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European Parliament Elections in Lithuania : Populist Competition in the Shadow of the Presidential Vote

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**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS IN LITHUANIA:
POPULIST COMPETITION IN THE SHADOW
OF THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE**

Abstract:

The 2014 European Parliament elections in Lithuania were successful for mainstream political parties: no new-born political movement came up in the political scene; no open Euro-sceptic party was able to gain any seats. But such a victory came at a price: the major European topics (joining the euro-zone, land-ownership by the foreigners) were left aside; the EP electoral campaign was overshadowed by Presidential elections with populist discussions about Russian threats and national security. The coincidence of two political campaigns boosted the voter turnout and made a significant impact on the distribution of MEP seats; because of the higher turnout, smaller parties were able to enter the EP, while two established parties with devoted core voters suffered some losses compared to the 2009 EP elections.

Key words:

European Parliament, Lithuania, elections, campaign, electoral slogan, populism

Introduction: Lithuania in the EU and the EU in Lithuania

In 2014, Lithuania elected members of the European Parliament for the third time. In every election, the number of parliamentarians representing the country declined by one: from 13 in 2004 to 11 in 2014. The 15% decrease of the number of seats in ten years remained mostly unnoticed. Lithuanian apathy towards European affairs and an uncritical attitude towards Brussels could explain the public ignorance of the fact, that the Lithuanian (as well as the Irish) delegations in the EP proportionally shrank in comparison to other countries’.

This attitude dates back to the very beginning of the Lithuanian membership in the EU: on November 11th, 2004, the Lithuanian Seimas¹ was the first (even before the European Parliament) to ratify a contradictory Treaty, establishing a Constitution for Europe, which was signed less than a fortnight earlier and rejected half a year later by the referendums in France and the Netherlands. Ten years ago, the premature decision to ratify the imperative document without public or even parliamentary discussions was justified by the fears of the ruling elite: in October 2004, a new born Darbo partija (DP, Labour Party) won the Seimas elections and the outgoing parliament was afraid to leave the ratification of vitally important documents to unknown politicians. A few weeks later DP entered the coalition government and later joined Lithuanian mainstream politics.

The escape from broader public discussions on European affairs gradually became a sad tradition in Lithuania. This was clearly reflected in the 2009 EP elections, where the turnout was less than 21% - Lithuanians were the second least active voters in the EU (only Slovaks were less enthusiastic). Even the presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2013 did not stimulate substantial changes in this field.

Lithuania remains a strongly pro-European country, but the attitudes are going through gradual transformation. In 2004, i.e. in the first year of membership, 68% of Lithuanians said they trust the EU, while only 52% preserved such high expectations in 2013. Meanwhile, the proportion of the population who distrusted the EU more than doubled from 15 to 35% in ten years [Eurobarometer 62; Eurobarometer 80]. The fact that trust of the EU had not dropped below 50% in Lithuania is more symbolic, and it is hard to answer the question: has the attitude of Lithuanians towards the EU become more realistic or more sceptic?

The roots of an uncritical attitude towards the EU could be traced back to over a quarter of a century ago. Membership in the EU and NATO was the dream in the first decade of Lithuanian independence; this goal united the nation, was accepted without public discussion and understood as a vital guarantee of lasting independence and prosperity. The Baltic States were in the second wave of the NATO enlargement, they joined the Alliance five years later than the first applicants from the CEE. Initially, Lithuania was absent in the first proposed wave of the EU enlargement as well, and a fear to be left outside the EU and NATO was politically real and publicly insulting. The membership talks resembled a horse race; Lithuania tried to close negotiation chapters as quickly as possible in order to overtake the countries which started negotiations earlier. In the 2003 referendum, 89.95% Lithuanians voted for membership in the EU. This was the second best result in the history of enlargement referendums. At the same time, Slovakia scored 92.5% in favour of membership.

¹ Lithuanian Parliament

On the eve of the 2014 EP elections, a few uncomfortable questions clearly revealed the widening gap between the rank and file and the political elite on their attitudes towards the EU. Joining the euro-zone was an old dream of Lithuania. In 2006, the Lithuanian application was rejected because of the failed inflation target. When the economic crisis hit, the common currency lost its idealized appeal to Lithuania, however, two consecutive governments and President D. Grybauskaitė continued to vow for the common currency. Because surveys showed Lithuanian distrust in the Euro, the political elite faced a delicate task of how to avoid ‘uncomfortable’ discussions about joining the euro during the EP election campaign.

Another, just as troublesome issue, was the problem of land ownership. During membership negotiations, Lithuania agreed on a 10 year transition period during which foreign citizens were not allowed to own land in Lithuania. From May 2014, the land ownership rules were relaxed, but Seimas failed to pass the legislation which would protect local landowners. The situation provoked discontent; a group of citizens initiated a referendum on a law, forbidding foreigners to buy land in Lithuania. Strict Lithuanian laws on referendum require at least 300 thousand signatures supporting the call of referendum for it to take place. In a country with less than 3 million inhabitants it is a huge task, which, up until then, had never been fulfilled. The Supreme Electoral Commission and Seimas did everything to postpone the vote after the EP elections and at least temporary to bury the question.

Introduction of the euro and land ownership were obvious topics for the EP election campaign. If put on the electoral agenda, they could have made an essential impact on the vote results and Lithuania would have followed the mainstream European trend of increasing Euro-scepticism. Yet, because of the united attempts of all mainstream political parties, as well as favourable circumstances, the main discussions concerning Europe shifted towards security issues. The Ukrainian crisis and Russian aggression in Crimea easily overshadowed economic problems. It became possible to present the euro-zone not as an economic question, but as security dilemma. Supporters of the referendum on land ownership were presented as undercover agents for the separation from the EU by the mainstream media. In the face of Russian aggression, any doubts about the importance of the EU (or NATO) looked like betrayal. The Baltic States had suffered from Russian occupation more than any other countries in the EU, hence, their attitudes towards Moscow are often perceived as an over-reaction. But even after a quarter of a century, the Soviet past remains an important political factor in Lithuanian politics.

In 2014, the EP elections in Lithuania coincided with the second poll of Presidential elections, which are generally valued as the most important

national vote. Security problems, even ‘the feeling of the upcoming war’ became the best tools for mobilisation of the voters. Without any doubt, the EP elections were overshadowed by the Presidential vote. Both electoral campaigns influenced each other, but with different strength and outcomes.

Electoral calendar and political landscape

If we would look for a single most important factor which influences the outcome of elections in Lithuania, the timeline for elections would be the best bet. The timing of elections not only dictates the main political topics of the campaign, but also determines the voter turnout. A low turnout is highly beneficial for the so called traditional parties, whose roots go back to the struggle for Lithuanian independence in the late 1980s and beginning of 1990s. The leading right wing party Tėvynės sąjunga-Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai (TS-LKD, Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats) inherited traditions of the Sąjūdis movement, which played a crucial role in the struggle for independence and was the main opponent of local and Russian communists. The leading party of the left wing Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija (LSDP, Lithuanian Social Democratic Party) incorporated ex-communists and social democrats who recreated their party shortly after restoration of Lithuanian independence. These two parties extremely benefit from the stubbornness of their core voters: the proportion of TS-LKD and LSDP votes dramatically increase in case of a low turnout. TS-LKD and LSDP in Lithuania are immune to the consequences of declining voter turnout which could be noticed all over the CEE countries. We could even identify some sort of ‘a paradox of democracy’, when parties with disciplined voters are not interested in broader public discussions, which could boost a higher turnout. Encouraging civic activism becomes a vital task for smaller political parties which are short of a devoted poll of voters. Electoral date and additional questions supplemented to the vote (in the form of a referendum) remain a few instruments capable of political manipulation.

Every parliamentary election in the 21st century saw a birth of a new political party in Lithuania. In 2000 it was Naujoji Sąjunga-socialliberai (NS, New Union–Social Liberals), 2004 saw a rise of DP, in 2008 Tautos prisikėlimo partija (TPP, National Revival Party) was created, in 2012 Drąsos kelias (DK, The Way of Courage) entered Seimas. From all these newcomers, only DP managed to become an established political force. The rise and fall of new parties together with ‘pulsation’ of voter turnout is replacing the ‘electoral pendulum’ which was the most important electoral factor in the first decade of Lithuanian independence, when in 1992 parliamentary elections did a sharp turn to the left, followed by no less sudden turn to the right in 1996. From new

party creation point of view, there are essential differences between the EP and national parliament elections. Victory in the EP elections gives no greater political influence on the national political stage. For most new parties, Seimas elections become the entry point, but the electoral calendar plays its role as well. In 2004, the EP elections were a rehearsal for DP just before Seimas elections, which were held the same year. New born TPP was very successful in the 2008 Seimas elections, but totally defeated in the EP elections the next year. New DK received moderate support in its first electoral attempt on national level in 2012, but after two years in Parliament was unable to even register for the EP elections.

In the public eyes, the EP elections only provide an opportunity for a handful of politicians to get high paid jobs in Brussels. Different parties use different strategies to choose their candidates for the election list. In 2004, the leading parties - TS-LKD and LSDP - decided to send to the EP their most experienced politicians (V. Landsbergis, L. Andrikienė, A. Sakalas, J. Paleckis). It is not clear whether these parties consider the job in the EP a promotion, honourable pension or political exile. In any case, LSDP logically preserved this principle of selection in all the following elections. Meanwhile in 2009 and 2014, TS-LKD put some new, unknown politicians into the first positions of the electoral list. DP, the winners of the first EP elections in 2004, picked unknown politicians for their electoral list, at the same time, Liberalų demokratų partija (now known as Partija Tvarka ir Teisingumas, PTT, Party 'Order and Justice') recruited a professor of philosophy; while Valstiečių ir Naujosios demokratijos partijų sąjunga (now Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjunga, LVŽS, Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union) was led by the chairwoman of the party. 2009 marked a great shift in favour of parties' leaders: the chairmen of three parties DP, PTT and Lietuvos Lenkų rinkimų akcija (LLRA, Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania) were elected into the EP. A strategy of 'celebrity promotion' was used by one of the liberal parties, Lietuvos Respublikos liberalų sąjūdis (LRLS, Liberals Movement of the Republic of Lithuania), who endorsed a professor of philosophy who was simultaneously a TV personality.

Because the EP elections in Lithuania coincide with Presidential vote, the second round of Presidential elections, which is held at the same day as the EP vote, becomes a crucial factor. If the President is elected in the first round (as it happened in 2009), voters do not bother to vote in the EP elections; if the votes coincide, they boost the turnout (as in 2004).

Another important question concerns the electoral support for parties which are currently in power. The EP elections in 2004 were held half a year before Seimas elections and were a boost for a new political force DP. The EP elections in 2009 were held just half a year after parliamentary elections, which

saw a victory of the right wing and populist parties. A short period between two votes was useful for the ruling coalition. As the economic crisis had just begun, the first steps of the government were unpopular, but the impact was not widely felt. Together with the low turnout, this helped TS-LKD claim the victory of the EP elections in 2009. The EP elections were another sign that the ‘electoral pendulum’, which usually punishes ruling politicians, is losing its strength.

It is very complicated to speak about the ideological background of the parties in Lithuania. The Left-Right axis in Lithuania lacks traditional socio-economic content and even after a quarter of a century brings up Communist-Anti-Communist discussions from the period of the fight for independence [Ramonaitė 2007: 166]. The European context makes the situation even more uncomfortable. It is not a problem with the identity of TS-LKD or LSDP: their representatives join groups of European People’s Party and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the EP. But the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe recruited representatives of two very different Lithuanian political parties – DP and LRLS (in 2004 LICS, Liberalų ir Centro Sąjunga, Liberal and Centre Union). DP is considered to be left wing populists, while LRLS is clearly on the right side. The representatives of PTT during different terms joined different political groups. But these changes had its logic: PTT in 2004 was a part of the Union for Europe of the Nations group, later migrated to the Europe of Freedom and Democracy, and then to the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy. The leader of LLRA stayed in the European Conservatives and Reformists group for both terms, while representative of LVŽS in 2004 was a member of the Union for Europe of the Nations group, but joined the Greens-European Free Alliance in 2014. However, we should take note, that during this period, LVŽS consolidated its powers with part of the Green movement.

Table 1. Lithuanian political parties in the EP. Data Parliamentary Research Department, 2014-05-19.

	European United Left/Nordic Green Left	Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats	Greens-European Free Alliance	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe	European People’s Party	European Conservatives and Reformists	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy*	Union for Europe of the Nations
2004		2 LSDP		5 DP 2 LICS	2 TS-LKD			1 PTT 1 LVS**
2009		3 LSDP		1 DP 1 LRLS	4 TS-LKD	1 LLRA	2 PTT	
2014		2 LSDP	1 LVŽS	1 DP 2 LRLS	2 TS-LKD	1 LLRA	2 PTT	

* Europe of Freedom and Democracy in 2009; ** became LVŽS in 2014

Election campaign

After the 2009 EP elections, certain changes in Lithuanian laws were made and had direct impact on further campaigns. In 2010, the Lithuanian Constitutional Court decided that the requirements of the electoral law, claiming that only political parties can form electoral lists, contradicted the Lithuanian Constitution. Lithuanian Seimas passed the changes of the law which created an option to form new entities – Electoral Committees. Citizens could join such committees, create electoral lists and participate in the EP elections. Such liberalisation of electoral laws was followed by changes in the regulation of funding. In order to minimise the influence of business on politics, it was decided to increase state support for political parties. Simultaneously, political parties were forbidden to receive donations from legal entities; only physical persons' support was allowed. In practice, Electoral Committees were left without options to receive any substantial funding and the possibility of their creation and electoral success remained highly uncertain. In theory, these changes were designed to support democracy and curb political corruption. In practice, the changes favoured existing political parties, reduced possibilities for new political movements, and, to some extent, encouraged the conservation of the Lithuanian political system, which, even after 25 years of independence, cannot be called a mature one.

On the eve of the EP elections, the Lithuanian Ministry of Justice had registered 42 political parties: 11 of them had not met requirements to submit a list of their members each year or had already declared intentions to stop activity. The remaining parties had a total of 114 147 members, what means that about 4.5% of Lithuanian voters had declared their support to one or another political group. Only two of the parties had more than 20 thousand members (DP and LSDP), another two claimed membership of more than 10 thousand (TS-LKD and PTT). Four political parties had more than two thousand members (LRLS, LICS, LVŽS, LŽP). A new law, passed in 2013, requires political parties to have at least two thousand members. All minor political parties have two years (till the end of 2015) to satisfy these new requirements or face closure. If we consider any elections as an opportunity to increase visibility of the political party and to boost its membership, the EP elections and local elections in 2015 were the last chance to do so.

All political parties with more than two thousand members entered the electoral race on their own. For the elections, LLRA formed a coalition with the party Rusų aljansas (RA, Russian Alliance), while DK, which was born just before 2012 parliamentary elections failed to collect 10 thousand signatures of supporters, required by electoral law was not registered for the elections. From the minor political parties, only Tautininkų sąjunga (TS, National Union), with 16 hundred

members, decided to take part in the elections and managed to collect 10 thousand signatures supporting their bid. The attempts by extreme left wing Socialistinis liaudies Frontas (SLF, Socialist People's Front) and populist Liaudies partija (LP, Peoples party) failed. There were two attempts by the Electoral Committees to enter the race, but both failed on different stages of their activities.

It is rather complicated to speak about the programmes of 10 political parties which entered the electoral race, as well as about the issues raised in discussions. Presidential electoral agenda was the moving force of both elections; and the escape from genuine European problems as well as concentration on security questions and Russian aggression were the most important features of campaigning.

In most political campaigns, party programmes remain out of reach of the ordinary voters. The ideas are interpreted and commented by the media; the rank and file are influenced by a mixture of these interpretations. To some extent, the most authentic ways of self-expression of the parties are the slogans, i.e. the most important messages politicians would like to send to their constituencies. A brief analysis of the slogans used by Lithuanian political parties in 2014 EP elections allow us to notice a few interesting things.

Eight out of ten Lithuanian parties used one or two geographical names in their slogans (Europe, Lithuania, or both). It would be too bold to make precise conclusions from these observations (picture 1). We could presume that mentioning only Lithuania in their election slogans shows more nationalistic attitudes of PTT and LVŽS, or that no geographical names in the slogans of LŽP and LSDP is a sign of open-mindedness. Geographical names in political slogans of the EP elections could serve as a map, which shows the routes of political parties on their trips to the 'hearts and souls' of the voters. In this case, it is clear that the Coalition's target is the Polish and Russian speaking voter; for DP the accent on Europe helps escape some uncomfortable questions (their leader is ethnic Russian). It is worth to notice, that all parties with overlapping voters tried to choose different geographical names (LSDP and DP; LICS and LRLS; LŽP and LVŽS).

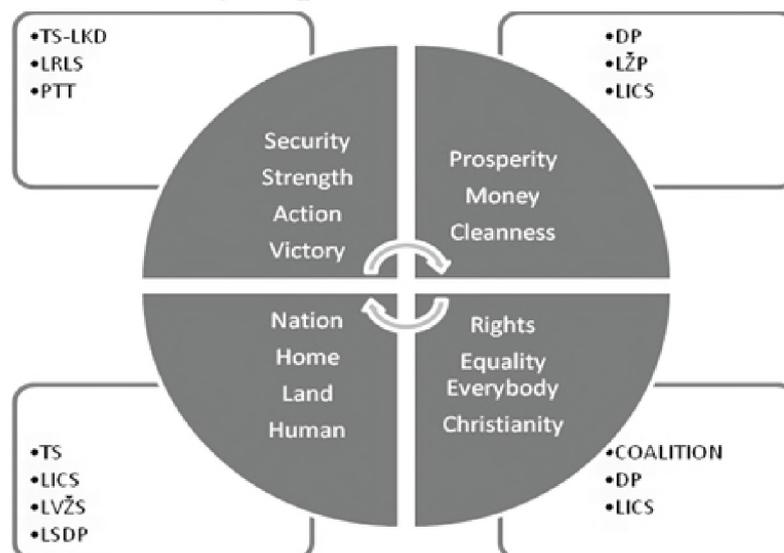
The words signifying certain values in the slogans of the election campaign could develop into an even a more useful instrument for identification of the orientation of political parties. In picture 2, we have grouped these 'value words' in four categories: up-left concentrating on Success (Security, Strength, Action, Victory), up-right on Materialism (Prosperity, Money, Cleanness), bottom-left is centred on Locality (Nation, Home, Land, Human), and bottom-right on Universality (Rights, Equality, Everybody, Christianity). Of course, this identification of values is highly conditional. But a few interesting features could be mentioned. LICS was the only party which diversified its electoral message into

three out of four categories: was speaking about money, home and everybody. Besides other important factors (after 2012 Seimas elections, LICS had no representatives in the parliament for the first time, the party was losing the fight with LRLS for the votes of the liberal minded population) such electoral tactics of ‘catch them all’ could have contributed to the defeat in the EP elections. DP was the only party which packed its electoral slogan into two categories, all the other parties concentrated into one field. It is interesting to mention, that the topics promoted by TS-LKD and LRLS – Security, Strength, Action, Victory – were in the centre of presidential campaign of incumbent president D. Grybauskaitė.

Picture 1. Key geographical names in official slogans of Lithuanian political parties participating in 2014 EP elections



Picture 2. The key words in official slogans of Lithuanian political parties participating in 2014 EP elections



Electoral tactics of political parties in the 2014 EP elections should also be considered in the context of presidential elections. We could identify two main models (support of incumbent president or competition), but the models have some interesting variations, for different political parties' application of these models brought very different results.

Two most influential right wing parties, which, until 2012, were in the government and during the EP elections remained in the opposition – TS-LKD and LRLS – decided to support incumbent president D. Grybauskaitė and did not evoke candidates of their own. Grybauskaitė's electoral tactics were based on alienating herself from any political party; she presented herself as independent. Such a situation complicated positions of conservatives and liberals. As all the attention was concentrated on the presidential campaign, TS-LKD and LRLS lost chances to increase their visibility and to present their agenda to the voters. However, as the main theme of D. Grybauskaitė electoral campaign was mobilisation against Russian aggression, TS-LKD felt extremely comfortable with the topic, as patriotism remains the distinctive feature of this party's identity.

TS-LKD decided to use an electoral trick which, to some extent, could be classified under 'the false name' category. 'The father of Lithuanian independence' V. Landsbergis had always been one of the greatest electoral assets of TS-LKD. He is now in his eighties and, after two terms in the EP, V. Landsbergis decided not to participate in elections any more. TS-LKD recruited V. Landsbergis' grandson, Gabrielius, to be on the list. A young man without any political experience was considered to be a strange and risky choice [Navickas 2014]. However, the traditional conservative electorate warmly welcomed the new politician and he finished the race in first place of the party's list (originally G. Landsbergis was third). For TS-LKD, the best outcome of presidential elections would have been D. Grybauskaitė's victory in the first round. In such case they could expect a repeated 2009 scenario: low turnout in the EP elections gives extra opportunities for traditional parties.

Although LRLS supported D. Grybauskaitė's presidential bid, they were highly interested in two rounds of presidential elections. An increased turnout would have attracted more voters who could have chosen neither TS-LKD nor LSDP. LRLS was inspired by its success five years ago, and expected to go on with the consolidation of the liberal electorate and focus on younger urban voters. In order to achieve their aims, LRLS tried to replicate their old tactics and recruited a well-known businessman A. Guoga as number two of their list, which was led by ex-minister for education G. Steponavičius. The ranking of the party list (A. Guoga finished first), showed how liberal voters love celebrities and despise politicians.

Other political parties tried to combine the presidential and the EP electoral campaigns. The most successful in this model was Coalition lead by LLRA. In principle, they used the same strategy, which was very effective five

years ago: the leader of the party, V. Tomaševski, was nominated as a presidential candidate with no chances of success. However, the very fact of his participation helped mobilize the Polish speaking voters. With the turnout as low as it was in 2009, this easily gave him a seat in the EP. In 2014, the task was much more complicated, as the second poll of the presidential vote was nearly inevitable as well as the higher turnout in the EP elections. V. Tomaševski could not be sure that the same tactics would lead to the same success twice in a row. So LLRA formed a coalition with RA. Before, such coalitions were fragile. Since there are more active Polish than Russian voters in Lithuania, after ranking, Polish politicians usually won the seats and the Russians left empty handed. However, after the 2012 parliamentary elections, a few Polish candidates declined to enter the Seimas and the leader of RA became a MP, the mood changed and the coalition partners gained more trust in each other.

The most contradictory combination of the two election campaigns was chosen by the leading party of the governing coalition, LSDP. Prime Minister A. Butkevičius declined the offer to participate in presidential elections. At the time he was the most popular LSDP politician with modest chances to win the presidency. The party nominated MEP Z. Balčytis as the presidential candidate; he was simultaneously assigned to lead the party list in the EP elections. In the LLRA case such a strategy and the logic of a ‘double candidate’ was very clear to the supporters. For the LSDP, the same strategy brought a lot of misunderstanding, which translated into an awkward situation and possible losses for the EP elections. Z. Balčytis succeeded to win the second place in the first poll of presidential elections and participated in the second. But being on two separate ballots in the same election raised difficult questions about Z. Balčytis preferences: was he eager to become the president or a MEP? Z. Balčytis lost the presidential elections, the voters ranked him down from the first place in the party list to the second, but in any case, he succeeded and became MEP for the second time.

Similar electoral combinations were on the agenda of PTT and LŽP, but their nominees were excluded from the participation in presidential elections. The leader of PTT, R. Paksas, was president of Lithuania in 2003-2004, but was impeached and barred from any office where he has to take an oath for the Republic of Lithuania. MEP remained the highest political position available for R. Paksas and he was elected in 2009. The lifetime ban from elected office for R. Paksas was ruled as illegal by the European Court of Human Rights in 2011, and Lithuania was obliged to change the law, but had not met this commitment. Despite the fact that the party, led by R. Paksas (PTT), participated in the ruling coalition, attempts to make last minute changes of the Constitution to enable R. Paksas to participate in presidential elections failed; PTT decided not to nominate another presidential candidate.

The Supreme Electoral Commission refused to register the leader of LŽP L. Balsys as a candidate for president. LŽP managed to collect 20 411 signatures in support of the leader's presidential bid, but part of the signatures were declared invalid. The former adviser to the incumbent president D. Grybauskaitė and current MP L. Balsys remained on the top of the party list in the EP elections. However, LŽP lost the opportunity to show up in presidential debates, which significantly decreased its visibility.

DP and LVŽS participated in both elections, but the DP more and the LVŽS less actively tried to separate their campaigns. DP presidential candidate A. Paulauskas was not on the EP electoral list, his presidential campaign had little correlation with the party EP campaign. In comparison with other large political parties, DP electoral campaigns could be characterised as the most professional. DP hires expensive foreign consultants; their campaigns have precise targets, are well funded and managed. It's hard to escape the impression that the leaders of DP considered the 2014 EP elections of secondary importance. As the leaders of the party were on trial for financial manipulations, the founder of DP, V. Uspaskich, needed parliamentary immunity. These modest, but selfish, intentions were unable to build a sufficient motivation for a successful election campaign.

LVŽS strength lies in rural regions: this party is more represented in local politics, so a combination of the presidential and the EP elections became a good opportunity to present themselves as a national political force. The leader of the party, R. Karbauskis, led the electoral list; the second position was left for party presidential candidate B. Ropė. Due to moderate chances of success in presidential elections and modest prospects in the EP elections, this tandem was the best decision for the party. B. Ropė's participation in presidential debates helped the party increase their visibility. To some extent this electoral strategy resembles LLRA case. When R. Karbauskis refused to enter the EP in favour of B. Ropė, it was quite understandable to the supporters of the party.

The two parties which were considered as the outsiders in the EP elections tried to replicate the mainstream strategy of connecting two electoral campaigns. But for different reasons TS and LICS were unable to succeed. TS was the weakest participant in the elections: it had no representatives in the parliament and lacked state funding which, after changes of party financing laws, became an important factor of success. TS ties with the presidential candidate MP N. Puteikis were not officially exposed. TS and N. Puteikis helped each other with the collection of signatures supporting their electoral bids, openly expressed sympathy to the upcoming referendum on land ownership, which was ignored by the other political parties. TS received nearly six times fewer votes than N. Puteikis in the first poll of the presidential election, but nearly doubled in comparison with the 2012 Seimas elections.

The 2014 EP elections could be the last for the LICS. In 2009, the party had already begun losing its position as the center of liberal electorate, when another liberal party (LRLS) managed to get twice as many votes. Participation in the government and unconditional support for president D. Grybauskaitė in the 2012 parliamentary elections became a handicap for LICS. The former leader of the party, A. Zuokas, entered the presidential race independently, but it remained unclear how either side could benefit from this ‘silent coalition’.

Election results

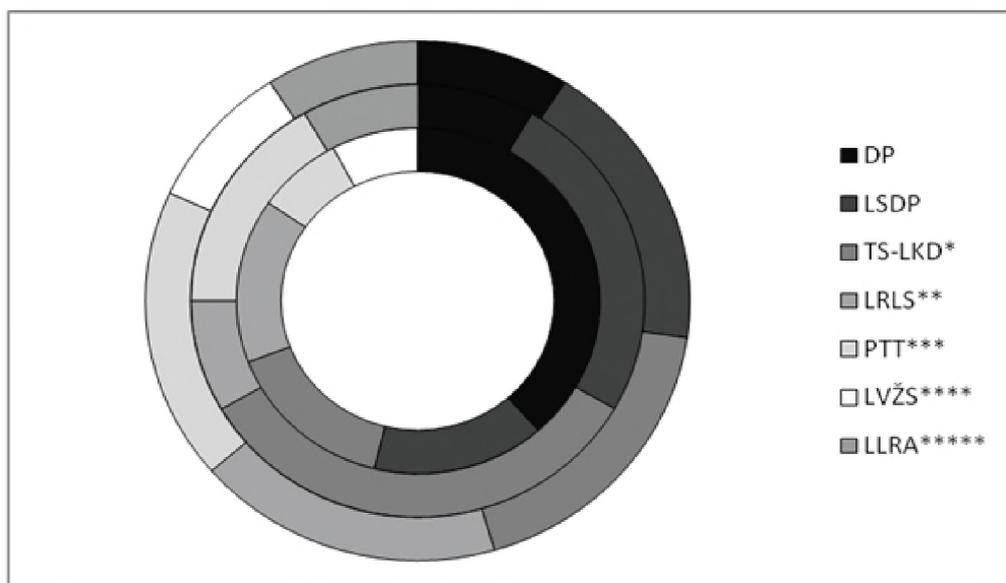
The results of the 2014 EP elections in Lithuania were unexpected and inspired passionate public discussions about the actual winners. The results provoked the political instinct to claim victory even in the case of defeat. The identification of the winner was confusing due to the even division of votes: 4 parties received 2 MEP seats each; 3 parties got 1 seat and 3 parties received zero. But the main factors which aggravated the identification of the winner, were sociological forecasts, which predicted unexpectedly good results for the ruling parties. LSDP was nearly positive of the victory and even planned personal changes in the government as some key figures were expected to leave for Brussels. The difference between expectations (the first place and 30% of votes) and reality (the second place and 17.26% of votes) was a shock for LSDP and a great joy for TS-LDK, who received 2 thousand votes more than LSDP and, despite losing half of their seats in the EP, spoke of ‘success’. The situation prompted one of the leaders of LSDP, G. Kirkilas, to put all the responsibility on sociologists and declare, that “our sociologists are becoming participants of electoral campaigns” [Samoškaitė, 2014-05-26]. To some extent this is correct: in Lithuania, sociological data has not become a valuable instrument for strategic decisions, but is used as a propaganda argument or to help construct ‘self-fulfilling forecast’. However, the results are to be blamed on the politicians, not sociologists [Žinių radijas 2014].

There were no problems with the identification of the winners in all previous EP elections. In 2004, DP became a clear leader with 5 seats and more than 30% of votes, in 2009 TS-LKD claimed victory with 4 seats and nearly 27% of the votes. In 2014, no party received more than 18% of votes and the more rational evaluation of the outcome is revealed by analyzing the changes of the MEP seats gained (or lost) compared with the 2009 EP elections. Two traditionally largest political parties representing right (TS-LKD) and left (LSDP) came in first and received a nearly equal shares of votes (17%), thus 2 seats in the EP. But it was a loss of half (for TS-LKD) or a third (for LSDP) of their representation in the EP. Three political parties (PTT, LLRA, DP) retained status qua, while LRLS doubled their number of MEP (from 1 to 2) and LVŽS regained a seat in the EP after five years.

One important outcome of the elections was evident even before the vote: compared with previous votes there were fewer registered electoral lists. Only 10 lists competed in 2014, while in 2009 there were 15 electoral lists and 12 lists in 2004. In 2014 only 7.04% of the votes ‘were lost’: the share of the voters whose support to political parties was not translated into MEP seats dramatically decreased. In 2009 and 2004, 15.31% and 17.36% votes were cast for parties which had not gained participation in the EP.

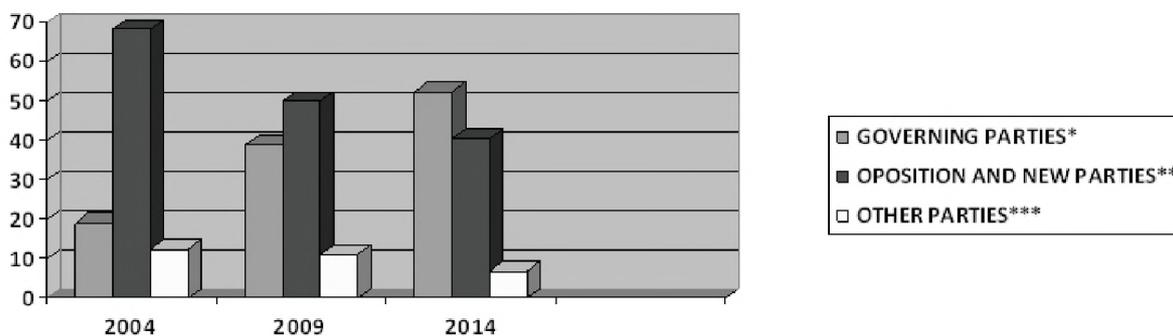
Picture 3. Lithuanian representatives in EP.

2004 (13 seats – inner circle); 2009 (12 seats – middle circle); 2014 (11 seats – outer circle)



* in 2004 participated as TS; ** in 2004 participated as LICS; *** in 2004 participated as LDP; **** in 2004 participated as LLRA & LRS Coalition, in 2009 as LLRA

Picture 4. Results of EP elections in Lithuania. Balance between governing and opposition parties



* 2004 – LSDP; NS; 2009 – TS-LKD, LICS, LRLS, TPP; 2014 - LSDP, DP, PTT, LLRA; ** 2004 – DP (new party), TS, LICS (LRLS), PTT (LDP); LVŽS (LVNDPS); 2009 – LSDP, DP, PTT, LLRA, LVŽS (LVLS); 2014 – TS-LKD, LRLS, LVŽS; *** 2004 – including LLRA; 2014 – including LICS

Without a clear impact on national politics, the EP elections could be considered as a test of trust for the incumbent government. As parliamentary elections are held in Lithuania every 4 years and the EP elections every 5 years, the time gap between the two votes has an impact as well: the less time passed after national elections, the better results governing parties can expect. In 2004, the EP elections were held three and a half years after Seimas election, the ruling coalition suffered hard defeat and a new born DP gained victory. In 2009, the time gap between national and the EP elections was only half a year, the outcome of elections was much better for the ruling parties. That year, members of the governing coalition, the short lived populist TPP was defeated, but the core ruling party, TS-LKD, gained victory. In 2014, the governing coalition was 1.5 years old and did much better than the opposition parties for the first time. However, we should note that in 2014, no new-born political party participated in the elections, and it is also important to note that the governing coalition was unusually vast.

Conclusions: short time impact or long lasting tendencies

Five weeks after the EP elections, the Referendum on land ownership was held in Lithuania. Under the turnout of less than 15%, the vote was declared invalid, as Lithuanian laws require the minimum turnout of 50%. The Supreme Electoral Commission and Seimas did everything to separate the referendum from the EP and presidential elections. This separation of referendum from EP elections and the connection of the EP vote with the second poll of presidential elections were the most important factors which determined the character and outcomes of the vote. We could presume that without ‘support’ of presidential elections the real turnout in Lithuanian EP elections could be about 15-20% instead of the actual 46.35%. The situation in Lithuania reminds of Slovakia, where presidential elections are held just before the EP elections and Slovak voters do not bother to come to the polls for the third time in a few weeks. The rise of voter turnout in 2014, in comparison to the 2009 EP elections is an illusion; in ten years the EP elections in Lithuania became a routine political act, traditional Lithuanian Euro-optimism is more a mood than an active civic position.

The Lithuanian media noticed that the ordinariness of the election in Lithuania is unique in the context of the EU, where Euro-scepticism is gaining power [ELTA 2014]. The domination of traditional parties and failure of extreme and populist forces was presented as a welcome outcome of the elections [BNS 2014]. Such observations please the governing establishment and simultaneously help mask the emerging contradictions inside the society. The European project becomes more and more elitist, and as the 2014 EP elections in Lithuania showed

in order to get popular support the established political parties are turning away from European problems and returning to old discussions which remind of the two decade old debates about national security and Russian threats. The victory against Euro-scepticism and populism in Lithuania was achieved at the cost of broadening the gap between political elites and ordinary voters.

In recent years we can observe certain attempts of the established parties to preserve the existing political system in Lithuania, to create artificial obstacles for establishing new political parties or movements. The 2014 EP elections saw the further steps in this direction. Formal relaxation of the rules for participation in the EP elections was inactivated by the tightening of financial restrictions on political campaigns. In Lithuania we can observe a situation when political parties are losing the interest to appeal for broader audiences; politicians are concentrating their attention on their core voters. The most important political challenge is the encouragement of your voters' participation; in this situation manipulations of electoral calendar becomes the principal method of political contest.

The ranking of party electoral lists remains one of a few channels for the voters to send their direct messages to politicians. All four parties which gained two seats in the EP saw important changes in their party electoral lists after the voters' ranking. In most cases, this influenced the personal distribution of MEP seats. The fact that after unexpected ranking into the second place of PTT list Minister of Environment V. Mazuronis decided to resign and choose the MEP seat instead of the important government job and leading position inside the party, is only an example how Lithuanian politicians value comfortable working conditions of MEP.

If we consider the EP elections as an important attempt to create a unified European political sphere, Lithuanian vote results did not support this illusion. The electoral campaign was highly concentrated on national topics, without any doubt, the EP elections lost the competition to the presidential vote even before the beginning of campaigning. Strategic decisions and steps by political parties in the EP elections were subordinated to the presidential vote. The 2014 EP elections in Lithuania revealed a fact that is clear in most 'old members' of the EU: the European project needs new stimulus. This stimulus should have a popular appeal. It is difficult to speak about the future of a united Europe if this union only makes the materialistic dreams of professional politicians and bureaucrats come true.

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Annex:

Table 1. Lithuanian political parties mentioned in the article

Abbreviation	Lithuanian name	English translation
DK	Drąsos kelias	The Way of Courage
DP	Darbo partija	Labour Party
LICS	Liberalų ir Centro Sąjunga	Liberal and Centre Union
LLRA	Lietuvos Lenkų rinkimų akcija	Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania
LP	Liaudies partija	Peoples party
LRLS	Lietuvos Respublikos liberalų sąjūdis	Liberals Movement of the Republic of Lithuania
LSDP	Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija	Lithuanian Social Democratic Party
LVŽS	Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjunga (earlier Valstiečių ir Naujosios demokratijos partijų sąjunga)	Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union
NS	Naujoji Sąjunga-socialliberai	New Union–Social Liberals
PTT	Partija Tvarka ir Teisingumas (earlier Liberalų demokratų partija)	Party 'Order and Justice'
RA	Rusų aljansas	Russian Alliance
SLF	Socialistinis liaudies Frontas	Socialist People's Front
TPP	Tautos prisikėlimo partija	National Revival Party
TS	Tautininkų sąjunga	National Union
TS-LKD	Tėvynės sąjunga-Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai	Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats