

THE COMPLIANCE OF THE BALTIC STATES WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF TOLERANCE AS CONDITION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNITED EUROPE

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Abstract: The article studies the compliance of democracy of the Baltic States with the principle of tolerance. The study demonstrated specific social phobias (xenophobia, migrant phobia, homophobia, islamophobia, romaphobia, etc.), hate speech and other destructive trends in the Baltic countries that contradict values of liberal democracy. The authors argue that Baltic States face similar challenges of strengthening the principle of tolerance as well as how they differ in intolerance manifestations and mechanisms of their prevention and counteraction. In the Baltic States, issues related to promotion of tolerance are claimed to be common at two levels: at the institutional level (countries do not fulfil some of the EU guidelines aimed at enhancing the principle of tolerance); at the value level (population does not accept completely liberal-democratic values that the EU advocates).

Keywords: the Baltic States, the principle of tolerance, intolerance, social phobias, hate speech.

Summary: 1. INTRODUCTION. 2. THE COMPLIANCE OF ESTONIA WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF TOLERANCE AS THE CONDITION FOR PROGRESS OF THE UNITED EUROPE. 3. TOLERANCE VS INTOLERANCE: LATVIA'S CASE AS AN EXAMPLE OF VALUE AND INSTITUTIONAL AMBIVALENCE. 4. SOCIAL ANXIETY AND PHOBIAS ON THE INTOLERANCE BASIS IN LITHUANIA. 5. CONCLUSIONS.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the political and legal discourse, tolerance has been the critical subject for a long time. Modern scientific discussions are aimed at finding clearer limits of tolerance in the world when new global and local challenges emerge. Determining effective ways in practical and multidimensional implementation of the principle of tolerance, prevention and counteraction of intolerance remains relevant in the political and legal realities.

The intention of states to exercise the principle of tolerance is enshrined in many documents, ranging from the preamble to the UN Charter (Charter of the United Nations, 1945) and the interpretation of tolerance as "harmony in difference" (Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, 1995). Tolerance is often interpreted as "forbearance" or the readiness to "put up with" with what one dislikes (Rapp and Freitag 2015; Verkuyten and

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Slooter 2007). We adhere to the interpretation of tolerance as a socio-cultural attitude and the perception that all possible diversity is a positive matter, the norm of coexistence.

At the same time, the notion “tolerance” is frail due to its abstract nature that is aimed at assessing one’s compliance to certain significant political and legal values. Back in 1976, J. W. Ferrar highlighted in his research that “the concept of tolerance is in a state of disarray” (Ferrar, 1976, p. 63). Since then the situation has not altered greatly, despite a fairly large number of empirical and theoretical-methodological studies of tolerance.

Nowadays, a quite stable consensus is formed on understanding tolerance as the necessary condition for the progress of democracy (Kuklinski et al., 1991, p. 3). Since regression of democracy is seen worldwide, obviously deterioration of the quality of democracy should be studied in the context of increasing intolerance. Discussion regarding the issue of tolerance/intolerance intensified with the escalation of the migration issue in the EU in 2015. During the global pandemic COVID-19 we witnessed the expansion of the discussions concerning the limits and forms of tolerance in socio-political life. The issue of reliable indicators for measuring tolerance / intolerance (Hjerm et al., 2020, pp. 898-899) in order to assess the situation in the state has not lost its seriousness. The presence of certain prejudices is the indicator that is mostly used to study tolerance / intolerance. At the same time, the study of tolerance as a value orientation towards difference is expanding (Hjerm et al., 2020, p. 914).

As a matter of fact, the EU promotes tolerance as one of the most important conditions of its functioning. The EU advocates the values of diversity, “being another or unlike”, the right to opinion pluralism. The EU member-states signed Declaration of Principles on Tolerance (1995). Although, the EU member-countries are aimed at endorsing the rule of law and liberal democracy³, nowadays, all of them are challenged to a greater or lesser extent by violations of rights and liberties of “Others” through gender, age, educational, interethnic, racial, religious, political, sexual, etc. discrimination. We imply segregation, racism, xenophobia, migrant phobia, romophobia, homophobia, the increase of hate speech and others. Radical right-wing organizations, neoracists, religious fundamentalists, chauvinists, xenophobic or ethnocentric people and other disruptive groups reject the principle of tolerance publicly. Moreover, some high-ranking officials deliver hate speeches that go unpunished. All these violations challenge the EU’s policy of affirming the value of tolerance which is a cornerstone of the progress of the united European community. Thus, the effective prevention as well as counteraction of intolerance is on the EU agenda.

The immensity of the intolerance issue in the EU is testified by the public surveys. According to the results of the Special Eurobarometer on Discrimination (Special Eurobarometer 493, 2019), respondents from the EU countries pointed out the cases of discrimination toward the Roma people (61%), harassment by the ethnic origin or skin

³ Hungary and Poland are the exceptions among the EU member states as there was an illiberal turn in the last decade. This process is characterized by conservative nationalist atmosphere, intensification of hate speech, xenophobia, opposition to immigration.

color (59%), sexual orientation (53%), religion or worship (47%), disability (44%), age (40%) and gender (35%). We should highlight that levels of particular types of intolerance vary significantly in different EU countries. The indicated demonstrations of intolerance also prevail in the “young” Baltic democracies. Moreover, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania face common challenges and differ in the intolerance manifestations as well as in approaches of preventing and counteracting them. These processes should be studied.

2. THE COMPLIANCE OF ESTONIA WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF TOLERANCE AS THE CONDITION FOR PROGRESS OF THE UNITED EUROPE

The national legislation of Estonia (Võrdse kohtlemise seadus, 2008) as well as the state’s implementation of the international rules are aimed at preventing and counteracting any discrimination through efforts of state institutions and civil society. However, it cannot be prevented completely in practice.

We should mention that in Estonia issues of tolerance are greatly influenced by their history as foreigners ruled in these territories for a long time, for example, Danes, German, Swedes, Russians (tsarist and Soviet periods). Particularly traumatic was the Soviet occupation. Its results are still noticeable today, primarily, in terms of political culture of population. However, Estonia preserved its cultural, linguistic, etc. identity despite the huge external impact. This is the reason why Estonia (as well as Latvia) has chosen a model of ethno-national self-defense, which aims to ensure the privileged position of the titular ethnic group through strict conditions for acquiring citizenship, language, personnel policy (Vitman, 2006, p. 55).

Following the declaration of independence (and especially after a pseudo-referendum in 1993 and a separatist attempt to secede from Estonia by three cities: Narva, Sillamäe and Kohtla-Järve⁴) the policy towards Estonia's Russian-speaking minority was intensified. The critics of this approach determined it as discrimination and intolerance. The course of European integration has softened Estonia's policy on this issue, as the EU has demanded a review of the acquisition of citizenship by the Russian-speaking population. Since 2015, Estonia has softened language requirements for people over 65. Since 2016, the automatic granting of Estonian citizenship to children born in Estonia, regardless of the citizenship of their parents was permitted (ECRI Report on Estonia, 2015, p. 9). Thus, there were 32% of people who lived in Estonia without citizenship in 1992, 6.5% of people in 2014 and 5.3% of population at the beginning of 2020. We should highlight that the integration policy of the Russian-speaking population has not always been effective since Estonia’s membership in the EU. It is related to a part of the stateless persons (mostly older people) who are less motivated to learn Estonian language or to integrate into the Estonian community as they may exercise the same rights as the EU citizens since 2004.

⁴ The north-eastern region of Estonia that was culturally and media isolated from the rest of the country for a long time.

As for the youth, for some time it was difficult for the Russian-speaking young people in Estonia to compete with Estonians when entering the institutions of higher education in Tallinn or Tartu due to the high standards of knowledge of the Estonian language. However, the state solved the problem of increasing their socio-economic marginalization through the establishment of a college for Russian-speaking youth from the University of Tartu in Narva. Education there is in Estonian, but the requirements to the knowledge of language are lower. In 2015, the public TV channel ETV + was created for the Russian-speaking audience. We should mention that contrary to Latvia, Estonia did not ban the Russian media.

The study of administrative service portals and other important online resources in Estonia has shown that the Estonian population that does not speak the state language fully receives information through multilingual Internet services. For example, official information of COVID-19 is reported equally in Estonian, English and Russian. The Estonian authorities support the policy of broadcasting significant information in many languages and this is an essential step towards establishing the principle of tolerance.

It should be noted that freedom of religion is enshrined at the constitutional level in Estonia; incitement to religious hatred as well as discrimination on religious grounds are criminalized. In general, religious tolerance in Estonia is high; manifestations of religious intolerance are not frequent.

Manifestation of anti-Semitism is a sensitive topic in Estonia, as almost all Jews in the country were killed by January 1942. It was Estonia that the Nazis declared the first “Juden Frei” country in Europe (“territory free of Jews”). The Jewish community has been concerned about the recent initiatives by the Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE). One of them was to return a monument to an Estonian soldier (a monument to soldiers of the Estonian SS Legion) that was exhibited in a Nazi uniform. A number of other crimes related to intolerance have been recorded, such as the desecration of a monument to Holocaust victims in the village of Kalevi-Liiva near Tallinn; it was marked with a swastika, a Nazi salute (August 2018). Another desecration of tombstones was in the ancient Jewish Rahumäe cemetery in Tallinn (June 2019), etc.

Discrimination and social exclusion of the Roma people are among the acute tolerance problems in many EU countries. The Roma community is small in Estonia (0.1% of the population). Usually Estonian Roma have access to public health insurance and education. However, their level of education is low, therefore the unemployment rate is high. There are issues with the complete integration of the Roma people into Estonian society as well as destructive stereotypes about them still persist (Viies, 2011, p. 3).

Islamophobia is a certain tolerance challenge for Estonia today, although its manifestations are currently infrequent. Estonia has one of the smallest Muslim communities in Europe, only about 1,500 people profess Islam. The most serious incident of intolerance can be considered an act of vandalism in 2018. On the facade of the building of the Estonian Islamic Center were inscriptions that can be classified as islamophobia. It should be mentioned that wearing of Islamic clothing is currently allowed in Estonia, but,

in 2015, the Estonian Ministry of Justice started working on a bill that would ban from wearing a burqa or niqab in public places (government agencies, schools, hospitals, etc.). Estonian Muslims consider the potential introduction of these changes discriminatory.

The problem of tolerance for sexual minorities is especially intense in most regions of the world. Although Estonia is considered more liberal to the LGBTQ community than other Baltic countries, discrimination and prejudice against this group have been widespread in Estonian society until recently. At the same time, even before Estonia's accession to the EU in 2004, the state institution brought national legislation in line with EU norms regarding the inadmissibility of different forms of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Same-sex relations were decriminalized in Estonia in 1992. Since 2002, transgender people in Estonia have been allowed to change their legal status and name. Since 2006, the Criminal Code of the Republic of Estonia has authorized public incitement to hatred based on sexual orientation. Representatives of sexual minorities can serve in the Estonian army.

Estonia's greatest progress in combating intolerance towards sexual minorities was achieved with the adoption of the law "On cohabitation" in 2014 (took effect in 2016). It allowed the legalization of relationships between people living without marriage registration. This act was the first manifestation of the legalization of civil partnership in the post-Soviet space. It is an alternative to traditional marriage, which is possible in particular for same-sex couples. Since then, same-sex unions have been legally registered in Estonia (notarized), and homosexual couples have been equated in rights with heterosexuals living in civil marriages. It should be highlighted that in the case of homosexual couples, not marriage, but same-sex civil partnership is implied.

Yet, the topic of same-sex relations remains controversial in the Estonian community. This fact is illustrated by the results of a monitoring poll which was conducted in 2012, 2014, 2017 and 2019 by the Finnish company Turu-Uuringute AS and commissioned by the Estonian Human Rights Center. Based on their results, an idea of Estonians' attitude towards sexual minorities is formed, as well as the dynamics of constructive / destructive changes on this issue. In 2019, 41% of respondents considered same-sex relationships completely or rather acceptable, while 52% viewed them as completely or rather unacceptable (LGBT teemaline avaliku arvamus uuring, 2012). They can be compared to the results of the previous years, in 2012 – 38% and 57%, in 2014 – 34% and 59% of respondents replied respectively. The level of tolerance / intolerance of Estonians towards sexual minorities can be assessed only in relation to other countries. For example, in Finland and Denmark, high tolerance is exhibited through the right to same-sex marriage, while in Lithuania and Latvia, intolerance for sexual minorities is manifested in strong opposition to the institution of same-sex partnerships (as in Estonia).

Of course, tolerance for sexual minorities in Estonia is rising, albeit slowly. However, this growth is uneven for different socio-demographic groups. The level of tolerance of Estonians towards sexual minorities correlates with age, language of communication and level of education. The greatest support for the law is in the age group of 20-29. Most likely, this fact can be explained by the liberal democratization of the

political culture of citizens who were born in independent Estonia and socialized largely by the influence of neoliberal democracy values.

Compared to other Baltic countries, the level of homophobia in Estonia is much lower. There are many more programs aimed at preventing it. However, intolerance towards sexual minorities is demonstrated in the statements of some government officials, political and public figures of conservative, clerical, and right-wing radical ideas.

It should be noted that in Estonia there is no legal regulation of the hate speech issue, although the problems caused by it are obvious in Estonian society. There are racist comments in social networks, state institutions do not respond properly to homophobic, transphobic statements of politicians. Moreover, reporting on cases of racial, homophobic and transphobic intolerance is insufficient, the level of training of police and judges to respond appropriately to hate speech is inadequate, management of the events that intend to draw public attention to the problem of hate speech and prevent it is problematic. These unresolved issues are highlighted by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI Report on Estonia, 2015). At the same time, the efforts of Estonian state and non-state groups should not be ignored. For many years they have been conducting many social campaigns against racism, homophobia, etc. which contributes to the strengthening of Estonian tolerance.

The issue of overcoming xenophobia in the workplace remains relevant for Estonia. In companies, conflicts based on values related to the ethnicity of employees have been repeatedly reported. Since 2012, legal entities in Estonia have joined the signing of the Estonian Diversity Charter which obliges employers to respect the diversity of the current society as well as to protect staff from various discrimination in the workplace (Estonian Diversity Charter, 2012).

An important factor of the rising intolerance is the coming to power of radical, populist political parties, the intensification of the illiberal segment of civil society in many EU countries. Estonia is not an exception. Right-wing populist, Eurosceptic parties have been represented in the parliament in recent years. In particular, it is related to the EKRE party whose program is based on populism and the slogan “Estonia – for Estonians”. According to the results of its first election campaign (in 2015), this party entered into the Riigikogu (8% of the vote), and in the next elections (in 2019) has already received 18% of the vote. This is the largest increase in parliamentary representation among all Estonian parties, despite the fact that members of the EKRE party express misogynistic, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, homophobic and racist views (Bathke, 2019). This situation is an alarming marker for values of Estonian society. Even before the party entered Riigikogu, EKRE leaders voiced intolerant messages, such as “If You're Black, Go Back!” (Conservative Politician, 2013). Today, the attitude of the party and its leaders is even tougher, that is, general opposition to migrants regardless of their skin color and country of origin.

One of the reasons for EKRE's electoral success has been the escalation of the migration crisis in Europe since 2015 and the manipulation of anxiety about the possible problems of small Estonia, due to the need to comply with EU migration quotas. Although,

immigrants are largely satisfied with life in Estonia, they assess the level of Estonians tolerance as insufficient due to cases of disrespect, violence, prejudice against them personally or their community (Survey of new immigrants to Estonia, 2016). It should be noted that as of 2018, Estonia has accommodated only two hundred refugees within the migration plan agreed by the EU member states in 2015. Estonia is certainly open to migrant entrepreneurs, initiators of innovative startups, and talented programmers, but it applies to refugees from conflict and war zones less.

Currently there are two refugee centers in Estonia (Vao, Vägeva) and the number of accommodated people is decreasing every year. In particular, as of May 1st, 2020, only 40 people lived in these centers (Lepik, 2020). Estonia declared that it is ready to join the EU in resolving the migration crisis, but in terms of providing technical assistance within EU refugee programs. This position of the state was announced by the Minister of the Interior of Estonia M. Helme and it is completely consistent with the EKRE course. According to M. Helme, as long as EKRE is a part of the Estonian government, the country will not be open to immigrants (Helme, 2019).

At the same time, Estonia is successfully implementing certain steps to overcome a number of intolerance problems. For instance, there were launched a system of data collection and a system of statistics on cases of racist and homo- and transphobic hate speech, which were reported to law enforcement agencies and prosecuted by the courts; the implementation of the integration strategy of vulnerable groups (Russian-speaking minority, stateless persons applying for citizenship of the Republic of Estonia, etc.) (ECRI Conclusions, 2018). Information campaigns are being implemented to form a positive perception of different nationalities inhabiting Estonia, for example, the TV program “Meie Eestid” (aired on the Estonian TV channel ETV in 2017).

3. TOLERANCE VS INTOLERANCE: LATVIA’S CASE AS AN EXAMPLE OF VALUE AND INSTITUTIONAL AMBIVALENCE

In the Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030 (“Latvija 2030”) tolerance is determined as one of the strategic principles. However, the document’s interpretation of the content of tolerance indicates a narrow list of fields for reducing social exclusion and discrimination, that is, “inequality of income, age and gender discrimination in the labor market, ethnic prejudices and linguistic institutional obstacles” (Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030, 2010, p. 8).

One of the most acute intolerance and discrimination issues in Latvia is citizenship that has a historical background. World War II and Soviet occupation have greatly changed the ethnic structure of the country’s population. Before the declaration of independence only 52% of the population were Latvians. The long Latvian-Russian border (270 km) as well as the numerous Russian minority are the factors that aggravates the issue of stateless persons. These aspects are considered as a potential threat to the country’s preservation of sovereignty as well as falling under the strong influence of the Russian Federation. Thus, after the restoration of independence, the policy of citizenship was based on doctrine of state continuity. In 1994, Latvian parliament legislated the procedure for acquiring

citizenship through naturalization. At the same time, the European institutions prompted the liberalization of the citizenship procedure.

Therefore, in Latvia (as in Estonia), the status of non-citizen has been authorized, and it can be changed via naturalization. It is criticized due to the fact that this status makes it impossible to exercise a number of human rights. Contrary to Estonians, Latvian non-citizens cannot vote in the local elections. In general, stateless persons consider this status discriminatory and the process of fulfilling the criteria to acquire citizenship is viewed as humiliation as well as restriction of human rights. These aspects exacerbate the issue. If Latvia is compared with Estonia, the percentage of non-citizens in the Latvian population is twice higher, however, their number decreases. In 1995, there were 28% of stateless persons, in 2011 – 14.1%, in 2017 – 11.4%, in 2019 – 10.7% and in 2020 – 10.4%.

The EU institutions criticized Latvia repeatedly for having non-citizen children. Though their amount is not high (in 2016, there were 47, in 2017 – 51, in 2018 – 33 children), the situation itself is unacceptable in the context of the contemporary understanding of the children's rights and safety. In 2017, the President of Latvia Raimonds Vējonis initiated the automatic granting of citizenship to children born to the non-citizen parents, but then this innovation did not receive political support. On October 17, 2019, the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia passed historic legislation that automatically grants citizenship to all children born from January 1st, 2020 and it only requires an application from one of the parents. Thus, due to the law changes in the citizenship of the newborns, the number of non-citizens will gradually decrease, and the amount of people of retirement and pre-retirement age among non-citizens will grow.

Intolerance for sexual orientation is one of the most intense issues in Latvia. Same-sex relationships are legalized since 1992, and representatives of sexual minorities can serve in the army. However, they cannot marry, adopt a child or register a same-sex civil partnership as an alternative to marriage (as in Estonia). The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia prohibits same-sex marriage indirectly. In Article 10, the family is defined as the union of a man and a woman. Latvian sexual minorities continue to face additional legal and social challenges. A high percentage of Latvians are prejudiced against sexual minorities due to social conservatism.

Intolerance towards sexual minorities is the most vivid at the public events. During the first parade in Latvia “Riga Pride” in 2005, homophobic manifestations were recorded and the event itself was disrupted (Birnbau, 2015). Notably, even the high-ranked politicians opposed the Pride publicly, for instance, a former Prime Minister of Latvia Aigars Kalvītis. Though, in recent years, homophobia is less exhibited during the parades, they are held involving a great number of law enforcement officers.

Remarkably, Latvian political and state officials usually distance themselves from events held by sexual minorities, therefore, they do not direct public opinion towards the tolerance ideas. Edgars Rinkēvičs was the first Latvian official (Minister of Foreign Affairs) who informed about being gay in his Twitter. Minister announced this fact in order to fight for the legalization of same-sex marriages in Latvia, or at least same-sex civil partnership.

We should highlight that on January 30, 2015, a Latvian politician Veiko Spoliš submitted a bill that would legalize civil partnership in Latvia. However, the proposal was rejected by the Legal Affairs Committee. The initiation of the bill started a discussion in the country (Miķelsone, 2015). In 2019, the Saeima considered civil partnership bill, but did not support it.

The 2019 survey of Special Eurobarometer 493: Discrimination in the EU reported on the low level of tolerance of Latvians towards same-sex relationship: only 25% of the respondents agreed that it is normal, while 68% considered it unacceptable. However, Latvians were more tolerant answering the question whether the LGBTQ community representatives should have equal rights with the heterosexuals (49% respondents agreed to the equality, while 43% disagreed). At the same time, Latvia's level of intolerance towards sexual minorities is the highest among the Baltic countries. In general, Latvia develops from survival to self-expression values quite slowly and low level of tolerance for sexual minorities proves that (Rungule and Seņkāne, 2018, p. 95).

Intolerance towards sexual minorities is demonstrated not only by destructive non-governmental actors, but it can also be argued and originated by the state institutions. However, we have already recorded examples of how the state institution in Latvia (court) defended sexual minorities despite the prevailing atmosphere of conservatism in the society. A specific case illustrates that. On 12 November 2020, the Constitutional Court delivered the judgement in case No. 2019-33-01 "On the Compliance of Article 155 (1) of the Labour Law with the First Sentence of Article 110 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia" (Spriedums 2020). The contested provision was Article 155(1) of the Labour Law according to which: "The father of a child is entitled to a leave of 10 calendar days. Leave shall be granted to the father of a child immediately after the birth of the child, but not later than within two months from the birth of the child". The issue of this lawsuit is that the Constitution of Latvia defends and supports family exclusively as the union of a man and a woman. While a plaintiff was a woman in a stable same-sex relationship and applied for paternity leave, which was granted exclusively to male parents in Latvia until now.

We think that the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Latvia took a prudent view when considering the specific case. Especially, in a situation where the interpretation of the family as a union of a man and a woman is enshrined in the Constitution of the state.

The Court took the following position: alongside the state's obligation to protect and support marriage as a union between a man and a woman, the first sentence of Article 110 of the Satversme establishes an obligation of the state to protect and support also family, parents, and children. The Constitutional Court concluded that a family was a social institution founded on close personal ties that could be identified in the social reality, and based on understanding and respect. Even in the absence of a biological link or legally recognized child-parent relationship, *de facto* family relationships can exist between a child and the person who has taken care of the child, depending on whether they live together, on the duration and quality of their relationship as well as the adult's role in the relationship with the child. The existence of close personal ties follows from

a concluded marriage or the fact of kinship; however, in the social reality close personal ties develop also in other ways, for instance, as the result of de facto cohabitation. The first sentence of Article 110 of the Satversme defines a positive obligation of the state to protect and support all families, also, inter alia, de facto families (Spriedums 2020).

The Constitutional Court of Latvia paid attention to the fact that the concept of marriage has been defined in the first sentence of Article 110 of the Satversme as a union between a man and a woman; however, the concept of family used in the same article has not been specified and does not advance gender as a criterion for determining the persons who should be recognized as being a family. The Constitutional Court of Latvia emphasized that the stereotypes prevailing in the society may not serve as constitutionally justifiable grounds for denying or restricting the fundamental rights of a certain person or groups of persons in a democratic state governed by the rule of law. If the Constitution declares the human right to privacy, the state must consider sexual behavior as one of the elements of person's private life. Therefore, the Constitutional Court of Latvia assessed that human right to freedom of sexual behavior requires defense despite the way of its expression or sexual orientation (case № 2019-33-01). In this context, it is the state's obligation to protect and support families of same-sex partners.

It is a positive trend that the Constitutional Court of Latvia took a position that the state is obliged to ensure the legal protection for families of same-sex partners as well as to regulate provision of social support to such families. Although, the Latvian parliament (the Saeima) interprets the concept of family in a conservative way, it cannot be a reason to deprive families with same-sex partners of adequate social and economic support from the state. Thus, it is necessary to amend the text of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia (Article 110). Since decisions of the Constitutional Court are not subject to appeal there is reason to expect changes in a situation where still only mother and child are socially and economically protected by the state in a same-sex family, while another partner is disadvantaged in many ways. It is clear that the Republic of Latvia has to study the issue of the legal status of same-sex families carefully and in details. The important objective for Latvia is to make changes in the legal regulation of family relations in order to further ensure the protection and support of same-sex partners and children born into their families.

There are some other issues in the context of tolerance within the Latvian society and state. Issues related to the country's historical heritage, especially during World War II, remain particularly sensitive in terms of tolerance / intolerance in Latvia. First of all, we imply the annual marches in Riga (on March 16) which are held to honor members of the local legion Waffen-SS. As of the beginning of 2020, about 400 legionnaires lived in different countries worldwide and some of them are in Latvia. There is no unity in the Latvian community regarding the attitude towards legionnaires and the state's policy towards them. This was pointed out by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI Report on Latvia, 2012, pp. 7, 24-25)

The European institutions are sympathetic to the fact that part of the Latvian public views the Legion's activities not as solidarity with Nazism but as a struggle

against the Soviet regime to restore the country's sovereignty. However, in 2012, ECRI voiced concern about the try to justify the Legion's actions as this can threaten to incite xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance. The United Nations, the European Parliament, Jewish organizations and other institutions have also repeatedly expressed concern over events such as Latvian Legionnaires' Remembrance Day. Despite ECRI's assessments, Latvia continues the tradition of commemorative events dedicated to the unofficial Day of Remembrance of Latvian Legionnaires who fought in World War II. These ceremonies are always followed by different incidents which requires the strengthening of law enforcement measures.

The events of World War II are connected with other problems that arise in Latvia in terms of tolerance. For example, in 2014, the Israeli government protested against the staging of the musical "Cukurs, Herbert Cukurs". It honors the memory of Herberts Cukurs, a Latvian soldier who was a member of the Arajs Kommando, which was involved in the extermination of Latvian Jews during the Holocaust in the Second World War. At the same time, as an aviator and writer, Cukurs is perceived in Latvia as a national hero. In fact, the musical "Cukurs, Herbert Cukurs" was prepared by a private company. Although it was criticized by the Latvian authorities, it is not banned.

In recent years, the Latvian state's attention to hate speech has increased at the request of EU institutions. The changes that are taking place are mainly reflected in the legislative innovations caused by Latvia's international obligations. In particular, in 2014, the Criminal Code of the Republic of Latvia was amended to provide criminal liability for inciting social hatred on the grounds of sex, age, disability, etc. The topic of racism was supplemented by national, ethnic, religious matters, that is, the range of hate-vulnerable groups was expanded. Although the list of vulnerable groups is not complete, parliament did not include sexual orientation in it, despite the high level of homophobia in Latvia. In addition, it should be noted that the incitement of hate speech on the Internet is a growing problem nowadays.

At the same time, public information on the recorded hate crimes in Latvia is insufficient. Official data on such crimes are limited and the amount of criminal proceedings for offenses committed on the basis of hate speech remains insignificant. Government statistics on the number of offenses committed on the grounds of racial hatred, xenophobia and homophobia differs greatly from the unofficial statistics compiled by Latvian human rights NGOs (Latvian Center for Human Rights, "Mosaic", etc.) (Kamenska, 2017, p. 6). It should also be noted that a common trend in Latvia is the reluctance of victims of hate crimes to report them to law enforcement agencies. One of the possible reasons is insufficient government programs to support victims of hate crimes. The Latvian government started providing public funding for social rehabilitation services to victims of all types of crimes only in 2015.

Prevention and counteraction of various manifestations of intolerance, measures to improve the political and legal culture of both the population and professionals whose objective is to prevent and combat intolerance are paramount for Latvia. There is information that the State Police College has conducted a training course for Latvian

judicial and law enforcement officers on hate speech and the proper response to such offenses. But, researchers characterize these measures as irregular and unsystematic (Kamenska, 2017, p. 6).

After the beginning of the European migration crisis in 2015, refugees from outside Europe are particularly vulnerable to xenophobia and alienation in Latvia (Responding to racism in Latvia, 2019, p. 2). Latvia accommodated 374 refugees (the EU quota was 550 people). Latvia was one of those countries that in 2017 actively supported the initiative of Polish Prime Minister D. Tusk to abolish the EU practice of setting refugee quotas for member countries. Instead, Latvia supported the Agreement between the EU and Turkey on the reception of refugees by the latter country (readmission) in exchange for financial assistance from EU member states. Most of the people accommodated in Latvia under EU quotas soon departed mainly to Germany or the Scandinavian countries. This fact illustrates the assessment of attitudes towards refugees in Latvia.

Thus, the stability of tolerance is currently a challenge for Latvia. We consider that a large percentage of non-citizens as well as the highest level of intolerance to sexual minorities among the Baltic States are the main reasons in problematic promotion of tolerance and prevention of intolerance in Latvia. Latvia's legislation is not completely in line with the ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 7 on combating racism and racial discrimination. Law enforcement agencies lack special services that would help the victims of hate crimes. Latvian officials and social activists do not adequately promote discourse against the racist, homo/transphobia hate speech. Marginalization of the Roma community persists, especially in terms of employment and the provision of public medical and educational services. There are manifestations of anti-Semitism, particularly in the Internet discourse. Despite the small number of refugees admitted by Latvia in recent years, there is a high level of intolerance towards asylum seekers.

In our opinion, these problems are related to the political and legal culture of Latvians which is still quite intolerant of diversity as well as they do not have sustainable neoliberal-democratic values, which the EU focuses on. Countering intolerance remains an important component of the country's incomplete post-socialist democratization.

4. SOCIAL ANXIETY AND PHOBIAS ON THE INTOLERANCE BASIS IN LITHUANIA

The implementation of the principle of tolerance in Lithuania has a long tradition dating back to the time of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. For hundreds of years, Lithuania has been a territory of coexistence and interaction of numerous peoples, cultures and religions. However, deep-rooted prejudices and new ethnic stereotypes, anxiety of immigration and new challenges that stimulate destructive assessments and actions which are intolerant of human dignity are now evident.

The problem of intolerance took on a new tone after Lithuania's accession to the EU, as the state was given new responsibilities to implement the EU policy, including the establishment of equality, non-discrimination, the principle of tolerance, etc. However, there are a number of different phobias (xenophobia, homophobia, migrant phobia,

romophobia, etc.) in the country even after almost two decades of the EU membership. Although Lithuania has enshrined the principle of tolerance in law, its content is not clearly defined which complicates investigating the cases of intolerance and bringing the perpetrators to justice.

A survey commissioned by the Ministry of Social Security and Labor of the Republic of Lithuania showed that approximately 80% of the country's population describes itself as tolerant (Ditkevičius, Goročovskis, 2015). However, the answers to the questionnaire cast doubts on such a high percentage. In particular, a significant number of respondents who identified themselves as “tolerant” indicated that they could not work with “Others” and agreed that they were tolerant of certain issues only as long as it did not concern them personally. Such responses indicate a latent intolerance in relationships with people of different ethnic, racial, sexual, and other identities.

Lithuanian public opinion has a fairly vivid and high intolerance of the Roma people, sexual minorities, migrants and refugees. At the same time, the level of tolerance of Lithuanians towards people of other races and nationalities is much higher than towards representatives of other religions (non-Christian). This may indicate a strong religious conservatism of Lithuanians which may lead to an increase in, for example, Islamophobia. However, such effects require monitoring studies to confirm / refute this hypothesis.

After the collapse of the USSR, Lithuania chose a different approach to granting citizenship than Latvia and Estonia, therefore there is no group of non-citizens in the population (Venkov, 2018). Citizenship requirements in Lithuania were the most liberal among the Baltic States after independence. The reason is mostly explained by the relatively low level of immigration to Lithuania from other parts of the USSR, as a result, the population was ethnically more homogeneous (Budryte, 2005, p. 150).

14.7% of the population of Lithuania consists of national minorities: Poles (6.6%), Russians (5.8%), Belarusians (1.2%), etc. Now there is no vivid intolerance between representatives of different nationalities in Lithuania, but there are some manifestations of ethnic intolerance (Janušauskienė, 2013, p. 428). In particular, the largest minority in Lithuania is the Polish one (over 200,000 people) and the debates over their rights exacerbate tensions between Lithuania and Poland. Poland has repeatedly stated violations of the rights of its compatriots in Lithuania⁵. In 2012, a single curriculum in the Lithuanian language and the state exam were introduced and have become a challenge for students in schools where lessons are conducted in minority languages, including Polish⁶. Since then, a discourse on the reform of Lithuanian education discriminates against children of

⁵ For example, the former President of Poland Lech Wałęsa refused to accept one of Lithuania's most honorable awards, the Grand Cross of the Order of Vytautas the Great, in protest against the position of Lithuanian Poles. First of all, Poland criticizes the provisions of the new Lithuanian law on education which intensifies learning of the Lithuanian language in minority schools. The problem of intolerance towards the Polish minority in Lithuania is exacerbated primarily by Polish radical political organizations.

⁶ In 2018, the legislation on education was amended: up to the 7th grade at least 50% of subjects are taught in Lithuanian, in 7- 9th grades 80%, in 10-12th grades 100%.

minority languages schools became relevant. The problem remains under the EU's control. In particular, in 2019 the Council of Europe appealed again to the Lithuanian authorities to adopt a comprehensive legal framework to prevent discrimination against students among national minorities. The European institutions drew attention to the need for Lithuania to comply with national legislation with the Framework Convention on the use of minority languages in administrative bodies, commercial sign boards and topographic instructions, spelling of names and surnames in official documents.

From Poland's perspective, in order to guarantee the rights of Poles in Lithuania, it is necessary to: 1) establish the bilingual names of settlements and streets / squares in areas where Poles make up a third or more of the population; 2) legalize spelling the names of Lithuanian Poles in accordance with the Polish tradition. It should be mentioned that there are Polish-language schools in Lithuania, a branch of the University of Białystok with a Polish language of teaching, as well as the study of Polish philology and the training of Polish language teachers are also possible.

The problem of anti-Semitism in Lithuania deserves special attention. Firstly, anti-Semitism is exhibited in the public events of right-wing radical political organizations. For instance, in 2015, the Lithuanian Nationalist Youth Union organized a march in Kaunas and some of the participants had the swastika symbol on their clothes. The action took place near the historic site of the Kaunas massacre where in 1941 several thousand Jews were killed. Lithuania has also reported vandalism of Lithuanian Jewish cemeteries and Holocaust memorials. Occasionally, anti-Semitic essays appear in national newspapers. Although negative stereotypes about Jews are quite archaic in Lithuanian society, they sometimes appear in different forms. Domestic anti-Semitism persists mainly at the level of Lithuanian folklore.

The surge of anti-Semitism in Lithuania, the threats of neo-Nazis to the Jewish community even led to the short-term closure of the only synagogue and headquarters of the Lithuanian Jewish community in Vilnius in August 2019. This effect was caused by the actions of some political forces. In particular, the center-right conservative political party The Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) is actively lobbying for the recognition as national heroes of individuals who are accused of anti-Semitism and involvement in the Holocaust. A part of Lithuanian society perceives these historical figures as national heroes, while another one as Nazi war criminals and collaborators. We mean first of all Jonas Noreika (in his honor a memorial plaque was installed on the building of the Library of the Wroblewski Academy of Sciences, but later it was dismantled) and Kazys Škirpa (in 1998, the alley in Vilnius was named in his honor, later it was renamed the Alley of Tricolor). These events provoked an active debate in society and in the Lithuanian Seimas.

It should be emphasized that the first Jews settled in Lithuania in the 12th century, but the 700-year history of Lithuanian Jews has only recently been integrated into the national education system. For a long time, the Lithuanian education system did not pay proper attention to the Lithuanian Jewish history (Beresniova, 2017, p. 54), but in recent years, textbooks on Lithuanian history focus on this topic much more, especially on the

Holocaust. For a while, the matter of the Holocaust in Lithuania was discussed primarily in narrow academic circles, while the general public was limited to it.

Anti-Semitism has been repeatedly recorded in Lithuanian media. Such cases were considered by the Lithuania Ethics Commission of Journalists and Publishers. Almost all anti-Semitism cases concerned the same media group “Respublikos leidinių grupė”, but the Commission did not confirm the incitement of anti-Semitism for any case.

In our perspective, effective prevention and counteract of new manifestations of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, especially in cyberspace, is a relevant objective for Lithuania nowadays. Unfortunately, Lithuania lacks a single centralized institution that would respond to cases of anti-Semitism. Lithuanian judicial and law enforcement agencies often do not identify a certain illegal act as demonstration of anti-Semitism, that is, they do not classify it as a crime committed on the grounds of hatred.

Intolerance in Lithuania is also exhibited in romaphobia. The Romani community is small; it is only about 3 thousand people (less than 0.1% of the population). Lithuanian Roma people are spread all around the country and the only place of their dense residence is the village of Kirtimai near Vilnius where more than 500 Roma live (Poviliuna, 2011, p. 4). In fact, this settlement vividly shows poverty and social isolation that are common for Lithuanian Roma people.

Lithuanian Roma community faces significant accommodation issues. The European institutions have repeatedly drawn attention to the need to provide them with social housing as well as to overcome the prejudices of Roma people among landlords (ECRI Conclusions, 2019, p. 5). At the initiative of Vilnius City Hall, “Vilnius (Kirtimai) Roma Tabor Community Social Integration Program for 2016-2019” was implemented. It should be highlighted that the project estimated at 700 thousand euros was discussed without the involvement of the Lithuanian Romani minority. This case is an example of pseudo-integration of Roma without the involvement of the Roma themselves (Kiurė, 2017). In fact, the program was aimed primarily at providing Roma with social housing, but the set order of priority in the right to accommodation caused dissatisfaction among the rest of the population and only exacerbated hate speech against the Roma minority. We should note that during its independence Lithuania has implemented several programs of Roma integration, however, in the lives of the latter there have been minor changes. On the contrary, Romaphobia rose in the Lithuanian community. The full access of Roma people to the Lithuanian labor market is particularly problematic.

Migrant phobia is another problem of Lithuania in the context of tolerance / intolerance. Lithuania did not participate much when the EU faced a migration crisis in 2015. According to the EU quota, Lithuania had to accept 1105 refugees (later the quota was revised TO 1077 people). As of the beginning of 2020, Lithuania accommodated only 490 people⁷, many of whom later left for other EU countries. The reason for this kind of attitude is that Lithuanians have a firm stereotype that asylum seekers are primarily

⁷ Lithuania intends to continue participation in the migrant transfer programs (till 2022).

economic migrants. Lithuanians attribute the possible increase in crime and unemployment, aggravation of social problems, etc. to refugees. Prejudice against them is growing, though the vast majority of Lithuanians have not communicated with people from the Middle East and Africa affected by wars and civil conflicts. Lithuanians seem to be characterized by a sense of fear of the unknown and this anxiety is manifested by asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa. Many Lithuanian employers also have negative stereotypes about refugees. The issue is exacerbated because the Lithuanian media do not pay enough attention to specific cases of refugees, that is, how successfully they integrate into the Lithuanian community, whether it is easy for them to find understanding in the workplace and outside it, etc. We assume that the lack of knowledge and personal experience cause anxiety regarding refugees among Lithuanians.

Neo-racism in Lithuania aggravated beyond just skin color discrimination. It includes ethnicity, religion, etc. Neo-racism is demonstrated via different means, for instance, the language of hatred, making labor ethnical matter, etc. It is promoted through actions of radical organizations as well as officials whose activity discriminates against certain social groups in education, health care, employment, etc.

In Lithuania, the victims of hate speech are primarily refugees, ethnic minorities and foreign citizens (Responding to racism in Lithuania, 2019). Ultranationalist, clerical and other radical political organizations express insulting and unreasonable generalizations frequently. Despite the fact that the far-right parties in Lithuania do not have a large number of supporters, they actively promote hate speech and different types of inequalities. Moreover, the Lithuanian media are often guided by destructive stereotypes when they spread certain information. Consequently, they promote negative images of certain minorities, refugees and others. Currently, hate speech is incited in cyberspace, for example, within Facebook groups, forums, where 90% of hate speech cases occur (Bitiukova, 2011, p. 7). For now, the efforts of Lithuania to solve the problem of neo-racist, homo- / transphobic, etc. hate speech is not a comprehensive strategic vision for finding solutions, therefore they are not effective enough.

Among the post-Soviet Baltic States Lithuania has the most conservative views of sexual minorities. Consequently, it was repeatedly criticized by the EU institutions. Considerable influence of the Catholic Church is one of the reasons for this attitude. There are small communities of sexual minorities only in the largest cities (Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda). Lithuania was the last among the Baltic States to abolish a criminal prosecution for the same-sex relationships (in 1993). Lithuania's membership in the EU obliged it to adopt legislation (in 2005) that formally prohibits any types of discrimination, including sexual one.

There is no legal recognition of the same-sex couples in both Lithuania and Latvia, that is, no registration of same-sex marriages or no civil same-sex partnerships (as in Estonia). The public remains unchanged and does not support legalization of the same-sex marriages, and the opposition of the heterosexual and homosexual couples is firmly established in the Lithuanian conservative culture. The survey of Eurobarometer (Special Eurobarometer 437, 2015) reported that only 24% of the respondents approved same-sex

marriages (lower percentage among the EU countries was only in Latvia, Romania and Bulgaria).

Cases of direct or indirect hindrance of social or cultural events of the LGBTQ community in their own or rented premises have been recorded. Denial of rental or access to venues is related to their organization by sexual minorities. There are a number of other restrictions in Lithuania, in particular, joint adoption or adoption by a second partner of a same-sex couple is not possible.

Although training on racist and homo / transphobic violence was conducted for the Lithuanian law enforcement and judicial staff in 2012-2014 at the request of European institutions, progress has not been adequate. Educational projects have not sufficiently changed the state's response to cases of hate speech and illegal actions based on hatred.

Even though national legislation of Lithuania as well as international legal acts are aimed at preventing intolerance, the establishment of the principle of tolerance is highly problematic in the country. Legal mechanisms for the protection of human / civil rights and liberties are not applied effectively; law enforcement and judicial bodies are not competent enough, especially in their response to illegal actions committed on the basis of hatred, the use of hate speech, etc.; Lithuanian society is passive in the inadmissibility of intolerant processes; Lithuanian culture is quite conservative and liberal democratic values are not sustainable and solid yet. Lithuanians express anxiety, destructive stereotypes and unreasonable phobias towards asylum seekers and foreigners. The state is not firm in combating intolerance or promoting integration of the social excluded groups.

Lithuanian establishment of tolerance principle differs from other post-Soviet Baltic countries (Estonia and Latvia) in its distinct approach to citizenship as well as higher levels of homophobia.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the post-Soviet Baltic countries issues related to tolerance / intolerance are similar. However, they differ in their volume due to national peculiarities that are connected with mechanisms of acquiring citizenship. Existence of the problems at both institutional (country does not fulfil some of the EU guidelines aimed at promotion of the principle of tolerance) and value levels (population does not accept completely liberal-democratic values that the EU advocates) are common features of all the Baltic States.

Compared to the young democracies of Central and Eastern Europe (especially, the V4 countries), Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania do not have uprising tendencies of intolerance, but Baltic state institutions do not provide effective or consistent strategies that enhance the principle of tolerance. It results in stagnation and reduction of counteraction of ethno-national intolerance, prevention of social anxiety and fears (romaphobia, islamophobia, migrant phobia, etc.), the spread of hate speech. Though, at the institutional level the Baltic countries realize that prevention and counteraction of intolerance is a guarantee for their further practice. Current destructive processes are determined by a number of reasons,

that is, political culture of development in the EU, not all the conditions required by Copenhagen criteria are followed in population, lack in the activity of liberal-democratic part of civil society, absence of political freedom among the leading state bodies, etc. They take place due to an increase of new populist, radical, conservative clerical and other political entities in the context of the socio-economic problems in the world. Thus, this implies the worldwide deterioration of quality of democracy.

In our perspective, intolerance solving activities of state institutions are related to features of political culture of the post-Soviet democracies and population's values. The Baltic communities combat intolerance passively. Their inactivity is impacted by the dominant conservatism of political legal culture and instability of liberal democratic values among the citizens. The Baltic political culture demonstrates intolerance towards diversity, while the liberal-democratic values that the EU endorses remain unsustainable. We consider that particularly the change of values is the basis for the establishment of the principle of tolerance in the Baltic States.

In addition to the axiological issues, activity of the Baltic political bodies is not effective enough due to the regulatory gaps as well as discrepancy between the national and the EU legislation systems. States do not implement some of the EU guidelines that are aimed at prevention and reduction of intolerant destructive processes. Baltic state institutions are not consistent in combating intolerance or in the integration of the stigmatized groups. Inadequate intolerance counteractions at the institutional level are exemplified by the fact that a great number of people that acquired the status of refugees or asylum seekers in the Baltic countries depart to other EU countries. Another acute issue is that law enforcement and judicial bodies are not competent enough in their response to illegal actions committed on the basis of hatred, the use of hate speech, etc.

At both institutional and value levels, the “young” Baltic democracies’ problems include social phobias, intolerance towards sexual minorities, xenophobia, increase of neoracist, homo/transphobic hate speech, etc. as well as state disability to prevent and combat them effectively. We associate the possible mitigation and further solution of the current set of intolerance issues in the Baltic countries with the prospect of changes at value level, liberalization of the citizens’ political culture while intensifying institutional transformations in line with the EU objectives.

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Received: September 23rd 2020

Accepted: December 1st 2020

