

Lithuanian watchdogs - late November 2012 - Portal Organizacji Strażniczych || WATCHDOG.ORG.PL

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While the governmental crisis and its formation attracted most of the public attention in Lithuania in November, Lithuanian watchdog continued to move forward with their mission to speak up about important public issues, such as prostitution and protection of prostitutes' right, national minorities' protection and transparency in the largest project in the Baltics up to date - Visaginas nuclear power plant. In addition, the late practice to educate the public and raise awareness about the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the situation of human rights in Lithuania is gaining a momentum and the interest in human rights in Lithuania is reaching its higher point.

- Prostitution is a pressing problem for every country. **Lithuania faces a challenge to decide whether to legalize prostitution or not.** It is constantly debated whether prostitution is a form of abuse or a profession - says M. Adutavičiūtė, a representative of [the Human Rights Monitoring Institute](#). She delivered a presentation on legalization of prostitution during the conference called "Prostitution in Lithuania: Illegal yet Thriving" in Kaunas. The conference addressed issues, such as whether it would help to protect the rights of prostitutes if the prostitution was legal and what measures should be taken to fight the prostitution phenomenon. A representative of the HRMI once again remarked that there is a bill in the Parliament suggesting to abolish an administrative liability for engaging in activities qualifying as prostitution in Lithuania. She also added that **the position of the human rights' defenders is clear: Lithuania should adopt the Swedish model which would mean that only those who buy prostitution could be held liable** (more about it [here](#)).

The Human Rights Monitoring Institute continues to exercise its expert function and to educate the public on the implementation of [the EU Human Rights Charter](#), among other international documents in Lithuania. **On 19 of November, the HRMI for the third time launched an online course "Human rights: conception, challenges and protection mechanisms"** which lasts for four weeks and which serves as a great opportunity for the public to learn more about the concept of human rights, their categorization, main UN documents protecting the human rights, institutions and their functions, to attain new knowledge about human rights situation in Lithuania and also discuss with their peers in the discussion forums. For the Institute, it serves as a way to once again speak up about human rights in Lithuania and spread the word about the main challenges that Lithuania faces in effectively protecting the human rights. [More about the course](#).

[The European Foundation of Human Rights](#) (EFHR) is working along very similar lines in terms of educating the public about human rights. On 23 November, **the EFHR has completed the training titled "Conducting cases of violation of human rights in the European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the European Union – the procedure and formal requirements".** Participants had a great opportunity to deepen their knowledge about the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU as a practical tool for conducting cases of violation of human rights as well as case law analysis from the European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the European Union. [More about the training](#).

The European Foundation of Human Rights (EFHR) once again successfully intervened with [the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights](#) and made sure the mistakes occurring in the Human Rights report on Lithuania in 2010 are corrected. According to the conclusion in the Agency's report 2010, in Lithuania around 42% of the national minorities faced difficulties finding a job, because of a Lithuanian language barrier. The EFHR drew agency's attention to the fact, that only 3,9% of an unemployed Polish population in Lithuania

has difficulties finding a job because of a language barrier. In response to the intervention of the Foundation, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights has affirmed that it would take into account the remarks of the Foundation and that it will correct the mistake in its report.

[More about it.](#)

The EFHR took part in the case, which subjected one of the most pressing issues in terms of Lithuanian-Polish relationship lately- the use of the language and letters not belonging to the Lithuanian alphabet. The Vilnius district Administrative Court reaffirmed that the public signs in Lithuania should be written in the country's official language (according to article 17 of the state language Act); however, to excise stamps on the goods subjected to excise duty (such as cigarettes and alcohol), car licence plates and proper names of companies this Act does not apply. That is how Vilnius District Administrative Court decided in its ruling, dismissing the plaint filed to the State Language Inspectorate by the European Foundation of Human Rights ([more info on this subject](#)). In its plaint, EFHR pointed out that the rules of creating and spelling of legal entities' proper names, registered licence plates, and excise stamps should be the same as the ones applied to the spelling of names and surnames. It means that those names should also be written exclusively in the country's official language with the use of the letters and symbols of the Lithuanian alphabet. [More about it.](#)

On 12-17 the EFHR took part in a conference titled "Wake Up Europe: It's Time to Act! Creative approaches to tackle discrimination" in Finland. The aim of this conference was to **share the latest strategies and practices in the "European movement against discrimination"**. The conference included the plenary sessions, working in groups, lectures, workshops, presentations, debates, open forums and other interactive **methods of solving problems of discrimination, anti-racism, anti-fascism, refugees, migrants, volunteering, human rights and minorities**. The subject of the discussion was the difficult situation of the Roma minority, possible **alternative methods of fighting against discrimination**, such as art, and the widespread hatred among young people and students. Over 90 participants represented organizations from different countries of the Council of Europe. The European Foundation Of Human Rights (EFHR) was able not only to present its activities, achievements and values to other participants, but also to cooperate with other organizations of similar character. [More on it.](#)

On a slightly different note, [Transparency International Lithuania](#) decided to raise one of **the most sensitive public issue lately in Lithuania- the transparency of the Visaginas nuclear power plant project and organized a debate between the main stakeholders**. Participants in the debate included an official advisor to the Lithuanian Government, a lawyer for the Lithuanian Visaginas Nuclear Power plant company, representatives from Latvia and Estonia, and a local lawyer. Under discussion was the draft concession agreement negotiated by the outgoing government and approved by a law in the Seimas, the Lithuanian Parliament, which contains a blanket confidentiality clause that violates national and international law on the right of access to information: **the Parties agree, and the Republic of Lithuania shall ensure, that no member of the public shall be entitled to receive all or any information ... in connection with the Project pursuant to any applicable Law relating to or in connection with freedom of information.**

Lithuania has two laws governing the right of access to information as well as a law protecting access to environmental information. Lithuania has also signed and ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents and the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. A primary concern that emerged during the debate was the validity of the article bearing in mind that contracts do not normally have the ability to take precedent over national laws including laws on access to information. [More about it.](#)
