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## Organization Infamous for “Lithuania for Lithuanians” Slogan is Supported by the State

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Photo: Š. Mažeika

The Union of Lithuanian Nationalist Youth, infamous for the slogans “Lithuania for Lithuanians” and “Neither for East nor West, Lithuania for Lithuania’s Children” and which annually [for the last 3 years — Trans.] organizes a February 16<sup>th</sup> march and recently organized a youth camp in Dieveniškės, is supported financially by the state. The Cultural Support Fund allocated 8,000 litas for the camp in Dieveniškės and the Youth Affairs

Department has given 10,000 litas to Lithuanian Patriotic Youth projects this year.

Henrikas Mickevičius, director of the [Lithuanian] Human Rights Watch Institute, says he doesn't think state support may be given to organizations which contribute to spreading a culture of intolerance.

“To be frank, this fact shocked me. Obviously this organization is of a very radical bent, which truly contributes to the spread of a culture of intolerance in Lithuania, and state institutions are financing this activity. At the very least that is strange,” Mickevičius told Delfi.

## Organized February 16th March in Kaunas

The slogan “Lithuania for Lithuanians” and similar slogans were shouted during the March 11th march in Vilnius, although this march was organized by the Lithuanian Nationalist Center, even though members of the Union of Lithuanian Nationalist Youth usually take part.

But the union annually organizes the February 16th march in Kaunas featuring chants of “Lithuania for Lithuanians,” “Neither for East nor West, Lithuania for Lithuania’s Children,” “We will not sell our land, we will not submit to Brussels,” “We are White Brothers,” “Lithuania for Lithuanians, Lithuanians for Lithuania.”

Although these slogans raise the hair on the back of the heads of ambassadors from foreign states and human rights defenders, Union of Lithuanian Nationalist Youth projects receive financial backing from Lithuanian state institutions.

For example, the Youth Affairs Department last year gave 3,000 litas and this year 10,000 litas to projects by the Union of Lithuanian Nationalist Youth. The Cultural Support Fund under the [Lithuanian] Cultural Ministry gave 8,000 litas for the camp at Dieveniškės in the Šalčininkai region with the official ambiguous slogan of “Thank God(s) I was born a BALT!”

## H. Mickevičius: The State Shouldn't Finance Radicals

[Lithuanian] Human Rights Watch Institute chairman H. Mickevičius says he is shocked that state institutions are financing an organization which is not noted for its tolerance of foreigners, people of other races and other sexual orientations.

“It seems to me that we are legitimizing the fringe whose philosophy is very narrowly xenophobic and nationalist. The question even arises here as to whether we are operating according to the Lithuanian constitution, because the constitution proclaims different values: democracy, openness, tolerance, pluralism and so on. I don't know what we ought to think about this, what this is, what it means, how it should be judged legally. It seems to me we are approaching the point where all of this will need to be judged legally, and not necessarily in regard to a specific organization, but in general as a phenomenon,” he said.

Minkevičius also pointed out the ambiguous slogan of the Dieveniškės camp, “Thank God(s) I was born a BALT!,” which could be interpreted in the context of both the unity of the Baltic nations and inciting racial discord. The human rights defender recalled that a similar ambiguous phrase, “Without Gays, without Blacks, without Reds and Without the Gypsy Caravan,” was the slogan of the party Young Lithuania led by Lithuanian Nationalist Center chairman Ričardas Čekutis [a “chief specialist” the state-run Genocide Research Center] during municipal elections.

“The way they usually explain it is like blowing smoke in the eyes, they didn't mean that by using those words, but they are manipulating, and worse, they are part of serious discussions [i.e., “they are taken seriously.”] And this is the same thing, it seems. Yesterday I was at an event with many foreigners who asked what that meant. It is actually quite difficult to explain whether they are proud that they are Baltic or proud that they are white [*baltas* means white in Lithuanian; the Minkevičius quote in the Delfi piece uses English words in the last sentence, “Baltic” and “White.” —Trans.],” Mickevičius said.

He said human rights defenders have been alarmed in general recently that rather radically predisposed nationalists have been perceived as a normal expression of democratic life.

“There, the patriots are meeting, propagating Lithuanian-ness and so on. But that is not the point. It is that there are people who reject the basic foundations of contemporary modern Lithuanian statehood: pluralism, tolerance, heterogeneity, human rights, the concept of the civic state [or “concept of the state of citizens”]. The Constitutional Court explained that the Lithuanian state is civic, not ethnic,” Mickevičius said.

Asked whether he thought these sorts of trends were due to the fact that nationalist organizations have political support from the nationalist wing of the ruling Homeland Union/Christian Democracy Party, Mickevičius agreed, but added that radical nationalists also enjoy the silent support of other political parties.

“These marginals have political support. Really, we can’t even call them marginals anymore because they have been legitimized, they participate in national politics. Yes, they have support in parliament, but they also have silent support among people who don’t speak loudly, many in Homeland Union/Christian Democracy, Law and Order and the Labor Party,” he said.

## J. Panka: They are Trying to Marginalize Us like Murza

Union of Lithuanian Nationalist Youth chairman Julius Panka told Delfi the main sources of the organization’s financing are support from the Youth Affairs Department, members’ dues, donations and sometimes projects such as the camp in the Šalčininkai region receive financing externally.

“We organize the February 16th march in Kaunas, that is our annual event But we also organize blood donor drives, camps, [ethnographic] collecting [of] folklore. Regarding the slogan ‘Lithuania for Lithuanians,’ yes, during March 11th it was repeated too frequently and too many times. Our organization’s slogan is a little different: ‘Neither for East or West, Lithuania for Lithuania’s Children.’ That is broader and more politically

correct, because the concept of Lithuanian children is more widely understood even by the simple person,” Panka explained.

Asked whether he thought that state financing of the organization he leads might be considered dubious, he said in general the Union of Lithuanian Nationalist Youth receives small financing which it uses “legally, correctly, encouraging patriotism and civic-mindedness.”

Panka also said the Union of Lithuanian Nationalist Youth cooperates with the Young Conservatives League, the young Christian Democrats and the Lithuanian Scout Union and is an observer member on the board of directors of the Lithuanian Youth Organization.

“Some of the media really really want to marginalize us, to push us into Murza backwater [Murza is a neo-Nazi leader in Lithuania –Trans.], but we have said and will say that we are not extremists, we are not chauvinists, we are for that, that it would be good for all of Lithuania’s children to live in Lithuania,” Panka explained.

## J. Meldziukas: No Radical Nationalism Detected in Union of Lithuanian Nationalist Youth Projects

Youth Affairs Department deputy director Juozas Meldziukas told Delfi that projects presented for financing are assessed by a multi-agency commission made up of different experts, a commission comprised of experts from the European Union’s Active Youth program, the [Lithuanian] Education Ministry, the [Lithuanian] Social Security and Labor Ministry, the [Lithuanian] Cultural Ministry, representatives of the board of directors of the Lithuanian Youth Organizations [?] and representatives of the youth organizations themselves.

“They don’t indicate marches and so on in their programs, they indicate commemorating important state holidays, their camps and so on, including publication of a newspaper, so you can’t say there is anything of the sort,” Meldziukas said.

“At least in looking at the entire content of programs this year and last, the experts didn’t make any observations that the content might violate laws in some way,” the deputy director of the department added.

He said that earlier the Youth Affairs Department had worked with the State Security Department in allocating financing and used to ask for information about organizations which were potentially dangerous. “If we receive such information, either the experts or the director will be availed of it, and then we can make some sort of decision,” Meldziukas said.