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Open Letter to Audronius Ažubalis, Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Emanuelis Zingeris, Chairman of Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas)

Wednesday, February 23, 2011

Dear Mr. Ažubalis and Mr. Zingeris,

As representatives of the non-governmental organizations Lithuanian Gay League (LGL) and Gay Alliance Belarus (GAB), we are writing concerning the recent exclusion of LGL from participation in the round table [discussion](#) held by the Lithuanian Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee regarding the Belarusian democratic opposition and human rights issues. After answering the invitation for NGOs to take part in the discussion to be held on Wednesday, February 23, LGL was informed that there was no space for an LGBT organization to participate.

This rejection, made by from Ramūnas Misulis, the Head of the Bureau of Foreign Affairs Committee of Lithuanian Parliament, directly contradicts the mission of the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) and their official [position](#) on inclusion and welcoming “constructive, focused and consolidated civil society recommendations on all issues concerning the OSCE human dimension.” We are especially concerned since, after the meeting took place, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy for the European Council, Catherine Ashton, released letter [stating](#) that “this is the time for real work,” and that it is necessary to intensify the dialogue and support Belarusian civil society, and for the European Union to increase the amount of direct aid for non-governmental organizations of Belarus.

LGL is already connected with several Belarusian human rights non-governmental organizations, and believes it can be a strong contributing force as Lithuania moves ahead in defining how the country will support the Belarusian opposition. “LGL is eager to be involved with what was described in the call for NGO participants at this meeting – namely, ‘opportunities for involvement with activities in Lithuania regarding the Belarusian democratic opposition.’ We want to participate in dialogues concerning human rights, inclusion, tolerance, and equality – the very issues specified on the

invitation issued by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Lithuanian Parliament for NGOs to participate in this discussion,” said Em Šaras, Communications Officer at LGL.

Vladimir Simonko, Chair of LGL, said on Wednesday: “If LGL is not invited to participate in this round table discussion, despite our NGO status and focus on equality of human rights, how can we expect that LGL will be considered an equal partner in supporting the democratic opposition in Belarus? Lithuanian politicians – including Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Ažubalis – have to be brave and send a strong message of inclusion and equality for all within this democratization process.”

GAB regrets to hear about this decision of the round table organizers. Aliaksandr Paluyan, Coordinator at GAB, states that “European politicians have once again demonstrated that some issues - in particular, the issues of equality of homosexuals - are treated on a different plane than other issues with regards to the overall processes of democracy and human rights. This is unacceptable behavior towards Lithuanian Gay League, which should serve as an example for other countries and organizations that are fighting for and defending human rights and democracy. We hope that this action was just a mistake made by the round table organizers, and that the Lithuanian Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee and OSCE will reconsider their attitudes towards Lithuanian Gay League, and that LGL will be to take part in round table meetings and conferences on the issues at stake in Belarus in the future.”

As you may be aware, Lithuanian Gay League (LGL) is a Lithuanian NGO, founded in 1995 that advocates for the rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans individuals in Lithuania. The Gay Alliance of Belarus was established in 2008 as an initiative group fighting for sexual and gender equality and human rights. Both of these organizations have worked for years on human rights issues, with a focus on fighting homophobia, exclusion, and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. These groups do the important work of disseminating accurate information about the lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, and creating favorable conditions for the development of safe and healthy LGBT communities through various cultural events, human rights conferences, education, and social activities.

We look forward to hearing from you about this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Aliaksandr Paluyan
COORDINATOR AT GAY ALLIANCE BELARUS



Vladimir Simonko
CHAIR AT LITHUANIAN GAY LEAGUE