

Latvia's Liberal Party (LLP) in post-Soviet Latvia: a glance into its programme and fate.

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Abstract.

The aim of this article is to look at one of the two parties in Latvia, whose ideology is classical liberalism. In the situation of the transition from totalitarianism to democracy the liberal ideas appeared to be unpopular to the majority of the population of Latvia, due to different difficulties linked to transition, both economical and psychological. The article gives a glance to the programme and internal problems of LLP.

When speaking of liberal parties in the sense of neoliberalism in Latvia, we should speak of parties, which ideology is classical liberalism. There were two such parties in Latvia—Latvia's Liberal party and Latvia's Liberal Democratic Party. Both parties participated in the elections of the Parliament (Saeima), but failed to get any places. These are not the only liberal parties in Latvia of course. In 1993 the party called "Latvia's Way" was founded and it's one of the leading parties in Latvia's politics, though it's ideology is not that of classical liberalism. Let's look at one of them, that is Latvia's Liberal Party (LLP).

The party was founded in 1990 and dissolved in 2000, due to a lack of members, as told the leader of the party Janis Danoss (1). It should be noted that the party had small amount of members from its foundation. The number was 40 in the beginning (spring 1991), then 130 (November 1991), (2). Though, the list of parties, organizations etc., published in Moscow in 1990, meant 140 as the number of members. The small number of members is an usual case for political parties in Latvia, but numbers for LLP were really small. The leaders of the party understood, that there will

not be much people in post-soviet Latvia, wishing to become members of liberal party. As Gunars Lansmanis put it "LLP doesn't wait for 700 000 pensioners and 100 000 invalids to support it" (3). The party stated, that it's the party of people, who can sell their work, that is party of businessmen, doctors, scientists, intellectuals. Free market, private enterprise etc. were aims of the party. LLP wanted to use the tactics of "shock therapy", which as they thought should heal the state in some months.

The 1st Congress of LLP took place in November 1991 and the programme was adopted. As one of the problems the small number of members was mentioned. The programme (4) of the party in the field of economics stated that the private property, which was nationalised during the Soviet times, should be returned to heirs of oldier proprietors. LLP suggested the wide range privatisation of the state property at open auctions. The taxes system should be changed, and those, starting business, making export, enlarging the amount of work places, should be assisted. Speaking of the political system, the party wanted to recreate the democratic Parliamentary Republic, which was based on the Constitution of Latvia

(Satversme, 1922). One of the most interesting questions is the question of citizenship. The situation of Latvia was such, that there lived both descendants of citizens of independent Latvia, and people, which came to Latvia from the time it was Soviet. At the dawn of renewed independence Latvian People's Front (LTF), (5) proclaimed, that the citizenship will be given to all people now living in Latvia. After the independence was regained the balance of political powers changed, Latvian People's Front losing power, and the Latvia's National Independence Movement (LNNK), (6) suggested to give citizenship only to the descendants of the citizens of independent Latvia. Therefore 1/3 part of the population had no right to vote (7). LLP thought that the law should be prepared by the Supreme Council of LR and approved by referendum (8). Human rights were one of the central points in the pro-



1-Rīgas Balss, 23.03.00

2-Neatkarīga Cīņa, 8.01.91

3-Same.

4-Rīgas Balss, 18.12.91

5-The referendum was held, asking if people wanted to live in "independent and democratic Republic of Latvia". The results showed, that the numbers for independence were higher than the percent of ethnic Latvians in population of Latvia, that meant, that minorities voted for independence too.

6-Both LTF and LNNK formed in the period of Perestroika. LTF was the party, which aim was to assist Gorbachev's perestroika in the beginning. LNNK was proindependence from the start.

7-The Citizenship law was liberalised after the referenda was held in October 1998.

8-The Supreme Council was elected in 1990, those elections were first in Soviet Latvia, where relative concurrence to Communist party was accepted. First Parliament in the history of renewed Latvian Republic was elected 1993.

gramme: the party declared that death penalty should be abolished. According to LLP none should object the right of a person to one's sexual orientation. When speaking of prostitution, the party suggested to legalize it. To avoid alcoholism, the creation of the free market system was suggested, which should give people possibility to realize their talents. In the field of education, the party was for state financed education, suggesting to find money by limiting money spent for the needs of bureaucrats.

There were some internal quarrels in the history of Liberal party. The year 1992 was marked by the first crisis in the party—some members being expelled from the party without making them know, which was against the Stautes of the party. Expelled members published "Copenhagen declaration" and accused the leader of the party of authoritarianism and neglect of all traditions of liberalism. They asked international and Latvia's organizations to boycott the party, until it neglects the Stautes. The second negative moment in the history of LLP was its extraordinary Congress in 1993, when the leader of LLDP G.Čulkstēns was elected the leader of the LLP. The previous leader J. Danoss was not present at the

Congress and did not accept the result of elections. As a result both parties participated in the 5th Saeima elections with two different lists.

As it was told earlier LLP participated in the 5th, 6th Saeima elections, but failed to get any of the candidates to be elected to the national legislature. Same is true to local government election of 1997. The program of the party for the 6th Saeima elections had not a lot of changes, when comparing it to the first program: decentralisation and more power to local government, less money to bureaucrats, the rights of person in the first place, lowering of taxes.

Latvia is told to have two antiliberal traditions—one that of authoritarian regime (1934-1940) and the second—the failures of reforms in the 1990-s, which are associated with liberalism, not with people, who realized reforms. The electorate of the Liberal party was very small. After the breakdown of planned economy, the economic situa-

tion was not that good and there were not a lot of people, who could start doing something. People, who looked for food and money, couldn't be pleased by the proposals of "shock therapy". No wonder, that in 1991 Gunars Lansmanis had to note at the press conference some time before the 1st Congress, that the party unites people, who want to see economic prosperity of Latvia, not those, who



want to sell Latvia. As Valdis Blūzma noted, there were two things, that deprived the party from success: a) quarrels inside the party and b) the party couldn't understand interests of the largest part of the electorate and make their programs fit interests of voters.

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1-Neatkarīga Ciņa, 5.06.92.

2-1st Saeima was elected 1922 for 3 years, 4th Saeima was elected in 1931, but it's work was interrupted by the coup d'etat, made by K. Ulmanis.

3- Elections took place in 1993 and 1995.

4-The percent and number of those, who voted for the party: 0.13592% (1520)—5.Saeima, 0.22640% (2163)—6.Saeima.

5-Neatkarīga Ciņa, 8.11.91

6-V.Blūzma was one of those, who signed “Copenhagen declaration”.