



Lithuanians in the European Parliament: Goals and achievements

WHAT CAN LITHUANIAN expect from its 13 EU representatives?
Elections to the European Parliament (EP) were held throughout June 2004 across the whole European Union (EU). It was the first time that Lithuanian citizens had the chance to vote. According to the Treaty of Nice, Lithuania can have 13 representatives in the EP between 2004 and 2009, and exactly that number were elected. Now, one and a half years into their work with the EP, it is interesting to compare the aims and expectations of Lithuania's representatives with their actual achievements, so we asked one of the delegates, Dr. Laima Andrikiene, to let us have her opinions on what has happened with and for the Lithuanian delegates after they took their seats in Brussels in 2004. And don't forget: The delegates are elected by the people of Lithuania in order to represent our country in the best possible manner, and to contribute to positive progress for Europe as a whole. They are YOUR people, and you should know what they do for you and what they are achieving on behalf of Lithuania!

Text: **Dr.Laima Andrikiene**

IT MAY APPEAR to some that all 13 Lithuanian representatives act as one cohesive Lithuanian delegation speaking with one voice in the EP. This is not the case however, as the foundation of the EP is not to have national delegations, but rather political families or factions that decide on the policies adopted and the decisions taken. Two of Lithuania's representatives are in the European People's Party – European Democrats faction (EPP-ED), another two are in the of European Socialist Party (PSE), seven are in the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) faction and two more are in the Union for the Europe of Nations (UEN) faction.

All these political families have their ideologies, programmes, strategies and tactics, and we Lithuanians, seeking resolutions that are necessary and useful in a Lithuanian context, must first convince other members of our factions and only later work on convincing the committees and plenary sessions. So in this respect it is by no means easy for us in the EP, given we are merely 13 of 732 other EU parlia-

mentarians. In addition, we represent a new EU member state, so our wealth of experience is limited, as was our understanding of the mechanisms behind accepting new resolutions. As in other professions, we sometimes had to learn from our mistakes.

I remember, during the election campaign, when certain party candidates eagerly explained to voters in Lithuania that if they were elected to the EP, they would first seek to renegotiate Lithuania's conditions for EU membership. They promised to do all in their power to arrange much better conditions than what Lithuanian negotiators managed prior to Lithuania's accession into the EU. A large number of voters believed these promises, a majority of which remained just that – promises. It is unfortunate that those who promised the most did not even dare speak up in the EP plenary meetings, most often defending themselves by saying that they were working on much more important tasks, that speaking out was not the most important way of achieving desired goals, as if parliamentarians should employ some other means of achieving their goals instead of speaking and convincing others. For goodness sake, the word parliament itself comes from the French word parler – to speak!

Goals

In preparing this article I asked my colleagues in Lithuania what their goals were, what priorities they have, what was most important to them during their candidacy. It's strange, but this proved to be no easy task for them! But Prof Vytautas Landsbergis, the European People's Party – European Democrats fraction (EPP-ED) representative formulated his most important goals and priorities with no hesitation. They are, "first of all, it is in Lithuania's interests to be part of a more united Europe that is not in opposition to the USA; secondly, democratic progress – where possible – in regions to the east of Lithuania, with a longer perspective that one day similar moves will take place in Russia as well; thirdly, European security in a Middle East context where the situation is rapidly degenerating, where it is becoming more and more dangerous, however, not everyone in Europe wants to believe this."

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) fraction's representative, Margarita Starkevičiūtė, said that her goal is that "decisions made by the EP must encourage rapid and

balanced growth in living standards for Lithuanians and ensure these figures approach EU averages". She believes that this goal can be reached by "encouraging direct co-operation between citizens of EU countries and Lithuania, giving more attention to resolutions that would improve people's living standards, and putting in place both the legal and economic conditions that would create well-paid, highly qualified positions in the Lithuanian labour market".

Prof Aloyzas Sakalas was very concise in outlining his goals: firstly, to do his duty honestly and, secondly, to ensure that resolutions accepted by the EP are put into action by EU diplomats.

And talking for myself; - my most important goal is a strong Lithuania in a strong EU. I believe this reflects the aspirations of most Lithuanians, because during voting in the referendum for Lithuania's accession to the EU our nation's citizens first hoped that in the EU, Lithuania would be safer, stronger and more economically powerful. They hoped that the implementation of EU principles of solidarity and cohesion would bring marked improvement to their lives, and that this would not take decades.

All this can be possible only when the EU itself is strong, dynamic and competitive. Apart from this main goal I have also raised certain clear objectives for myself – goals that I am seeking to realise. First, as much as possible, Lithuania's interests need to be reflected and integrated into EU interests. If an EU interest does not incorporate Lithuania's interests, well, I'm sorry but then it's just empty space, form without content. The two should not be in conflict with one another, the co-ordination of these interests is by no means a simple, and rather, it is a difficult and subtle task that I have set for myself in working for the EP. Secondly, the Baltic region needs to appear on the top of the EU work agenda, the Baltic Sea needs to become the most important sea in the EU region. The Mediterranean Sea has always been the most important EU sea, but since the most recent EU expansion and the new borders it has given the Baltic Sea region new geopolitical importance – something that needs to be stressed in the EU. This goal is closely related to another: that the EU Baltic Sea region should strive to become the most dynamic and competitive region in the EU – a goal that has real potential. This is why it is in Lithuania's interest to implement the measures outlined in the Lisbon Strategy, and give more attention and allocate more funding



to science, education, innovations, small and mid-sized businesses. And thirdly: the European Neighbourhood Policy should become an increasingly important instrument in spreading the values of democracy and a market economy with European values in general among EU neighbours, including Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and many other countries not only in Europe, but also in Africa and Asia. Russia and especially its Kaliningrad region must be a focus of EU attention. And finally, the fourth goal: using not only the opportunities given to me as a member of the EP, but also my own private finances, I am persistently working towards ensuring that many Lithuanian citizens familiarise themselves with EU, visit the EP, participate in discussions about the EU, its policies and institutions. That is, not to see the EU as some foreign and distant entity, but to consider all of Europe as their home.

It is true that life itself creates changing priorities. Today few would argue that energy is highly placed in either the EU's or Lithuania's list of priorities. That is why, while not being in any way a specialist in this field, I feel I must delve deeper into energy issues and help find some sort of resolution.

And what about co-operation between the Lithuanian delegates?

Though perhaps not so often or regularly, Lithuania's parliamentarians also meet in EU offices together with Lithuania's permanent representative to the EU to discuss relevant matters. At the end of 2004 and the start of 2005 attempts were made to meet with Dalia Grybauskaitė, our European Commission member, on a monthly basis in order to discuss the most important issues. However, this never became a tradition; another good initiative fell through... As I see it, this shows that certain Lithuanian representatives are not yet experienced politicians, some still believe that they are lone soldiers and that they can work single-handedly towards achieving a useful result for Lithuania. Unfortunately, practice shows that in seeking a positive outcome it is not enough for us Lithuanians to merely unite, in addition we need to do considerable work and find allies among the Latvians, Estonians, Poles, Spaniards, Greeks, Hungarians and Germans, depending on what issue is under consideration and who would be the best allies, and who are affected by the same issue.

I must also mention that the more active Lithuanian representatives meet every month in Strasbourg for the Baltic Europe parliamentary group meetings, an organisation of which I am the vice president. The aim is to raise the profile of the Baltic Sea regional problems in the EU and in



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the work schedules of the EP, and try to make this EU region the most important or at least markedly more important than it was up to the last stage of EU expansion. These meetings are attended by Swedes, Finns, Danes, Poles, Germans, Latvians and Estonians as well as by representatives of several other countries.

Achievements

As for all politicians, this is a very difficult question. I wouldn't bring it on myself to criticise a colleague's work because I don't think it would be ethical. And to praise yourself doesn't seem appropriate either, but I will just mention a few of the important jobs we have undertaken in the last year and a half.

My greatest love is foreign affairs, and I am a member of the EP Foreign Affairs committee, so therefore I was an active participant in the establishment of the EP's resolutions dealing with EU and Russian relations, human rights, governmental international relationships, etc, and was one of many who initiated and worked on these projects. Also I initiated two hearings in the EP about the situation in Colombia (where there is a Lithuanian candidate in the presidential election this year, Prof Antanas Mockus, who has already been elected mayor of Bogotá twice), and on the situation in Kazakhstan before the presidential election held in December 2005.

I have visited Moldova several times in my capacity as a representative of the EP, to observe the parliamentary elections. I also visited the conflict zone of Transnistria where both the efforts of the international community as well as the EU need to be stepped up. Kaliningrad and Colombia were also on my itinerary. I work for two parliamentary co-operation delegations that look at EU-Russia and EU-Moldova relations.

My other EP work on is the budget committee. I was designated shadow rapporteur for the 2006 Budget by the European People's Party, the largest EP faction, which is why I spent a great amount of time in the second half of 2005 working on EU Budget 2006. I learnt a great deal and was able to help Lithuania in the process...

Generally speaking there is a lot of work, goals and plans are ambitious, and resources, as always, are limited, therefore it is a matter of creating a formula for prioritising my work and to tackle it strategically and tactically, using the limited resources, both in manpower and finances, so that I can reach my goal: so we can all live in a strong Lithuania and a healthy EU.

One of my friends always ends his messages to me with the saying: Avanti, sinjora! – and I like that and it suits me, especially working for the EP, and so I bid you all: Avanti.