

# ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT IN LITHUANIA: „NATIONAL“ AND „EUROPEAN“ CAMPAIGNING TOPICS

*Liudas Mazylis, Prof. Dr.*

*Ingrida Unikaite-Jakuntaviciene, Assoc. Prof. Dr.*

*Romualdas Povilaitis, Assoc Prof. Dr.*

*Liucija Mazylyte, MA*

Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

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## Abstract

Elections to the EP held in Lithuania 2004, 2009, 2014 are analysed with special attention to the latter ones. Content analysis of party programs and of news media portal texts was carried out combining with individual level data. Positions of interest groups were taken into account as well. Meeting criteria of „second order“ elections are discussed.

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**Keywords:** European Parliament, elections, campaigns, Lithuania

## Introduction

The aim of this research is to assess the "national" or "European" features of the programs of Lithuanian political parties taking into account programmatic statements, reflections of the campaigns of the elections to the European Parliament held in 2004, 2009, and 2014 in the online news portals, using statistical data of the individual level of analysis. Involvement of the interest groups, directly and indirectly, as well as ties with ideological provisions of transnational party unions are to be taken into account. Agricultural, business and environmental groups served as an object of the analysis concerning them as „mainstream“ interest groups especially because all three have their supranational representation.

Main research question is to be answered: are national campaigns topic dominating rather than European ones?

Additionally, there is to be answered:

Is EP campaign influenced by a presidential election campaign, what particular variables and to what extent;

Are interest groups involved directly, or indirectly, into the EP election campaign;

This raises a number of questions to answer, a number of methodological problems including:

How to determine whether voters' choice is connected with European programs of political parties? Are the campaign discourses shaped basing them on national problems by just "adding" European issues?

The following research instruments are selected: party program analysis, allowing evaluation of the main programmatic statements of mainstream and marginal parties to address their compliance with national and European issues;

Analysis of the major media portals, allowing assessment of how party positions are reflected passing through the lens of the media;

Reflections of the interest group statements in the media, enabling to position them within context of European Parliament election campaign.

The answers to these questions may allow searching for the compliance with the second order elections model.

Basic statistical data such as turnout, support for political parties, are also used in order to take into account individual level voting preferences.

## I.

The European Parliament elections represent a rather interesting case for election analysis. As Stroembaeck J., Maier M., and Kaid L.L. (2011) pointed, they are both national and European at the same time. However, despite the massive changes from the first direct EP elections in 1979, there remains one constant: the relative unimportance of the European elections (average turnout of voters is decreasing). The EP elections research data shows that parties and candidates as well as the media and voters tend to treat EP elections as *second order national* elections. The second-order nature and lack of European content in EP elections is related to the failure of political parties to campaign on European issues (Norris, 1997). By campaigning weakly, parties contribute to second-order patterns such as the decreasing turnout in EP elections. By focusing their campaigns on domestic rather than European issues, parties turn these elections into national (Jalali and Silva, 2011).

According to Europe-wide opinion polls, Lithuania is attributable to countries where support for the European integration project is high. On the other hand, this statement is derived from the consent of the opinion polls. During election campaign additional factors may work such as party discipline, additional mobilization or demobilization. Additional insights may be provided here by interpretative approach. Problem of discourse construction (media, political, and academic discourses) are inter-related with the content of the campaign: is the content of a European campaign to be considered as "existing" or "constructed", „interpreted“?

Some scholars tried to explain elections to the European Parliament through the second-order national model (Reif, Schmitt, 1980) already in the first elections after Lithuania's accession to the EU (Mazyliis L.,Unikaite I., 2004; 2005).

Since 2004, elections to the European Parliament coincide with elections of the President of the Republic of Lithuania thus creating possibilities of looking for mutual influence of two different types of elections at the same time and of parallel campaigns with slightly different actors, and programs, and slogans but lagging at the same point of political developments. Not the least, turnout above 50 per cent might be explained by parallel Presidential elections in 2014 as well as in 2004. Besides, question arises on advertising and visibility. Some parties have double visibility if they have presidential candidate, but some parties have just one campaign. Taking all the aspects analyzed, all three elections, that of 2004, 2009, and of 2014, can be categorized as corresponding model of second order elections.

As pointed out in the introduction, we focus on three aspects of elections to the EP - programs, media reflections, and individual level statistics.

### **Program analysis**

Analysis of the programs of political parties is based on the official programs published by Electoral Commission. “General”, “national“, and “European“ programmatic statements were distinguished.

Among the possible discursive devices such as narratives, myths, scripts, and more (Schmidt) - special attention was paid to the "slogans " (Carvalho, 2000).

Programs of 10 political organizations – campaign participants – were analyzed (4 more were registered but they were unsuccessful in collecting the required number of signatures of voters).

*Liberal Movement (LRLS):* 5 conceptualized issues (idea of freedom; better conditions for business - new jobs and dignified salaries; respect for human rights; the euro and the EU's global competitiveness; EU common security and defence policy).

*Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS – LKD):* 3 conceptualized issues (European welfare for all; infrastructural Lithuania's integration into Europe; decisive change in Lithuania's and the Eastern Neighbourhood).

*Coalition of Polish Electoral Action and Russian Alliance (LLRA):* equality of all people before the law; Christian values; respect for the tradition, sovereignty, democracy and the identity of the nations; family as a union of a man and a woman; postponement of the introduction of the euro would be the best solution; it is necessary to smooth out direct payments to farmers in all Member States immediately; standing for Lithuania without GMOs; EU need to develop a common social policy.

*Labor Party (DP):* solving the basic problems of our people such as poverty, unemployment, social exclusion; active creation of new jobs; transparent and objective distribution of EU funds for business; strengthening of the regions and districts; for strengthening of Lithuania's energetic security; against GMO, common social policy, the free movement of labour; give compensation for the state where a person acquired the training and competence if the person goes to live and work in another country; traditional family values; for democratic rights and freedoms; gender equality in all spheres of life; reasonable operative, professional and appropriate medical protection and assistance for everyone; traditional values of our country: culture, language, land integrity, preservation and promotion of Lithuanian traditions and identity.

*Order and Justice (TT):* guarantee of Lithuanian statehood development and its geopolitical security - a strong, independent, sovereign states Commonwealth - the European Union; Christianity is fundamentally important for European democracy; in the European legal documents we will write: family is one man and one woman union; striving to achieve that by the year 2019 throughout the European Union to establish a uniform minimum income per capita criteria; Common Agricultural Policy, as one of the EU's economic and political instruments; Lithuanian Energy Strategy shall be integrated into a common EU energy policy; European Union Member States are committed to the European Union's common foreign and security policy; long-term strategic direction of East Policy Centre should be set up in Vilnius.

*Lithuanian Green Party (LŽP):* welfare economics; European and Lithuania's energetic security in the use of green energy; against GMO and for organic food; protecting the privacy rights and say against unauthorized interception; we will seek to ensure that more citizens and communities will be involved in the policy-making process.

*Nationalists Union (TS):* to restructure EU institutions so that they represent the Member States; co-existing decisions are made only by mutual agreement; the legislation fostering sexual perversions must be removed; opposing laws that attempt to legitimize kidnapping of kids from a family and trafficking; seeking to prohibit homosexuals to adopt children; seeking the agreement of the Member States to reduce emissions by switching to organic sources; mass emigration and brain drain management – the issue for the entire EU. International policy coordination is necessary to provide for the countries of the Presidency; for Ukrainian integration if their nation will declare a wish in referendum.

*Liberal and Center Union (LiCS):* we will represent Lithuania's national interests by seeking eliminate discriminatory subsidies for farmers; achieving that Europe would negotiate a uniform gas and other energy sources prices with *Gazprom* and other suppliers of raw materials; reaching out that the European Parliament would support the countries, of which there are many economic migrants, by reimbursing a part of the social costs;

strengthening the overall security of the people of Europe and supporting the European Union in its integration of the close Lithuanian Eastern neighbours.

*Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (LVZS)*: Lithuania should remain the healthiest and greenest European country; it has to become the cultural and tourism attraction center; Lithuania shall seek the review of the EU policy in the land market - free movement of capital cannot be fully applied to agricultural land. Lithuania shall be without GMO; actively defending the interests of Lithuania and the EU in the negotiations on a free trade agreement with the United States of America; adjusting EU subsidies, government procurement, import competition policy to the local markets in order to have more local products; seeking that the European Parliament and the European Council would adopt a position on climate and energy policy after 2020; withdrawal of any support for nuclear projects in Europe, with the exception of the old nuclear power stations; the EU should aim to support the business and create jobs, where people live, and the earning of people having minimum income shall be at least 60 percent of the national average wage; achieving a common EU standard that at least 10 percent; health budget should be allocated for the prophylaxis and prevention.

*Lithuanian Social Democrats (LSDP)*: new economy based on democratic governance; undertaking constant focus on the requirement that decisions have to be taken at the level at which they are closest to the ordinary citizen of the Union, providing jobs and better lives; time to complete the right wing-imposed social fragmentation, increasing inequality policy in the European Union practice; new social justice for all people strategy; new advanced model of the European Union; the Social Democrats seek to reform the European Union that it would become Solidarity Union.

Main campaign items are further conceptualized as slogans.

Table 1. Campaign slogans of Lithuanian political parties in the elections to the European Parliament, 2014

Party	Election slogan
Liberal Movement (LRLS)	Functioning Europe, winning Lithuania
Lithuanian Conservatives (TS – LKD)	Secure Lithuania in a strong Europe
Coalition of Polish election action and Russian Alliance (LLRA)	Equal rights for all, and Europe based on Christian values
Labor Party (DP)	For Europe, where it is good to live for everyone
Order and Justice (TT)	Lithuania get up!
Lithuanian green party (LŽP)	For a clean environment and a clean policy
Nationalists Union (TS)	Lithuania for Lithuanians, Europe – for the European Nations
Liberal and Center union (LiCS)	The European money in every home
Lithuanian farmers and greens union (LVZS)	For Earth, humans, Lithuania!
Lithuanian Social democrats (LSDP)	Most importantly - the man (human being)!

**Source:** The website of Republic of Lithuania Central Electoral Committee. (Election programs of the parties): <http://www.vrk.lt/rinkimu-programos-2014-ep>, accessed on 10 September, 2014.

### News media portal analysis

The media is one of the most important sources of information and channels of communication in all kinds of elections, including European ones. The media, however, does not only reflect the agendas and priorities of political parties and candidates. Increasingly, the media themselves help in shaping the election campaigns, thus influencing both political parties and candidates, and the voters (Cook, 2006; Mazyliis, Unikaite, Povilaitis, 2006).

Our analysis is based on news portals lrytas.lt and delfi.lt as the biggest and most popular ones.

## **lrytas.lt**

Obviously, this news portal gives priority to personalized information illustrating it by the pictures with recognizable faces rather than programmatic statements.

Search system of lrytas provides 754 publications since 2006 to now by the combination of elections + to + European Parliament. Without going deeply into full texts, however, it is clear that some publications are only indirectly related to „Europe“ where these words are not necessarily linked (for example, „elections to“ the Ukrainian parliament, which is mentioned in the context of „Europe“).

Thus, by this combination were found:

In 2009: from January to June published 120 publications (in July - August, another 12 publications).

In 2014: from January to September inclusive, 158 publications (up to 144 in June )

From among publications these directly related to the European Parliament were selected, and the content analysis was carried out.

The well-known personalities (such as Tomasevskis , Blinkeviciute, Donskis, Zilinskas, Zuokas, OnaJukneviene, Bielinis, Maldeikis) as candidates to the European Parliament are presented in more than 10 publications speculating who will become Members of the Lithuanian Parliament instead whether aforementioned politicians will be elected European Parliament.

The dominating amount of publications could be called purely informative. Here, readers are informed that 12 members of European Parliament will be elected (not 13 MEPs as it was in 2004). Data of the survey on voters' intentions to participate in the elections to the EP are published (16 per cent in February; by the way, in an event the turnout was 21 percent). About what particular political parties submitted their documents, there were at least 6 publications in 2009, and that finally 15 of them were registered (3 publications about it). On the campaigning rules and other legal aspects of the campaign there were 4 publications, and about violating voting procedures 7 publications were published. Six publications can be attributed to those dealing with the international dimension of trans-national parties, but it is again rather general information (2009-05-31 15:07 / AFP and lrytas.lt info). Finally, in terms of overall results, it was stated that "Europe leans to the right". Meanwhile, the assessment of the results of Lithuania provides 8 publications stating what particular personality won the seats, but not in the context of party programs.

Another array of publications –private opinions and positions of journalists such as about „: the alleged lack of competent politicians of Lithuania“, and „non-talented actors‘ elections“ (lrytas, News / 2009-06-01 05:03), „after all, they promise to represent the nation's non-existent - the interests of the European Union“, „ the upcoming elections are a farce reminds democracy“, „from the Lithuanian cold to the warm seats in Brussels“ (News / 2009-02-23 05:01 / AldonaJankauskiene).

Thus information presented in lrytas version of the analysis shows that it is difficult to expect that the reader will have some important insights into the programmatic provisions of the parties, or be able to evaluate and compare the dimension of the left versus right, European Left versus European Right, Lithuanian issues versus European ones. Directly linking the information with any person, obviously appeals to a consumer version of the politics that has already been formed by images of actors, or just incrementally changing.

As it was quite rightly pointed out by one of the candidates, L.Donskis: „Election is coming, so a few days ago I started to take an interest in all present and, as always, decide what you would like for your vote was extremely difficult“.

It can be argued that the pattern of providing information established in 2009 was followed in 2014. It started from presenting „faces“ rather than programs. All the publications started in January 2014. It begins with the „news“ that the candidate Gabrielius Landsbergis

is indeed the grandson of famous Lithuanian politician Vytautas Landsbergis, and may replace his grandfather in the European Parliament (3 publications on it –by the way, it happened in an event). Problems of Social Democrats with their representative Z.Balcytis who became the Presidential candidate simultaneously were analyzed in 2 publications. (By the way, it was predicted correctly: after the elections, electorate of the Social Democrats felt the confusion of this person seeking two posts at the same time, that of the President of the republic of Lithuania, and the MEP post). Representatives of totally 13 political parties, such as Zuokas, Sedzius, Tomasevskis, Uspaskikh, Guoga, were presented in a more detailed manner. There have been several publications on the so-called "Land" referendum, and personal ratings of the politicians. „Poor campaigning“ and „crisis of ideas“ was stated (Comments / 2014-04-18 07:33 / Signs of Time). The fact that the representatives of the Lithuanian Parliament 2009-2014 was one of the most passive and was discussed in the 2 publications, little public interest in European Parliament affairs in 1 publication; campaigns in other EU countries overviewed in 6 issues. They came again to the idea of the very high MEPs income (2 publications). Organizational / procedural election issues and how the weather factor will influence turnout were reflected in 4 publications. The final accord was the publication about the ruling Social Democrat party (which was expected to win the election but failed) blaming the sociologists who have forecasted their results incorrectly. (After the defeat the Social Democrats require sociologists' heads. News / 2014-05-26 18:58 / ELTA and lrytas.lt info).

### **Delfi.lt**

Delfi.lt created the special rubric “Balsuok 2014” (“Vote 2014”) where they posted information and articles on the two elections, EP and Presidential ones. The analysis below is limited to 100 publications published mainly in the end of 2013 and in 2014.

All the publications were grouped according to their content (although a significant part of the publications can not be accurately assigned to any of the groups, because they reflected more than one topic. In this case, we were grouping them, according to the dominant theme).

1. Official information on the elections. These publications consisted of only 4-5 percent.

2. Attempts to analyze the elections as the political phenomenon, and striving to enhance turnout by this type of publications: passive stance is dangerous to Europe because it creates „radical“ political forces. However, in general, the number of this kind of publications was rather small (about 4-5 per cent).

3. Electoral organization of the politicians and party activities before the election. These publications make a group up to 30 per cent of total. Low turnout among young voters is mentioned as dangerous tendency. (MartynasBlazaitis, Regina Barbsyte. How to bring young people to the polls? 2014-04-28). Analyzing the vote of Lithuanians living abroad, preferences of them were analyzed. However, these publications usually provide superficial information, more deep analysis is lacking.

4. Electoral perspective of the parties and their leadership (about 15 per cent of all publications). But here only most scandalous and most influential parties were analyzed basing on population survey. It is discussed why so many MPs, ministers and party activists seek MEP's mandate; the factor of big salary (EgleSamaskaite. Competition on 21 thousand litas salary: who will succeed. 2014-04-25) or just a possibility to advertise themselves was suspected. It discredits the elections and reduces the population of interest in them as well as EU policies.

5. Electoral results are analyzed in a comparatively big number of publications (more than 15 percent). This analysis, however, is limited to the presentation of statistics and superficial comments, although it is made by famous political scientists, analysts, and editors of newspapers and portals. The major attention was paid to the unpredicted (relative) defeat of

ruling party, Social Democrats, and the relative success of oppositional Homeland Union. How the results of elections to the European Parliament will be reflected upon domestic politics was speculated, too. (EgleSamaskaite; BNS; ELTA; SarunasČerniauskas. Results of the elections to the EP: Social Democrats crushed, sensations sprinkled. 2014-05-25).

6. Some (though not numeral) publications contain deeper and more professional analysis. The EP election results are discussed in the context of Lithuania's presidency in the Council of Ministers of the European Union. The electoral campaign was assessed critically. It was stated that the importance of the elections to the EP is far behind the elections to the domestic parliament and even behind local ones. Politicians do not seek real representation of their ideas in the European Parliament. The voters are feeling confused by that. There is a lack of incentive to deal with the European political issues; politicians only seek to mobilize voters for domestic affairs (discussing problems such as sale of land to foreigners, introduction of the euro, etc.). (Rasa Cergelienė. Double games of election agents. 2014-04-17).

About 8 per cent of all the publications do not fall into any of 6 aforementioned groups.

Several of them are trying to inform about elections in other EU countries (Hungary, Slovakia, and others). (In EP elections: how did our neighbors. 2014-05-26), discussing and evaluating radical forces as dangerous. The activities during their terms of office of Members of the European Parliament elected in different EU countries are analysed by the "Vote Watch Europe" leading to the conclusion that MEP's elected in Lithuania are among most passive ones.

### **Interest group stance**

Following trends of the interest group positions can be seen.

Main agricultural union, *Zemesukiorumai*, informs that current representative in ECOSOC, Mindaugas Maciulevicius, is a candidate to the European Parliament on the list of Farmers and Green Union ([www.zur.lt](http://www.zur.lt), 2014-05-20).

A detailed analysis of the environmental provisions - namely, climate change - is carried out by Inga Ringailaitė and Gintarė Jonusauskaitė published on 2014 05 21 on the website of the *Environmental NGO Coalition*, <http://aplinkosauga.lt/ka-apie-klimato-kaita-sako-lietuvos-politiniu-partiju-ep-rinkimu-programos/>

Approaching EP elections, environmentalists reviewed all ten of the EP elections of parties participating in the election: what do they say, and sometimes - what are silent, on climate change. They were looking for party provisions on climate change, energy efficiency, air pollution control, European electricity grid, environmentally friendly transport and other environmental issues. Seven out of ten of the EP election programs mentioned climate change, five - RES and energy efficiency and renovation. Trying to group political parties according to whether they are in favour of climate-friendly policy, there are two poles. As might be expected, Lithuanian Green Party and the Union of Farmers and Greens engaged into issues of climate change and the green economy. And on the other pole - Polish Electoral Action and the Russian Alliance Coalition which is indifferent to climate change, there are no clues to the energy.

It can be assumed that the industrialists support the liberals: for instance, on May 20, 2014, Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists had held a meeting with the Lithuanian Liberal Movement candidate for the European Parliament, <http://www.lpk.lt/lt/naujienos/ep-rinkimai>

## General characteristics of the results of elections to the EP

Table 2. Turnout of Lithuanian voters in the EP elections

LT	2004	2009	2014
TURNOUT	48.38	20.98	47.35
EU			
TURNOUT	45.47	43	42.54

Source: prepared by the authors according to the EP information: <http://www.rezultatai-rinkimai2014.eu/lt/election-results-2014.html>

Table 3. Distribution of EP mandates according to the Lithuanian parties and EP political groups, 2014

PARTIES	%	MANDATES	ELP	S&D	EKR	ALDE	GUE/NGL	greens/ELA	EFDD
TS-LKD	17.43	2	2						
LSDP	17.26	2		2					
LRLS	16.55	2				2			
TT	14.25	2							2
DP	12.81	1				1			
LLRA	8.05	1			1				
LVZS	6.61	1					1		
LZP	3.56	0							
TS	2	0							
LiCS	1.48	0							
OTHERS	0	0							
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>11</b>	2	2	1	3	0	1	2

Source: prepared by the authors according to the EP information: <http://www.rezultatai-rinkimai2014.eu/lt/election-results-2014.html>

## Conclusion

The analysis led to the following conclusions.

National issues are predominant in the party programs in the elections to the European Parliament but there is an evident effort to link them with European issues.

The pattern of information in the news media portals is slightly changing. Seeking for the attention of readers, they present personal profile of particular politicians suggesting readers to recognize his/ her ideological affiliation sometimes modifying it incrementally.

Synergy of two parallel campaigns, European and national presidential, should be studied further in order to have more nuanced picture of mutual interdependence.

Interest groups are reluctant to identify themselves with particular actors of campaigns. However, there are indirect signs agricultural lobbyists are close to the Union of the Farmers and Greens, when industrialists to the Liberal Union.

Set of empirical instruments allows positioning of Lithuania as a typical European country corresponding, in general, model of elections to the European Parliament as second-order elections.

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