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March 11th March Organizers Recognized by Lithuanian Council of Youth Organizations

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photo: Andrius Vaitkevičius/15min.lt / March 11th march

The Union of Lithuanian Nationalist Youth (ULNY), criticized for the excessively patriotic March 11 marches they organize, have received recognition. The organization finally managed to become a full member

of the Lithuanian Council of Youth Organizations (LCYO). Proponents of tolerance say this not only weakens the name of the youth association, but signals a fiasco in youth policy.

No One Voted Against

The ULNY, which until now had observer status, was accepted as a full member at the spring assembly of the LCYO which took place over the weekend. Nineteen voted in favor, 7 organizations abstained and no delegate voted against.

The door to full LCYO membership for the nationalist youth was only opened after their fifth attempt. Twice last year they were denied full membership. “Organizations of a cosmopolitan stripe are working hard to confuse the other organizations and to portray us as a union predisposed against the law. I am glad we have managed to defend ourselves from the campaign of slander and mud incited by the social democrats attempting to associate us with extremist attacks abroad. Their initiative to kick us out as an observer member has fallen in shame,” a notice on the ULNY webpage said regarding those earlier decisions [to deny full membership].

The LCYO, celebrating its 20th anniversary this autumn, represents the interests of youth and also participates in forming youth policy. It is the largest youth NGO in Lithuania, including in its ranks 64 national youth organizations and regional unions of youth organizations, comprising over 200,000 young people. Other full members include AIESEC Lietuva, the Futurists’ Federation, the Federation of Sober Youth, Baltų ainiai, the Union of Young Christians, Scouts of Lithuania, Marine Scouts of Lithuania, the Union of Lithuanian Student Governments, the Riflemen’s Union, Nationalist Lithuanian student corporation Neo Lithuania, the Association of Tolerant Youth and various youth organizations of different political parties.

The LCYO proclaims it is based on principles on mature democracy and is working to create an environment open to diversity. ULNY, on the other hand, argues for the distinct and exclusive celebration of Lithuanian culture, patriotism, love of Lithuania and the inculcation of ethnic consciousness, and aspires to foster nationalist values among all the youth of the country. The Union of Lithuanian Nationalist Youth’s [most recent] slogan is

“Neither East nor West, Lithuania for Lithuanian Children,” although the group claims to respect all ethnicities and nationalities.

The organization’s webpage, commenting upon skinhead violence against foreigners, claims they don’t justify criminal acts, but support the idea of patriotic youth and will always stick with good nationalists. They are openly against the EU and globalism: “We are against the external global organization which was created to destroy the independence of nations, the European identity, morals and traditions.” “We will not allow the fate our people to be given over to different ‘unions’.” ULNY was one of the [organizers] of the patriotic March 11th march which took place in the capital. Marchers either chanted or held plaques reading “I am Proud I am Lithuanian!” and “Lithuania for Lithuanians, Lithuanians for Lithuania!”

EU Dissatisfied But Doesn’t Halt European Money

“This was a decision by the entire assembly,” LCYO president Loreta Senkutė told 15min.lt . “Every time before organizations are accepted, they tell about their activities and answer questions. This time there were many who spoke out in favor. The organization didn’t face large challenges, it took care of small problems, it answered questions by members. We didn’t have anyone speaking out against their membership, on the contrary, there was great support.”

All Voices Should be Heard, Including Ours

Loreta Senkutė said consensus was sought in the council, so that ULNY’s position was neither encouraged nor suppressed. “If the organizations are able to agree, if their activities are acceptable, it is possible to work with everyone, even if opinions sometimes differ. We are looking for points in common, not points that divide us.” ULNY director Julius Panka said his organization has lent strength to the LCYO, because now the latter will represent a wider diversity of opinions. “Just as political parties try to enter parliament, so do we seek to participate in one of the largest arenas of youth activity. All voices should be heard, including ours,” he told 15min.lt .

Panka said the nationalist youth had cooperated with certain LCYO members in the past on different issues and now hopes to find common ground with other members, for example, organizations with a more leftist ideology. LCYO receives funds for its activities by taking part in contests

and seeking aid for various projects from the Lithuanian budget and EU structural funds, and other sources. It is ironic that the nationalist youth organization which speaks out against the EU finds it acceptable to be part of a structure which is financed by the EU.

A Blow to LCYO's Reputation?

ULNY's representatives will find themselves at LCYO events sitting next to representatives from the Tolerant Youth Association, which promotes tolerance and defends the rights of homosexuals and human rights in general. ULNY makes a point of speaking out against desecration of family values and does not tolerate "injustice, violations of law and morality, we do not like [sexual] deviants, criminals and other evil-doers."

Mindaugas Klounis, a member of the board of directors of the Tolerant Youth Association, thinks accepting the nationalist union as a member is a blow to the reputation of LCYO and might have negative consequences for the organization's influence. He said the result of the voting "showed yet again that the youth organizations lack principles, a sense of obligation to honor democratic values, and civic-mindedness."

"The organizations comprising the council have been informed many times that there is a convicted criminal on the board of directors of the ULNY, that this organization is involved in controversial marches, that it organizes camps where they walk a fine line balancing on the border of inciting ethnic and racial hatred," Klounis told 15min.lt . He said the acceptance of ULNY as a member in the association "clearly shows that a conjuncture, cynical calculations by the so-called 'youth leaders,' while the biased Lithuanian educational system, which lends insufficient attention to the crimes of the Nazis, has failed to foster critical thinking and failed to instill democratic values."

"In actuality, the acceptance of the ULNY signals a fiasco in terms of Lithuanian youth policy, and should be a serious warning sign to the public not to believe that the youth, and especially current youth leaders, are able to change anything," Klounis warned.