

The Lithuanian President, Dalia Grybauskaitė, did not support the Polish minority

Since Lithuania's Seimas had amended the education law thus narrowing the scope of education in the Polish language and significantly reducing the number of schools with Polish as the language of instruction, Poles from the Vilnius region had been appealing to the country's president for vetoing the new law. Contrary to their expectations and appeals from Poland, Dalia Grybauskaitė signed the law on 30 March and thus enabled the closing of the legislative procedure and the entry into force of the new regulations.

After parliament's decision, President Grybauskaitė was suggesting that she would not sign the bill if the Polish minority in Lithuania as a consequence of the new regulations would have fewer rights than the Lithuanian minority in Poland. She hinted thus that the principle of mutuality was an eligible criterion for regulating the rights of ethnic minorities in Lithuania. She disregarded the European standard, according to which rights vested in ethnic minorities should not be worsened. She deemed that ethnic Poles must first of all learn Lithuanian in order to become rightful citizens. She stressed that the amended law would offer young ethnic Poles greater education and job opportunities. Meanwhile, Poles in Lithuania are emphasising that they are loyal citizens, actively engaged in the country's public and political life. So far, Polish children at schools with Polish as the language of instruction learnt Lithuanian to a level which did not prevent their integration with the rest of society or further education. In the opinion of Lithuanian Poles, the reduction of the scope of using Polish at schools will lead to a Lithuanisation of their new generation since, alongside the family, the Polish school has been so far the most important institution which guaranteed the preservation of ethnic identity to the Polish community in Lithuania.

Grybauskaitė's decision proves that in the heated dispute between the right-wing government, which has been ruling Lithuania for three years, and the Polish minority, the president is determined to support the nationalist Lithuanian political elite and shares its views regarding minority issues. Given the president's high popularity among the Lithuanian public, her support is important, because the political right has already started mobilising its electorate before the parliamentary elections next year, in which the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania stands a good chance of crossing the 5% electoral threshold. <jhyn>