

Abstract

Lithuania is known as a country making huge progress in gender equality issues not contradicting the state family policy. But in the period of 2006-2008, three legal acts on family policy endangering gender equality and women's rights were under consideration at the Parliament. The results of voting on these three legal acts are being analysed. Basing on the results of longitudinal study "Woman in Lithuanian Society" it is shown that attitudes of those Parliamentarians who voted did not reflect view of Lithuanian population towards definition of a family and ban of abortions. Results of analysis allow to presume that there was little struggle between ideologies on high political level due to too small number of Parliamentarians advocating gender equality. The majority of members of Parliament were afraid to express their position in gender-sensitive questions. There are signs of backlash in gender equality but economic crisis reduces deepening of it.

Introduction

Lithuania is known as a country making huge progress in gender equality issues. In 1998, the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men was adopted, and consequently, the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsman was established in 1999. The first Governmental Program on the Advancement of Women was adopted in 1996, and since then similar programs followed one after another. Recent programs were substantially financed from the state budget. Lithuania's achievements reflected in UN indexes measuring gender equality. In 2007, according to the gender-related development index (GDI), Lithuania was ranked the 38th out of 167 countries, and according to the gender empowerment measure (GEM) – the 25th out of 93 (Human Development Report 2007/2008, 2007, p. 326-333). On these achievements was based the decision to establish EU Gender Equality Institute in Lithuania.

Although "it is analytically, and politically, essential not to forget the rooting of patriarchalism in the family structure, and in the socio-biological reproduction of the species, as historically (culturally) framed" (Castells, 2004, p. 193), it seemed that in Lithuania gender equality and family policies were developing in line, not contradicting each other.

¹ Part of the results being analysed in this article were presented at the international conference "Welfare, Gender, and Agency in Russia and Eastern Europe", Helsinki, 10-12 December, 2008, part – at the National conference of Lithuanian sociologists "Achievements and visions. Twenty years anniversary of Lithuanian sociology", Vilnius, 28 November, 2009.

Family policy during the past years was shifting to the policy of socialdemocratic welfare state model². Family policy was oriented towards dual-earner family. Universal benefits, long child-care leaves with high percentage of salary compensation, equal rights of both parents to child-care leaves, father's leave, etc., were introduced or expanded during the period of 2001-2008 when coalition Governments were led by Social Democrats. The family support schemes were being improved following Nordic examples although they did not reach that of Nordic countries in terms of financial amounts, as well as of provision with child-care facilities and promotion of gender equality.

Fertility rate is regarded as one of the main indicators of successfulness of the family policy. For example, the state family policy in Estonia has three pillars, and the first of them aims to "increase the number of births to reproduction level" (i.e. the total fertility rate of 2.1) (Ministry..., 2006, p. 1). Fertility rate in Lithuania remained one of the lowest in the European Union, directing, therefore, Lithuanian family policy to the measures to increase it. The lowest total fertility rate (1.24) was fixed in 2002 (Figure 1). Since then it increased slowly and showed successfulness of family policy.

² According to the classification of G.Esping-Andersen (1990).

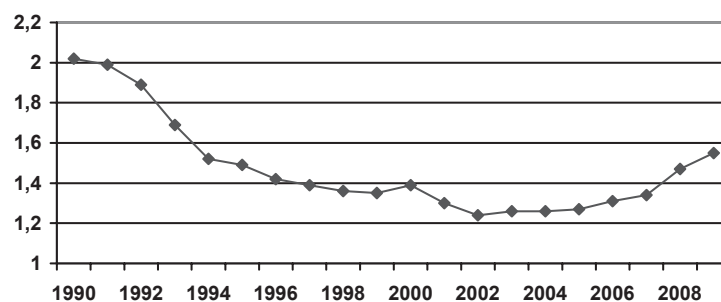


Figure 1. Total fertility rate in Lithuania (1990-2009)

Sources: Statistics Lithuania, 2001, 2006, 2008, 2009, Statistikos departamentas, 2010.

It should be noted that this period was marked by high emigration rates after Lithuania had become the member of the EU. Taking into account this fact, family policy measures were regarded as effective. The last of the former Governments expanded monthly child benefits to all children, free lunches for all primary school pupils were introduced, child care leave was gradually prolonged and level of compensation was gradually increased. But at the same time, in the period of 2006-2008, discussions on several legal acts connected with family and gender equality policies raised doubts about the sustainability of family and gender equality policies. The main aims of this article, therefore, are to analyse how results of voting in the Parliament on the most controversial acts depended on the political affiliation of MPs and to compare their expressed will to public opinion towards issues of concern. To achieve these aims, document analysis (that of legal acts, protocols of Parliament sessions) as well as analysis of results of the longitudinal national representative survey “Woman in Lithuanian Society” were used.

Political context in 2006-2008

In July 2006, new center-left minority Government headed by Prime Minister from Social Democratic party was formed. The right-wing opposition in Parliament comprised the majority. Later on, due to shifts of few parliamentarians from opposition to position, position had one-vote preponderance. During the last year, women comprised 33 members of Parliament out of 141, i.e. 23.4% (2004-2008 term of office). 15 women belonged to position coalition, and 18 – to opposition. 8 women could be regarded as left-wing – members of Lithuanian Social Democratic party faction, 6 – purely right-wing (Conservatives), 19 belonged to other factions, center-oriented or populist.

The year of 2008 was marked by upcoming parliamentary elections (12 October 2008). This influenced behaviour of parliamentarians. It should be pointed out that the Catholic Church in Lithuania is

high-powered, and its influence is growing before elections. Family policy and gender issues are the ones where the Catholic Church uses the highest political pressure towards policy makers.

Controversy in family policy related to gender issues

During the period described above, among many others, three highly contradictory projects of legal acts on family and gender policy were being discussed at the Lithuanian Parliament: The Concept of Family Policy (Valstybinė..., 2008), The Law on Basics of Family Support (Paramos..., 2007), and The Law on Protection of Prenatal Life (Gyvybės..., 2006). The situation was complicated by the fact that two of these acts – The Concept of Family Policy and The Law on Protection of Prenatal Life – were signed by the representatives of government coalition members from Peasants and People’s faction. The Catholic Church also put pressure on members of Parliament to adopt these legal acts. The Concept of Family Policy was already approved by the Parliament on 3rd June 2008. Two other documents were approved after the first reading in the Parliament. All three documents expressed conservative views, and were highly discriminatory against women and children.

The Concept of family policy defines family as “Spouses and their children (adopted children), if they are” (Valstybinė..., 2008). Partnerships (even with children) or single-parent families are left out of family definition. This concept is far less progressive in comparison with Conception of Lithuanian Family Policy (Šeimos..., 1995), which was approved by the Government on 8th March 1996. In this Conception the family was defined as “Community of individuals, linked up together by kinship, interdependence, responsibility, or care relations, legitimized by the law or socially accepted order”. The problems addressed in both documents were similar, main differences concern reproductive rights and gender equality issues. It has to be noted that the

Conception of Lithuanian Family Policy was never implemented due to Parliament elections in autumn of 1996, which were won by the Conservatives. The drafting of the new Concept was initiated by the members of Commission on Family and Child Affairs of the Parliament, headed by female repre-

sentative of Peasants and People's faction. Peasants and People's party was the member of government coalition, and this made it impossible to reject the Concept by the position votes. Finally, the Concept on Family Policy was approved by the Parliament with big preponderance (Table 1).

Table 1

The results of final voting on the approval of the Concept of Family Policy in the Parliament

Faction	Number of MP's	For	Against	Abstained
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	38	8	4	12
Liberal and Centre Union	10			5
New Union (Social Liberals)	9			5
Peasants and People's	14	11		
Homeland Union (conservatives)	26	22		
Labour Party	23	17		
Liberals Movement	9	1	2	1
Non-affiliated members	1	1		
Order and Justice (Liberal Democrats)	11	9		1
Total	140	69	6	24

Source: Seimo posėdis Nr. 424 (2008-06-03, rytinis).

Note: The titles of position factions are printed in bold.

It should be noted that only 99 out of 140 members of Parliament were present at this voting. Nobody could say that this voting was regarded as unimportant. It was preceded by hot discussions in the society. The absence of quite a big group of Parliamentarians could be rather explained as their fear to reveal their attitude before elections.

Another legal act – the draft Law on Basics of Family Support – was presented to the Parliament by the representatives of the opposition, namely Homeland Union (conservatives). The main attitudes expressed in this draft Law (Paramos..., 2007):

- Presumes definition of the family according to the Concept on Family Policy (2008);
- Is highly discriminatory towards women, children, and men;
- Clearly imposes the role of the homemaker, and the whole responsibility for the family on a woman;
- All support to children is proposed to be 15% higher, if they are raised “in a Family”;
- Contradicts many human rights conventions³;

³ The department of European Law in its conclusion mentions many legal acts to which discriminatory attitudes of this draft law may contradict: EU Treaty, Universal Declaration on Human Rights, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=305704.

- Is supportive towards the richest – compensations for family services by decreasing income taxes;
- Proposes to split social security old age pensions into two parts, one of them being directly proportional to children's income;
- Proposes to change Children Rights Ombudsman to Family Rights Ombudsman with the right to accept individual complaints towards other individuals who interfere with cherishing family values.

This draft law was approved in the Parliament after the first reading (Table 2). In this case, only 63 members of Parliament out of 140 voted. Perhaps it was due to weak attention to the first reading.

This law does not pass further phases of the consideration: the Committee on Law and Justice recognized this draft Law being in contradiction to the Constitution. But taking into account that this draft law was signed by three extremely influential members of the Conservatives who after elections in the end of 2008 became the Prime Minister, the first Vice-speaker (later – the Speaker) of the Parliament and the Minister of Social Security and Labour (later resigned, but became the head of Parliamentary Committee on Social Affairs and Labour), there is a high probability of return to discussions on this proposal in the Parliament.

Table 2

**The results of voting after the first reading of the draft Law on
Basics of Family Support in the Parliament**

Faction	Number of MP's	For	Against	Abstained
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	38	6	1	5
Liberal and Centre Union	10	-		
New Union (Social Liberals)	9	3	1	
Peasants and People's	14	9		
Homeland Union (conservatives)	26	17		
Labour Party	23	12		
Liberals Movement	9	3		1
Non-affiliated members	1			
Order and Justice (Liberal Democrats)	11	5		
Total	140	55	2	6

Source: Seimo posėdis Nr. 336 (2007-10-09, vakarinis).

Note: The titles of position factions are printed in bold.

The third proposal – draft Law on Protection of Prenatal Life (Gyvybės..., 2006) was submitted by some members of Peasants and People's faction, i.e., of the ruling coalition. Article 2 of this proposal states: "Human life starts from the moment of conception of a woman". Also, this draft law proposes two important definitions (Art. 3): "Life in prenatal phase – life before the birth" and "A child in prenatal phase – from conception until the birth". In fact this draft law bans abortion. According to this project, termination of pregnancy (up to 12 weeks) is allowed in two cases:

- 1) if pregnancy endangers woman's life or health",
- 2) if there is an evident suspicion that a woman

was impregnated in a criminal way" (Art. 6).

The submitted package also included amendments to The Civil Code (Civilinio..., 2005) and The Penal Code (Baudžiamojo..., 2005). The amendment to the Civil Code proposed to equalize "the rights of the child in prenatal phase" to "the rights of the born child". And the amendment to the Penal Code states "For taking away life of the unborn child – punishment up to 3 years of imprisonment".

This proposal generated a lot of discussions in the society, and was widely criticized. Voting results after the first reading showed only slight preponderance of advocates of abortion ban (Table 3).

Table 3

The results of voting after the first reading of the draft Law on Protection of Prenatal Life

Faction	Number of MP's	For	Against	Abstained
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	38		3	7
Liberal and Centre Union	10		1	
New Union (Social Liberals)	9		1	
Peasants and People's	14	4		2
Homeland Union (conservatives)	26	19		
Labour Party	23	2	3	2
Liberals Movement	9			2
Non-affiliated members	1	1		
Order and Justice (Liberal Democrats)	11			
Total	140	26	8	13

Source: Seimo posėdis Nr. 368 (2007-12-20, vakarinis).

Note: The titles of position factions are printed in bold.

It should be noted that in this case extremely small part of parliamentarians took part in the voting: 47 out of 140. This case confirms the hypothesis that part of parliamentarians did not intend to reveal their views before the elections. Only the

members of Homeland Union (conservatives) faction could be sure for the support of greater part of their electorate for banning abortions. Members of other parties could suppose that the largest part of their electorate was against banning the abortions.

But at the same time they were interested in support of Church in the elections. This is a possible explanation of low participation in voting on the issues of moral self-determination. The future of this proposal is unclear. The main initiators of the Law on Protection of Prenatal Life were re-elected to the new Parliament, thus renewing of the discussion on this project is highly probable.

It is interesting to analyse voting results of fe-

male parliamentarians (Table 4). The voting behaviour of women parliamentarians in decisions on the most important gender issues is shocking: about 2/3 of women MPs did not take part in the decisions neither on the Law on Basics of Family Support nor on the Law on Protection of Prenatal Life. What does it mean: indifference towards gender issues or the same intent “to be good” to all voters and the Church?

Table 4

The results of voting of women parliamentarians (out of 33)

Legal act	For	Against	Abstained	Absent
The Concept of Family Policy	20	2	6	5
The Law on Basics of Family Support	11	1	1	20
The Law on Protection of Prenatal Life	3	5	3	22

Sources: Seimo posėdis Nr. 336 (2007-10-09, vakarinis); Seimo posėdis Nr. 368 (2007-12-20, vakarinis); Seimo posėdis Nr. 424 (2008-06-03, rytinis).

Out of three legal acts under discussion, the Concept of Family Policy was the least discriminatory towards women. If definition of the family was changed, following this Concept would not be so damaging to family policy. On one hand the Concept expressed more conservative views on gender issues (especially concerning reproductive rights) to compare with former Conception of Lithuanian Family Policy, but on the other hand it addressed new family problems such as violence in a family. Therefore it was easier to justify one’s decision to vote for the Concept. All six female members of Homeland Union (conservatives) and all six of Peasants and People’s faction unanimously voted for the Concept (Seimo posėdis Nr. 336, 2007). Seven out of 10 members of Labour Party faction voted for, and 3 were absent. It is interesting that the only 2 women out of 8 members of Lithuanian Social Democratic Party faction clearly expressed their position and voted against. Other four abstained and two were absent. Three more factions had only one female member each. Representative of Liberals Movement voted for, representative of New Union and Order and Justice – abstained.

In two other cases the majority of women parliamentarians escaped from showing their position. In case of voting on the draft Law on Basics of Family Support after the first reading, 20 female MPs out of 33 were absent. For this law voted 3 representatives of Peasants and People’s faction, 4 of Homeland Union, and 4 of Labour Party. Only one representative of Social Democratic Party faction voted against, and one abstained, other 6 were absent along with the rest of female MPs (Seimo posėdis Nr. 336, 2007). Voting on the most contro-

versial draft law on Protection of Prenatal Life after the first reading was marked by the lowest support by female MPs but at the same time by the greatest absence of them (22 out of 33). Only eleven female MPs dared to openly show their attitudes towards ban of abortions. Two representatives of Homeland Union and one of Peasants and People’s faction voted for, two members of Social Democratic Party, two of Labour Party and one of New Union factions voted against, one member from Social Democratic, one from New Union, and one from Labour Party factions abstained (Seimo posėdis Nr. 424, 2008).

Lithuanians’ attitudes towards family definition and abortions

Having analysed position (or not having position) of Lithuanian parliamentarians towards family issues connected with gender equality and women’s rights, first of all we have to compare this position with attitudes of Lithuanian population. Does position of the Parliamentarians (who voted) reflect the attitudes of the population? Analysis of attitudes of the population is based on the results of the national representative survey “Woman in Lithuanian Society 2009” conducted by the company Baltic Surveys Ltd. in April-May, 2009. The attitudes towards abortions are also being compared with the results of the surveys “Women in Lithuanian Society 1994” (Purvanekienė, 1995) and “Woman in Lithuanian Society – 2000” (Purvanekas, Purvanekienė, 2001). All three surveys were completed using the same methodology and (almost) the same questionnaire, designed by the author of this paper.

One of the most important questions – what is Lithuanians’ understanding of a family? To get an

answer to this question, we proposed several descriptions of households which reflect contradictions in definition of a family in the Concept of Family Policy. For example, according to the Concept, a divorced woman with children is regarded as a family, but a single (unmarried) woman is not. The Con-

cept does not give an answer about a more complicated situation, if, for example, a divorced woman with children has more children with a partner to whom she is not married... The opinions of Lithuanian people are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Conception of family by Lithuanian population

Description of a household	Yes, this is a family, %			No, this is not a family, %		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
Married parents with children	98.4	98.4	98.4	0.2	0.6	0.4
Unmarried parents with children living in common household	78.1	73.0	75.6	17.1	19.6	18.4
Married woman and man	94.7	94.1	94.4	3.7	4.7	4.2
Unmarried, living together woman and man	43.1	44.6	43.9	50.2	46.6	48.4
Same sex partners living in common household	11.2	10.0	10.6	80.7	81.8	81.3
Divorced parent with children	76.0	69.9	72.9	18.7	22.9	20.8
Single parent with a child (children)	65.9	61.1	63.5	25.8	29.5	27.7
Grandparents living with grandchildren (if their parents were married)	66.9	62.0	64.5	24.4	28.2	26.3
Grandparents living with grandchildren (if their parents were unmarried)	55.9	52.6	54.3	32.3	35.4	33.9
Brothers and sisters living in common household	51.8	45.8	48.8	37.8	44.6	41.2

We can see that decisive factor for Lithuanians to define a family is having children. Any household comprised of adults (parents or grandparents) and children is regarded as a family by the majority of the population. The tolerance towards partnership of a woman and a man without children is high, but has not reached the level of such partnership being recognized as a family by the majority of the population. Partnership of two same sex persons is not recognized as a family by the absolute majority of population.

Anyway, attitudes of Lithuanians towards definition of a family do not coincide with those expressed in the Concept of Family Policy, in which marriage is the starting point for a family and the decisive factor to be recognized as a family. From the

results in Table 5, we can see that there are about 10% of population to whom a marriage is a decisive factor in recognition of a family in any of the described households. This group is mostly comprised of the eldest inhabitants of rural areas and small towns.

Another question – attitudes towards banning of abortions. In Lithuania, the majority of the population is against the ban of abortions. Let us look at changes in the opinion of Lithuanian people which occurred from 1994 to 2009. In 1994, 27% of the population were for ban or strict restriction of abortions, in 2000 – 20%, and in 2009 – 19%. Women (compared with men) on average less approved of ban or restriction of abortions and more approved of a right for a woman to decide (Table 6).

Table 6

Lithuanians' views on banning abortions

Attitude	Women, %			Men, %		
	1994	2000	2009	1994	2000	2009
Abortions should be unconditionally banned	10	8	2	11	5	5
Abortions should be strictly limited	15	13	16	16	12	15
Abortions should not be banned, but the community needs to be educated	38	33	35	36	35	34
Abortions cannot be banned – this is the right of a woman	34	40	43	32	33	32

Attitudes towards ban or strict limit of abortions almost did not change since 1994. The majority of the population (70% in 1994, 71% in 2000 and 72% in 2009) was against banning or strict restriction of abortions. The group of population expressing opinion that abortions should be unconditionally banned decreased to 3%, and is mostly comprised of the eldest, low income men.

Discussion

So, did voting of the Parliamentarians on gender-sensitive questions coincide with opinion of the population? From the analysis above, one can see that opinion of those who voted did not coincide. But there were large groups in every voting who escaped from taking decision. Therefore, who are those groups in the Parliament who have strong ideological background of gender equality, and can advocate it or women's rights when it is connected with a family? Basing on voting behaviour in the period of 2006-2008, the answer is not optimistic – there is no single group (faction or group of women parliamentarians) who could advocate gender equality or women's rights. The big group or the majority of parliamentarians escaped showing their positions: 41 (out of 140) Members of Parliament were absent

during voting on the family concept, 77 – during voting after the first reading of the law on family support, and even 93 – after the first reading of the law that presumed ban of abortions. What does it mean? In the author's opinion, this is caused by the role of Church, and by danger to Parliamentarians not to be elected again. Although official position of the Church is: not to interfere in political processes, but this is far from reality.

It goes without saying that the right-wing parties, and particularly the Conservatives, were not afraid to show their discriminatory attitudes towards women (and even children) in family issues. But other parties, calling themselves centre-left (Labour Party, Order and Justice, and others), also supported these initiatives of conservative nature. There were only a few persons who openly protested against legal acts in question. More precise analysis shows that the only advocates for women's rights are not the groups, but personalities – mainly members of Lithuanian Social Democratic Party.

So, what is the future of gender issues? Big backlash could be prognosticated after parliamentary elections in 2008 (Table 7), when the right-wing parties got the majority.

Table 7

Distribution of Members of Parliament by factions after elections in 2008⁴

Faction	Number of MPs	Women
Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats	46	10
Liberals Movement	11	2
Liberal and Centre	9	-
National Revival	18	5
Labour Party	10	3
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	26	4
Non-affiliated Members	4	1
Order and Justice	18	1
Total	141	26 (18%)

Source: Political Groups in the Seimas (2008).

Note: The titles of position factions are printed in bold.

As it was noted earlier, the main authors of the draft Law on Basics of Family Support got extremely influential positions. But backlash did not become deeper yet. Why? It should be noted that economic crisis this time acted as suppressive factor for backlash in gender issues. The new right-wing government, formed after elections, due to lack of finances and particularly bad situation in social security was not able to implement the Concept of Family Policy and to reform support to a family, taking into account definition of a family in the Concept.⁴

⁴ The composition of the Parliament underwent several changes since 2008, but this did not affect the distribution of political power.

The analysis of voting behaviour of parliamentarians concerning gender equality issues in the Parliamentary term of 2004-2008 showed signs of backlash in gender issues. The main reason for that was too small numbers of politicians supporting gender equality ideology. The big backlash after elections in 2008 is postponed by the economic crisis. But for how long?

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ŠEIMOS POLITIKA LIETUVOJE: IDEOLOGIJŲ KOVA AR REGRESAS LYČIŲ KLAUSIMUOSE?

Giedrė Purvaneckienė

Santrauka

Lietuva garsėjo kaip šalis, kuri itin progresuoja lyčių lygybės srityje, kurios šeimos politika rezultatyviai skatino gimstamumą. Tačiau 2006–2008 metais, valdant centro-kairės mažumos Vyriausybei, atsirado lyčių lygybės ir šeimos politikos nesuderinamumo požymių. Lietuvos Respublikos Seime buvo svarstomi trys su šeimos politika susiję teisės aktai, tiesiogiai nukreipti prieš lyčių lygybę ir moters teises. Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjami Seimo narių balsavimo už šių aktų projektus rezultatai, remiantis Seimo posėdžių protokolų analize. Nagrinėjamas balsavimu išreikšto Seimo narių nuostatų (ne)atitikimas Lietuvos gyventojų požiūriui į šeimos apibrėžimą bei abortų uždraudimą, remiantis kartotinio tyrimo „Moteris Lietuvos visuomenėje“ rezultatais. Daroma prielaida, kad aukštame politiniame lygmenyje nėra ideologijų kovos lyčių lygybės klausimais, o lyčių lygybę atvirai gina tik atskiros asmenybės. Daugelis Seimo narių pačiais jautriausiais klausimais bijo išreikšti savo poziciją, todėl lyčių lygybės politikoje yra regreso požymių. Tačiau pastaruoju metu jam gilėti trukdo ekonominė krizė.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: lyčių lygybė, moters teisės, šeimos politika.