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TESTING EUROPE SALIENCE AND SECOND-ORDER ELECTION THEORIES: 2019 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN LITHUANIA

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ABSTRACT

The article assesses the 2019 elections to the European Parliament (EP) in Lithuania and their theoretical relevance. The analysis presents the political stances of parties and the electorate towards the EU. The focus then shifts to information and political campaigns, the parties participating in the EP elections, and the electoral results. These aspects serve to evaluate the theoretical relevance of Second-order election theory and the Europe salience theory, revealing the absence of Eurosceptic, protest, populist, and postmaterial mood in the 2019 EP elections in Lithuania.

KEYWORDS

Lithuania, European Parliament, Elections, Second-order election theory, Europe salience theory.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2019 marked intense electoral activity in Lithuania, with voters asked to cast their ballots eight times. Municipal elections and two-round mayoral elections took place in March, along with two referenda on constitutional amendments. Additionally, two rounds of presidential elections and elections to the European Parliament (EP) were organized in May. The fourth election to the European Parliament symbolically marked the 15th anniversary of the country's EU membership.

Since 2004, Lithuania has participated in European joint decision-making, received tangible financial support, and enjoyed the benefits of access to the single EU market, not to mention ample opportunities for unrestricted travel, work, business, and study. This has led to a growing Europeanization process in the country, supported by all national governments, irrespective of their ideology. Lithuania joined the Schengen zone in 2007, held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2013, and introduced the euro in 2015. In terms of top-down Europeanization, the implementation of EU regulations and good practices became standard in domestic policies. As for bottom-up Europeanization, Lithuanian concerns and national interests were uploaded onto the EU political agenda. The EU co-financed electricity grids to Sweden and Poland, increased national energy production to reduce reliance on Russia. Lithuanian support for democratization and the rule of law in the Eastern Partnership countries, as well as bolstering EU sanctions on Russia for its war against Ukraine, remain high priorities in EU external relations.

The EU did not drive a wedge into Lithuanian politics, and no parties wooed the electorate with hard Eurosceptic messages. Support for the country's EU membership has been very high. Eurobarometer data from 2019 indicates that trust in the EU and support for the free movement of EU citizens were the highest among member states, with 72 percent and 94 percent, respectively. Lithuanians also ranked third in optimism about the EU's future, after Ireland and Denmark, with 76 percent.[1]

Similarly, the political establishment in the country considers the EU necessary, even vital, for Lithuania's democracy, security, and prosperity. Research from focus groups[2] revealed that the EU is understood as a union of states with joint legal norms and support for economically weaker member states. The main advantages of the EU include free movement, EU financial support, freedom of opinion, democracy and security, and openness of people. Lithuania is considered a small state with limited impact on EU policies. However, EU shortcomings include rising prices after the introduction of the euro, emigration, fading national identity, decommissioning of the Ignalina nuclear power facility, and the loss of the national currency.

While Lithuania's relation to the EU in general has received substantial academic attention, the European Parliament vote in Lithuania has been comparatively under scrutinized in scholarship. Kluonis[3] discussed the results of the elections and their impact on the party system. Liudas Mažylis et al.[4] examined elections to the EP in 2004, 2009,

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1 *Standard Eurobarometer 91* (2019) // https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/standard/surveyky/2253, accessed on 4 May 2020.

2 *Lietuva Europos Sąjungoje: grupinės diskusijos*, Vilnius, Vilmorus (2017 September), Focus group research commissioned by Lithuanian foreign ministry.

3 Mindaugas Kluonis, "2009 metų Europos Parlamento rinkimų Lietuvoje rezultatai: aplinkybės ir prognozė," *Parlamento studijos*, Nr. 8 (8) (2009) // http://www.parlamentostudijos.lt/Nr8/8_politika_1.htm

4 Liudas Mažylis, Ingrida Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, Romualdas Povilaitis, Liucija Mažylytė, *Elections to The European Parliament In Lithuania: "National" and "European" Campaigning Topics in 2nd Mediterranean Interdisciplinary Forum On Social Sciences And Humanities*, MIFS (Almeria, Spain, European Scientific Institute, 26–28 November 2014), 306–314.

and 2014, shedding light on party programs, news media, and discussing 'second-order' elections. Ingrida Unikaitė[5] analyzed campaigning and media coverage of the 2014 EP vote. Irmina Matonytė[6] focused on elections to the EP in 2009 and established a consensus on European issues among the political elite and electorate. Mažvydas Jastramskis[7] provided an overview of the 2019 election context, campaign, and results and emphasized the defeat of Eurosceptic parties. Šuminas et al.[8] surveyed the 2019 election campaign and established that parties leaned on social media posts, printed posters, advertisements published in national newspapers, and commercials. Finally, Kiryl Kascian and Viktor Denisenko[9] wrote on emotional displays in campaign messages during the 2019 European Parliamentary election in Lithuania. The novelty of the article lies in the new empirical data analysed and the application and testing of Europe salience and Second-order election theories. The data for the analysis of the case study come from parties' EP electoral manifestos, central electoral commission of Lithuania, Eurobarometer, interviews with members of the European parliament and other officials, focus group results and laws, regulating the elections. The article consists of several parts. First, theoretical considerations on Europe salience and Second-order election are presented, followed by party profiles and campaign issues alongside people's attitudes towards the EU. Then, information and political campaigns are discussed further. Third, attention turns to parties participating in the elections to the EP and their results. Finally, an analysis of the Lithuanian case evaluates the employed theoretical premises.

1. DO EU AND EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS MATTER? EUROPE SALIENCE AND SECOND-ORDER ELECTION THEORISING

The theoretical chapter delves into two key aspects: the salience of Europe in European Parliament elections and the overall relevance of EP elections. The growing political significance of European integration and its impact on both domestic and foreign policy debates have elevated the importance of EP elections within the broader electoral landscape. Elections to the European Parliament have become more intertwined with general election cycles, with Europe emerging as a relevant political dimension.[10] Lithuania has been organising elections to EP since 2004 and each electoral campaign brings out various issues of 'Europeanness' in politics.

Catherine de Vries and Sara Hobolt[11] highlight a significant trend of EU issue voting in European Parliament elections. Their findings underscore the importance of

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5 Ingrida Unikaitė, "2014 European Parliament election campaigning and coverage in the media: case of Lithuania"; in: Liudas Mažylis, ed., *Constructing "Europe" and spread of European values* (Kaunas: Vytautas Magnus university, 2014).

6 Irmina Matonytė, "Lithuania": 345–389; in: Viola Donatella M., ed., *Routledge Handbook of European Elections* (Routledge, 2015).

7 Mažvydas Jastramskis, "Lithuania: Defeat of Eurosceptic parties in the shadow of a presidential campaign": 187–191; in: Lorenzo de Sio, Mark N. Franklin and Luanna Russo, eds., *The European Parliament Elections of 2019* (Luiss university press, 2019).

8 Andrius Šuminas, Justina Januškevičiūtė, Akvilė Kiliulytė, "Lithuania": in: Edoardo Novelli, Bengt Johansson, eds., *2019 European Elections Campaign: Images, Topics, Media in 28 Member States* (Brussels, 2019).

9 Kiryl Kascian and Viktor Denisenko, "Patterns of Emotional Displays in Campaign Messages during the 2019 European Parliamentary Election in Lithuania, Intersections," *East European Journal of Society and Politics*, Issue 6 (2020): 40–60.

10 Katjana Gattermann, Claes H. de Vreese and Wouter van der Brug, "Introduction to the special issue: No longer second-order?" *Explaining the European Parliament elections of 2019 in Politics*, Vol. 41, Issue 4 (2021): 423–432.

11 Catherine de Vries and Sara Hobolt (2016), "EU Issue voting in National and European Parliamentary Elections": 101–124; in: Wouter van der Brug and Claes H. de Vreese, *(Un)Intended Consequences of European Parliamentary Elections* (Oxford university press, 2016).

EU-related issues in shaping voter behaviour during EP elections, particularly when there is substantial media coverage of EU topics and when political parties offer clear and distinct positions on European issues. In Lithuania, this phenomenon is evident as well. All political parties participating in EP elections craft electoral manifestos that emphasize European issues, and they actively campaign on these topics. Media attention on EU matters is noticeable during electoral campaigns, further highlighting the salience of Europe in political debates.

Given the significance of EU-related issues, parties with a clear and coherent stance on the EU tend to experience greater success in EP elections. Conversely, parties that lack a well-defined vision or offer vague positions on the EU may struggle to persuade voters effectively. Ferrara and Weishaupt[12] have also noted the importance of parties' evaluations of the EU, categorizing them into those that positively endorse European integration and those that adopt a more critical or negative stance towards the EU.

Parties' success in European Parliament elections is often closely linked to their clarity of vision and positions regarding the European Union. When parties have well-defined and coherent stances on EU-related issues, they are more likely to resonate with voters who prioritize European integration or who have strong opinions about the EU's role and direction. These parties can generally be categorized based on their evaluation of the EU. Some parties positively endorse European integration, emphasizing the benefits of EU membership, such as economic prosperity, peace, and cooperation among member states. They typically advocate for deeper integration and support measures aimed at strengthening EU institutions. On the other hand, there are parties that adopt a more critical or negative stance towards the EU. These parties may question the extent of EU integration, express concerns about loss of sovereignty, or critique specific EU policies or decisions. Their positions may range from advocating for reforms within the EU to outright scepticism or opposition to European integration.

The Europe Salience theory suggests that success of Green, hard-right, hard-left and Eurosceptic political parties in European Parliament elections elevate the role of EU in politics.[13] According to this theory, Green parties, which typically have a positive view of the EU and prioritize environmental issues, are expected to perform relatively better in EP elections. This is because voters may perceive the EU as a more effective platform for addressing transnational environmental challenges, making green parties more appealing in the context of EU-level politics. The potential success of Green parties in EP elections may be linked to the perception among citizens that addressing environmental issues requires collective action at the EU level. This was evidenced in the 2019 EP elections, where Green parties saw increased support as voters recognized the importance of addressing environmental challenges through EU-wide initiatives and policies.[14] The inclination of Green parties to embrace EU integration and prioritize green issues within the EU framework is well-documented.[15]

In turn, hard right, hard left, and Eurosceptic political organizations, which tend to have a negative view of the EU or advocate for its reform or withdrawal, may also

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[12] Federico Ferrara and Timo J. Weishaupt, "Get Your Act Together: Party Performance in European Parliamentary Elections," *European Union Politics* 5 (3) (2004): 283–306.

[13] Donatella M. Viola, "European Parliament Elections Theories,": 29–49; in: Donatella M. Viola, ed., *Routledge Handbook of European Elections* (Routledge, 2016).

[14] JeongHun Han and Daniel Finke, "Voting Green in European Parliament elections: issue voting in an electoral context," *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 30, Issue 12 (2023): 2764–2785.

[15] Marc Helbling, Dominic Hoeglinger, Bruno Wüest, "How political parties frame European integration," *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 49, Issue 4 (2010): 495–521.

perform relatively better in EP elections. This could be attributed to the tendency for EP elections to attract voters who are more ideologically driven or who prioritize issues related to sovereignty, immigration, or Euroscepticism. Additionally, electoral turnout in EP elections and public attitudes, particularly trust in EU institutions, further underscore the significance of political Europe. Higher turnout in EP elections compared to national elections, as well as varying levels of trust towards EU institutions among citizens, reflect the relevance and impact of European-level politics on the electorate.

On the other hand, the performance of Eurosceptic parties also serves as a signal of the salience of European issues. Dissatisfaction with the depth or ideological aspects of EU integration may prompt some voters to turn towards Eurosceptic parties, which can be found on both the right and left ends of the political spectrum.[16] These parties often advocate for scaling back EU authority or even withdrawing from the Union, reflecting a scepticism towards European integration. In the context of Lithuania, characterized by a high level of electoral volatility,[17] it would be informative to examine the success rates of formerly insignificant Green, Eurosceptic, hard-right, and hard-left parties in European Parliamentary elections. The electoral performance of these parties in EP elections can serve as an indicator of the salience of European issues within the Lithuanian political landscape.

Second-order election theory provides insights into the extent to which European Parliamentary elections capture voters' attention relative to national elections, thereby shedding light on the relevance of European matters in domestic politics. According to this theory, elections at the local, mayoral, regional, European Parliament, and by-election levels are considered second-order elections. These elections are generally perceived as less significant than general elections.[18] Second-order elections exhibit several characteristic features. Firstly, they tend to have lower turnout compared to general elections. Additionally, second-order elections often present better opportunities for political newcomers and smaller political parties to gain traction. Moreover, these elections typically focus more on domestic issues rather than broader European concerns. Another common outcome of second-order elections is the defeat of governing parties, as well as the decline in support for major parties. Finally, the timing of elections can also have significant effects on their outcomes.[19]

Low turnout in second-order elections is often indicative of low voter mobilization and interest, with the issues at stake perceived as less important compared to national elections. European Union issues are often relegated to a secondary status in these elections, with parties typically modifying their national electoral manifestos to include a "European" flavour. As a result, European Parliament elections may resemble national elections but with a twist[20]. Furthermore, the candidates vying for EP seats often tend to be either relatively young or perceived as past their prime, indicating that the most

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16 Yoav Raskin and Tal Sadeh, "Responsive voters – how European integration empowers Eurosceptic parties," *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 29, Issue 8 (2022): 1309–1329.

17 Mindaugas Jurkynas, "Change in a time of pandemic: the 2020 parliamentary elections in Lithuania," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 52. No. 2 (2021): 269–278.

18 Karlheinz Reif, Hermann Schmitt, Pippa Norris, "Second-order elections," *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 31, Issue 1–2 (February 1997): 109–124; Sara Binzer Hobolt and Jill Wittrock, "The second-order election model revisited: An experimental test of vote choices in European Parliament elections," *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 30, Issue 1 (March 2011): 29–40.

19 Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt, "Nine Second-Order National Elections – A Conceptual Framework For The Analysis Of European Election Results," *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 8, Issue 1 (March 1980): 3–44.

20 E. Oppenhuis, C. van der Eijk, M. N. Franklin, *The Party Context: Outcomes, in van der Eijk, C., and Franklin, M. N., eds, Choosing Europe*? (The European Electorate and National Politics in the Face of Union, University of Michigan Press, 1996).

influential decision-makers typically remain in national politics. Additionally, the timing of second-order elections relative to national elections plays a significant role in shaping their outcomes. Generally, the closer the second-order election is to the national one, the more closely its electoral outcome mirrors that of the national election.

In by-elections held close to national elections, voters tend to favour the (future) winners of the general election. However, as the time gap between the two elections increases, governing parties may experience a decline in electoral support. This shift in voter preferences can be attributed to voters aligning themselves more closely with candidates who reflect their own views and no longer viewing the previously successful parties with as much favour. Additionally, voters may feel that there is less at stake in EP elections compared to national ones, leading them to express support for smaller, less traditional parties, such as protest, radical, or populist parties, while reducing support for larger, more established parties. In second-order elections, voters often have the luxury of voting based on their personal preferences rather than strategic considerations, and they may use these elections as an opportunity to punish governing parties.[21] In summary, the theories of Europe salience and Second-order elections provide a framework for evaluating the 2019 EP elections in Lithuania and help to test the chosen theoretical premises in the context of these elections.

2. PARTY PROFILES AND CAMPAIGN ISSUES IN ELECTORAL MANIFESTOS

Sixteen parties and electoral committees participated in the 2019 EP elections and seven crossed the electoral threshold to receive seats in the European Parliament. They were Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TSLKD), Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP), Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union (LVŽS), Labour Party (DP), Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania (LRLS), Societal electoral committee "Train of Aušra Maldeikienė" and "Block of Valdemar Tomaševski" - Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families and Russian Alliance (LLRA-KŠS).

Party manifestos provide information on parties' attitudes and stances towards the EU. Before the 2019 European election, all contestants presented their short party programs,[22] while broader programs were available on the parties' websites. This section discusses political profiles and the main campaign foci of the parties which won seats in the EP. It focuses on such topics as support or opposition for the euro and/or for the EU, attitudes towards EU enlargement, immigration, economic crisis and unemployment, environment and climate change, terrorism and security, Brexit, Transatlantic trade, Ukraine, Russia's and the US role in the EU, and fake news.

The Conservatives have always held pro-Western stances, strongly supporting Lithuanian membership of and integration into the EU. In May 2018, the party adopted a declaration – 'We believe in Europe' – which became the basis for the pre-electoral messages. The manifesto highlights the party's commitment to EU solidarity, consolidation in the areas of common policies, solidarity in tackling refugee-related problems, and the expansion of EU powers into new areas since Western standards brought progress in Lithuania. It argues that EU consolidation is needed in areas where problems

[21] J. R. Koepke and Ringe N., "The Second Order Election Model in an Enlarged Europe," *European Union Politics* 7 (3) (2006): 321–46.

[22] *Rinkimai į Europos parlamentą 2019*, (2019) (accessed 15 March 2020) // https://www.vrk.lt/documents/10180/676652/EP+bendras+leidinys++A5+2019.pdf/36efb36d-7f88-479e-855a-666c4060b322

are best resolved jointly. The Conservatives advocate for a larger EU budget and a link between financial support and reforms. The manifesto also sees EU enlargement policy towards Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine as a geopolitical soft power inducement for reforms that enhance Europeanization and show a different political development for Russian society. The EU must defend and expand worldwide core values of European civilization, including freedoms of thought, conscience, democracy, a free society, human rights, and the rule of law. The Conservatives have long been considered the most anti-Kremlin political force in Lithuania. It is thus hardly surprising that the party supports EU-imposed sanctions on Russia and considers the latter an assertive state to be contained. In sum, the solidarity of European nations is seen as a fundamental EU value and the main guideline for EU activities.

The Social Democrats strongly support the EU, perceiving Europe as a benchmark for democracy, peace, stability, the rule of law defending human rights, and promoting solidarity. The Social Democrats chose the slogan 'Safe and Just Lithuania in Europe'[23] and advocated for a free and just Europe with accessible jobs, health services, education, networks of social care, fair wages, and pensions. They argue for a Europe of solidarity with welfare for all that embraces just taxation, the reduction of income inequality, social exclusion, regional differences, and poverty. The manifesto calls for unified payouts for peasants, clean air, water, energy, public transport, and equal opportunities to work, balance work and private life, and participate in societal and political life. The party advocates for youth employment, more security for the elderly, the Child Guarantee Initiative, and additional pan-European unemployment insurance. According to the party, Europe needs a just asylum and migration policy with European responsibility and solidarity and cooperation with countries-immigration sources. It argues for a new partnership with Africa and a 'Marshall plan' for that continent to tackle the causes of migration. The party emphasizes that a liberal and conservative emphasis on the market economy alone will erode the EU – social problems cannot be left to EU member states single-handedly. The Social Democrats emphasize the democratization of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, want to end the isolation of Belarus, and then seek a dialogue with Russia and China along the lines of international law, democracy, and human rights. Brexit is seen as a result of irresponsible politicians and populist promises, and partly due to governments of member states that failed to finalize energy and banking unions, the European digital market, and so on. The party supports transparency and cooperation of police and courts in fighting terrorism. It argues that high environmental standards must be incorporated into EU trade agreements with other trading partners. The Social Democrats also support the Paris climate accord.

The Peasants and Greens Union's slogan was 'Lithuania in Europe: Let Us not Stop Growing.' The party sees the EU as providing opportunities for the development of welfare. It argues that the EU can be improved in terms of solidarity, sustainability, and social justice. The party believes that European taxation should foresee lower taxes for employees and bigger responsibilities for large businesses. Payouts for farmers should be unified, and more jobs ought to be created in regions, according to the party. The party wants smooth implementation and finances for the strategic country's interests like 'Rail Baltica', energy security, and the decommissioning of the Ignalina nuclear facility. Unsafe nuclear energy projects next to Lithuania and in Europe will be stopped.

[23] *LSDP Europos Parlamento rinkimų programa 2019*, (2020) (accessed March 15) // https://www.lsdp.lt/europosprograma

Green economy, equality of goods' quality across Europe, and education, science, and innovations are among the top priorities.

The Labour Party entered the elections with the slogan 'I am Responsible for my Words!' The party claims to represent only the interests of Lithuanian people and calls for equal minimal pay, fair pensions, just payouts for farmers, equal labour and competition opportunities in the EU market, equal social protection for all EU citizens, and multiculturalism. The manifesto advocates for good and pragmatic relations with neighbouring states from the Lithuanian interests' point of view and stresses ecology against reckless economic growth. Peace and a strong EU are priorities for the Labour party.

The Liberal Movement has been known for its pro-EU stances. The party's 2019 manifesto was called '15 Solutions for European Lithuania'[24] and advocated for an open, united, and strong Europe while opposing ultra-nationalism and populism. The Liberals called for maintaining the EU common market, multiculturalism, a reduction in bureaucracy and decentralization, and new jobs for small and medium businesses and youth. They emphasized common foreign and security policy, the Schengen area, strong external borders, reduction of CO2 by 55 percent in 1990-2030, development of renewable sources of energy and circular economy, the shutdown of the Belarussian Astraviec nuclear plant, synchronization of Lithuanian and EU electricity grids, and connection of Lithuanian and Polish gas networks. EU enlargement is considered a condition for EU stability and prosperity in the whole continent. The party supported Ukrainian, Georgian, and Moldovan EU membership, the common EU digital market, investments into science and innovations, and a strong Euro. On the other hand, the Liberals were eager to stop current membership negotiations with Turkey. The party wanted the best Brexit for both Europeans and Lithuanian citizens and supported EU resilience to hybrid threats and disinformation. In 2019, Russia was considered an aggressor and a threat to European energy independence. Migration was seen by the Liberals as both a challenge and an opportunity for Lithuania. European asylum policy must comply with the capacities of EU member states to integrate asylum seekers. Migration has to meet labour market needs and European humanitarian values. According to the Liberals, Europe ought to foster development cooperation with migration sources, and illegal migration flows must face a speedier return procedure.

The manifesto of the societal electoral committee 'Train of Aušra Maldeikienė' was called 'More Europe in Westernized Lithuania/Last Ticket to Europe!'[25] It asserted that Lithuania's independence and welfare depend on the EU's survival. The manifesto called for equal opportunities for labour and pay between Western and Eastern Europe and endorsed the Western orientation of freedom, human rights, rule of law against populists and Lithuania's solidarity with the other EU states. The committee is currently against EU enlargement until internal EU problems are solved. Otherwise, Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership countries, and Turkey are seen as EU directions for enlargement. It argued that the European Parliament had to create financial incentives for the Mediterranean countries since political instability and conflicts in the Middle East and Northern Africa will affect the whole Europe. The EP must help stabilize these regions, mitigate conflicts through trade in Syria, Yemen, and Libya, and demographic pressure

[24] LRLS, *15 sprendimų europietiškai Lietuvai*, (2019) (accessed 15 March 2020) // https://www.liberalai.lt/15-sprendimu-europietiskai-lietuvai

[25] *Visuomeninio rinkimų komiteto „Aušros Maldeikienės traukinys" programinės nuostatos*, (2019) (accessed 15 March 2020) // http://www.maldeikiene.lt/viskas-apie-europos-parlamento-rinkimus-ir-ausros-maldeikienes-traukini-vienoje-vietoje

in Northern Africa. The EU has to continue joint external border protection against illegal migration. The committee argued that the EU economic model was responsible for two crises: internal EU migration from peripheries to wealthier centres and reducing living standards in old member states. AMT called for stronger social European policy and common social standards and protection of employees. The EP should fight underqualified labour imports from third countries and labour dumping in the EU. Europe is considered a leader in the green revolution. Environment-friendly jobs, human rights to clean environment, consumer protection, economic consumption of energy resources, increase of energy efficiency, and so on must enhance welfare and quality of life for EU citizens. The EU must be a leader in energy of renewable resources and low carbon emission economy. AMT supports a reduction of transport-induced pollution, park development, and renovation of public buildings. Since Ukraine faces aggression from Russia and the latter has to face sanctions for the violations of Ukrainian and Georgian territorial integrity. The relations with aggressive Russia should be conducted via EU common foreign and security policy and civil society and democratic forces in Russia have to be supported. The EP should bolster the Eastern Partnership.

The 'Block of Valdemar Tomaševski' – Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families and Russian Alliance went into the election with the slogan 'For Europe Based on Christian Values! For Europe of Nations!' According to its manifesto, Europe must return to its origins and Christian roots. The reformed EU should be based on homelands-for-Europe provisions such as Christian civilization, freedom, solidarity, equality against the law, respect for tradition, sovereignty, democracy, identity of European nations, family of man and woman, and sanctity of life. The party list called for good relations with the EU's Eastern neighbours while objecting to the services and ACTA2 directives, genetically modified organisms in the EU, and economic migrants to the EU. The manifesto underlines equal payouts for all farmers and a common European social policy to equalize the quality of life in EU member states.

3. LITHUANIAN PEOPLE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE EUROPEAN UNION

The EU did not create divisions within Lithuanian politics, and no parties attempted to win over the electorate with hard Eurosceptic messages. Support for the country's EU membership has consistently remained high. According to Eurobarometer data from 2019, trust in the EU and support for the free movement of EU citizens were the highest among member states, standing at 72 percent and 94 percent, respectively. Lithuanians also ranked third in terms of optimism about the EU's future, with 76 percent expressing positivity, following Ireland and Denmark.[26] Additionally, according to the opinion polling company Vilmorus, the highest level of support for Lithuanian EU membership was recorded at the end of the accession year in 2004, with 82 percent in favour and only 8 percent opposed. Between 2004 and 2012, support for EU membership never dropped below 61 percent, and opposition never exceeded 23 percent. The image of the EU has also remained positive since 2004.[27] The highest level of positive perception of the EU was in 2004, reaching 60 percent, compared to the EU average of 50 percent. The lowest was in autumn 2011, with 31 percent, in line with the EU average. From 2017 to 2019, the proportion of respondents with a positive image of the EU gradually

[26] *Standard Eurobarometer 91*, (2019) (accessed on 4 May 2020) // https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/standard/surveyky/2253
[27] Ibid.

increased to 50 percent, compared to the EU average of 42 percent. It is evident that Eurosceptic parties in Lithuania have never succeeded in securing seats in either the national or the European Parliament.

4. POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

The national political campaign to the elections to the EP started on 26 November 2018 and ended on 10 September 2019, as the end of the campaign is 100 days past the election.[28] According to the Law on the Elections to the European Parliament,[29] the electoral campaign cannot violate the Constitution, laws and object to morality, justice or societal cohesion and fair elections. After the Central Electoral Commission confirms the candidates and their lists, their representatives can use channels of communication on national media free of charge. The state budget finances electoral agitation on the national radio and television and the central electoral commission sets the rules for the format and length of the agitation so that the lists of candidates are treated equally in the national media. The commission also investigates disputes and complains concerning political agitation. Groups of political candidates agree for the debate with opponents; otherwise, they are randomly ascribed. Private broadcasters can independently organise debates among contestants. The central electoral commission publishes lists of the candidates and their programmes. The law forbids to place outdoor advertising on public sector buildings, monuments, road safety and regulation zones, 50-meter radius from the pooling station. Persons putting outdoor advertisement are obliged to remove it before the ban on political advertising before the election day. The law stipulates that in case a media outlet posts negative information, not an opinion, about a candidate, electoral committee or a party, they have a right to respond to that information in the same media outlet. The law forbids to exploit EU, state and municipal public office positions and national and local media for political campaigning or influencing voter preferences. Political campaigning and advertising are forbidden 30 hours prior to the election till the end of the voting.

The European Parliament Liaison Office (EPLO) held presentations, lectures and talks on EP elections with school and university students, members of the Central Electoral Commission, representatives of the Confederation of Industrialists, the Investors Forum, the Association for Disabled People, the Trade Union Confederation, the University of Third Age, civil servants and the Europe Direct network. The Office provided information for 12 regional debates on the EU for general public, undertook the initiative called 'Learn before you vote' aimed to increase youth political awareness. Four hundred and ninety people took part in 'Let's Vote' simulation games, which were organised by Office across regions in Lithuania in 2019.

In view of the May 2019 election, the EPLO in Lithuania, which employed six people, organized a series of activities aimed at eliciting public interest.[30] Several Lithuanian MEPs who wished to be re-elected attended these events. The EP Office together with the European Commission Representation in Lithuania co-hosted the European Election Information Centre, which received more than 7,600 people in 2019, including

[28] 2019 m. gegužės 26 d. rinkimų į Europos Parlamentą grafikas, *Central Electoral Commission*, (2019) (accessed 22 December 2019) // https://www.vrk.lt/documents/10180/676652/05-26+grafikas+EP.pdf/97417a5a-4414-4cfc-aa32-b694c7c29352

[29] *Lietuvos Respublikos rinkimų į Europos Parlamentą įstatymas*, (2003) (accessed 22 December 2019) // https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.222922/asr

[30] Interview with Daiva Jakaitė, Head of the Office, 10 January 2020.

2,600 individual visitors and 146 groups. The visitors were mostly interested in EP elections. In addition, both offices organised jointly a stand on the upcoming EP election at the three-day Vilnius Book Fair, where people could meet some the Lithuanian MEPs, play interactive EU-related games and print a selfie with the elections date.

Another cooperation with the European Commission Representation resulted in a coordination event for the EU information network. Representatives from the regional libraries, local authorities, Europe Direct, and the Europe Youth team (about 100 in total) were introduced to the EP elections campaign and This Time I'm Voting (TTIV) possibilities. In addition, a conference on the future of Europe with a focus on EP elections brought together about 120 participants from the Lithuanian Parliament, ministries, academia and civil society. The EPLO and the EC Representation organized a hackathon. About 60 young professionals and eight mentors from companies like Google Lithuania and Wix developed material for social media to raise attention to the EP elections and to induce young people to go to the polls. At the Europe Day Fair in May 2019, the EPLO organised an installation of an online project 'Don't Be a Couch Potato' in the centre of the capital and in one of its major shopping malls. The project urged people to vote in the upcoming elections to the EP. The installations attracted over 3,500 visitors. There were 57 EP election-related debates in Lithuania, which were made available for viewing on the TTIV platform, launched by the European Parliament. The EPLO organized six regional quiz competitions on the EP elections and the Election Night event, during which 100 participants from the public discussed together the role of the EP and geopolitical challenges to the EU, like Brexit, Russia. Moreover, the EPLO has sent at random 'reminder-to-vote' postcards to 1000 citizens.

In 2018-2019, the Office also ran a project called 'European Parliament Ambassador Schools' at 99 secondary and vocational schools and gymnasiums including EP elections topics. The schools organised debates or presentations about the EP elections and pupils created video material encouraging people to vote. The final contribution toward urging to vote in the EP elections was the creation, just before the EP elections, of five one-minute-long video profiles of five 'influencers', including President of the Republic of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė, talking about the relevance of vote for democracy. They attracted over 130,000 views on the Internet. Before the EP election in 2019, the European Commission Representation organised 59 meetings and debates on EP elections and the future of the EU with local communities and media across Lithuania with head of the Representation Arnoldas Pranckevičius.[31] In January 2019, the Representation organised an annual conference with high-ranking Lithuanian politicians debating EP elections and EU problems and it initiated an Internet blog Euroblogas.lt, which, among other topics, discussed EP elections. The Representation also ran a 'European Exam' for 20,000 participants from the public in Lithuania. The exam tested their knowledge about the EU, including the European Parliament. Another event run by the Representation was 'Eurodebates', in which the European Youth Team, coordinated by the Representation, brought together participants in 21 Lithuanian cities. The Team also held about 200 meetings communicating about the EU institutions to youth representatives in the country.

The parties that succeeded in winning seats in the EP employed different outlets for advertising: radio, TV, print media, internet, social platforms and so on in Lithuanian, Polish and Russian languages. Television was among the most important platforms for

[31] Interview with Justas Klimavičius, political analyst at EU Representation in Lithuania, 20 February 2020.

political campaigning, accounting for nearly 50 percent of advertising costs for some parties.[32]

In Lithuania candidates are entitled to a limited amount of financial support. It can come from political parties, candidate's personal means up to 17,700 Euro, donations from individuals up to 8,850 Euro per separate election candidate and interest on money in the campaign account. Political parties can also borrow from EU/EEA registered bank branches operating in Lithuania. Financing from business companies is banned. During the 2019 political campaign, election participants amassed 1.7 million Euro; 72.3 percent came from political parties, 17.4 percent from candidates' own finances and 10.3 percent from donations from individuals. Expenses for political campaign comprised 2.1 million Euro; 82.5 percent of this this sum went for political advertising and 17.5 percent for other expenses and a number of participants ended the elections with debts.

Lithuanian parties extensively employed different means to spread political ideas before the EP vote. The Lithuanian Social Democratic Party exploited media and social networks.[33] The party adapted European Socialist Party's stances for Lithuania and running party members and the party were active mostly on Facebook. Calendars, leaflets and brochures were distributed door-to-door, and party candidates visited people in their homes – there was tangible progress compared to earlier campaigns. The party was visible in local and national media with advertising, interview and press releases. However, demonstrations, political house parties and whistle-stop tour across towns were not LSDP's *forte*; the party did not even organise a march on the Workers' Day, 1 May 2020. A professional public relations company BPN LT, party members and volunteers were mostly responsible for campaigning activities.

The Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union used Facebook and Google ad words.[34] Other social networks were not chosen due to the shortness of the electoral campaign and the key target groups using in Facebook. Door-to-door campaigning was replaced with a campaign information tent, which was used as a hub for delivering campaign materials across streets and courtyards and meeting people in public halls across towns. The party published a newspaper with substantial circulation. LVŽS developed a series of interviews with the candidates standing in the EP election, which they placed on Facebook and YouTube. Marches, mailings, phone calls, door-to-door visits and political house parties were not used because of lack of resources. Party members and volunteers were the main activists in the campaign.

The 'Block of Valdemar Tomaševski' – Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families and Russian Alliance opted for Facebook as the medium for messages from the party, its leader and the candidates.[35] Party also paid large attention to posters including party's electoral number, name, slogans, as well as flyers about candidates – postal services were used for distribution. TV and radio broadcast party's political commercials and presentation of candidates and political debates paid by the Central Electoral Commission. Yet, printed local media in Polish and Russian was given priority. As for mass meetings, LLRA-KŠS organised local electoral conventions for party

[32] Politinės kampanijos dalyviai, *Central Electoral Commission*, (2019) // https://www.vrk.lt/politines-kampanijos-dalyviai-2019-ep?srcUrl=/politKamp/1126/dalyviai/dalyviai.html

[33] Interview with Juozas Olekas, member of the European Parliament, Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, June 20, 2020.

[34] Interview with Linas Kontrimas, head of election headquarters of Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union, June 22, 2020.

[35] Interview with Vanda Kravčionok, head of the parliamentary faction of Lithuanian Polish Electoral Action, June 21, 2020.

members and supporters and the main party event to present a programme, slogans and other election-related information. Appearances in small towns were organised upon request from local communities. The party did not employ SMS and e-mail platforms, but activists engaged in door-to-door campaigning. No public relation companies were hired in order to involve more people via direct contacts and persuade them to take part in the elections.

The Liberal Union relied on Facebook and Google.[36] Ads on Facebook were among priorities, but expenses for the TV commercials, which were considered most influential, were by far larger. Twitter was not used and Instagram only minimally. The party used posters and leaflets door-to-door distribution. The latter is deemed as increasingly irrelevant, as all candidates employ the same tactics. Newspapers, radio and TV announcements were used to present the five main candidates and party ideas. Press conferences, news releases and interviews are understood as part of routine party-parliamentary work. No political house parties, demonstrations, rallies and marches or mailings and phone calls were organised. Several candidates did a whistle-stop tour in several small towns, usually to party branches or upon an invitation. The Liberals did not hire a public relations company and relied on volunteers instead.

Aušros Maldeikienės Traukinys, AMT (Train of Aušra Maldeikienė) mostly relied on Facebook and Instagram because the Committee had the biggest exposure there. Due to expensive advertisement AMT did not have funds for other campaigning activities.[37] It also had leaflets distributed during face-to-face meetings with voters. Newspapers, radio and TV announcements were not important at all. The Committee organised a few press conferences in the national parliament, since the leader of the list was a member of the *Seimas*. However, the media was not interested in them. AMT broadcast all its press conferences over YouTube, which gave the contestants quite a lot of exposure. Demonstrations, rallies, marches and other forms of mass meetings as well as mailings, phone calls, door-to-door visits were not employed. The Committee's candidates attended a few gatherings in public libraries to meet and talk directly with the voters. As for political house parties, the Committee invited people to watch as a group the presidential elections and to provide commentary. No professional marketing firm or volunteers were employed.

The Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats relied heavily on Facebook advertising and used outdoor advertising, as well as campaign information published in the weekly 'Savaitė'.[38] Newspapers, radio and TV announcements, press conferences, news releases, interviews (Radio, TV). Political house parties, mailings, phone calls, door-to-door visits were not employed. On the other hand, party candidates participated in meetings with the audience across the country. The advertisement agency 'Children' was hired in the campaign.

33.6 percent out of 301 candidates were women. Among the mainstream parties, only the left-of-centre Social Democrats and the Labour party had high proportion of female candidates both in the candidate list and the first ten positions of the list. The highest proportion of female candidates with 40 percent or more were in the societal electoral committee 'Train of Aušra Maldeikienė' (66.7 percent), Labour Party (50

[36] Interview with Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen 2020, head of party, Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania, June 21, 2020.
[37] Interview with Aušra Maldeikienė, member of the European Parliament, June 29, 2020.
[38] Interview with Andrius Vyšniauskas, head of election headquarters of Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats.

percent), Lithuanian Centre Party (50 percent), Lithuanian Green Party (47.4 percent), Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (40.9 percent) and 'Block of Valdemar Tomaševski' – Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families and Russian Alliance (40.9 percent). The highest proportion of women in the top-10 candidate lists were in the societal electoral committee 'Train of Aušra Maldeikienė" (six out of nine) Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (five), Labour Party, societal electoral committee 'Decisive Leap' (four) and 'Block of Valdemar Tomaševski' – Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families and Russian Alliance (four).

5. RESULTS OF ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT IN 2019

In May 2019, Lithuania was run by the left-of-centre ruling coalition, consisting of the leading *Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjunga*, (Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union) and its smaller coalition partners from *Lietuvos socialdemokratinė darbo partija* (Lithuanian Social democratic Labour Party), Partija Tvarka ir teisingumas (Party Order and Justice) and Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija-Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjunga, (Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania-Union of Christian Families). The President of Lithuania was independent Dalia Grybauskaitė and the prime minister was Saulius Skvernelis from Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union. Change was in the air, as opinion polls showed bleak perspectives for the ruling coalition, and the incumbent president could not run for the third presidential term due to the constitutional restriction. The results of election to the EP confirmed the changing political mood in Lithuania: the governing parties have lost.

5.1. Turnout and Results

Sixteen lists participated in the election to the European Parliament in 2019: 10 political parties, five societal electoral committees and one coalition of political parties. Societal electoral committees consisting of independent participants took part in the EP election for the first time. The law allowed such committees to take part in the contest for votes since 2015. The turnout in the election reached 53.5 percent per cent (turnout in 2014 was 47.4 percent). It is partly due to the organization of the election to the European Parliament on the same day as the run-off in the Lithuanian presidential election. The main opposition parties, Homeland Union-Lithuanian-Christian Democrats and Social Democrats won 18.7 percent and 15 percent per cent respectively. The ruling Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union ended up with nearly 12 percent and another opposition - Labour Party and Liberals - collected 8.5 percent and 6.2 percent of votes. The last two parties over 5 percent electoral threshold were the societal electoral committee "Train of Aušra Maldeikienė" (6.1 percent) and the "Block of Valdemar Tomaševski" – Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families and Russian Alliance (5.2 percent) representing the votes of key national minorities.

Table 1. Election Results to the European Parliament, 2019

Party	Percentage of votes received	Mandates received (mandates in 2014)
Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats	18.7	3 (2)
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	15.0	2 (2)
Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union	11.9	2 (1)
Labour Party	8.5	1 (1)
Liberal Movement of the Lithuanian Republic	6.2	1 (2)
Societal electoral committee "Train of Aušra Maldeikienė"	6.1	1a
"Block of Valdemar Tomaševski" - Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families and Russian Alliance	5.2	1 (1)
Lithuanian Centre Party	4.9	0a
Societal electoral committee "Movement of President Rolandas Paksas"	3.8	0a
Societal electoral committee "Vytautas Radžvilas: Let Us Get Our State Back!"	3.2	0a
Party Order and Justice	2.6	0 (2)
Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party	2.2	0a
Lithuanian Green Party	2.1	0 (0)
Lithuanian Freedom Union (liberals)	1.8	0 (0)
Societal electoral committee "Strong Lithuania in United Europe"	1.3	0a
Societal electoral committee "Decisive Leap"	1.1	0a

Note. a – Contestants did not participate in the earlier elections to the EP.

Source: Lithuania's Central Electoral Commission.

Table 2. Lithuanian MEPs: 2019

MEP	Party Affiliation	Party group at the EP
Petras Auštrevičius	Liberal Movement of the Lithuanian Republic	Renew Europe Group
Ms. Vilija Blinkevičiūtė	Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament
Ms. Rasa Juknevičienė	Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats	Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
Andrius Kubilius	Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats	Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
Ms. Aušra Maldeikienė	Societal electoral committee "Train of Aušra Maldeikienė"	Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
Stasys Jakeliūnas[39]	Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Liudas Mažylis	Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats	Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
Juozas Olekas	Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament
Bronis Ropė	Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
Valdemar Tomaševski	Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
Viktor Uspaskich	Labour Party	Renew Europe Group

Source: Central Electoral Commission.

[39] After the election, Raimondas Šarūnas Marčiulionis refused his mandate, which was transferred to the next candidate in the party list, Stasys Jakeliūnas.

5.2. Second-Order Election Hypothesis

The Second-Order Election theory emphasises low turnout, a focus on domestic problems, losses for the governing and mainstream parties and the effects of election timing. Turnout in EP elections has mostly been boosted by coinciding presidential votes. In all four elections to the EP since 2004, except in 2009, the turnout was relatively high according to the Lithuanian 'standards', by reaching around 50 per cent turnout. In 2004, the European election was held alongside the first round of the presidential vote, while in 2014 and 2019 the EP elections coincided with the presidential run-offs. Perhaps, only the EP vote in 2009 with 21 per cent electoral activity could support the Second-Order Election theory, as in terms of electoral passivity, Lithuanian voters came second after Slovakia.[40] Simultaneous EP and presidential elections in a way elevate national concerns and local leaders. Since the President is a directly elected highest political executive, naturally, all eyes are upon candidates and their ideas in the presidential contest. Established members of political parties scooped voters' sympathies in the EP vote, and party programmes referred both to national and European issues.

As the section on campaign issues showed, questions pertaining European integration and the future of the EU have waded into Euro-campaigning and debates before the EP election. Political parties signal they care about EP electoral manifestos and campaigns and the EP vote has gradually become more relevant. The 2019 EP election did not reveal party shifts in their traditional positions towards Europe.

In Lithuania, there are no parties taking part only in the EP contest. Eurosceptic wooing is relatively weak. Governing parties' low levels of success in the EP election do not show a lower relevance of the European vote but are rather the reflection of public mood – no party has ever been consecutively re-elected to the government in Lithuania since 1990. Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union, 'Block of Valdemar Tomaševski' – Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families and Russian Alliance, Party Order and Justice and Lithuanian Social Democratic Labour Party attracted barely 21.9 percent of the votes and won three EP seats out of 11. By contrast, the parliamentary opposition parties scored 39.9 percent and six EP seats. The impact of timing is relevant here. A national electoral cycle sheds light on diminished popularity of the parties in the government: the EP vote took place in the second half of a parliamentary term and this tends to go along with the sinking public support for the ruling parties. In 2004 EP vote, which marked the end of the parliamentary term, governing parties attracted barely 19.3 percent of votes; in 2009, which followed the national elections of 2008 as a 'honey-moon period', the ruling parties got 38.7 percent; in 2014, in the middle of the national election cycle, the governmental parties received 49.5 percent. The comparison reveals ruling parties seem to be punished in an EP contest given looming parliamentary elections. These results also bolster the argument of a 'marker-setter' elections, which take stock of political popularity once earlier national elections have faded into relative oblivion.

In the testing of the hypotheses, the 2019 EP elections did not witness a decline of national parties. The established parties collected 76.9 percent of electoral support and took 10 out of 11 EP mandates. Only the newcomer – a societal electoral committee "Train of Aušra Maldeikienė" – squeezed in with 6.1 percent of votes and one EP

[40] Wojciech Gagatek, *The 2009 Elections to the European Parliament Country Reports* (European University Institute, Florence, 2010) // https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/13757/EUDO_2009-EP-Elections_CountryReports.pdf?sequence=1

seat. Radical, populist and protest calls fell deaf on voters' ears both in the EP contest of 2019. Small parties neither crossed the five percent threshold nor substantially increased their share between 2016 and 2019 – media coverage and visibility for small parties did not help. Looking at all EP votes in Lithuania, small parties and other contestants with no parliamentary record got 5.8 percent in 2004, 11.4 percent in 2009 (without parallel elections), 5.3 percent in 2014 and 22.4 per cent in 2019. Many contestants in 2019 EP vote were *ad hoc* societal electoral committees registered just for the EP vote. The data suggests that the election to the EP in Lithuania confirm the Second-Order Election theory. The turnout was low, the parties participating in the elections retained a focus on domestic problems. Besides, the governing parties suffered losses which exacerbated during the national elections in 2020 – the effects of election timing in 2019 revealed the change of political mood among the electorate.

5.3. The Europe Salience Hypothesis

Europe Salience theory argues that Green, extreme, and Eurosceptic parties perform better in European elections compared to national parliamentary elections. The leading governmental party, the Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union, has always run on the agrarian ticket and as an alternative choice to successful traditional parties. The party changed its name to a current title in 2012. The party's MEP sits in the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance and the party's candidate for the member of the European Commission emphasised 'green' platform. Some members of the green NGOs joined the party. However, LVŽS postmaterialism was limited to ecological farming and opposition to nuclear energy. Meanwhile, the Lithuanian Party of Greens has never crossed electoral threshold. The party did not take part in the *Seimas* elections in 2012 yet received 3.4 percent in the EP vote in 2014, 1.9 percent in the national elections in 2016 and 2.1 percent in the EP contest in 2019.

There is no space for successful far-right or far-left parties in Lithuania either. The Communist party is banned and the closest of its kin was the Socialist People's Front with 3.2 percent in 2008 and 1.2 percent in 2012 parliamentary elections. On the right, the 'Young Lithuania' party attracted 1.8 percent and 0.6 percent in 2008 and 2012 *Seimas* elections respectively, the nationalist party 'Lithuanian path' received just 0.3 percent in 2009 EP elections, Nationalist Union 'For Lithuania in Lithuania' ended with 0.9 percent in 2012 parliamentary contest, Nationalist Union got 1.9 percent in 2014 EP vote. The 'Path of Courage' party running on anti-system and conspiracy theories scored 8 percent and 0.3 percent in 2012 and 2016 respectively and no far-right emerged in the 2019 EP vote. Soft-Euroscepticism has begun to emerge since 2016 national elections. Though no parties consider the EU to be redundant or hostile, some marginal nationalistic parties on the right are critical towards the EU.

When it comes to populist parties, the most sustainable protest, populist and anti-establishment parties - the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats (renamed into the Party Order and Justice) – entered the politics in the early 2000s. The National Resurrection Party ridiculing politics and the radical and populist party Path of Courage were one-election stands in 2008 and 2012 respectively. The popularity of the protest parties climaxed with 35.5 percent of parliamentary seats in 2004. It has been gradually decreasing to about 12 percent after the 2019 EP elections. Former protest parties turned into mainstream via participation in the government and several ad-hoc societal electoral committees and the Centre party bore veiled nationalist traits. For instance,

the electoral committee 'Movement of Rolandas Paksas' raised the will of the Lithuanian nation, Christian traditions and political sovereignty against globalisation. According to this movement, the development of democratic society in Lithuania does not work and statehood can be lost.[41] In turn, the electoral committee 'Vytautas Radžvilas: Let us get our state back!' opposed policies which supported EU federalism, reduced the state and the nation, destroyed their spiritual heritage, cultural tradition, moral norms and innate family with mass immigration and multiculturalism.[42] The Centre party positioned itself as a staunch opponent to governments' backed globalisation too. In sum, populist and protest parties have shown fading fortunes in the European Parliament elections and did not confirm the Europe Salience hypothesis.

Table 3. Elections to the European Parliament of (ex-)Populist and pPotest parties, Labour and Party Order and Justice

	2004	2009	2014	2019
Labour party	30.2	8.8	12.8	8.5
Order and Justice	6.8	12.2	14.3	2.6

Source: Central Electoral Commission.

6. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN LITHUANIA AFTER THE 2019 EUROPEAN ELECTION

After the national elections in 2020, the Homeland Union returned to power, controlling 35.5 percent of MPs and ruling with the Liberal Movement (9.2 percent of seats) and the Freedom Party (7.8 percent of seats). Since 2019, the president of Lithuania has been the independent Gitanas Nausėda, and since 2020, the prime minister has been Ingrida Šimonytė from the Homeland Union. Lithuania also held local elections in 2023. Following the element of timing in the Second Order Election theory, they revealed, again, changing political preferences before the national and EP elections in 2024. The winners of the local elections were the Social Democrats with 17.5 percent of votes. The Homeland Union got 16.2 percent, various political electoral committees – 13.8 percent, the Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union – 9.2 percent, the Liberal Movement – 7 percent, the Democratic Union "For Lithuania" (the split from the Peasants and the Greens) – 6.7 percent, the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania-Union of Christian Families – 5.3 percent, and the Party "Freedom and Justice" – 5.2 percent. Comparing with the local elections in 2019, the Social Democrats conspicuously increased their share of votes, and the Democrats and Freedom and Justice participated in the elections for the first time. The support for the Homeland Union and the Electoral Action rose very insignificantly. The biggest losers were the Freedom Party, the Labour Party, and the Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union.

After the 2020 national elections, the fragmentation of the party system is moderate, with 7.8 effective electoral parties and 4.8 effective parliamentary parties. Then, the share of wasted votes was 19.2 percent, and the number of invalid votes reached 3.5 percent. The party system can be characterized as moderate pluralism with

[41] *Rolando Pakso pilietinio judėjimo "Šaukiu aš tautą" manifestas*, (2019) (accessed 15 March 2020) // http://www.paksas.lt/rolando-pakso-pilietinio-judejimo-saukiu-as-tauta-manifestas

[42] Vytautas Radžvilas, *Susigrąžinkime valstybę,* (2019) (accessed 15 March 2020) // http://www.radzvilas2019.lt/p/priedas-nr.html

centripetal competition and a moderate multi-party system with an even distribution of parliamentary seats. The 2023 local elections in Lithuania and opinion polls signal a loss of the ruling coalition of the Homeland Union, Liberals, and Freedom Party to be replaced by the Social Democrats, the Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union, and most likely a new Democratics "for Lithuania" party.

CONCLUSIONS

The 2019 elections to the European Parliament in Lithuania revealed several things. First, the electoral turnout, as before, reached traditional heights around 50 percent, given the simultaneously organized presidential vote. Second, the party system did not change and remains rooted in moderate pluralism and centripetal competition, with six parliamentary-relevant parties at the core before and after the national elections in October 2020. Two centre-right parties (TSLKD, LRLS) and four left-of-centre parties (LSDP, LVŽS, DP, LLRA-KŠS) have been dominating Lithuanian politics for the last ten years. The mainstream parties received 77 percent of votes and 10 out of 11 EP mandates. Despite several societal committees participating ad hoc in the EP election, only one, the pro-European "Train of Aušra Maldeikienė," broke ranks of traditional parties with 6 percent of votes. This committee did not participate in the national vote in 2020.

The EP election was a wake-up call for the old-timer Party Order and Justice, which did not obtain any EP seats and failed to cross the electoral barrier in the 2020 general elections. Third, parties of the ruling coalition (LVŽS, LSDDP, LLRA-KŠS, TT) suffered heavy losses, collecting three mandates and 22 percent of total electoral support nearing the end of the national electoral cycle. Fourth, Lithuanian hard-left, hard-right, populist, and protest parties are not represented in the EP. Small parties, including ad hoc societal electoral committees, collectively attracted over 22 percent of votes and obtained one MEP. Fifth, EP elections confirm unchanging positive party stances towards Europe. Sixth, Greens from Lithuania were never elected to the EP. Even though the Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union have a semantic reference in the party name and flirt with the Greens at the EP, post-material issues do not rank high on the party's agenda. Seventh, one-third of contestants in the EP election were women who secured 27 percent (3 out of 11) of mandates. Finally, domestic and European issues are mixed in the EP election – parties pay increasingly more attention to EU-related problems.

The 2019 elections to the EP in Lithuania confirmed the Second-Order Election theory, as the electoral turnout was low, the parties participating in the EP elections focused a lot on national issues, and the governing parties performed worse. Also, the election timing in 2019 indicated the changing political mood confirmed by the national elections in 2020. Earlier EP elections in Lithuania were also in line with the Second-Order Election theory. Even though the Europe Salience theory sees Green, extreme, and Eurosceptic parties performing better in European elections compared to general elections, the Lithuanian case revealed the absence of Green, Eurosceptic, hard-left, and hard-right parties, and insignificant electoral fortune of populist and protest parties, thus not corroborating the Europe salience hypothesis. The results of the 2019 elections to the EP offer a modification to the Europe Salience hypothesis. In the absence of Green, Eurosceptic, and populist parties, one can focus on the weight of national and European issues among the electorate and political parties before EP elections and after. It is naïve to anticipate EU issues to prevail in their entirety, yet a tangible share

of European issues would enable measuring the relevance of Europe in the domestic politics of any European country.

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APPENDICES

Table 1. Turnout in European Parliament Elections in Lithuania: 2004–2019

2004	2009	2014	2019
48.4	21.0	47.4	53.5

Source: Central Electoral Commission.

Table 2. European Parliament Elections in Lithuania, 2004–2019 (parties, percentage of votes, mandates won)

Party/Year	2004 (13 mandates)	2009 (12 mandates)	2014 (11 mandates)	2019 (11 mandates)
Labour Party	30.1 (5)	8.8 (1)	12.8 (1)	8.5 (1)
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	14.4 (2)	18.6 (3)	17.3 (2)	15.0 (2)
Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats[a]	12.6 (2)	26.9 (4)	17.4 (2)	18.7 (3)
Liberal and Centre Union	11.2 (2)	3.5 (0)	1.5 (0)	1.8 (0)i
Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union[b]	7.4 (1)	1.9 (0)[e]	6.6 (1)	12.6 (2)
Party Order and Justice[c]	6.8 (1)	12.2 (2)	14.3 (2)	2.6 (0)
Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance[d]	5.7 (0)	8.4 (1)[f]	8.1 (1)[h]	5.5 (1)
Liberal Movement of the Lithuanian Republic	-	7.4 (1)[g]	16.6 (2)	(1)

Source: Author's calculation.

Note. a – The name in 2004 was Homeland Union (conservatives, political prisoners and deportees, Christian democrats); b – The name in 2004 was Peasants and New Democracy Party Union; c – The name in 2004 was Liberal Democrat Party; d – The name in 2004 was Coalition of Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania and Union of Russians in Lithuania "Together we're strength!"; e – The name in 2009 was Lithuanian Peasants People Union; f – The name in 2009 was Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania; g – The party split from the Liberal and Centre Union; h – The name in 2014 was "Block of Valdemar Tomaševski" – Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania and Russian Alliance; i – The name in 2019 was Lithuanian Freedom Union (liberals).

Table 3: Gender Balance of Lithuanian MEPs in the European Parliament: 2004–2020

	Women	Men
2004–2009	6 (46.2%)	7 (53.8%)
2009–2014	3 (25%)	9 (75%)
2014–2019	1 (9.1%)	10 (90.9%)
2019–2020	3 (27.3%)	8 (72.7%)

Source: Central Electoral Commission.