugee), and with 1 person who works in the Jewish community but is not of the Jewish descent. Quantitative data has been used for the overview of social distance in Lithuanian society, as well as public opinion analysis of Euroscepticism and the analysis of the results of elections. Moreover, the survey of the young people (16-25 years of age) explored their attitudes to hate speech. It was conducted twice for technical reasons and altogether 189 people took part.

1. Hate Speech

1.1 Legal Regulation and a Definition of Hate Speech

The Lithuanian Constitution explicitly provides for the ban on hate speech. Paragraph 4 of Article 25 of the Constitution states that “freedom to express convictions and to impart information shall be incompatible with criminal actions - incitement of national, racial, religious, or social hatred, violence and discrimination, with slander and disinformation”³ Furthermore, the Lithuanian Constitution establishes the principle of everyone’s equality before the law.⁴ This principle is important in the context of hate speech because hate speech directly violates the principle of equality before the law, as it places the individual from the minority group in an unfavourable position *vis a vis* the majority and infringes the rights of the affected individuals and / or groups because of their characteristics which are protected by the Constitution.

The spread of hate speech through public information channels is prohibited under the Law on Provision of Information to the Public. Moreover, in Lithuania, hate speech is not only prohibited but also criminalised as a crime against person’s equality before the law. Article 170 Paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code provides that “a person who publicly ridicules, expresses contempt for, urges hatred of or incites discrimination against a group of persons or a person belonging thereto on the grounds of age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, race, nationality, language, descent, social status, religion, convictions or views shall be punished by a fine or by restriction of liberty or by arrest or by a custodial sentence for a term of up to two years”⁵. Paragraph 3 of the same Article bans incitement to violence or a physical violent treatment of a group of persons or a person belonging thereto to the above mentioned groups.

Hence the prohibition of hate speech under Lithuanian criminal law is rather broad as it encompasses not only a ban on direct incitement to violence, but also public ridicule, expressions of contempt and incitement of discrimination of individuals and groups due to their protected characteristics.

³ The Republic of Lithuania. (1992), Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania. Government of Lithuania. Article 25, paragraph 4.

⁴ Article 29 provides that “[a]ll persons shall be equal before the law, the court, and other State institutions and officials. The rights of the human being may be not restricted, nor may he be granted any privileges on the ground of gender, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions, or views”.

⁵ The Republic of Lithuania. (2000), Law on the Approval and Entry into Force of the Criminal Code, Document No: VIII-1968, Article 170 Paragraph 2

The official definition of hate speech is provided in the Prosecutor General's 2020⁶ methodical recommendations on investigating hate crimes and hate speech. According to the recommendations, hate speech is public dissemination (oral, written or in other form) of information (ideas, opinions, knowingly false facts), which ridicules, expresses contempt, incites hatred, discrimination, violence and physical attacks towards a group of people or a person belonging to such group on the grounds of age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, faith, convictions or views. According to Paragraph 60 of the recommendation, publicity of hate speech is a mandatory element of the criminal act. It means that the hate speech has to be intended to reach and incite a certain circle of readers or listeners.

In February, 2021, the Minister of Justice, introduced an initiative to review the legislation on incitement to hatred and introduce changes in the Criminal Code and the Code of the Administrative Offences so that it would be possible to apply the administrative liability in the cases of hate speech that do not directly incite violence. Even though the draft law proposed to decriminalise some aspects of hate speech, it attracted a lot of negative media coverage as it was seen to be an encroachment on the freedom of expression (for example, Praleika 2021). The project was shelved on the 25 March (Dobrovolska 2021).

1.2 Policy Documents on Combating Hate Speech

One of the policy documents on combating hate speech in Lithuania is the Non-discrimination Action Plan 2021-2023⁷. However, although the document acknowledges the prevalence and negative effects hate speech has on vulnerable communities, it provides only two measures to combat negative social attitudes and strengthen institutional responses to hate speech and hate crime. The first measure is to conduct activities to increase the understanding of hate speech among the general public, however, this measure covers only one protected ground - nationality. According to indicators, only 20 persons per year are expected to participate in these awareness raising events. The second measure is to build the competences of police officers and police students to adequately respond to hate crimes, investigate such crimes and prevent them. However, no funding has been allocated to implement this measure.

⁶ Prosecutor General. (2020), Methodical recommendations on conducting, organising and managing pre-trial investigations into hate speech and hate crimes, No. 17.9-4265.

⁷ The Republic of Lithuania, Minister of the Social Security and Labour. (2020), Dėl Nėdiskriminavimo Skatinimo 2021-2023 Metų Veiksmų Plano Patvirtinimo [The approval of 2021-2023 action plan on promotion of non-discrimination].

Although both measures are important and relevant, they are definitely not sufficient to systematically respond to hate speech. For example, no measures have been foreseen to; encourage the reporting of hate speech, set up support services for victims of hate speech, introduce referral systems, conduct further research, raise public awareness and recognition of hate speech on all protected grounds, not only the grounds of nationality. Furthermore, the budget allocated for the implementation of the whole Action Plan is only 19 thousand euros per year, all of which is allocated to state institutions. This gives the impression that there is no serious political commitment to actually achieve any significant changes in this area.

The necessity to fight hate speech and hate crimes is also mentioned in the 2015-2025 Programme for Development of Public Security. It is stated in the Programme that because of migration, the number of persons of different race, nationality, religion and language, are and will continue to increase in the future in Lithuania. “With a purpose to prevent potential manifestations of xenophobia, discrimination and racism, including the incidents of violence, there is a need to foster society’s tolerance towards persons and groups of persons of other race, nationality, language, origin, religion or other, and implement effective punitive policy towards persons, inciting hatred or conducting acts of violence against such persons.”⁸ According to the Programme, it is necessary to ensure, that hatred related motives of criminal acts are revealed and taken into account during the whole criminal process. Therefore, one of the objectives of this Programme is to “prevent the spread of crimes committed that express hatred towards a group of persons or a person belonging to such group on the grounds of race, nationality, language, origin, religion, sexual orientation or other hateful motives”⁹. However, even though the Programme acknowledges the issue of hate speech and hate crimes, it provides only for general objectives in this area, without specifying the measures with which these objectives are to be achieved or the indicators for showing how the progress will be measured.

Hence overall, although policy documents distinguish hate speech and hate crimes as requiring an effective institutional response, the concrete measures are actually very scarce and there is a lack of any systemic, strategic approach to fighting hate speech and hate crimes. The lack of funding for such measures demonstrates insufficient political commitment and an incomplete understanding of the actual prevalence of these crimes and their effects on minority groups and society at large.

According to our interview with a policy maker, there is a lack of common understanding of the issue itself, a lack of cooperation among state institutions, and little strategic direction for working towards the same goal: “[...] in order to cooperate,

⁸ The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania. (2015), Nutarimas Dėl Viešojo Saugumo Plėtros 2015-2025 Metų Programos Patvirtinimo, [Ruling on Approval of the Public Security Development Program for 2015-2025].

⁹ *ibid.*

it is important that everybody had a common objective and the tasks to be implemented. One can call it a strategy where everybody would see their role in, objectives to reach... If we only concentrate on law enforcement and prosecution, of course, there will be some results, but it is important to have a more active prevention and education activities.”¹⁰ According to this policy maker, the Non-Discrimination Action Plan could be an example of how to have inter-institutional cooperation for tackling hate speech. However there is an outstanding question over which institution should take the leading role. According to the interviewee, there are some tasks there related to hate speech and hate crime prevention, but it would seem that currently the plan is more of a formality.

1.3 Statistics and Public Opinion Polls

According to the data of the official crime register, over the last decade the number of registered hate speech crimes has been steadily declining (ird 2021). In 2011, there were 328 crimes officially recorded, in 2017 - only 17.

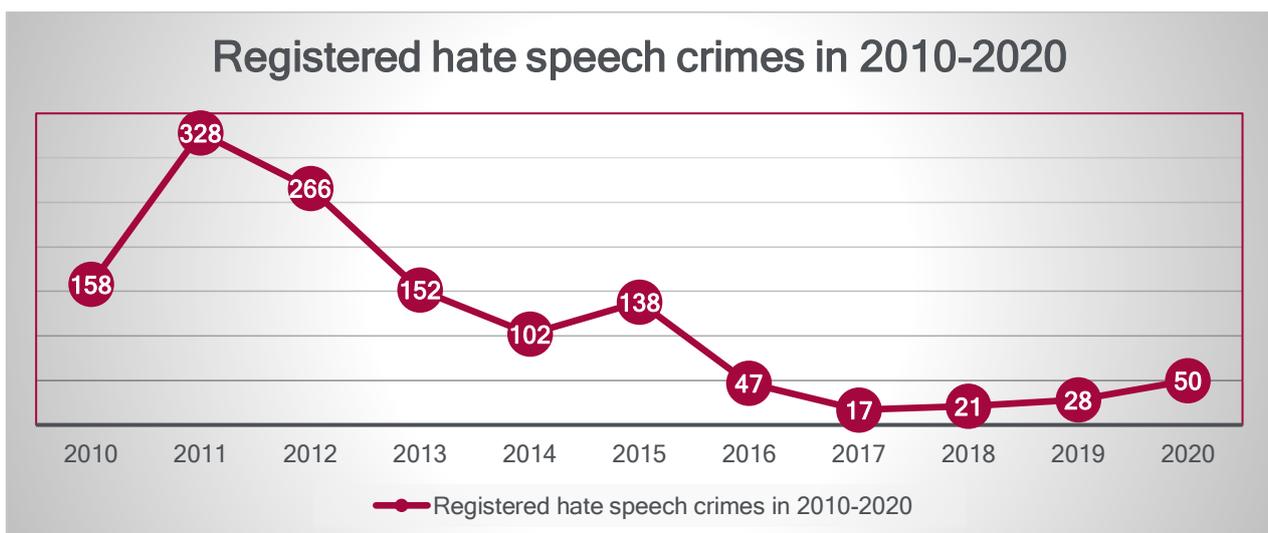


Chart No. 1. Registered hate speech crimes in 2010-2020 (ird 2021)

Since 2017, the number of recorded crimes has slightly increased but it is still very far from the numbers recorded at the beginning of the decade. It is important to note, that the recorded crimes do not reflect the actual prevalence of hate speech, this is due to low levels of reporting and a high number of refusals to initiate pre-trial investigations into the incidents of hate speech. The dynamics of registered crimes indicates a growing reluctance of law enforcement institutions to initiate pre-trial investigations into hate speech incidents.

¹⁰ HRMI interview with a policy maker, conducted on 23 July, 2021.

Similar trends can be identified whilst analysing the statistics of hate speech cases adjudicated by the courts. In 2011, there were 95 such cases adjudicated and in 2019, there were only 5 such cases were reviewed by the courts.

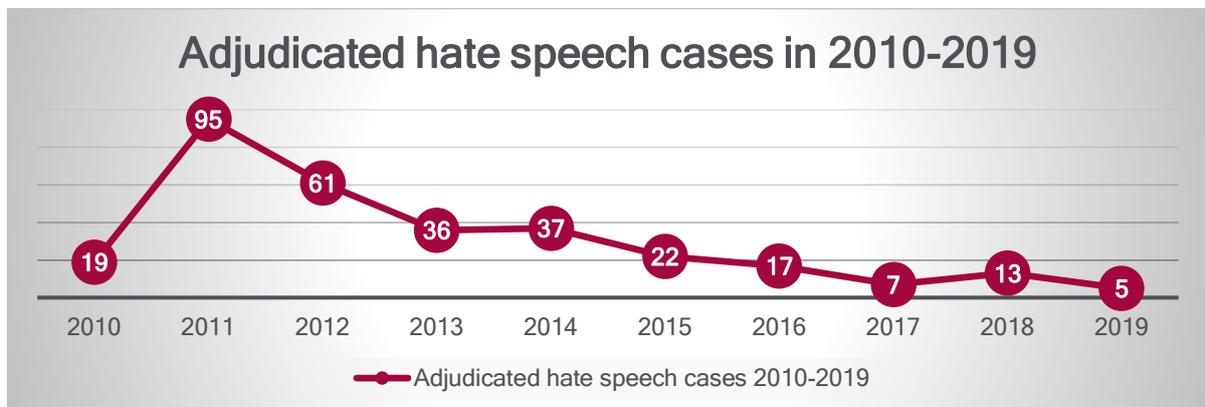


Chart No. 2. Hate speech cases adjudicated by courts in 2010-2019 (National Courts Administration, 2010-2019)

It is apparent that fewer and fewer hate speech incidents are prosecuted and taken up by the courts. For example, in 2019, 39 criminal investigations into hate speech incidents were discontinued on the grounds that no criminal activity had been committed, in 2020, 47 such investigations were discontinued and the cases never reached the courts (ird 2021). The overall statistics indicate that institutional responses to hate speech crimes suffer from systemic deficiencies and are therefore not effective given the actual prevalence of these crimes.

In October 2019, the European Foundation of Human Rights, a non-governmental organisation, commissioned a public opinion poll on hate crimes and hate speech (EFHR 2020). A total of 1,008 respondents from 18 to 75 years of age were surveyed. Almost 72% of the respondents claimed that they would report to law enforcement authorities if they were a victim of a hate crime; 64% stated that they have enough information / knowledge on hate crimes and hate speech, however, only 56% claimed that hate crimes are a serious problem in Lithuania. It was agreed by 70% of respondents that hate crimes against people because of their sexual orientation do exist in Lithuania; 60% claimed that hate crimes based on race exist in the country, while 53% agreed that nationality-based hate crimes exist. Only 32% agreed, however, that gender-based hate crimes exist in Lithuania. As regards the punishment for such offences, 49% of the respondents thought that a warning or administrative fine should be applied for online hate speech, 30% claimed that criminal responsibility should apply, while 21% thought that no responsibility should be applied to online hate speech. The respondents were able to recognise hate speech relatively well: 62% agreed that the online comment “And from me throw the brick to those LGBT ugly-faces, who advertise their perversion and who took away the rainbow from children”, was hate speech on the grounds of sexual orientation, whilst 62% agreed that the comment “Russians, go home!” was hate speech on the

grounds of nationality; 62% also agreed that the display of a swastika next to the building of a Jewish community amounts to hate speech. Hence the poll indicates that the relative majority of society believes hate speech and hate crimes do exist in Lithuania and are able to recognise hateful speech, however, only 30% think that criminal responsibility should be applied in cases of hate speech.

The general social context is also of relevance to hate speech, that is, whether the prevalent attitudes of society are negative and / or tense towards certain social groups. These attitudes can be derived from the so called social distance polls, which indicate the distance that the majority would like to maintain from mainly minority groups, for example, refusing to let a flat to the members of that group, live with them as neighbours or work in the same workplace.

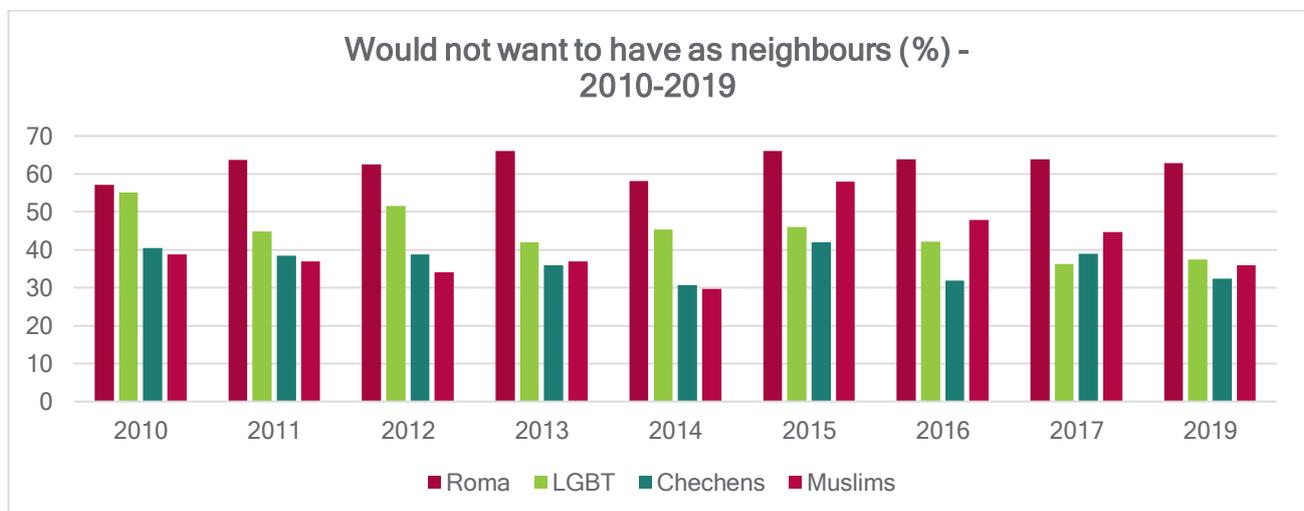


Chart No. 3. With which of the listed groups of people you would not want to live in the same neighbourhood? (LSRC 2019)

The overview of social distance polls over the last decade indicates that the groups most affected by this social distancing in Lithuania are Roma, people with psychosocial disabilities, former inmates, homosexuals, people of Chechen nationality and Muslims. Other groups that have been indicated as subject to social distancing were Jehovah witnesses, refugees, Pakistanis, Hindus and Buddhists, black people, Chinese, Jews, Kazakhs, and Turks. Over the decade, the negative attitudes towards the LGBTQIA+ community have somewhat decreased. The attitudes towards Muslims and Chechens have varied over this period, increasing substantially during 2015-2016 because of the European refugee crisis and terrorist attacks in different parts of Europe, and later returning to the pre-crisis levels. On the other hand, Roma people have always remained on the top of this list and the attitudes towards this group have not changed over the years.

The European refugee crisis had a significant effect on how Lithuanian society views refugees, and has substantially increased the intolerance level towards these

groups. In 2016 and 2017, refugees were one of the most unfavourably viewed social groups from the social distance perspective. In 2016, 45% of respondents indicated that they would not want to live with refugees in the same neighbourhood, whilst in 2017, 39% stated the same (compared, for example, with 31.6% in 2011). The majority of respondents would disagree or rather disagree that Muslim climate change refugees (66% in 2016, 68% in 2017) and Muslim war refugees (64% in 2016 and 2017) should be allowed to come to Lithuania. A slightly lower percentage disagreed that labour migrants from outside of the EU and political refugees should be allowed to come to Lithuania (respectively 53% and 52%). More tolerant were views towards Christian refugees - 55% in 2016 and 56% in 2017 agreed that they should be able to come to Lithuania. The vast majority of respondents believed that refugees could increase the level of criminality in Lithuania (83% in 2016, 80% in 2017) and that refugees could cause social unrest in Lithuania (80% in 2016, 74% in 2017).

As it is evident from the opinion polls, the refugee crisis highlighted or even increased unfavourable views of Lithuanian society towards refugees, especially towards those of a different religion.

1.4 Groups affected by hate speech

In 2019, the Ministry of Internal Affairs commissioned a qualitative research “Hate Crimes Against Vulnerable Communities, Qualitative Research Report”(Labanauskas 2019). The research investigated the effects of hate speech and hate crimes on vulnerable groups such as the Lithuanian Roma community, Lithuanian Jewish community, LGBTQIA+, Muslims and people of other races.¹¹ It aimed to assess the extent of and the reasons for non-reporting, and to establish the support and protection needs of these more vulnerable communities. A total of 84 respondents were interviewed. The research found that potential hate crime incidents encompass a wide spectre of experiences, from verbal insults (insults can also mean comments) to physical attacks. Verbal insults were found to be the most frequent form of hate incidents. The research also revealed that the more visible the person’s identity (ethnicity, religious clothing, gender expression), the higher the possibility of them becoming a victim of verbal or physical aggression. The interviewees encountered hate speech and hate crimes in schools, universities, public institutions, social circles, public spaces, the media, and online. According to the data from the research, it can be concluded that the number of hate crime incidents is higher than officially reported. The research also found that because of a low level of trust in law enforcement responses to hate speech and hate crime, the

¹¹ The vulnerable groups chosen for this overview are the ones which are subject to the most hatred inciting comments online, according to the data gathered over the years by European Foundation of Human Rights.

affected members of these groups most often turned for support to their families, friends or communities.

The research report concluded that Roma people are the most vulnerable to hate speech and hate crimes because of the community's marginalisation and widespread stigmatisation. Roma encounter comments of a discriminative and insulting nature even when turning to various institutions for services, for example, hospitals, municipalities, and job services.

Hate crimes and hate speech have major negative effects on Roma people. In public places they feel tense, fearful and unsafe (especially women) and feel like worthless members of society (this is extremely hurtful to men). The Roma community also displayed the least amount of trust in law enforcement institutions and rarely if ever report incidents. The Roma community believes that the police have negative attitudes towards them and they are afraid that they themselves will be blamed for the incident; they also do not expect the offender to be found and punished. Another hindrance to reporting is the lack of education among the Roma community and a low level of awareness of their rights and legal proceedings.

Another group affected by discriminative and hateful attitudes and incidents is the Lithuanian Jewish community. Typical situations include "innocent" jokes, verbal comments, observations, bullying, stereotyping, also anti-Semitic articles and comments on the internet and social networks. According to the interviewees, anti-Semitic jokes and stereotypes are a part of their daily lives. The interviewees also emphasised about the amount of information spread by hate groups and the activities of neo-Nazis, for example, vandalising places of importance to Jews. According to the interviewees, the majority of the hateful speech is spread through media channels and online; the numerous anti-Semitic comments in the media and on social networks could be described as "an ocean of hatred". The activities of organised hate groups are also being considered by the research subjects as a constant threat to the Jewish community. As a consequence of widespread stereotyping and hateful attitudes, some of the interviewees claimed they try to hide their identity from outsiders. Some also feel helpless and believe that this problem cannot be solved: "I think that anti-Semitism in Lithuania has been entrenched for ages". However, younger interviewees are more active in responding to the incidents of hatred and in taking some kind of action.

In terms of reporting, the association "Lithuanian Jewish Community", is active in reporting various incidents, but the community members themselves rarely report or ask for help. This is because it is painful to talk openly about these issues and the members of the community do not want additional attention because of the incidents. Some do not know where and how to report, do not trust law enforcement, and fear retaliation or secondary victimisation from police officers; they believe that police

officers lack the competences to investigate hate speech and hate crimes. The interviewees also claimed they lack the necessary support to go through the legal proceedings, as it is unlikely to expect that the Lithuanian Jewish community would be able to solve these problems on its own. To improve institutional response to hate speech and hate crimes, the interviewees suggested the designation of specialised police officers to investigate such incidents, better police protection of objects of importance to the Jewish community as well as raising awareness in society through fostering intercultural contacts and especially investing in the education of young people.

Another of the most vulnerable communities in terms of hate speech and hate crimes in Lithuania is LGBTQIA+ community. The research indicates that the majority of the members of this community seek to be unrecognisable and invisible. This need stems from the prevalent of negative attitudes and prejudices of the majority of society towards this particular group. Therefore, the LGBTQIA+ community tends to live in a “social bubble” and distrusts outsiders. The interviewees claimed that they are most hurt by degrading and insulting comments spread by public figures, in the media, online, and through social networks. This group also experiences negative attitudes expressed towards them by their families and close relatives. They also often encounter institutional discrimination and harassment, for example, in the workplace. Especially vulnerable to verbal and physical attacks are transgender people as it is more difficult for them to hide their identity. The research also found that the more open and visible members of LGBTQIA+ community are, the more vulnerable they are to verbal insults and even physical attacks.

Most of the interviewees claimed that they would report to the police physical hatred motivated attacks, but are inclined to ignore verbal insults, they minimise them and state that they have no time to report such incidents. The interviewees claimed that it is impossible to report every incident and it is not clear how they would be assessed, therefore they share the experiences of the insults and hurtful speech only with their closest friends and relatives who understand them. They also turn for support to other members of LGBTQIA+ community. Some choose not to report to the police because they believe that their complaints would not be taken seriously by the police officers and are also wary of police officers’ potential homophobic and contemptuous attitudes towards them; some think the police lack the competences to investigate such incidents and doubt whether the offenders will be punished. The interviewees claim that to improve law enforcement’s response to hate speech and hate crimes, it is necessary to increase their sensitivity to LGBTQIA+ issues as well as a demonstration from the leadership in the law enforcement ranks in expressing public support for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Another group affected by hate speech and hate crimes in Lithuania are Muslims and people of other races. This group is mainly comprised of refugees, immigrants and

foreign students. Although the interviewees claim that the majority of the Lithuanian population is friendly, “there are people who very much dislike those who came from other countries”. Therefore Muslims and people of other races feel disliked and segregated from society. Students from other countries claim that they experience isolation and segregation in universities, because Lithuanian students would not interact with them and exclude them from group activities. Muslim interviewees claimed that they encounter verbal insults and mean comments, equating them with terrorists.

Muslims and people of other races, especially men, are very vulnerable in public places. The interviewees talked about verbal assaults, threats using a gun, fights on the street, and physical injuries (stabbed with a knife). People of other races are also becoming victims in public transport and places of public services - shops, bars, and restaurants. One interviewee recalled that, whilst on the bus, someone threatened him and said: “Čiurka, go away from here”.¹² Muslims and people of other races also shared about encountering incidents of institutional discrimination and negative stereotyping from public officials. Interviewees claimed that such incidents cause tension and fear, which in turn causes them to hide their identity as much as possible whilst in public spaces, for example, women do not wear hijab but cover their heads with smaller headwear, whilst Muslim men and men of other races remain always “vigilant” whilst in public.

Research data shows that when encountering hate related incidents, Muslims and people of other races usually turn only to their friends and relatives. Reporting to the police is aggravated by the language barrier and the lack of evidence, as well as any legal knowledge. Some feel lost in a foreign country and do not know where they can report or where they can turn for support. Some distrust the police and believe that the police would side with the local offenders. However, when asked what are their main needs in cases of hate speech and hate crime incidents, the interviewees claimed that they need more information on how to report such incidents and defend their rights.

The interviews with representatives from vulnerable groups, conducted in the course of this research, reveal similar experiences with hate speech. As one interviewee of a Syrian origin explained, after an interview with him was published on an online news portal, he was shocked at the amount of hate speech he received: “(...) the hate speech I experienced under that article was really killing, that would kill all your vibes inside you for any initiative others may take of any efforts you may take yourself to base yourself in the country.” He reports to the social media administrators the harshest comments. “If I want to help this country to get better, I need to do this. (...) and it also feels bad. Because it curbs their freedom of speech. (...) But it [hate

¹² “Čiurka” is a degrading description for people usually of Asian descent.

speech] triggers something inside the others and encourages others to say the same, so I have to report that.”

Another interviewee, a Jewish person, has experienced hate speech personally, however, only as a young boy. “If I take my all life, then 95 percent of all the comparisons related to race happened in childhood from very young people. (...) The race was never described, it was used as something bad. Nobody said something like: “Oh, a Jew who steals money”, they just used the word “Jew” and it was imagined that this word itself was a bad word. (...) It did not affect me, because this “insult” did not have any reason, excuse and did not reach the target.”

The interview with a person from the LGBTQIA+ community also confirms that LGBTQIA+ persons are one of the groups most affected by hate speech in Lithuania: “I have personally experienced hate speech and not just once. And not only against me, but the LGBTQIA+ people in general. As we know hate speech against LGBTQIA+ is directed against all the group because of belonging to that group. As I work in the media, I quite often find myself at the centre of attention. So there are comments that are very close to the threshold of the Criminal Code: about the killing, torture, these people need to be treated, etc...”

To summarise, all the researched groups shared somewhat similar experiences with regards to hate speech, encountering insulting and degrading comments and other verbal assaults in various spheres and through various channels. Some claimed that the verbal insults are part of their daily experience. Degrading and discriminative attitudes are also encountered in various institutional settings, such as workplaces, educational institutions, and governmental services. Hate speech and hate crimes have a considerable negative effect on the vulnerable communities, forcing their members to hide their identity from the outsiders and live in their own “bubble”. Reporting to the police is often viewed as futile, as most of the interviewees believe that the police are either not competent enough to respond to such incidents, will not take them seriously, will display similar negative attitudes as the majority of society or will even engage in victim-blaming. However, the interviewees claimed they wanted more information on how to report and on the relevant legal proceedings to better defend their rights, and emphasised the need for specialised police officers, sensitivity training for law enforcement, and the raising of awareness and educating of law enforcement personnel - as well as society at large.

1.5 Attitudes of Young People Towards Hate Speech in Lithuania: Results of the Survey

In order to get an insight about the attitudes of young people (16-25) towards hate speech in Lithuania, a survey “What do you know about hate speech in Lithuania?” was developed. The survey was published on the Human Rights Monitoring Institute’s Facebook page (HRMI 2021), requesting young people to fill it in. However, it received many negative comments. One of the followers shared the post in various other Facebook groups¹³ where people usually post about the traditional family, as an opposition to the LGBTQIA+ community, also against vaccination and, in the summer of 2021, messages directed against migrants¹⁴. In a shared post, the person invited people to participate in the survey and pretend to be youth and so “help Europe to understand that in Lithuania such novelty as “hate speech” does not exist”. See the screenshot below:

¹³ For example, the post was shared on the group Stop LGBT propaganda Lithuania (Stop LGBT propaganda Lietuva, 8.3 thousand members), United Parents II (Vieningi tėvai II, 41 thousand members), “Movement of Lithuanian Families” (Lietuvos Šeimų Sąjūdis, 33.8 thousand members)

¹⁴ In summer 2021, Lithuania saw a significant increase in migrants from neighboring Belarus. In September, 2021, more than 4,100 migrants entered Lithuania illegally from neighbouring Belarus. The rise in illegal crossings started in June after the EU imposed sanctions on Belarus's authoritarian leader, Alexander Lukashenko. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-58255448>. Due to the rise of migrants, one could notice also the rise in negative comments against them.

VIENINGI TĖVAI II

Gabija Ir Marius V bendrino įrašą.
Liepos 3 d., 20:37 · 🌐

Gal reiktų Europai padėti suprasti, jog Lietuvoj neegzistuoja "neapykantos kalbos" naujadaras? Kviečiu pabūti dvidešimtmečiais, pasakyti savo poziciją.

Ką žinote apie neapykantos kalbą Lietuvoje?

What do You know about hate speech in Lithuania?

Žmogaus teisių stebėjimo institutas
Liepos 2 d., 10:05 · 🌐

Jei jums nuo 16 iki 25 metų, kviečiame sudalyvauti apklausoje apie neapykantos kalbą Lietuvoje! Apklausa yra anoniminė ir anketos pildymas tetruks apie 5 minutes. Mes labai vertiname Jūsų atsakymus ir skirtą laiką!

👉 Anketą lietuvių kalba rasite čia:
<https://forms.gle/st1gxw6zJQTJ2Nou5>

Daugiau apie projektą, kuriam bus naudojami apklausos rezultatai, rasite čia: <http://hrmi.lt/aktyvus-europos-pilieciai-pries.../>

If you are 16-25 years old, we invite you to fill out this survey about hate speech in Lithuania. The survey is anonymous and will take around 5 minutes to fill out. We appreciate your time and responses!

👉 Survey in English is available at
<https://forms.gle/bBwViS5ZrQujxsXw9>

This survey is in the framework of implementation of the project Active European Citizens against Hate Speech. For more information <http://hrmi.lt/.../active-european-citizens-against-hate.../>

In the proceeding 2 days after it was published, the HRMI received 114 responses to the survey, and, after noticing that some responses were bordering on incitement to hatred, the survey was closed (hereafter, Survey No1). Based on the answers, the respondents' ages were between 15 and 68. 69 (60.5%) were women, 41 (36%) were male and 4 (3.5%) stated other. The survey was repeated, but this time it was distributed via email to youth organisations, universities and NGOs working on various human rights issues. This time 75 people participated in the survey (Survey No2): 52 women and 23 men, aged 16 - 24.

As the Survey No1 is an interesting example of hate speech spreaders' participation, it was decided to overview the results of both surveys and compare them.

Is It a Problem?

In Survey No1, 52 respondents (45.6%) did not think that hate speech is a problem in Lithuania, 12 (10.5%) said that it is a small problem, while 19 (16.7%) indicated that it is a problem, and 31 (27.2%) stated that it is a serious problem. Of those who answered that it is not a problem, 39 respondents (58.2%) thought that freedom of

speech should never be restricted, while 17 (25.4%) said that they do not know any people who have experienced hate speech. The same amount of people answered that they feel that Lithuanian society is very tolerant.

The results of Survey No2 were quite different. The majority of the survey participants, 40 respondents (53.3%) agreed that hate speech is a serious problem in Lithuania, while 26 (34.7%) answered that it is a problem, 7 (9.3%) said that it is a small problem, and only 2 (2.7 %) answered that it is not a problem at all.

In this question one may find the main divergence between the surveys, as the majority respondents (56%) in Survey No1, think that hate speech is either not a problem at all or a small problem, while in Survey No2 the majority of respondents (88 %) think that it is either a problem or a serious problem.

Targeted groups

The results of Survey No1 show that, according to the respondents, the most affected groups by hate speech in Lithuania are LGBTQIA+ community (52 or 45.6% of respondents chose this option), followed by people with disabilities (38 respondents or 33.3%), “people with a darker skin” and Roma community (both named by 37 respondents (32.5%). 36 respondents (31.6%) also indicated asylum seekers/refugees. 32 (28.1%) marked Muslims, 22 (19.3%) stated women, 20 people (17.5%) named Jews and Roma people, 14 (12.3%) elderly people, 13 (11.4%) representatives of other religions, and 7 (6.1%) marked that Christians were among the most targeted groups by hate speech.

While answering this question 18 people (15.8%) also wrote “none”, which was not an option in the survey. Some of the respondents somehow managed to include their answers as additional options that were visible to other people or they repeated the same coordinated answer, or it is possible the same people were answering from different google accounts. Among those created options was the phrase that hate speech is targeting “people who are nurturing traditional values” (25 or 21.9% of respondents marked this option). 18 respondents (15.8%) wrote that “people with traditional views completely lost the freedom of speech. Everything is allowed only for LGBTQIA+. We do not feel like people with all rights. Contrary, we feel we are humiliated and belittled.”

In the Survey No2 the absolute majority (74, or 98.7%) answered that the LGBTQIA+ community is among the most targeted groups by hate speech, 60 (80%) said that it is people with darker skin, 52 (69.3%) stated Muslims, 49 (65.3%) immigrants, 49 (65.3%) people with disabilities, 45 (60%) Roma people, 45 (60%) asylum seekers / refugees, 34 (45.3%) women, 29 (38.7%) other national minorities, 23 (30.7%)

representatives of other religions, 22 (29.3%) Jewish people, 9 (12%) elderly people, 5 (6.7%) Christians, 1 (1.3%) wrote “men”, and 1 (1.3 %) wrote “Polish, Russians”.

Therefore, there are some overlaps between the participants in both surveys. The most targeted group in both surveys is named as the LGBTQIA+ community. The other groups do not line up in the same order, but the respondents in both surveys agree that “people with a darker skin”, Muslims, Roma people, people with disabilities, and asylum seekers / refugees are among those most targeted groups.

Places for Hate Speech to Spread

The answers to the question where the respondents mostly heard or saw hate speech during the last year did not differ significantly between two surveys, therefore the results of Survey No2 will be used. Most often people spotted hate speech on social media (73 people or 97.3% chose this option), followed by public places, streets, shops, public transport (67 respondents or 89.3%), 42 (56%) said that they heard it among their friends and colleagues, 31 (41.3%) stated at educational establishments, 25 (33.3%) said on television, 12 (16%) on the radio, 6 (8%) said that they saw it in the newspapers, 1 person answered “at home” and 1 person said that they have never seen or heard hate speech.

The most common social media networks, where the respondents noticed hate speech, were Facebook - 65 (89%), followed by Instagram and TikTok - 36 (49.3%) and YouTube - 32 (43.8%), followed by news sites - 30 (41.1%), internet forums - 29 (39.7%), Twitter - 11 (15.1%), and “other platforms” were marked by 8 people (11%).

Frequency of Hate Speech

The results about the frequency of hate speech in the respondents’ lives shows that hate speech is quite a common phenomenon. In Survey No1, 38 respondents (33%) answered that they encounter hate speech every day, 30 (26.3%) said every week, 21 (18.4%) stated rarely, 12 (10.5%) several times a month, and 18 (15.8%) chose the option “never”.

In Survey No2, 34 people (45.3%) indicated that they hear or see hate speech every week, 23 (30.7%) chose the answer “several times a month”, 15 (20%) said that they see or hear hate speech every day, and 6 people (8%) answered “rarely”, nobody marked the option “never”.

Causes and Actors of Hate Speech

In Survey No1, among the causes of hate speech, 67 (58.8%) indicated that hate speech is caused by some politicians, 49 (43%) by peoples’ prejudices, 41 (36%) by a lack of understanding about the harm of hate speech, 33 (28.9%) answered that some people do not respect European and democratic values, and 29 (25.4%) said

that there are not enough reactions or sanctions against hate speech. Among the answers that were not included in the survey, in Survey No1, some answers also revealed that to some people spreading hate speech is simply about having a different opinion, 37 respondents (32.5%) wrote that hate speech is caused by the fact that “such minorities as LGBTQIA+ impose their ideology and call us homophobes if we have our own opinion”. 32 (28%) also answered that “hate speech is a novelty invention, by the means of which they want to lock us, young people, in a prison of censorship.” 16 people (14%) mentioned that the causes of hate speech are “political aspirations”, and 10 (8.8%) stated that there are no reasons for hate speech.

The majority of respondents (63 or 55.3%) believe that hate speech is mostly spread by the anonymous online commentators. 62 (54.4%) said “politicians”, 52 (45.6%) answered that most hate spreaders are “public figures”, 43 (37.7%) blamed “journalists”, 14 (12.3%) said relatives or friends, 11 (9.6%) said colleagues, and 9 (7.9%) pointed to NGOs. Among the additional answers, there were 40 responses (35.1%) that said it is LGBTQIA+ community itself, 16 (14%) blamed liberals, and 10 (8.8%) said it was the Jews. There were also 3 responses indicating that people provoke hate speech directed at them: “people mock themselves, for example, with their appearance or behaviour, and then later they whine that somebody reacted to them improperly, or said something offensive.”

In Survey No2, the majority of respondents - 70 (93.3%) thought that people’s prejudices cause hate speech, 57 (76%) said there is a lack of understanding about the harm of hate speech, 49 (65.3%) thought that “many people do not respect European or democratic values”, 39 of the respondents (52%) answered that the hate speech is promoted by some politicians and that there is not enough reaction or sanctions against it, while 34 people (45.3%) answered that “there are many radical groups in society”. The respondents also mentioned the problem of education, and one person specified that, “a lot of people do not understand what hate speech is. For example, they sincerely think that the refugees are evil, crooks and so on. Therefore, I would say, that it is a question of education, irresponsible media, segregation in society (a lot of people do not know any black people (...), but they have an opinion about them)”.

The majority of respondents (74 or 98.7%) said that hate speech is mostly spread by the anonymous online commentators. 44 (58.7%) answered that most hate spreaders are “public figures”, 33 (44%) said politicians. 22 (29.3%) mentioned that their “relatives or friends” are engaging in the spreading of hate speech, 17 (22.7%) chose “journalists”, 10 (13.3%) said their colleagues, and 6 (8%) blamed businesspeople. 1 person answered that no one is spreading hate speech, 1 also wrote as their answer that it is “older people”, while the other also included “teachers, professors and others giving some lectures”.

While in Survey No1, the majority of respondents blame some politicians for inciting hate speech, 52% of Survey No2 respondents agreed with that, but they also chose several other options like the prejudices that some people hold, lack of understanding about the harm of hate speech, and a lack of respect for European values. Concerning the actors of hate speech, one can draw similar conclusions from both surveys. The majority of respondents of both surveys agree that most hate speech is spread by anonymous online commentators. However, they also agree that it is done by various public figures, especially politicians.

Personal Experience

The majority of people (58 or 50.9%) who participated in Survey No1 answered that they had never experienced hate speech themselves, while 46 (40.4%) said that they had, and 10 (8.8%) answered that they did not know if they had. However, 50 respondents (43.9%) indicated that their close people (family members, friends, classmates or colleagues) were the targets of hate speech.

While asked to specify what was the pretext for the hate speech they experienced, 66 people answered the question, but only few of the answers were related to protected characteristics (15 or 22.7% chose “gender”, 12 (18.2%) sexual orientation, 10 (15.2%) age, 7 (10.6%) religion, 6 (9.1%) nationality, 5 (7.6%) language, 4 (6.1%) race / skin colour, and 2 (3%) marked “disability” and “gender identity”. However, there were some additional answers and 23 respondents (34.8%) said “appearance”, 21 (31.8%) “because I am for traditional values”, and 7 (10.6%) stated it was because of their political views. There were also people who specified that they had experienced hate speech because they liked people of the opposite sex.

In Survey No2, 36 (48%) people answered that they had experienced hate speech personally, while 29 (38.7%) said “no” they had not, and 12 (16%) indicated that they did not know if they had. 25 (65.8%) of the respondents thought that it was due to their “gender”. 10 people (26.3%) experienced hate speech due to their sexual orientation, 9 (23.7%) because of their age, 7 (18.4%) due to their nationality and the same number mentioned “religion”, 6 (15.8%) said race / skin colour, 4 (10.5%) indicated language, and 4 said their social status. 3 (7.9%) mentioned disability, 2 (5.3%) gender identity, and 6 people included “their appearance, body shape, tattoos”. Moreover, 44 (58.7%) indicated that their close people (family members, friends, classmates or colleagues) have experienced hate speech while 20 (26.7%) said “no”, and 12 (16%) said that they do not know if they had.

Tackling Hate Speech

In Survey No1, 73 (64%) out of 144 respondents said that they took no action in responding to hate speech against them or other people. However, 43 people

indicated that they had: 33 (38.4%) responded to an author that such words are not acceptable, 21 (24.4%) reported hate speech to the administrators of the online platform, and the same number also said that they wrote or said a positive counter speech message to the perpetrator. Among the solutions to hate speech, 41 (36%) of the respondents agreed that people should be liable for spreading hate speech, 40 (35.1%) indicated that people should be educated about the harm of hate speech. 36 (31.6%) supported the idea that the online platforms must delete hate speech, 34 (29.8%) indicated that young people have to take an active role in hate speech prevention, 32 (28.1%) said that everyone should report hate speech to online platforms and the police. 30 (26.3%) said that there should be more public campaigns about hate speech and its harm. 17 (14.9%) said that there is nothing to do. Among the additional answers, there was a suggestion “not to fight the hate speech itself, but analyse its causes and fight them” (36 or 31.6%). 23 people (20.2%) added that there is no such thing as hate speech, the same number also wrote “it is the problem of lobbyists and their seeking to profit by instigating people”. 19 (16.7%) said that it was “important to be tolerant to people who defend the traditional families”.

There were also several answers that could be prosecuted as an incitement to hatred if the respondents were not anonymous: 9 people wrote that the best way to tackle hate speech is “to exterminate the LGBTQIA+ community, and to deport all the immigrants and Jews”. Several people (or accounts?) suggested “to expel all who are not Aryan”. 3 people also wrote that one needs to “reduce the aggression of LGBTQIA+”.

In Survey No2, the majority of respondents, 41 (54.7%) said that they took some actions concerning the hate speech directed at them or other people. 23 people (46.9%) said that they told the hate spreader that their words are not acceptable, 18 (36.7%) wrote / said a counter positive message, 14 (28.6%) asked for help from people they trusted, and 10 (20.4%) reported to the administrators of the social media site. Only two people indicated that they had reported the hate speech comment to police.

The majority of respondents (64 or 85.3%) thought that the best way to fight hate speech is by educating people about the harm of hate speech. However, it should be said that most respondents marked all the possible options: 52 people (69.3%) agreed that people should be liable for spreading hate speech, 48 (64%) thought that young people have to take active role in hate speech prevention, 46 (61.3%) said that there should be more public campaigns about hate speech, the same number of people thought that the online platforms must delete hate speech, and 44 (58.7%) thought that everyone should report hate speech to the online platforms and police. Only 2 people said that nothing should be done. Among the open answers, the respondents mentioned that the “majority” should be more often “exposed to

minorities”, and also stressed the importance of education, not letting hate speech to slip unnoticed, and educating friends and close people.

It is difficult to draw clear conclusions from these two surveys, as some of the findings are quite contradictory, primarily, the difference in evaluation of hate speech is a problem. However, both of the surveys produced a similar list of the most targeted groups: LGBTQIA+, people with darker skin, Muslims, immigrants, people with disabilities, Roma people, and asylum seekers / refugees. They overlap with the groups described in other parts of this chapter. The surveys also showed that in huge part, hate speech is an online phenomenon and it is usually spread by anonymous online commentators or various public figures. The main actors engaging in spreading discriminative and hateful context will be discussed in the next chapter.

1.6 Actors Spreading Discriminative or Hateful Content

This part of the report attempts to map the actors who spread discriminative, hateful, degrading or other radically biased content online and on social networks. The overview includes public figures, organisations, media outlets and so called influencers, who disseminate such content, but excludes the numerous anonymous or non-anonymous comments and messages posted by internet users on the online media platforms or social networks. It is important to note, that the overview points out that the majority of these actors do not spread *direct* hate speech. This trend is most likely determined by the potential criminal responsibility for such speech, which makes the actors adjust and avoid direct incitement to hatred and other forms of hate speech. The overviewed actors employ more subtle messages and promote certain ideological views that could be defined as traditionalist, illiberal and discriminative, and sometimes with elements of conspiracy theories. The majority of these actors target mainly the LGBTQIA+ community and the so called “LGBTQIA+ ideology” and “genderism”. “Genderism” is a term coined by these more traditionalist groups and actors, which is defined as a dangerous ideology, stemming from Marxism, which aims to destroy the natural division of the sexes, traditional family and the nation as a whole.

1.6.1 Public Figures

During the desk research, only two public figures were identified for systematically spreading hateful, insulting and discriminative messages towards vulnerable groups, mainly at the LGBTQIA+ community. One of them, a long term parliament member, Petras Gražulis, does not hide his discriminative views and often publicly denigrates LGBTQIA+ people. According to him, “previously it was very fashionable to be a communist, now - a homosexual” (Noreikiene 2013). He often publicly calls LGBTQIA+ people “perverts”. He views the protection of LGBTQIA+ rights as bending to Brussels and suggests following the example of Russia, “In Russia, a law was recently adopted which banned any propagation of homosexual relations. Ukraine also - there it is even stricter, the propagation of sexual perversion imposes five years of imprisonment. I congratulate. We should also be going this way” (Noreikiene 2013). The parliamentarian has also been very active in opposing LGBTQIA+ Pride marches in Vilnius and has been arrested by police for causing unrest during one of these marches back in 2013 (Zmones.lt 2013).

Another actor who can be considered as a systemic spreader of hateful messages is another member of the Lithuanian parliament, Valdemaras Valkiūnas. Whilst considering the appointment of one of the vice-chairpersons of the Parliament from

the Freedom Party, he delivered a speech where he said: “Honourable colleagues, according to the latest research, LGBT probably is a criminal organisation, which carries out activities in Lithuania contrary to the expectations and aims of our citizens. Therefore we cannot support participants and supporters of this organisation. It is the same as letting a ferret into a hen house”. In another parliamentary session, whilst considering the appointment of a new prime minister, Valkiūnas said: “You know, work in Seimas [Lithuanian Parliament] is not a lesbian show and it is not a concert of homosexuals’ wishes” (Bukimevieniingi.lt 2020). Whilst during a TV interview he stated: “The so called Freedom Party, I would call ‘pederalai’¹⁵, because there are liberals, and pederalai are liberals with a colour”. (Bukimevieniingi.lt 2020)

Other instances of spreading hateful messages by public figures are less systematic and more sporadic. One of the incidents involved a Member of European Parliament Victor Uspaskich, who during a Facebook live transmission on 10 January 2021 said: “At our place, here, we can simply very easily and simply legalise a family man with man, take and let them adopt a child. It is all natural, it seems. In some European countries it is even dangerous to talk that you have... are a representative of a natural orientation. It's dangerous. I don't want my TV shows, my lives on Facebook to be commented on by ‘pediks’¹⁶. Because it's not a livestream for them. I speak exactly about pediks, the deviants - fate, life has given them such a life, it's not their fault that in male clothes they feel like women, the majority of people do not go and advertise themselves. But the ones that would stick their *** under skirts and go into the streets to shout and scream, are pediks, deviants. And, really, these things should not be tolerated [...]” (Uspaskich 2021). The comment attracted a strong response and even calls for his removal as a Lithuanian MEP from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), a party in the European Parliament, to which Uspaskich belongs. After a public outcry and demands for an explanation from ALDE, the MEP issued a public apology letter where he claimed his statements were taken out of context (Beniusis 2021). On 20 January 2021, Uspaskich was removed from the ALDE faction in the European Parliament because of his homophobic comments.

Another instance of hate speech involving a public figure was recorded during the electoral debates on the national broadcaster. A member of the marginal People’s Party, Pranciškus Valickas, said during the debate: “Now, directly, genders are two, and there are no others. This is a creation of nature, and not a conception of various perverted philosophers. Now, another thing. Whilst covering themselves with very nice slogans about the protection of women, they want to promote families of homosexuals and pederastai¹⁷, legalise [them] like normal families. What does that

¹⁵ “Pederalai” is a degrading word for LGBTQI+ persons, combining another degrading word “pederastai” with the word “liberals”.

¹⁶ “Pediks” is a degrading term used to refer to LGBTQI people.

¹⁷ “Pederastai” is a degrading term to depict LGBTQI people.

mean? And this means, that they, perverts, then will be abled to adopt children and after adopting torture them, exploit, rape. This is, in a hidden form, it is being attempted to promote legalisation of paedophilia”.¹⁸ After the debate, members of the Freedom Party, LGBTQI+ activist Tomas Vytautas Raskevičius, appealed to the prosecution office requesting to initiate pre-trial investigation into the incitement of hatred. The prosecution granted this request and opened a criminal investigation (Tv3.lt 2020).

Some people interviewed for this research mentioned the member of parliament, Mindaugas Puidokas, from the Labour party as a politician who constantly spreads hate speech, others mentioned the President of the Republic of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėda, due to his opposition to the Partnership bill, that would recognise same-sex unions. Among other politicians that were mentioned were Nendré Černiauskienė, who is the assistant of the abovementioned MP Valkiūnas, and MP Vilija Aleknaitė-Abramikienė, who have both expressed their anti-LGBTQI+ attitudes.

The overview of hate speech incidents from public figures shows, that there are politicians in Lithuania who systematically spread hateful messages, however, other incidents are more of a sporadic nature. It is important to note, that these public figures, except for MEP Uspaskich, are considered to be radical and / or marginal politicians with relatively low influence and public standing. No politicians from the major parties have been found to be spreading hateful content.

1.6.2 Organisations

During the desk research, several organisations were identified that actively spread and promote messages of a discriminative nature and information hostile to primarily the LGBTQIA+ community. It is important to emphasise that none of these organisations directly incite hatred or spread other forms of hate speech as it is defined in the Criminal Code. These organisations promote a certain ideology that can be defined as traditionalist, pro-religious, illiberal and intolerant to minority groups, especially to the LGBTQIA+ community. LGBTQIA+ rights and their promotion is seen by these organisations as an existential threat to family values, national traditions and Christian culture.

Free Society Institute

Free Society Institute¹⁹ is a nongovernmental organisation which promotes socially conservative, traditionalist and religion-based views. The name of the organisation

¹⁸ Tomas Vytautas Raskevičius. (2020, September 23), Neapykantos kalba per LRT politinių partijų debatus (Hate speech during LRT political party debates), [Video], Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1478721885671533>

¹⁹ [Free Society Institute](#)

might be somewhat confusing as the organisation itself opposes an open and free society where individual human rights are respected. Free Society Institute advocates a pro-life ideology, traditional family values and so called anti-genderism, and attempts to influence national policies and legislation, as well as public opinion. The institute promotes the idea of complementarity of the sexes which means that there are two biological sexes that complement each other. It also spreads information that LGBTQIA+ orientation is not natural and is subject to change, for example, in 2019, the organisation published an article “Data shows that sexual orientation can change” (FSI 2019). The research was conducted by the Washington based “Family Research Council”, which describes itself as a pro-marriage and pro-life organisation.

Free Society Institute is very active in opposing the ratification of the Istanbul Convention on the grounds that the convention would legalise multiple genders and would cause an existential threat to traditional (nuclear) families. In 2020, the institute publicised and urged people to sign an international petition against the Istanbul Convention called “Stop gender. Stand for family!” (FSI 2020). The organisation also opposes a same sex partnership law. On 15 December 2020, the institute published an interview on its Facebook page with a homosexual catholic, and cited the interviewee in the post: “Exactly such partnership law, which is being most discussed, is not necessary. Because such laws usually equate a homosexual couple with a family. But in any case, two homosexual persons, living together, are not family” (FSI 2020). Although the Free Society Institute does not engage in spreading explicit hate speech, it actively promotes an ideology of a discriminative and intolerant nature, which is detrimental to LGBTQIA+ rights as well as the rights of women.

Vilnius Forum

Vilnius Forum²⁰ used to be a non-governmental association of citizens that called itself a “non-partisan political movement aiming to foster pro-state political thinking in society”. From the content of its messages, the organisation could be defined as traditionalist and nationalist, mainly concerned with the affairs of Lithuania as a nation state. It has published articles, statements and declarations of a nationalistic content.

In 2016, before the Baltic Pride, the association issued a statement titled, “On forceful imposition of communist ‘sexual revolution’ and Baltic Pride march”, it opposed the march and detailed the so called anti-genderism ideology (Vilnius Forum 2019). According to the statement, the Baltic Pride march “is another step with a purpose to impose on Lithuania, an anti-humanistic ideology of genderism, which negates the nature of a human being. It further states that according to this ideology, human beings choose their gender identity despite the biological sex, and all forms of sexual

²⁰ The internet page of Vilnius Forum has been deactivated in the course of conducting this overview.

behaviour are equal to a family based on the connection of a man and a woman. This ideology, contrary to reason and science, substantiates an experiment, currently performed in Western countries, of anthropological and social engineering, that is, creation of a new human being and new society. It is a continuation of the failed projects of XX centuries' totalitarian regimes - soviet communism and German national-socialism - to create 'a new future human being'. It is also claimed in the statement, that "the ideology of genderism is imposed on society by employing an open and audacious propaganda lie". The statement even depicts LGBTQIA+ people as victims of this ideology themselves: "It is necessary to stop spreading this ideological lie, that in Lithuania a hostile and hateful atmosphere towards persons of other orientation is prevalent or is being created. The society perfectly understands that the majority of these people are merely hostages and potential victims of an experiment designed outside Lithuania and financed from abroad. Instead of helping them to live with their problem, these people are being convinced, that the only problem is the environment - society's disapproval of the attempts to make homosexual orientation into a behavioural norm." The statement further reads: "The ideology of genderism professed by LGBTQIA+ and the creation of new morals, grounded by it, is contrary to the vital interests of the Nation and the state."²¹

Therefore, although such statements do not amount to illegal hate speech, they nevertheless are very harmful as they promote a relatively detailed and well thought out ideology with certain manipulative elements and deceptive messages, even equating the promotion of LGBTQIA+ rights with such totalitarian ideologies as communism and national-socialism. Although the statement is much more elaborate and complex than more primitive hateful messages, it nevertheless conveys substantial hostility towards LGBTQIA+ community, which stems from viewing the promotion of LGBTQIA+ rights is an existential threat to Lithuania's national identity and survival.

Pro Patria

Pro Patria²² is a nationalistic youth organisation with the slogan "Lithuanian state is created by nation". It defines itself as an "independent and voluntary organisation, uniting citizens of Christian and national consciousness with various political views". It claims that currently it unites "more than 30 young people - current or former students of political sciences, history, journalism and heritage protection". Pro Patria's main activities include maintenance of a website and the publication of articles, as well as organising nationalistic events. The organisation promotes a socially conservative, traditionalistic and nationalistic worldview, is pro-life and anti-LGBTQIA+. On their website, Pro Patria has a section called "Progressive ideology", where it publishes various articles related to LGBTQIA+ rights promotion, abortions,

²¹ Link to this statement is no longer available.

²² [Pro Patria](#)

sex education in schools, etc. For example, on 11 January 2021, it published an article “US Congress institutes a genderless speech” (Pro Patria 2021); on 27 July 2020, it published an article entitled “After removing abortion ban, during last year in Ireland 6666 abortions were performed” (Pro Patria 2020). It mainly shares the content of other organisations of a similar nature or articles and commentaries from various socially conservative and traditionalist authors.

In 2018, 2019 and 2020, whilst commemorating Lithuania’s Independence Day, Pro Patria together with another nationalistic organisation “Kryptis” organised a nationalistic march entitled “The March of Flames”. Each march was attended by around one thousand people carrying torches and national symbolic. These marches were fiercely criticised because of their connotations with Neo-Nazi marches and neo-Nazi symbolism. The organisers themselves claimed that the torches symbolise “the flame of freedom” and “witness the awakening of the Lithuanian spirit and the beginning of a new march for freedom”(BNS, 15min.lt 2019).



J. Česnavičius' picture, March of Flames, 2019.

Institute of Christian Culture

The Institute of Christian Culture²³ is a socially conservative religious organisation with a slogan “For the family, nation and civilization”. It came to public attention in 2019, when it organised a wide informational campaign against Baltic Pride by disseminating leaflets by post and urging people to sign a petition banning the LGBTQIA+ march (Aržuolaitienė 2018). The leaflet and the petition claimed that Baltic Pride violates the Law on Protection of Minors from Detrimental Effects of Public Information and urged Vilnius municipality to move the Pride to a less central area of the city or ban it altogether. The leaflet read: “Dear citizens, I appeal to you because of increasing propaganda of homosexuals and transsexuals and their public demonstration, which we all are forced to watch. Because of this propaganda, our smallest ones are suffering. They will suffer even more if homosexuals are allowed adoption. We have to protect the children! [...] I need your help so that we could stop

²³ [Institute of Christian Culture](#)

this homosexual march against family [...]” People were urged to sign the petition and post it back to the institute. According to the institute, the petition gathered more than 20 thousand signatures. The Inspector of Journalistic Ethics, which supervises the information spread through media channels, concluded that the content of the leaflet and the text of the petition contained elements of hate speech against LGBTQIA+ people and violated the Law on Public Information (15min.lt 2019).

The institute’s website contains very little information on its activities, but the organisation is very active on Facebook²⁴, where it spreads messages of a religious nature with elements of conspiracy theories, opposing the so called “liberal-communist” ideology. It has more than 1,400 followers.

Interviewees for this research mentioned several other organisations and media outlets that contribute to the spread of hate speech such as: the newspaper “Respublika” and its website²⁵ which often spreads anti-LGBTQIA+ content, the website of Bukimevieningi²⁶, and the social movement “March of Families”, which is analysed in the chapter “4.2 Actors of Euroscepticism”.

1.6.3 Influencers

One of the main influencers who systematically spreads messages of a hateful and discriminative nature, is the Blogger Zeppelinus (real name Raimundas Navickas). His Facebook²⁷ feed is full of anti-Semitic, anti-LGBTQIA+, and racist speech. Several previous Facebook accounts of this blogger have been suspended due to complaints from the public, however, he still has one account available and accessible and has over 4 thousand followers.

Here are a few examples of his content:



²⁴ [Institute of Christian Culture Facebook](#)

²⁵ www.respublika.lt

²⁶ www.bukimevieningi.lt

²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/blogeris.zeppelinus>

The picture depicts two orthodox Jews. The first message reads: “What are they celebrating after our Chanuka? Eastern? Kristmas? [names of the celebrations written with deliberate mistakes]. A Snow White’s birthday?”. The second message reads: “Why do we care about those goys’ celebrations? Congratulate according to seasons and don’t bother”. The phrase in red reads: “Congratulated with winter”, whilst the smaller font below reads: “because whilst saying ‘Christmas, Christians’ the tongue might dry out”. The Jews in the picture are depicted in a humiliating manner, one of them picking his nose, and the post as a whole conveys the message, that Jews dislike or despise Christians and their celebrations.



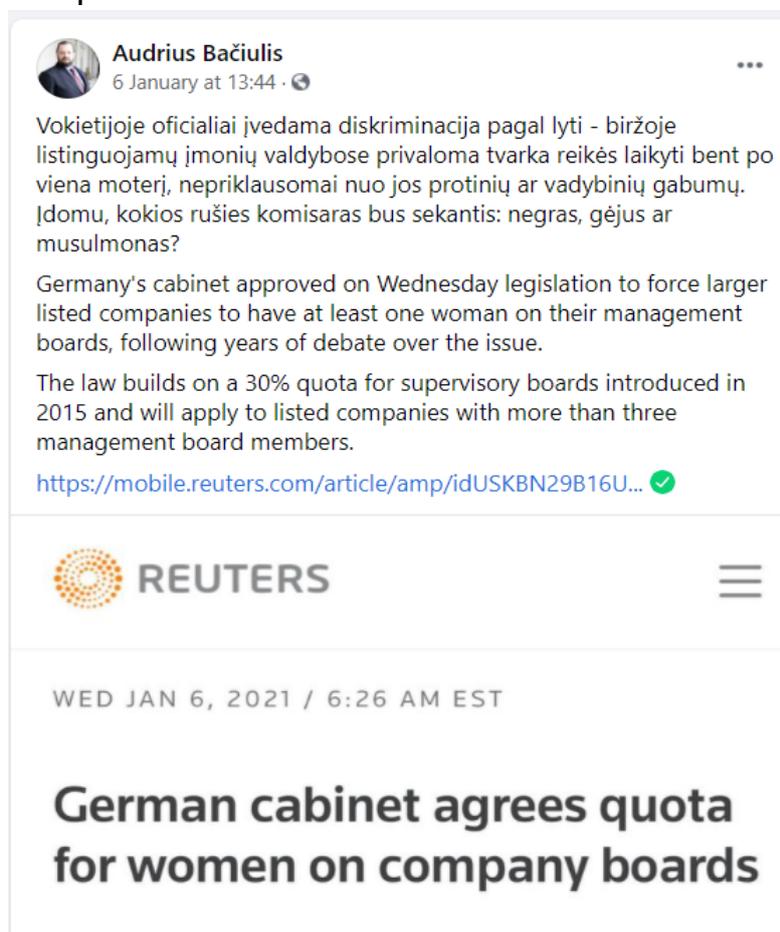
The top line of this post reads: “Lithuanian President apologised to the Jewish nation. Isn’t there a need for apology from the other side?”. The message in the picture reads: “We apologised! Now it’s your turn!” The message is based on a the rather widespread idea that communist Jews contributed to the deportation of Lithuanian citizens during the first and second soviet occupation, for which the Jewish nation should allegedly apologise. The picture depicts a Jew in a degrading way, with long nose, whereas the person requesting apology is depicted as a representative of an Aryan race.



Another post contains an anti-LGBTQIA+ message. The text on the top of the post reads: “- Dad, what is written on the man? - Kiss my ass. - Does his ass hurt? - Who knows. They make love this way”. The bottom red phrase reads: “How to explain this to children?”, whilst the smaller font below reads: “Directly, how it is.”

Another influencer who spreads content of discriminative nature is a journalist and defence expert, Audrius Bačiulis. Although he does not incite hatred directly, his messages promote an intolerant and discriminative view of women, people of other races, immigrants and minority groups.

Here are a few examples of his content:



The image shows a screenshot of a social media post and a news article snippet. The post is by Audrius Bačiulis, dated 6 January at 13:44. The text of the post is in Lithuanian and discusses discrimination based on gender in Germany. Below the post is a snippet of a Reuters news article titled "German cabinet agrees quota for women on company boards", dated Wednesday, January 6, 2021, at 6:26 AM EST. The article snippet mentions that Germany's cabinet approved legislation to force larger listed companies to have at least one woman on their management boards.

Audrius Bačiulis
6 January at 13:44 · 🌐

Vokietijoje oficialiai įvedama diskriminacija pagal lyti - biržoje listinguojamų įmonių valdybose privaloma tvarka reikės laikyti bent po viena moterį, nepriklausomai nuo jos protinių ar vadybinių gabumų. Įdomu, kokios rušies komisaras bus sekantis: negras, gėjus ar musulmonas?

Germany's cabinet approved on Wednesday legislation to force larger listed companies to have at least one woman on their management boards, following years of debate over the issue.

The law builds on a 30% quota for supervisory boards introduced in 2015 and will apply to listed companies with more than three management board members.

<https://mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN29B16U...> ✓

REUTERS

WED JAN 6, 2021 / 6:26 AM EST

German cabinet agrees quota for women on company boards

The part of the post in Lithuanian reads: “In Germany, discrimination on the grounds of gender is officially instituted - in the boards of companies listed on the market it is compulsory to have at least one woman, despite her intellectual or managerial abilities. It is interesting, what kind of commissioner will be next: negro, gay or a Muslim?”



The first part of the post reads: “In the theocratic Iran, where gays and drug addicts are hanged, Islam police patrols the streets, which supervises that women wear headscarves. In liberal Lithuania, where gays are walking the streets with naked asses, and drugs are being sold almost freely, the streets are patrolled by the police of masks, which ensure that people walked with covered faces.”

The mapping of the main actors spreading hateful and discriminative content suggests that there are several actors among politicians and influencers, who systematically spread hate speech which could be considered illegal. Other instances that were found during the mapping were more of a sporadic nature, although not less harmful. However, the mapping of the organisations demonstrated that they rarely if ever spread direct hate speech, but rather promote more complex ideologies and messages, that advocate for the exclusion of minority groups, especially LGBTQIA+. Such messages are of discriminative nature and also harmful to the vulnerable communities and society at large, as they spread ideas based on intolerance and prejudices with a purpose to restrict the rights of minorities or to hinder the promotion of their rights.

2. Euroscepticism in Lithuania

Public opinion polls (Eurobarometer 2010-2020) and their analysis show that Lithuania is one of the most pro-European countries in the European Union. However, as Gediminas Vitkus stated in his article, “Small is Small: Euroscepticism in Lithuanian Politics” and that, “it would not be true to claim that there are no manifestations of Euroscepticism in Lithuania in general”²⁸.

Even though hard Euroscepticism, understood as an outright rejection of membership of the EU or in the revisionist positions where the belief is that EU political and / or economic integration has gone too far or in the wrong direction, does not yield a strong appeal among the Lithuanian public, however, the “soft” Euroscepticism does have some support. If we take Euroscepticism as a critique or rejection of some European values which are understood as human dignity, freedom, democracy, rule of law, human rights and equality, then it has found some following.

2.1 Public Opinion

Lithuanian public opinion polls indicate that the population’s attitude towards the European Union throughout the past decade has remained favourable. From 2014, when the question on what image the European Union conjures up was first posed till now, less than 10% of respondents viewed the EU as “very negative” or “fairly negative” (Eurobarometer 2010-2020). The lowest point was in May 2016, when 9% of respondents indicated that they view the EU in a “very negative” or “fairly negative” light. At the same time the lowest percentage of people who viewed the EU as “very positive” or “fairly positive” was recorded as 43%. In contrast, in 2015, 55% of Lithuanians viewed the EU as “very positive” or “fairly positive”, just one year before that lowest point.

Public opinion polls show that Lithuanians trust European institutions much more than the national ones. This tendency has not changed in the last 10 years. The lowest trust in European institutions was recorded in April 2012, when 47% of respondents stated that they tend to trust the European Union and 39% indicated that they tend not to trust it. The highest point was reached in June 2019 when 72% of respondents stated that they tend to trust the EU. These numbers are quite striking when compared with the trust the Lithuanian residents felt with regards to the national institutions: since 2010, trust in the national parliament ranged between 6% (lowest point recorded in November 2010) and 22% (highest point in November 2016). While

²⁸ Vitkus, G. (2017), Small is Small: Euroscepticism in Lithuanian Politics, in Euroscepticism in the Baltic States: Uncovering Issues, People and Stereotypes, Publishers Zinātne, Riga. p38.

trust in the Lithuanian government has oscillated between 13% (lowest point in May 2010) and 46% (highest point in June 2019) (Eurobarometer 2010-2020).

2.2 Actors of Euroscepticism

Previously conducted studies have drawn the conclusion that in Lithuania there are nearly no influential Eurosceptical political parties (Vitkus 2017). In her analysis of manifestations of Euroscepticism in the activity of political parties between 2000 and 2012, Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė stated that: “Only small Lithuanian nationalist and populist parties, which are at the extreme political right, have an ideological stance that makes it easier for them to use the Eurosceptic discourse than other mainstream parliamentary parties.”²⁹ According to this study, these parties have no chance of entering parliament in the nationwide constituency, therefore by using the Eurosceptic rhetoric they try to differentiate themselves from the political mainstream and unite those voters who are unsatisfied by mainstream politics. From this, the author draws the conclusion that, “party Euroscepticism tends to be marginalised in the Lithuanian political party system. Major parties are not likely to use Eurosceptic rhetoric. Accordingly, small parties are not popular and have no chance to be represented in major national institutions (e.g. parliament or municipal councils).”³⁰

This section explores the main ideas that might be considered Eurosceptic, expressed by the political parties and their representatives during the elections, held in Lithuania in the period from 2010 - 2020.

Parliamentary Elections 2012

In her study, Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė covers the 2012 parliamentary election, an election that is relevant to this study. According to her analysis, these elections were the first parliamentary elections when Eurosceptic ideas appeared in the discussions. “Respublikonų partija” [The Republican party] did not directly make a statement against membership of the EU, but stated that it was necessary to fight against wrong and discriminatory policies of the EU, such as unequal subsidies for the farmers, etc. (2014).

Nacionalinis susivienijimas “Už Lietuvą Lietuvoje” (The national coalition “For Lithuania in Lithuania”), united a number of nationalistic parties such as “Lietuvos centro partija” (the Lithuanian Center party), “Lietuvos socialdemokratų sąjunga” (Lithuanian Social Democratic Union), “Tautininkų sąjunga” (Nationalist Union) and “Tautos vienybės sąjunga” (Union of National Unity). This coalition expressed indirect Euroscepticism by proclaiming that it was going to fight the propaganda of

²⁹ Unikaite-Jakuntaviciene, I. (2014), *Eurosceptics in Lithuania: On the Margins of Politics?*, European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities. 3(4), 1-21. p13.

³⁰ *ibid.* p13.

depravity (e.g. the issues of LGBTQIA+ rights and parades associated with EU policies) and against land sale to foreigners (Unikaite-Jakuntaviciene 2014).

The “Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjunga” (Lithuanian Farmers and Green Union) also expressed criticism towards some EU policies - e.g. it was against the land sale to foreigners (Unikaite-Jakuntaviciene 2014). However, the above mentioned parties all together received around 5% of the votes (CEC 2012).

The leaders of the more mainstream party “Tvarka ir Teisingumas” [Order and Justice], which in 2012 received 7.31% of the vote and won 11 seats in parliament (the party ceased to exist in 2020), supported the idea of a referendum on the introduction of the Euro in Lithuania and argued that the party stands against the discriminatory policies of the EU towards the farmers subsidies. They also expressed ideas about the necessity of reforming the EU (the importance of strengthening the model of the EU confederation instead of centralisation and federalisation of the EU) (Unikaite-Jakuntaviciene 2014).

European Parliament Elections 2014

The next elections in Lithuania were to the European Parliament (EP) and were held on 25 of May 2014. In total, 10 parties participated in these elections. According to Vitkus, the only openly Eurosceptic party was the “Tautininkų sąjunga” (Nationalist Union). They put forward in their electoral programme undoubtedly Eurosceptic objectives, such as “to revoke the pre-eminence of European legal acts over the national legal acts” or “to seek to recognise the Treaty of Lisbon as illegal and void.” The party was also against the introduction of the euro that had been planned for 2015 (Vitkus 2017). However, the Nationalist Union received only 2% of the vote and no mandates (CEC 2014).

Among the parties that received mandates, there were some who in their programmes or during the election campaign expressed their criticism towards the planned introduction of euro (Vitkus 2017). One of these parties, “Lenkų rinkimų akcijos ir Rusų aljanso koalicijos ‘Valdemaro Tomaševskio blokas’” (the Coalition ‘Valdemar Tomaševski Bloc’ of the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania and Russian Alliance), stated in their programme that the new, reformed European Union should be based on several provisions that are important for the Europe of homelands. One such provision was to recognise the family, which is understood as the union between a woman and a man, as the main element of society (CEC Coalition). The party received 8.05% of the votes and won 1 mandate.

Similar ideas were expressed in the programme of “Tvarka ir Teisingumas” (Order and Justice party). They promised in the laws of the European Union to “embed that the family is the union of one man and one woman” (CEC Order and Justice). The

party received 14.25% of the vote which translated into two seats in the European Parliament. The objective to defend the traditional values and family was also expressed in the programme of “Darbo partija” (Labour Party), they won 1 mandate to the EP. They also promised to defend their people “from the laws and projects created in Europe that contradict the attitudes, traditions, convictions and the character of Lithuanians” (CEC Labour).

Parliamentary Elections 2016

According to Vitkus, the elections to the Parliament on 9 October 2016 brought no change to the marginalisation tendency of the Eurosceptic parties. A smooth introduction of the euro in Lithuania on 1 January 2015 meant that there was no place for this topic in the political rhetoric. However, one of the most discussed EU issues during the pre-election campaign covered the consequences of the refugee crisis of 2015 and the decision of the Council of the EU to introduce quotas for the relocation of asylum seekers among the member states. This decision, which was supported by the Lithuanian government, was harshly criticised by the Labour Party, which urged that Lithuania should follow the example of Hungary and Poland (Vitkus 2017).

The posters of the pre-election campaign of the Labour Party promised that “it will stop the influx of the migrants” (picture below). They constantly used fearmongering about the inevitable “invasion” of migrants and refugees (Darbopartija.lt 2015-2016).



The poster of Labour Party for the 2016 parliamentary elections.

However, even though in 2015-2016 the Lithuanian media paid a lot of attention to the European refugee crisis and the relocation of asylum seekers (Biekša, et al. 2017), the Labour Party only received 4.68% of the vote and did not cross the necessary threshold to enter Parliament (CEC 2016).

The Order and Justice party did not support the refugee quota system as well. It was quite an unusual situation as this party was in the government and party member Tomas Žilinskas became the Minister of Interior in April 2016, and proceeded to implement the relocation of refugees. In their election programme they stated that “the EU quota system and its active implementation in Lithuania creates the conditions for the decrease of state security and the possible emergence of the breeding ground of conflict among nationalities.” (Tvarka.lt 2016). Therefore, they promised to seek to renegotiate the quota allocated for Lithuania, and would not accept any new quotas or other migrant relocation programmes. They stressed that they would agree only to such an asylum system where “the asylum seeker-pretenders and economic migrants” would be sent back as Lithuania “would only help those asylum seekers who are actually persecuted”. It also stated that any migrant who refuses to learn the Lithuanian language or does not follow the law or does not earn a living, “must leave Lithuania themselves” (Tvarka.lt 2016).

The party also expressed its commitment to guard and preserve “the family” and stated that “we will stop the spread of gender ideology, we will strengthen the family, defend the homeland and show a special role of the mother.” The party leader Rolandas Paksas, who at the time was a member of the European Parliament, stated in the election year that his party stands for “the national values, against immigrants, fetish of the sexual minorities, and against converting Europe as the community of nations to the United States of Europe” (BNS 2016). In the 2016 Parliament elections “Order and Justice” received 5.33% of the votes and won 5 mandates in a nationwide constituency and 3 more mandates in single-member constituencies (CEC 2016). However, it was considered a poor result and, after the elections, R. Paksas resigned as a party chairperson.

European Parliament Elections 2019

In the 2019 European Parliament elections, the 11 seats allocated to Lithuania were divided among 7 parties. The 3 parties with the most votes were Tėvynės Sąjunga - Lietuvos Krikščionys demokratai (The Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats), Lietuvos Socialdemokratų partija (Social Democratic Party of Lithuania) and Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjunga (Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union). These three parties received 7 seats, and all had quite pro-European programmes (CEC 2019).

Visuotinis rinkimų komitetas “Aušros Maldeikienės traukinys” (Public election committee “Aušra Maldeikienė’s Train”), Lietuvos Respublikos liberalų sąjūdis (Liberal Movement of Lithuania) and Darbo partija (Labour Party) won 1 seat each (CEC 2019).

“Valdemaro Tomaševskio blokas” - Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjungos ir Rusų aljanso koalicija (The Coalition “Valdemar Tomaševski Bloc” of Christian Families Alliance and Lithuanian Russian Union) won 1 seat and stated that the EU needs to return to its Christian roots. It once again expressed its support for the traditional family that is understood as a union between a woman and a man (CEC 2019).

The most Eurosceptic programme came from “Visuomeninis rinkimų komitetas “Vytautas Ražvilas: susigrąžinkime valstybę!” (Public election committee “Vytautas Radžvilas: Recover the State!”) which is led by the Lithuanian philosopher turned politician, Vytautas Radžvilas. Nonetheless, the national interest of Lithuania, as it was stated in the programme (CEC 2019), was “to stay a member of the European Union” and make sure that the EU survives as well. However, the ideas against the creation of the federation of the EU were expressed. It was also mentioned that the EU, in its current state, destroys the nation states’ “cultural traditions, moral norms and natural family”. Therefore, it promised to seek “to limit the Union’s interference into the matters of state”, so that it would not “destroy the traditions and values of the state, change the concept of the family and the ethnic composition of the nation”. The public election committee received 3.17% of the vote which was not enough to win a seat in the European Parliament.

Parliamentary Elections 2020

As in the previous elections, in 2020 no parties used a hard Eurosceptic message. All of the main parties in their programmes expressed their support for EU membership. However, the Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats, who won the most seats in Parliament, stated in their programme: “European Union, whose member state we are, is going through the period of transformation and self-searching. We have to be active in proposing a vision of a dynamic and active European Union with strong nation-states.” They also defined a family as a “marriage created by a man and a woman, as well as a community arising from motherhood and fatherhood, which has been the foundation of the sustainability and vitality of society for centuries.” However, they added that they “respect the freedom of individuals to form other unions that clearly enshrine the protection and responsibility of the fundamental rights of each individual”. Even though the party is very much pro-European, they expressed some ideas - support for the strong nation-states and a traditional concept of family - that echoed, in the more extreme form in the programmes of the more radical parties (Tsajunga.lt 2020).

Before the elections, there was an initiative from 3 public figures, who quite often express nationalist, pro-religious, illiberal ideas, to join forces and participate in the elections together. They were a candidate in the 2019 presidential elections Arvydas Juozaitis, the politician Rimantas Jonas Dagys who left the Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats in 2019, and one of the creators of “Pro-Patria”

Vytautas Sinica. However, in the end they could not reach an agreement and decided to establish 3 different parties and participate in the elections separately (Pankunas 2020). None of the parties received enough votes to enter the parliament, and all together they only received 3.38% of the votes.

In 2020, Rimantas Dagys (among others), established “Krikščionių Sąjungą” (Christian Union) which promised to return Christian values back into our lives, “We commit to not deviate in any way from Christian values in protecting families, human life, from the natural understanding of human sex”. The party promised to reject the Istanbul Convention and similar documents. “The return of the Christian values is needed as air for the European Union, which at the moment has lost its way” (Krikščioniu.lt 2020).

Nacionalinis susivienijimas (National Alliance) is a party led by Sinica and Radžvilas. In their election programme it is stated: “It is the duty of the state to ensure the free expression of the Church's teaching in all areas of public life, without being constrained by various forms of prohibition such as “discrimination” or “hate speech” (Susivienijimas.lt 2020). Even though they insisted on the importance of staying in the European Union, they stated that Lithuania can only survive in the renewed Europe. Among the conditions for this renewal is to fight together with the parties and the governments of other EU member states that hold similar views against the federalisation of the EU. Also, to make sure that no institutions of the EU interfere with a states’ right to define the concept of family, including the termination of funding for the propaganda of anti-human and criminal neo-communist ideology of genderism in the EU member states.

Conclusions

The analysis of the election programmes, the election campaigns of various parties in the period of 2010-2020, and the results of the elections from this period have shown that the people in Lithuania do not tend to vote for overt Eurosceptics. However, even though the traditional parties are pro-European and support Lithuanian membership in the EU, they tend to include their commitment to the so-called traditional concept of the family that is understood as a union between man and a woman. Therefore, this is an indirect criticism of the EU support for the LGBTQIA+ rights. Moreover, during the European migrant crisis quite a lot of parties expressed their criticism of the EU refugee relocation system. Some of these ideas - in more extreme forms of homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia - were echoed in the social movements.

Social Movements

Both Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė in 2014 and Vitkus in 2017, came to the conclusion that “Euroscepticism is more detectable in the ‘world’ of social movements than of the political parties in Lithuania”³¹. Vitkus, in his analysis mentions the referendum on the prohibition of selling land to foreigners and juridical persons and a resistance to euro adoption, along with suggestions to organise a referendum on this issue. However, as already discussed, the latter issue disappeared from the agenda after a smooth introduction of the euro in Lithuania on 1 January 2015. Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, in her analysis of the Eurosceptic groups and social movements in Lithuania, also found a link between Euroscepticism and homophobia (Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė 2014).

2.3 Euroscepticism and Anti-LGBTQIA+ Attitudes

According to Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, the groups critical of the EU became more visible in 2013 when Lithuania started its Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In other words, the EU became more visible in the media and so the groups that are critical of it also became more visible. According to the author, one instance of intensification of Euroscepticism was related to the European values in Lithuania, “During the Baltic Pride parade in Vilnius in July of 2013, among the observers of the parade standing along the street it was possible to see posters such as “ES iškrypėlių” (the EU is a union of perverts) and “Euro-Sodoma” (Euro Sodomy), etc.”³².

Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė mentions several possible reasons why homophobia became a tool of Euroscepticism. First, there are the EU requirements and pressure to ensure human rights, especially the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community. During the integration process into the EU in 2004, LGBTQIA+ rights had not yet been touched and discussed separately. Besides, in the communist regime homosexuality was a strictly forbidden topic in public discourse. Such people simply “did not exist.” Accordingly, LGBTQIA+ rights issues escalated when EU institutions began to raise the requirements for Member-States on LGBTQIA+ rights. The other reason why Euroscepticism and homophobia are related is the traditional concept of the family. EU requirements for LGBTQIA+ rights are automatically perceived as a threat to traditional family values in Lithuania (Unikaite-Jakuntaviciene 2014).

This connection has persisted during the period till now with more intensified anti-LGBTQIA+ messaging during the Baltic Pride events and during initiatives that are aimed at defending the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals. During the election of

³¹ Vitkus, G. (2017), Small is Small: Euroscepticism in Lithuanian Politics, in Euroscepticism in the Baltic States: Uncovering Issues, People and Stereotypes, Publishers Zinātne, Riga. p43.

³² Unikaite-Jakuntaviciene, I. (2014), Eurosceptics in Lithuania: On the Margins of Politics?, European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities. 3(4), 1-21. Available at Eurosceptics in Lithuania. p14.

October 2020, one of the more successful parties was a liberal “Freedom Party”, founded in 2019. It went to the elections with a promise to legalise same-sex marriage, it won 11 seats in parliament and, together with Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats and the Liberal Movement, formed a government. One of its representatives in the Parliament, MP Tomas Vytautas Raskevičius, is openly gay, and was elected on an explicitly pro-LGBTQIA+ platform³³ (Delfi.lt 2013). In November 2020 he became the Chairperson of the Parliament’s Human Rights Committee.

Just after the election, the Freedom Party started to draft the gender-neutral partnership law. This initiative was mostly led by Raskevičius. At the beginning of 2021, the public started to debate anew the ratification of the Istanbul Convention (the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence), as it was assumed that it would be on the agenda of Parliament’s spring session (Rimaite 2021). This Convention has received a lot of backlash due to the beliefs that it will introduce the concept of the so called “social sex”³⁴ into the Lithuanian law (Bakaite 2021).

In February, 2021, the Speaker of Parliament Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen (Liberal Movement), received a petition, allegedly signed by more than 300,000 people, calling for the dismissal of Raskevičius as the committee chair (LRT.lt 2021). The initiators of the petition claimed that Raskevičius was biased because of his previous work as an LGBTQIA+ rights advocate. In the words of one of the authors of the petition, Raimondas Grinevičius: “There is a clash of public and private interests, the rights of one narrow group are privileged, there’s no concern for the interests of the majority of the society”. Raskevičius constantly receives homophobic messages on Facebook (offending him, threatening him, “suggesting” he kill himself, etc.). Concerning some of them, the prosecutors started a pre-trial investigation (Prokuraturos.lt 2021 and Traceviciute 2021). On 20 March, during an anti-lockdown rally, one of the participants read out a letter written by someone else which referred to Raskevičius: “he is anti-state. People like him should be shot, at least one a year” (LRT.lt 2021).

In this political context, another initiative appeared that combined the rhetoric against the LGBTQIA+ community, the Istanbul Convention, and Euroscepticism. A group of people, among them Grinevičius, who was one of the authors of petition against Raskevičius, decided to organise a protest action titled, “The Great Family Defence

³³ He is not the first openly gay Member of Parliament, but he is the first who stands for the LGBTQIA+ rights. Previously, MP Rokas Žilinskas did not hide his sexual orientation, but he was against the same-sex marriage and adoption.

³⁴ “Social sex” is a literal translation of the word “gender” as there is no direct equivalent for this term in the Lithuanian language.

March 2021”³⁵ that took place on 15 of May 2021. The organisers issued a “Declaration on stopping the anti-state and anti-democratic actions” (Seimusajudis.lt 2021). They announced that they were coming together due to the fact that the European Union and the new Parliament of Lithuania, with the methods of the ideological war, were engaging “in the policy of privileging leftist liberal communities and LGBTQIA+ organisations, promoting the aggressive propaganda of the sexual minorities and legislation that discriminates the majority of society and threatens the fundamental principles of the social and national life” (Seimusajudis.lt 2021). It was added that this statement was a reaction to the declaration of the European Parliament and that the European Union is a LGBTQIA+ freedom zone. According to this statement, the European Parliament resolution and draft legislation of Parliament, “under the guide of the concept of ‘hate speech’, seek to legitimise universal control of ideas and the ideological dictatorship of minorities, to ban the freedom of speech enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania and to introduce criminal liability for the free expression of opinion.” “Due to this unacceptable situation”, the organisers declare that Lithuanians should defend themselves and defend the state, and therefore they declare “Lithuania without gender and LGBTQIA+ ideology” (Seimusajudis.lt 2021).

Among the organisers and supporters of the event were the editor-in-chief of the newspaper “Respublika”, Vitas Tomkus (Suliokas 2021) and several politicians that have been identified in this research as actors spreading discriminatory messages, such as MPs Petras Gražulis and Mindaugas Puidokas (Jakucionis 2021). The representatives of the NGOs, interviewed for this research, described the “March of Families”, as it is usually shortened, as “an absolute vortex of discrimination and intolerance”.

President of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėda, sent a video message to the participants of the March where he stated that the government does not do enough to support the families. He also mentioned that the state has to solve the issue with the same-sex couples; however “it should be done in accordance with the Article 38 of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, which states that the family is the basis of society and the State and the marriage is concluded upon the free mutual consent of man and woman. As the president of the Republic of Lithuania I will use my powers to make sure that it is so” (Jakucionis 2021 and LRT.lt 2021). The president’s message was transmitted after the opening remarks by the organisers and was followed by a pre-recorded speech by Bernhard Zimniok, a German MEP from the right-wing Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) populist party. Zimniok spoke out against migration, “genderist propaganda” and quarantine restrictions. The president’s decision to address the rally, which was held against the so called “genderist propaganda”, were perceived as problematic (LRT.lt 2021). This was not only

³⁵ The official website of the protest: <https://seimusajudis.lt/>

because of his choice to address the rally but also because of his statements on LGBTQIA+ rights. Two of the interviewed people (a person from the LGBTQIA+ community and one person from an NGO working on hate speech issues) mentioned President Nausėda as one of the actors spreading discriminatory messages.

2.4 Euroscepticism and Anti-Migrant Rhetoric

In Lithuania, the anti-migrant, anti-refugee rhetoric mostly overlapped with the criticism of the EU in the years of 2015-2016, during the so-called European migrant crisis. During that period there were a lot of articles and opinion pieces in the Lithuanian media depicting the migrants as violent (Vinokuras 2015), Muslims as prone to terrorism, posing a threat to European society and way of life (Lavaste 2016 and Balsiunaite 2016). The previously mentioned “Pro-patria” started to publish their own articles, and republish articles and opinion pieces from various other sources that were critical of the EU and its immigration policy. They promoted articles that negatively depicted refugees and migrants, especially those with Muslim background³⁶ (Propatria.lt 2015-2016). However, even though these articles contained and spread anti-migrant, anti-Islamic prejudices, the ideas expressed in these articles did not directly incite hatred or spread other forms of hate speech as it is defined in the Criminal Code.

Moreover, as the elections of 2016 showed, anti-immigrant, anti-refugee rhetoric, did not render many votes. Also, it would seem that it did not transform into big social movements. There were some initiatives, for example, from September 2015 till February 2016 in the website of petitions, there was one published by the “The General Committee against forced migration” that stated that Lithuania should take care of its own citizens first and only afterwards of “all the poor people in the world”. It collected more than 23 thousand signatures (Public Committee Against Forced Immigration 2015-2016). Also, in October 2015, in Kaunas, the second biggest city of Lithuania, there was a protest against the refugees. However, only around 100 people attended the protest. It was organised by the marginal party “Lithuanian Nationalist and Republican Union”, whose chairman Julius Panka is known for his radical nationalistic views. The organisers stated that the purpose of the protest was to stop the mass invasion and the compulsory quota dictated by the European Union. Among the participants were people holding the posters with the signs: “This is not

³⁶ For example: Laučius 2015b, Back to SSRS - again to profess the only truth; Radžvilas 2015, European Union - close to the fateful threshold; Kasciunas 2015, What will Lithuania choose: immigration or strong family?; Laučius 2015a, Why illegal immigrants are granted the privilege to disregard the laws of the EU member states?; Rubavičius and Jokubaities 2015, The European Union does not have an identity; Buchanan 2015, Islam conquers Europe; and Sinica 2016, The psychosis of the open doors opens the eyes of Europeans.

the Allah Akbar. This is Lithuania” and “Stop the invasion of immigrants” (Pupeikyte-Didziule 2015 and Delfi.lt 2015).

In the following years up to the summer of 2021, migrants have remained one of the main groups targeted by hate speech. However, as Lithuania has not been a country of immigration and the media did not pay a lot of attention to the migrant issues and refugees, the verbal attacks were more or less sporadic. This changed in the summer of 2021 when the question of migrants became one of the most discussed issues in Lithuania. This was due to the actions of the Belarus, Minsk regime, when more than 4,100 migrants have entered Lithuania irregularly from neighbouring Belarus (BBC.com 2021). However, even though the migrants themselves became one of the main targets of hate speech again, the crisis was not blamed on the policies of the European Union and it did not encourage a new wave of Euroscepticism.

3. Civic Activism Countering Hate and Enhancing European Values

Due to the fact that there is no common strategy on the state level to combat hate speech, the majority of the initiatives in this area come from civil society. In the last couple of years, one could notice an increase in initiatives to tackle hate speech in Lithuania. Some of them were identified by the authors of the report as they are part of these initiatives. Others were included based on the information gathered during interviews with the stakeholders.

One of the NGOs most active in the field of tackling hate speech is the European Foundation of Human Rights (EFHR). It focuses on the rights of national minorities, and since 2011 has been monitoring online platforms and comment sections of news sites, and reports incidents of hate speech to the police. The organisation also supports the victims of hate speech (and hate crime) during a criminal process (Efhr.eu).

Among the initiatives mentioned by several interviewees were the meetings between law enforcement officers and representatives of the groups vulnerable to hate crime and hate speech. Five discussions in five of Lithuania's biggest cities were organised by the Ministry of Interior, in cooperation with the Human Rights Monitoring Institute (HRMI) and the Lithuanian Human Rights Centre (LHRC) at the beginning of 2020 (Lrv.lt 2020). As one of the interviewed person who was among the participants in the event said, "It was a good initiative and allowed me to explore other areas of hate speech in the community and the society as I met with the guys from the Jewish community, from the LGBTQIA+ community, from the black community, and from the disabled community... (...). That event was really important, because it opened my eyes that hate speech is not only against refugees, Muslims, Jewish and LGBTQIA+, but also even against disabled people."

In September 2020, the HRMI, in cooperation with the Estonian Human Rights Monitoring Centre and Latvian Centre for Human Rights, presented four animated videos, accompanied with guidelines and leaflets, that informed the public on hate crime and hate speech (HRMI 2020). The voiceover of the video was recorded in Lithuanian, and the subtitles are available in English, Russian and Lithuanian. The interviewed policy maker mentioned the videos as one of the most memorable initiatives to combat hate speech and hate crime.

In the beginning of 2021, three NGOs, working in the field of human rights - LHRC, together with the partners HRMI and EFHR - started a social campaign titled

“Daugiau meilės”³⁷ (More Love), in order to counter hate speech. “It is said, that from hate to love there is only one step. And sometimes it is the police”, was the headline of the press release, presenting the start of the campaign (Delfi.lt 2021). It encouraged the public to report the incitement to hatred to the police or on the alternative platform hosted by the Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights and titled “Report Hate Crimes”³⁸.

For the campaign, several videos were created that transformed real online hate speech into the messages of love. One of the videos starts with the reading of hate speech comment: “And from me throw a brick to those LGBT”³⁹ that suddenly is transformed to a colourful image stating: “And from me - red roses to the LGBT”, and finishes with encouraging people to report hate speech to the police. Similar videos were created to counter hate speech against the Jewish and Roma communities, as well as for hate speech against Muslims and the Polish minority. Additionally, GIFs were created so that one could use them if somebody noticed a hateful comment on the internet. The campaign was supported by various articles on the subject that raised awareness about hate speech and its effect on the targeted communities.

Since 2017, the National LGBTQIA+ rights organisation LGL, in cooperation with the European Commission and main social media websites, monitors the anti-LGBTQIA+ hate speech and reports it to the administrators. As the LGL is a trusted flagger, the administrators of the social media websites, in 90 % of the cases, review the reports within 24 hours and in 71 % of the cases, remove the hateful comments (Kuktoraitė 2020). Also, LGL in cooperation with the partners in other European countries, have an alternative platform called “UNI-FORM”⁴⁰ that encourages the LGBTQIA+ community to report if they experience a hate crime and / or hate speech.

Among the initiatives that are not directly aimed at tackling hate speech, but spread the message of inclusion are the various “Pride” events: “Baltic Pride”, “Vilnius Pride” and “Kaunas Pride”, all of which attract not only the members of the LGBTQIA+ community, but also their allies. These events encourage the state institutions, universities, and various businesses to support the community with LGBTQIA+ friendly messaging.

One of the interviewees mentioned the rally “Black Lives Matter” that was organised in Lithuania in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd as one of the initiatives

³⁷ The campaign was implemented in the framework of the implementation of the project “#PoliceAcademy_LT: Promoting Effective Response to Hate Crime and Hate Speech in Lithuania” (project acronym - #MesVisi (#We-All), co-funded by the European Union under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme.

³⁸ <https://manoteises.lt/pranesk/>

³⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSdS2ESfY5g&t=1s>

⁴⁰ <https://uni-form.eu/>

that supported diversity and inclusiveness (Zvinakyte 2020). More than one thousand people participated in the protest, and, as the interviewee stated “I was so proud of Lithuanians who showed up. And even now when I remember it, I am still shivering as it was so humane, and I took part in it.”

As good examples of inclusion and pro-European values, the interviewees also mentioned the site of Mano Teises⁴¹, which is the site administrated by the LHRC. The website publishes opinion pieces, interviews, and information on human rights in Lithuania. The other website that was mentioned by several interviewees is Jarmo⁴² which is dedicated to news related to LGBTQIA+ rights.

It is important to note that none of the interviewed people mentioned the working group to promote effective responses to hate crime and hate speech, established by the Ministry of Interior at the beginning of 2020 (Lrv.lt 2020). Even though several of the interviewees represent their organisations in this group, it still was not mentioned. The working group includes 11 representatives of NGOs and various state institutions (among them, the Department of Police, Prosecutor General’s Office, and several ministries, etc.). Together they adopted an Action Plan for the year 2020-2022 on improving response to hate crime and hate speech. The lack of mentioning of this initiative among the stakeholders is the indication of its failure to achieve its main goal.

Despite the various initiatives among civil society, this study shows that they are not sufficient. A lot of people who belong to the communities affected by hate speech do not have enough knowledge on how and where to report hate speech. Moreover, the survey of the young people shows that there is a lack of understanding in society on the harm of hate speech on people who are attacked.

⁴¹ manoteises.lt

⁴² jarmo.net

Conclusions and Recommendations

The overview of the situation in Lithuania indicates that the institutional response to hate speech in Lithuania remains weak and inefficient. Over the last decade, no significant measures have been set up to encourage the reporting of hate speech, there has been nothing set up in the form of support services for victims of hate speech, referral systems have not been introduced, there has been no movement to conduct further research or raise public awareness or for the recognition of hate speech on other protected grounds.

The weak response to hate speech from the institutions that are tasked with combating it, determines the low rates of reporting and low levels of trust in law enforcement among the affected communities. Therefore the members of these more vulnerable communities turn for support to their families and their closest circles, and choose not to report the incidents.

Public opinion polls show that the majority of Lithuanian society believe that hate speech and hate crimes on various grounds exist in Lithuania and are able to recognise hate speech relatively well. However, half of respondents believe that more lenient forms of responsibility should be applied for online hate speech such as a warning or an administrative fine. Nonetheless, an initiative to introduce the administrative liability for some hate speech offences in the beginning of 2021 failed dramatically.

Social distance polls indicate that certain groups, such as Roma, LGBTQIA+, and Muslims, experience substantial social distancing and discriminative attitudes from the majority of society, which may contribute to the prevalence of hate speech as well as inefficient law enforcement responses to these incidents. According to the representatives of vulnerable groups themselves, hate speech and other hatred related incidents are a part of their daily life and have extremely negative, short term and long term consequences - it affects their feeling of safety, their sense of belonging to society, and their trust in people especially law enforcement institutions. The majority choose not to report the verbal incidents because they do not believe that the offender will be found and punished, and fear they themselves will be blamed for the incident. The analysis shows the need to raise awareness among vulnerable groups and general society on how to respond to hate speech and why it is important to react to such incidents.

The study shows that even though the hard Euroscepticism does not have a strong appeal among the Lithuanian public, the “soft” Euroscepticism has some support. As one of the possible manifestations of Euroscepticism is the critique or rejection of some European values which are understood as human dignity, freedom,

democracy, rule of law, human rights, and equality, there are some overlaps with the phenomenon of hate speech where it is an affront to the European values. This is mostly visible in the anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric, as the EU support for the LGBTQIA+ rights is perceived as an attack against the traditional family. The other issue where hate speech and Euroscepticism overlapped in the past decade was the anti-migrant, anti-refugee rhetoric in the years of 2015-2016, during the so-called European migrant crisis.

The main efforts on countering hate speech have mostly been taken by a limited number of Lithuanian NGOs through the implementation of different projects, monitoring, training courses, and awareness raising activities. However, without a comprehensive strategy from the state and its institutions, the NGOs alone cannot successfully tackle the phenomenon. There has to be comprehensive approach to targeting hate speech with the involvement of different actors - national authorities, institutions and civil society.

Based on the report and its conclusions, the authors propose the following recommendations for more effective measures to combat hate speech:

- There is a need for a national action plan on combating hate speech involving intersectional actors. It could be part of the Non-Discrimination Action Plan. However, this plan should be raised to the level of the Government and not be adopted by just one ministry (as it is now - Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour). Other ministries (Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Culture) should be involved and committed to tackle this phenomenon on an equal level. The NGOs, especially those representing the targeted communities, should be consulted in designing the plan and included in its implementation. Moreover, the Government should allocate a budget for the implementation of the Action Plan that shows a serious political commitment;
- One of the priorities with regard to hate speech, is the need to ensure that hate speech is punishable by law and adequately prosecuted. Therefore, there should be measures put in place to encourage the reporting of hate speech, to set up support services for victims of hate speech, to introduce referral systems, to conduct further research, and to raise public awareness on the effects of hate speech on the targeted groups and society;
- There is a need to increase the awareness of the targeted groups of their rights and the possibilities for the reporting of hate speech, also to encourage their trust in law enforcement;

- It is important to ensure that wherever possible the professionals involved in developing strategies to tackle hate speech are themselves people targeted by hate speech;
- Even though in 2020 the Ministry of Interior established a Working Group to promote effective responses to hate crime and hate speech, this format is not considered very successful and needs to be reviewed in order to strengthen cooperation between the state institutions, including law enforcement, and NGOs, for the more effective implementation of different activities and measures (the Working Group included representatives of NGOs and various state institutions - among them, the Department of Police, Prosecutor General's Office, and several ministries, etc.);
- In order to tackle online hate speech, algorithms should be developed and adapted to the national languages that could detect hate speech;
- More NGOs should be involved in cooperation with the European Commission and main social media websites in implementing the Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online and become part of the network of trusted flaggers;
- As journalists were among the harshest critics of the initiative to introduce the administrative liability for hate speech, there is a need to have more discussions with the media professionals on the promotion of inclusiveness and the countering of hate speech;
- Due to the fact that some of the politicians are involved in spreading hateful, discriminatory messages, it is important to encourage the parties to adopt the code of ethics and have the instruments to react if the politicians break it;
- The inclusiveness of different groups, especially those who are the most discriminated and targeted by hate speech, should become the *modus operandi* of every NGO, business, media and state institutions, etc.

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