

## ELF Ralph Dahrendorf Roundtable “LGBT rights in Times of Populism - Liberal ideas for a more tolerant Europe”

On the fringes of Baltic Pride Human Rights Conference, Vilnius, June 6

Following a proud SILC tradition of arranging events aiming at advancing LGBTI strategies and policy among liberal partners, the idea of this event was born around the time of the August 2018 ELF-event during the Stockholm Pride. Since no ELF-project was granted for another LGBTI-policy seminar for 2019, a RDR was planned as a plan B in order to keep up a strong European dimension and build on to the relationships between SILC and EU-based liberal LGBTI activists that were formed during 2018. This was done through a roundtable discussion held on the fringes of the Baltic Pride Human Rights Conference in Vilnius, during the Baltic Pride week on Thursday, June 6<sup>th</sup>.

Baltic Pride is the biggest Pride-week arranged in the Baltic region and a rotating event, shared between the three states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. LGBTI-rights are still largely threatened in Eastern Europe and as was displayed in the recent EP-elections, the region has stronger challenges with right wing nationalist populist movements than Western Europe. Traditional family values are still the norm, making events such as Baltic Pride even more important to support.

The event began with welcoming words from ELF board member Milosz Hodun and LGBTI liberals of Europe's Ralf Fröhlich. The actual roundtable had two parts, beginning with Cecilia Redner of the Church of Sweden, giving her reflections of a religious community where the discourse has changed and now openly welcomes and supports LGBTI-people. In this optimistic session, activists from Poland, Ukraine, Estonia and Latvia gave their comments focusing on the positive signs of advancement that can be seen in their respective countries. In the second half of the panel the Lithuanian MEP Andrius Austrevicius gave his reflections on what the EU is and can do, to push development in a more tolerant direction. This was then followed up by perspectives from Evelyn Paradis, executive director of ILGA Europe, LGBTI-liberals' Yuri Guaiana and Henk Nijmeijer, regional representative and activist from the Netherlands. The conclusions of the panelists were that although dark clouds of intolerance withstand on our European political scene, also post EP-elections, advances in LGBT acceptance and tolerance can indeed be interpreted from the election results. Several LGBTI-friendly MEP's have been elected and the advancement of Liberals but also Greens in the parliament gives hope.

The event was held in the beautiful Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center in Vilnius with an active and energetic audience. The event was streamed online and thereby accessible to a broader audience, although some viewers had problems with the connection. The beautiful location and many photographers however resulted in a good exposure to ELF and the LGBTI-liberals of Europe. After the event 17 evaluation forms were distributed and left only positive remarks. On average the quality of the discussions got 9,2 on a scale to 10 and the other responses followed a similar pattern. Many in the room expressed the importance of the EU and showed appreciation that liberals are leading the lines for more open and accepting societies.

Per Olsson, Swedish International Liberal Centre