

Dear Member of the EHU Admissions Committee,

I believe the development of civil society is only possible through the collaborative efforts of autonomous individuals. Becoming such an individual is a process that takes continuous education, communication, and reflection. These are some of the conclusions I have made summing up my volunteering year 2022 in Kaunas, Lithuania.

The volunteering was an overwhelming experience for me. I got a chance to observe and contribute to the work of such organizations as a youth NGO (AC Patria), contemporary cultural institutions (Kaunas Artists' House, Nida Art Colony), and non-profit humanitarian organizations (Red Cross, Caritas, Artscape). For the first time in my life, I participated in Pride in Vilnius, took part in a feminist festival, attended a camp on anthropology and political panel discussions, visited social centers, and went to a refugee camp in Rukla.

In 2022 Kaunas was a European capital of culture (ECOC), and I tried to engage in numerous activities and events the ECOC initiative could offer (workshops, concerts, performances, and exhibitions). I have met many bright, intelligent, inspiring people (fellow volunteers, educators, activists, artists, architects, designers, photographers, curators, musicians, poets, and writers).

Coordinated by European Solidarity Corps, the volunteering brought together youth from all over the world. I have learned so much about cultures, lifestyles, languages, political systems and struggles from my friends and acquaintances from Lithuania, France, Greece, Türkiye, Italy, Ukraine, Spain, Sakartvelo, Russia, Japan, Armenia, Peru, Slovenia, Germany, Slovakia, India, Azerbaijan.

Now writing these lines in Grodno, Belarus, my volunteering year 2022 almost feels like a dream. But I know it was true. It was the vision of how free civil society should operate in any country. It was the way to freedom, and I hope to find myself on this way again at European Humanitarian University.

Yulia Protas
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