

THE DEBATE ON THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

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March 2001 might be considered as the date for the official launch of the debate in Lithuania. It was after the Prime Minister of Sweden, who was holding the Presidency of the EU during the 1st half of 2001, wrote a letter to the Lithuanian Prime Minister calling upon Lithuanian interest groups, youth organisations, political parties and other segments of civil society to start comprehensive discussion on various aspects, that pertain to the future shape and policies of the EU.

The Discussion on the future of the EU is going on in Lithuania at various levels.

- In April 2001 the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania initiated a series of meetings to start reflection on the post-Nice issues:
 - During the meeting with the representatives of the Lithuanian political parties the Minister encouraged them to have a permanent dialogue and exchange of information concerning their European programmes, and to have contacts with their counterparts in Europe as well as emphasising their role in informing the Lithuanian society.
 - During the meeting with six prominent representatives of Lithuanian academia the Minister encouraged them to initiate a discussion on the future of the EU in Lithuanian universities. At the meeting - the group of prominent Lithuanian scholars presented their views on the future of the EU from different aspects (Lithuania's national interests, people, culture, society; development of CFSP and ESDP; EU institutions, competencies of the EU and member states; constitutional issues, Charter of Fundamental Rights, EU treaties, EU law; macroeconomics, common market, euro; new technologies, new economics). A follow-up meeting to discuss further was held in July 2001.
- In April 2001 the European Affairs Committee of the Seimas (Parliament) appointed a group of 4 *rapporteurs* to steer the debate and prepare reports to the Committee. Discussion on these reports was held in November.
- In June 2001 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania launched a specially designed website for the promotion of the debate on the future of the EU.
- In September 2001 a round table discussion with intellectuals was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the magazine "Kulturos barai" (the magazine for Lithuanian intellectual elite); material of the discussion was published in the magazine later on.
- In October 2001 a round table with representatives of youth organisations and students was organized in the Seimas.

- In November 2001 Mr. Jean Luc Dehaene, member of the so called “Laeken Group” and current Vice President of the Convention, paid a visit to Lithuania and met politicians, members of the Seimas, participated in a round table discussion at the Vilnius University and gave interviews to the media.
- In December 2001 a round-table gathering led by the President of Lithuania was held with the aim to take stock of the debate and to consider Lithuania’s suggestions for the Laeken Summit.
- In December 2001 a plenary session discussion was held in the Seimas on the EU issues including the future of the EU debate.
- In February 2002 the **Lithuanian Forum on the Future of the European Union** was established. Establishment of this Forum marks a certain new phase in the Lithuanian discussion on the future of the EU. The Forum unites non-governmental organisations and professional unions, youth organizations, religious communities and academic institutions as well as individual representatives of the art and intellectual world.
- The Forum seeks to involve the public in a broad debate on the future of the EU and Lithuania’s role in the changing EU. The Forum aims at unity, wisdom and creative decisions in the diversity of opinions when dealing with the issues that are raised by the Convention on the Future of the EU. In its efforts to reach these goals the Forum promotes active participation of the public and offers its ideas as proposals concerning EU reforms, enlargement and the future of the EU to the representatives of the Seimas and the Government of Lithuania in the Convention.
- At the inaugural conference members of the Forum elected its Council, consisting of 39 members. The President and his three Deputies were also elected by the Forum.
 - President – Algirdas Gaižutis, Academician, Vice-president of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences.
 - Vice-presidents:
 - 1) Prof. Saulius Katuoka, Head of the Department of the International and European Union Law, Lithuania’s Law University.
 - 2) Dr. Rimantas Dagys, Leader of the European Movement in Lithuania.
 - 3) Prof. Bronislovas Genzelis, Chairman of the Association of Lithuanian and Foreign Societies.
- The following commissions have been established in the Forum:
 - 1) Commission on National Identity in the EU.
 - 2) Youth Commission.
 - 3) Commission on Constitutional and Institutional Affairs.
 - 4) Commission on Rural Development and Ecological Issues.
 - 5) Information Society Commission.

Areas covered by these commissions reflect the main issues which have emerged during the discussion that has been going on in Lithuania.

- The Council of the Forum meets regularly to discuss issues of the debate with the representatives of the Lithuania's Government and the Seimas in the Convention.
- The Forum is taking the lead in organizing conferences and round tables in the regions of Lithuania, thus reaching a broad audience of Lithuania in various places of the country.
- The European Movement, the Europe House and other NGOs also organize activities: while informing Lithuanian society about the EU they include the debate on the future of the EU in their agendas.
- Special emphasis is laid on youth organizations which are becoming more and more active in the discussion on the future of the EU, especially after the Lithuanian representatives had been chosen for the Youth Convention in Brussels in June 2002. Prior to the European Youth Convention a Lithuanian Youth Convention is going to take place in the premises of the Seimas in the end of June and in the beginning of July the Council of Lithuania's Youth Organizations is convening a summer youth forum, which will also cover the issues concerning the future of the EU.