

EU-28 WATCH



No. 10
July 2014

ISSN 1610-6458

www.EU-28Watch.org

EU-28 Watch

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On the project

Euroscepticism and the European Parliament elections in 2014, the EU's Neighbourhood in light of the Ukraine crisis and power relations in the EU: The EU-28 Watch project is mapping out discourses on these issues in European policies all over Europe. Research institutes from all 28 member states as well as Iceland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey give overviews on the discourses in their respective countries.

This survey was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire that has been elaborated in March 2014. Most of the 33 reports were delivered in June 2014. This issue and all previous issues are available on the EU-28 Watch website: www.EU-28Watch.org.

The EU-28 Watch No. 10 receives significant funding from the **Otto Wolff-Foundation, Cologne**, in the framework of the "*Dialog Europa der Otto Wolff-Stiftung*", and financial support from the **European Commission**. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

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Lithuania

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1. Euroscepticism and European Parliament elections

Giedre Razgute, Liucija Mazylyte

European Parliament elections in Lithuania: key topics in the electoral campaign

The key issues of the European Parliament elections campaign were fighting unemployment, promoting Lithuania's energy independence, social inclusion, security, Lithuania's stronger voice at the EU level, federalization of the European Union, introducing the Euro in 2015, and inequality of the direct payments for Lithuanian farmers. Generally speaking, there were less topics of purely domestic/national competence compared to the previous campaigns in 2009 and 2004. However, a number of domestic problems such as social inequality or social exclusion were tied with eventual solutions for them on the European level by a number of candidates (for instance, by members of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party). A newly raised importance of security and defence in the region gained ever more attention throughout the campaign due to the Ukraine crisis and changing geopolitical environment in Europe.

The key slogans of the political campaign varied from EU-friendly ones, such as "Working Europe - winning Lithuania", "Safe Lithuania in strong Europe", even a little EU-exploitative, like "European money to every home!", to more eurosceptical, such as "Lithuania, awake!" or "Lithuania for Lithuanians, Europe for European nations!". Some parties had slogans based on their key political issues, for instance "For clean environment and clean politics" and "For Europe, based on Christian values".

There was little debate focused on the EU-wide frontrunners in the Lithuanian European Parliament elections campaign. Lithuania's national broadcaster screened the candidate debates for the European Commission President post. Mainstream Lithuanian parties have already indicated their support for the EU-wide frontrunners. Social Democrats have stated their support for Martin Schulz, whereas Homeland Union/ Lithuanian Christian Democrats support Jean Claude Juncker. At the same time, the Lithuanian Liberals Movement and the Labour party have declared their support for the EU-wide Liberals' candidate Guy Verhofstadt. All in all, the EP elections in Lithuania still strongly relate to the national context rather than to the EU-wide issues or contest of the candidates for the highest posts, such as the President of the European Commission.

Euroscepticism in Lithuania's electoral campaign

Euroscepticism played a role in the EP electoral campaign, mainly raising two issues: selling land to foreigners and introducing the Euro in 2015. On 1 May 2014, Lithuania had to open its agricultural land market allowing other EU citizens to buy land in Lithuania. However, this caused a big debate supported mostly by the Lithuanian Nationalist Union and followed by slogans such as "Lithuania will be sold to foreigners", "Lithuanian land is not a commodity", etc. An initiative to collect signatures against selling land to foreigners resulted in a referendum that will be held in late June 2014. The Euro

issue is supported by eurosceptics who say that introducing the Euro in 2015 is too early for Lithuania, it is better to wait and stick to our national currency, otherwise it might cause a crisis and Lithuania would end up like Greece or Portugal. Nevertheless, Eurosceptic statements were rather minor and did not cause much debate.

Possible explanations of the European Parliament elections' outcomes

There were some surprising moments in the EP election outcomes. The Social Democrats were leaders in the opinion polls whereas the results were rather disappointing for them as they received only two seats in the EP. The winning opposition party, namely the Homeland Union/ Lithuanian Christian Democrats, won 17.39 percent of the votes. The Liberal Movement gained two mandates leading to their highest achievement in the party's history at the EP elections. The Labour Party had better forecasts yet gained only one mandate, as did the Peasants and Greens Movement.

As some researchers and observers point out, several factors hindered the Social Democrats' success. Firstly, their candidate, Zigmantas Balčytis, ran for both presidential and EP elections. Voters may not have supported this dualism. Secondly, the party put names of several acting ministers and parliamentarians on the list. Voters may have wished to "punish" the ruling party for this act. As Professor Liudas Mazylis points out; there might be two explanations for the centre-right-wing success in the Lithuanian EP elections. Firstly, the electorate of the Homeland Union/ Lithuanian Christian Democrats generally presents greater loyalty and compliance and they tend to be well mobilized. Secondly, the EP elections were held on the same day as the second round of presidential elections. The winner Dalia Grybauskaitė was a candidate strongly supported by centre-right-wing parties. The success of the Peasants and Greens Movement might be explained by two aspects: popularity gained during the Presidential campaign and the party's visibility as strong opponents of selling Lithuanian land to foreigners.

Links:

- Wire, [EP elections turn in some surprises](#), 26 May 2014.
- Mažvydas Jastramskis, [Lithuania's Presidential and European elections may see 'anti-euro' sentiments, but not outright Euroscepticism](#), 24 May 2014.
- Mažvydas Jastramskis, [EU election: presidential poll adds intrigue to Lithuanian vote](#), 21 May 2014.
- Vadim Volovoj, [Elections to the European Parliament: major issues and challenges](#), 19 May 2014.

2. The EU's Neighbourhood

Dominant views on future relations with Russia

Linas Kojala

Lithuania's relationship with Russia and possible future developments are discussed mainly from two perspectives: economic/energy and security.

Lithuania celebrated its 10-year anniversary of accession to the EU in May 2014, but remains highly dependent on Eastern markets, Russia in particular. About 1/5 of Lithuanian exports go to Russia – it is the highest share of exports to Russia in the whole EU. Even though most of the commodities are re-exported – Lithuanian products, mostly meat and dairy products, account for less than 5 percent –

local businesses are sensitive to economic uncertainties and remain keen on stability. However, the economy is not separated from politics: for example, Lithuania's active stance on the Eastern Partnership during its Council Presidency, which was seen extremely negatively in Russia, is considered to be the cause of bans on Lithuanian dairy product imports to Russia at the end of 2013 without giving clear explanations.

Lithuania is even more vulnerable in terms of energy, as 46 percent of electricity, 98 percent of oil and remarkably 100 percent of natural gas is imported from the sole supplier Russia. Without alternative sources, Lithuania currently pays some of the highest gas prices in Europe – Russian state-owned Gazprom sold gas at a price of around \$480 per thousand cubic meters in 2013, while the average price for European countries last year was around \$380. The strategic goal of Lithuania to become energy independent, through the diversification of energy suppliers, directly contradicts Russia's interests. Strategic energy projects such as a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal, which is due to start operating at the end of 2014 and would enable gas imports from countries such as Norway, or the planned nuclear power plant in Visaginas, could be extremely important to this cause. During the implementation of these projects, Russia offered to lower the price of natural gas by 20 percent. Therefore, in this aspect, Lithuania's perception towards Russia is twofold: on the one hand, some argue that the perception towards the neighbouring country should be as neutral as possible in order to avoid politically motivated economic decisions, which may hurt Lithuanian businesses and energy consumers; on the other hand, there is a broad agreement on the need to diversify both economic market reliance and energy resources in order to reduce dependence on Russia, even though it might mean short-term or medium-term financial losses.

Due to objective reasons, the debate on security is much more one-sided. Russia, which regards the Post-Soviet region as Near-Abroad, is still perceived as a threat due to the high level of militarization in Kaliningrad, various military activities and hostile foreign and intelligence policies. It is emphasized both in official Lithuanian public security documents and analytical reports, which state that the hostile actions are conducted by combining the economic and military factors. For example, there are repeated cases of Russian military violating Lithuanian airspace or seaways; furthermore, regular military exercises in the region carry out offensive scenarios. The perception of Russia as a threat greatly increased during Russia's aggression in Ukraine, which was understood in Lithuania as evidence that Russia could quickly implement military actions on a number of countries in the Eastern region. Therefore, Lithuania seeks defence assurances from NATO and other allies in order to reduce its exposure to Russia.

Reflections on the events in Ukraine

Linas Kojala

According to opinion polls in Lithuania, most of the people consider Russia's actions in Ukraine as a direct military aggression towards another state (41 percent) or pressure in order to intimidate and destabilize Ukraine (36 percent). Furthermore, there were a lot of public campaigns, such as rallies, protests against Russia's actions, and financial support campaigns, in support of peace and Ukraine's independence.

The European Union's reaction to the crisis is seen as insufficient. Sanctions, which were implemented by the EU against people and enterprises considered partly responsible for annexation of Crimea and disturbances in Eastern Ukraine, were seen as symbolic rather than effective. The question of uneven dependence of EU member states on Russia, in terms of their economy, energy sources and politics, and its influence on political decisions is widely discussed.

It leads to two conclusions. On the one hand, Lithuania remains a staunch supporter of the EU's integration or enlargement eastwards, which is seen as an even bigger necessity during current

geopolitical circumstances and a more united and stronger stance towards Russia is expected in the future. On the other hand, Lithuania seeks assurances from member states that the current crisis will lead to the development of common policies, which may reduce European dependency on Russia, for example, through the creation of an internal energy market.

Perception of Turkey's EU membership perspective

Liucija Mazylyte

During Lithuania's presidency of the European Union Council, Lithuania strongly expressed its support for Turkey in its negotiations with the EU. The fact that Turkey has actively supported Lithuania's accession to NATO should not be forgotten and this point is often referred to when presenting Lithuania's position. As the chair of the Seimas Committee on European Affairs, Gediminas Kirkilas, pointed out, Lithuania's Presidency broke the deadlock and restarted the Turkey-EU negotiation process. The results, however, depend on Turkey's political will and ability to meet the membership criteria as well as a guarantee of ensuring human rights and fulfilment of justice. Some other politicians stress the need of the EU to work more closely with Turkey in order to help the country in promoting justice and human rights. Regarding the future membership, some politicians view a similarity between the status of Turkey and Ukraine – there might be a common status for both of them. They may not share full membership in the Union, yet certain aspects of membership will be achieved.

The country's official position remains to continue to promote and foster the negotiation process. Among the leading politicians there is a consensus on the issue of Turkey's membership opportunities. The issue frequently arises during debates on EU enlargement and support is declared with some references to the need of human rights and justice implementation. Nevertheless, regarding the EU enlargement, the key focus remains on the Eastern partnership countries and their future accession chances.

In order to enhance business relations between Lithuania and Turkey, the Lithuanian–Turkey Business Forum was held in 2013. Some cooperation initiatives that were derived from the Forum include a memorandum of the countries' national broadcasters and the railway cooperation initiative "Vikingas". This forum can be viewed as a positive step towards greater cooperation between the two countries.

Lithuanian media paid special attention to the official visits of the Turkish President and Minister of EU Affairs before and during Lithuania's presidency of the EU Council. Furthermore, the Lithuanian–Turkish Business Forum was positively viewed. Nevertheless, Turkey's membership in the EU hardly gains any permanent attention in Lithuanian media sources, except from the highest officials' visits during the Presidency period.

Links:

- Dr. Laurynas Kasčiūnas, Dovilė Šukytė, [The Future of the EU's Eastern Partnership – challenges and opportunities for Lithuania's foreign policy](#), 7 November 2013.
- Marius Laurinavičius, Dr. Laurynas Kasčiūnas, Linas Kojala, [What will determine Ukraine's future scenarios?](#), 29 April 2014.
- Marius Laurinavičius, Dr. Laurynas Kasčiūnas, Vytautas Keršanskas, Linas Kojala, [EU and Russia relations after Crimea: Red lines for "Business as usual."](#) 18 June 2014.
- Viktor Denisenko, [Could Lithuania help Turkey step up EU accession](#), 1 May 2014.

3. Power relations in the EU

Lithuania's perception of Germany's role in the EU

Liucija Mazylyte

Germany is a strategic partner of Lithuania, economic, social and cultural relations with the country are highly valued. Political elites agree on the importance of promoting cooperation between Germany and Lithuania. Lithuania's foreign policy strategy strongly indicates the importance of bilateral relations with Germany as one of the key strategic partner.

As the chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Gediminas Kirkilas, pointed out, Germany took on a lot of responsibilities during the financial crisis. At the same time, while being a great power, it has never aimed to use this for political benefits. According to Kirkilas, the country has a lot of pull in the EU but acts in a very gentle manner. Merkel is considered as a strong and talented leader. Politicians from the opposition also agree on the importance of Germany's role in the EU, especially during economic crisis. Nevertheless, France and the UK are perceived as more or less equal players.

Germany often appears in the Lithuanian media as one of the leaders in the EU, especially in the context of the economic crisis and the application of strong austerity measures. Germany is clearly viewed as a leader in saving the Eurozone as well as leading the EU out of the crisis. However, the chancellor, Angela Merkel, is sometimes slightly ironically portrayed in the mass media sources with reference to her strict ruling and decisions concerning euro-crisis or the past close cooperation with the French president N. Sarkozy. All in all, the tone of the Lithuanian media is rather supportive.

All this leads to the conclusion, that Lithuania perceives Germany as one of the key players in the EU, while not forgetting that the strategic Lithuanian–German relations must continue to be fostered.

"Austerity vs. growth" debate in Lithuania and preferred reform options at the European level

Ramunas Vilpisauskas

Two parties, which came in first and third in the recent European parliamentary elections, the conservatives and the liberals respectively, support fiscal consolidation (which seems to be a more appropriate term for what has been undertaken during the crisis period of 2008–2009. Austerity sounds like a very misleading term as the total amount of public expenditures has hardly been affected during the crisis). The Social Democrats who are currently a ruling coalition party and came second in the EP elections, talked before the national parliamentary elections of 2012 about the need for stimulus and less austerity, but their policy has been rather similar to previous centre-right government and the expected result of this policy is the planned introduction of the Euro in 2015. Other coalition partners such as the Labour party of Law and Justice are more outspoken against fiscal consolidation and are in favour of spending on pensions and similar social expenditures, but it seems that their statements are just a public relations campaign. Thus, most probably, it could be concluded that the dominant perspective in Lithuania is muddling through with some inclination for fiscal consolidation, but not because of its expected benefits, rather because of it being a precondition for the introduction of the Euro.

Lithuania's view on the possibility of the UK leaving the EU

Liucija Mazylyte

After Cameron's famous speech in 2013 on the potential referendum on the United Kingdom's (UK) European Union membership, the issue of the UK leaving the EU has attracted attention both from the Lithuanian elite and the mass media. It was a stimulus for eurosceptics to raise their doubts on the future of the EU and the path for Lithuania to take.

According to key politicians, there is almost no chance that the UK will leave the EU. As the chair of the Committee on European Affairs pointed out, the UK citizens are educated enough to understand the benefits of the membership. The country is still fighting the consequences of the economic crisis and EU membership remains crucial for a recovery. The message of his well known statement of January 23, 2014, was mainly meant for the internal rather than the external audience and presented a political and tactical manoeuvre before the future elections, as the chair of the Committee on European Affairs claims. However, Lithuanian politicians see the possibility of the UK referendum on the EU membership with almost no chance for a withdrawal.

Some Lithuanian politicians from the opposition also raise the question of France and its ever increasing euroscepticism, especially after the European Parliament elections where Marine Le Pen and her National Front gained 24.9 percent of the votes. Thus the eurosceptic moods in the UK are discussed in line with countries such as France and Austria.

Lithuanian media highlighted and gave an overview of both Cameron's statement in his 2013 speech and the EU response, namely statements from the member states' leaders and key EU figures. The articles indicated important consequences if the UK chooses to leave the EU, including damages to its financial business sector, large enterprises and citizens. The media also reflects the issue of rising euroscepticism in the EU countries, the results of the European Parliament elections acquired much more salience than the campaign itself.

All in all, as regards the threat of the UK leaving the EU, the general view in Lithuania does not support the idea of a UK withdrawal. Important benefits of membership, such as strong business ties in the EU's internal market or the free movement of capital, goods, workers and services should outweigh the eurosceptic moods.

Links:

- Inga Popovaitė, [Will Germany proceed to hold Europe on its shoulders?](#), 7 May 2013.