



## **Weekly Briefing**

### **Lithuania Political briefing:**

**Lithuania is celebrating the centenary of the women's suffrage and  
aims to close the gender pay gap**

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## **Lithuania is celebrating the centenary of the women's suffrage and aims to close the gender pay gap**

November in Lithuania has been marked by the increased attention given to celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the women's voting rights adopted at the start of independent Lithuania back in 1918. The anniversary was given a recognition at all levels of public governance through a number of staged events raising the public awareness about the women's rights in general and the gender equality and the equal pay in particular. From the President's office to the individual municipalities the anniversary was given a prominent place in the public discourse. A public advertisement campaign was initiated by placing outdoor advertisements on public transport stops; in one instance a new set of pedestrian traffic lights was installed with a female symbol instead of a male symbol. In addition, the results from a nation-wide survey on the gender equality in the regional municipalities were presented and further debates have been carried out to address the gender pay gap in Europe in general and in Lithuania in particular.

The analysis below attempts to explain why the gender issue has become such a mainstream political issue for the Lithuanian domestic politics and how the political system arrived at the situation where to address the gender pay gap has become a consensus between all political parties and at all levels of governance.

The start of the gender mainstreaming (assessing the different implications for women and men of any planned policy action, including legislation and programmes, in all areas and levels and offering a pluralistic approach that values the diversity among both men and women) in Lithuania started in the late 1990s. In 1995 a newly independent Republic of Lithuania made commitments to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provisions (adopted at the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women) and fully transposed those

provisions in the National Programme for the Advancement of Women, adopted the same year as a follow up to the Beijing Platform for Action. Interestingly enough, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which is recognized by the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment for Women as the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women's rights, has never been reflected in Lithuania within the context of the human rights for women across the world and its importance has been largely neglected.

In 2000-2004 a major development in the reform of the legal system was accomplished in Lithuania. Adoption and implementation of the new legislation in line with international commitments was an extremely important step in bringing Lithuania's legal system in line with the highest human rights standards and the principles of gender equality. The most important legislation introduced during this period is the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. The latest amendments to this Law (in 2017) introduced the following important novelties: a duty is imposed on employers to protect employees from harassment on the ground of gender; the Law protects them from sexual harassment, discrimination in the area of the sale of goods and the supply of services on the ground of sex includes pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding - unequal treatment with regard to sex is expressly prohibited in the area of the sale of goods or the supply of services. The Law stipulates that not only shall payment conditions be equal but also conditions to receive services or goods shall be without discrimination based on sex.

The entry into of Lithuania into the European Union in 2004 carried the process of the gender mainstreaming onto a new level. At the time of the enlargement the EU was initiating a new process which led to a new set of legislation which define the gender equality policies in the Union today. In 2006 the Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men was adopted which was harmonized with the 2007 Lisbon Treaty. In 2010 A Women's Charter Declaration by the European Commission on the occasion of the 2010 International Women's Day in commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the

adoption of a Declaration and Platform for Action at the Beijing UN World Conference on Women and of the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted. A corresponding Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015 was adopted to bring the key principles of the Women's Charter in practice.

A very important aspect was included in these policy measures, namely the realization that the equality issue is closely tied to the economic performance of the EU (which was severely hit by the financial crisis in 2010 and required new bold measures to tap into new resources), and that by addressing the gender equality question Europe can tackle also the economic problems and that the involvement of women in the process of economic recovery by ensuring the equal conditions and the equal pay (whether through the increased participation in the job market or at the decision making level in the board rooms of the publicly listed enterprises) could be beneficial for overall societal and economic goals.

During the period 2010-2015 the concerted efforts were made to monitor and propose the measures for improving the women's participation in the job market. The inappropriate behaviours at a workplace were classified by law as harassment and increasingly policed. The gender-biased advertisements and public speech acts have been censored accordingly. During this period the gender pay gap between women and men narrowed from 20 per cent (as reported by Eurofound in 2010) to 14,3 per cent in 2015, according to Statistics Lithuania. The latest report show from 2017 that the gender pay gap stood at 14,2 per cent (the average gender pay gap in the EU is 16.3%).

An important factor in mainstreaming the gender equality politics was the establishment of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) in Vilnius following Lithuania's accession to the EU. According to the agreement on the EU enlargement in 2004, each new Member State was selected as a seat for a certain EU agency. EIGE as an executive agency of the EU was inaugurated in 2007 and is directly funded by the European Commission. The Management

Board of the institute consists of eighteen representatives of the EU Member States appointed by the Council and of one member representing the European Commission. This agency supports the EU institutions and the Member States in promoting equality between women and men and combating sex discrimination. EIGE gathers, analyses and disseminates research data and information needed by policy-makers.

The local spill-over effect of this agency on the policy making at the national level in Lithuania has been quite remarkable – Lithuania has become the seat of the women’s rights policies in Europe with an increasing voice on this issue in the world (in June the country hosted the Council of Women World Leaders, the Women Political Leaders Summit gathering 300 women parliamentarians from all over the world to discuss, together with representatives from business communities, the academia and civil society organizations, women’s engagement in political life, equal economic opportunities, violence against women and ways to prevent it).

The implementation of the gender mainstreaming policy outcomes nationally is coordinated by the national watchdog for the equal rights between women and men, the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson which is directly responsible to the Parliament of Lithuania. This institution was setup in 2005 in accordance with an adopted Law on Equal Treatment which established 13 prohibited grounds of discrimination (gender, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion).

The mainstreaming of the gender equality policies since 2009 received a strong boost from President Dalia Grybauskaitė who has been a prime advocate for women’s empowerment in public life and has promoted women in public service and in state enterprises as well as by herself serving as an example of the women’s engagement in political and public life of the highest caliber. On 2 November this year, when Lithuania commemorated the temporary Constitution adopted on 2 November 1918 (which included in the fundamental principles the

women's suffrage) President Grybauskaitė spoke: "Today marks 100 years since Lithuanian women became one of the first in Europe to be granted the right to vote. With this democratic achievement, our country joined the first line of modern countries. Let us protect and defend the achieved victories."

However, despite the efforts made the authorities indicate that there is still a clear pay gap between women and men in Lithuania. During the recent two years the gender pay gap has increased by 0,8 per cent on average with the major differences across the industries. The biggest pay difference for men and women in Lithuania is in the higher paid positions in the higher value added sectors: according to Statistics Lithuania, in 2017 in finances and insurance the gender pay gap stood at 38.1 per cent followed by information and communication companies (28.2 per cent) and healthcare and social work enterprises (28 per cent).

The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has conducted a nation-wide survey of the gender equality at the regional municipalities. The results have been quite reinvigorating. It turned out that the women in the public offices at the municipalities earn on average up to 20 per cent more than men, yet, the experts indicate, that this might be due to a larger workload which is given to the women and to the fact that the jobs at the municipality offices are less remunerated and thus are more accessible to women than men.

EIGE estimated that the increased gender equality in Europe can boost the GDP and create economic benefits for the economic recover of the Union. It is predicted that as a result of the further improvements in gender equality in society by 2050 GDP might grow up to 9,6 per cent per capita. This could be so, but the open question remains how to ensure that this additional wealth is trickled down to women who would create it.