

Features of Euroscepticism in the Euro-Optimistic Society: Mapping Lithuanian Party-Based Euroscepticism

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Abstract

This article examines the political manifestations of Eurosceptic Lithuanian political parties and their degree of Euroscepticism in the context of a rather euro-optimistic Lithuanian society. The Eurobarometer surveys (2024) indicate that more than 77% of Lithuanian citizens (higher than the EU average) consider the EU a very important institution. However, there has been an increased number of Eurosceptic party lists in the European Parliament elections in 2024 and increased number of elected representatives joined Eurosceptic political groups in the EP. The aim of this paper is to analyse the extent and characteristics of Euroscepticism among Lithuanian political parties. The research includes an analysis of the data on the 2024 EP elections results, as well as content analysis of the manifestos of Eurosceptic political parties. The study covers cultural, identity, economic, nationalist and pro-Russian aspects of the ideological orientations of political parties. It is argued that in Lithuania, party-based Euroscepticism are diffused and do not have a major influence on the national political agenda yet. Lithuanian Eurosceptic parties are characterized by a soft Euroscepticism and a similar 'anti-genderist', 'pro-traditional family' campaign.

Keywords: Lithuania; soft euroscepticism; EP elections; identity; integration; euro-optimism

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1. Introduction

Since its accession to the European Union in 2004, Lithuania has been considered one of the most Euro-optimistic societies among the EU Member States with lower level of Euroscepticism compared to other EU countries (Vitkus, 2018; Rakutienė & Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė 2020; Vilpišauskas, 2021). According to a Eurobarometer survey (2024), Lithuania is among the countries that consider the EU to be an important rule of law institution. More than 77% of citizens believe this to be the case, above the EU average (72%).

Despite this quite high degree of euro-optimism and trust in EU institutions, only 28.35% of Lithuanian voters turned out to elect Lithuanian representatives to the European Parliament in 2024. This is quite a drop compared to the turnout in the previous year (2019), which was 53.48%. Although there is a logical explanation for this, as in previous years the EP elections were held together with the presidential elections, while the last time the EP elections were held separately from the presidential elections - in 2009 - the turnout of the Lithuanians was only 20.98%. On the one hand, this indicates that there is not a strong correlation between a higher level of public trust in the EU institutions and a higher level of turnout in the election of the European Parliament for the Lithuanian case. On the other hand, this EP election was characterized by a longer list of Eurosceptic political parties.

Lithuania elects 11 representatives to the European Parliament. Most of them joined the traditional EP political groups, but 3 of them joined the Eurosceptic political groups. This represents around 27% of the Lithuanian MEPs and shows their increased interest to work in EP Eurosceptic teams. The question is whether this reflects the growing Euroscepticism among the country's political parties and what is the nature and extent of the Euroscepticism they express? Therefore, this article focuses on party-based Euroscepticism.

In the article by analysing the data of the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania, as well as by investigating the electoral political programs of Eurosceptic political parties in Lithuania, it will be aimed to identify and group their manifestations and features of party-based Euroscepticism. The research includes 5 (both elected and non-elected) Eurosceptic political parties (The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union; Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance or EAPL–CFA; The People and Justice Union; The National Alliance and Peace Coalition), who took part in the European Parliamentary elections in 2024. This is because the electoral voting gap between several of these political parties is very small with fluctuating elections results (EP, national parliament) during the same year (2024). Also, an analysis of the programs of all the Eurosceptic political parties will better reveal the similarities and/or differences between them in their approach to EU integration and the degree as well as focus of Euroscepticism within Lithuanian political parties.

The study covers cultural, identity, economic, nationalist and pro-Russian aspects of the ideological orientations of Eurosceptic political parties in their political manifestos. It is argued that in Lithuania, Eurosceptic political parties are diffused and do not have a major influence on the national political agenda yet. It is also noted that Lithuanian Eurosceptic parties are characterized by a soft Euroscepticism and a similar ‘anti-genderist’, ‘pro-traditional family campaign’. Thus, more attention among parties is paid to articulating the cultural-identity aspects of Euroscepticism. In the context of research on Central and Eastern European countries (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2002, 2004; Kopecký & Mudde 2002; Tabata-dze, 2022; Havlik & Hloušek 2025), Lithuania has not been extensively analysed in studies on Euroscepticism to compare the attitudes of different Eurosceptic political parties. This study is also new and contributes to the existing literature on Euroscepticism in Lithuania (Vilpišauskas, 2021; Vitkus, 2018; Matonyte, Šumskas & Morkevicius, 2016; Unikaite-Jakuntaviciene, 2014) by analysing the latest data from the recent EP elections (2024) and current trends in party-based Euroscepticism in the country.

First, the paper reviews academic literature explaining the characteristics of Europeanness focusing on a spectrum from Euro-optimism to hard Euroscepticism. The paper then analyses the political situation in Lithuania and the electoral data, distinguishing between Eurosceptic MEPs elected in Lithuania, the extent of Euroscepticism and the favourability of voters towards them. The fourth part examines and compares programmatic preferences, manifestos of Eurosceptic political parties, identifying their links to various forms of Euroscepticism.

2. Literature Review: the spectrum of Europeanness - from euro-optimism to hard euroscepticism

Researchers studying the characteristics and spectrum of Europeanness – from euro-optimism to hard euroscepticism (see Table 1) – point out that citizens’ attitudes towards the EU are multifaceted, multidimensional and vary across Europe (Hooghe & Marks, 2007). Euro-optimism, political support for the European integration can be associated with both: *utilitarian* and *affective* reasoning (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas & Vreese, 2011). The former refers to the concrete benefits of EU membership and the latter to a certain emotional attachment and ideals defined by the EU identity and unity (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas & Vreese, 2011). The scholarly literature on Lithuanian case study also points out both reasonings. Polls show that most people believe that Lithuania's EU membership is beneficial (Unikaite-Jakuntaviciene, 2014). Lithuanians, too, from the very beginning of their independence, have wanted to adopt a European identity and associate it with Europeanism what is the contrast to post-Sovietism (Mato-

nyte, Šumskas & Morkevicius, 2016). Although Euroscepticism in the country has increased slightly, Lithuanians remain among the Europhiles compared to other EU countries.

Given the political trends in EU member states in recent decade regarding the rise of the populist and radical right (in Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Hungary and elsewhere) with the 'surprising scope and intensity', studies of Euroscepticism are exploding (Hooghe & Marks, 2007, p. 119). Scholars studying the relationship between political parties in EU Member States and EU integration (Baerg & Hallerberg, 2016) have identified several forms of Euroscepticism, and the inherent features of this political phenomenon suggest that Eurosceptic voices should not be ignored (Williams & Spoon, 2015; Usherwood & Startin, 2013). Economic interests and identity are generally seen as the main sources of Euroscepticism, with party competition, public opinion and media influence exacerbating the process (Hooghe & Marks, 2007).

Two types of Euroscepticism are most recognized: soft and hard (Williams, & Ishiyama, 2018). The latter, in its extreme form, focuses on disrupting and destroying the EU as a project, and conducting a national campaign for leaving the EU. Meanwhile, soft Euroscepticism is characterized only by criticism of specific EU policies and decisions. However, overt, extreme forms of hard Euroscepticism are quite rare, such as the campaigns in the UK (Havlik & Hloušek, 2025), while in other countries hardline Euroscepticism has other characteristics than a campaign to leave the EU. As Taggart and Szczerbiak explain:

'Theoretically, hard Eurosceptics include those who object in principle to the idea of any European economic or political integration. In practice the abstract notion of 'hard Euroscepticism' is expressed by a principled objection to the current form of integration in the EU on the grounds that it offends deeply held values or, more likely, is the embodiment of negative values. Examples of this would be the objection that the EU is too liberal/capitalist/socialist' (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004, p. 3).

Therefore it is pointed out that hardline Euroscepticism can also include those political parties that do not necessarily openly advocate or campaign for the country's exit from the EU, but have a principled negative attitude towards the current form of the EU integration model, which can be related to either a very strong disapproval of the promotion of certain values, EU federalism or of the further development of the integration model in a particular political sphere. According to the scholars, if a Eurosceptic political party is characterized by a persistent advocacy of a particular 'single issue', it is usually a hard Eurosceptic (Taggart & Szczerbiak 2004, p. 3).

Francesco Nicoli (2017) examining the different causes and forms of Euroscepticism states that Euroscepticism is most often caused by economic reasons in the context of certain crises that make countries 'losers' of integration. Similarly,

N. Brack and N. Startin (2015, p. 239) underlines that 'Euroscepticism has become mainstream' after the Eurozone crisis. Economic Euroscepticism can take both milder and hardline forms, with, for example, the suggestion to leave the eurozone being classified as 'hardline' Euroscepticism (Nicoli, 2017). By contrast, soft Euroscepticism is usually characterized by a tendency to highlight and promote the importance of 'national interests' and criticism of a particular EU policy area, but at the same time expressing principled support for the project of European integration (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004, p. 4). In the context of Euroscepticism, the economic effects of integration are one of the main areas of research (Hooghe & Marks, 2007).

In the EU and especially in Central and Eastern European countries, Euroscepticism also arises from social identity and cultural aspects (van Elsas, Hakhverdian & van der Brug, 2016), criticizing the EU's policies on minority issues (Hlatky, 2021). As R. Hlatky explains: '...minority advancement realized through EU funding drives voters toward Eurosceptic electoral options' (Hlatky, 2021, p. 348). Previous comparative studies of party-based Euroscepticism in Central and Eastern European countries have shown that Lithuanian parties are characterized only by soft Euroscepticism (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2002).

The research also indicates a correlation between hard Eurosceptic far-right populist parties and pro-Russian approach, helping to develop various pro-Russian narratives in Western societies (Snegovaya, 2022; Arridu & Molis, 2019). Such construction of pro-Russian narratives (e.g. 'For Peace') and protesting the provision of more arms to Ukraine or opposing the EU's eastern enlargement and sanctions against Russia is evident among hardline Eurosceptic parties (Gigani, 2024).

Table 1:

Literature review. The spectrum of Europeanness: from Euro-optimism to Hard Euroscepticism

	Identity/ cultural	(Pro) National (anti) federalist	Economic	Foreign policy orientation
Euro-optimism	Support (<i>affective</i>) for the development of a common EU identity, unity, EU values, emotional attachment to EU <i>Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas & Vreese 2011</i>	Support for further EU integration and 'deepening'; satisfy with status and direction of EU; Support for strengthening the EU's role in the world <i>Kopecký & Mudde 2002</i>	Support (<i>utilitarian</i>) for further development of the economic integration in relevant sectors (energy, etc.) <i>Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas & Vreese 2011</i>	Support for common EU position; More likely anti-Russian - supportive for Ukraine
Soft Euro-scepticism	A critique of the EU's cultural/values model, For preserving traditional family values. 'Cultural threat' <i>Hlatky, 2021; Hooghe & Marks, 2007</i>	For stronger defence of national interests; No to more federalization of EU <i>Hooghe & Marks, 2007</i>	Criticism of a specific policy area (Agricultural, Migration, Green Deal policies) 'Losers of integration' <i>Nicoli, 2017; Brack & Startin, 2015 Hooghe & Marks, 2007</i>	Different, diverse positions More likely - supportive for Ukraine <i>Tabatadze, 2022</i>
Hard Euro-scepticism	'Very strong anti-genderism' 'Single-issue party', <i>anti-establishment</i> ; <i>negative</i> campaigns <i>Nai, Medeiros, Maier & Maier, 2022; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2024</i>	Rejecting the EU project or a particular integration model outright; campaigning to leave EU <i>Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2024</i>	Rejection of EU liberalism, capitalism and socialism; 'Rejecting the global elite' <i>Taggart & Szczerbiak 2004</i>	More likely suppressing military aid to Ukraine; 'overt' or 'covert' pro-Russianism <i>Snegovaja, 2022; Arridu & Molis, 2019; Gigani, 2024</i>

Source: compiled by the author based on literature review.

Furthermore, scholars studying Eurosceptic electoral campaigns note that hardline Eurosceptics tend to use much tougher, harsher campaigns (Nai, Medeiros, Maier & Maier, 2022). Their campaigns are more likely characterized by populism and aggressiveness, trying to generate stronger negative voter emotions towards the current government's actions through *anti-establishment* campaigns (Szczerbiak & Taggart 2024). While Euro-optimists are more likely to use more

positive campaigns, soft Euroscepticism is also often characterized by more polite, moderate electoral campaigns towards opponents compared to hardline Euroscepticism, which is largely characterized by negativity and political attacks on opponents (Nai, Medeiros, Maier & Maier, 2022).

3. Methodology: party-based Euroscepticism

The main research focus of this study is party-based Euroscepticism in Lithuania. Researchers distinguish the influence of political party attitudes on public opinion and often categorize political parties according to their degree of Euroscepticism, based on a qualified typology and their political ideologies towards the EU project (Mudde, 2012; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008; Conti & Memoli, 2012). An analysis of the manifestos of political parties reveals their ideological approaches (Lees, 2002; Tabatadze, 2022; Lees, 2008).

Similarly, this study mainly adapts qualitative research methodology (see Table 2) based on the documents analysis and content analysis to reflect party-based Euroscepticism in Lithuania. In addition, a secondary analysis of statistical data based on the election results is also carried out. First, to show the extent, scope of Euroscepticism, the (un)popularity of Eurosceptic parties and the electoral trends in Lithuania in recent years, the statistical data are analysed. The author reviews and compares the data on the election results in the form of tables and graphs, using data from the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) of the Republic of Lithuania and the European Parliament's website on the number of MEPs joining Eurosceptic groups in the EP. In this way it is aimed to show whether and how the extent of Euroscepticism has changed among political parties in the country. This defines those parties that self-identify as Eurosceptic Lithuanian political parties by joining Eurosceptic political groups in the European Parliament. While recognizing that other parties may also have some politicians who express criticism of certain EU policies or leadership, most mainstream Lithuanian parties (which participated in EP elections 2024 and are not included in this analysis) can be classified as pro-European Consensus political forces.

Table 2:
Operationalization of the research

Focus of research	Data	Method
Share of votes for the Eurosceptic parties	Electoral statistical data of EP election results (2024) in Lithuania (data of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) of the Republic of Lithuania); European Parliament website (Lithuanian representatives in EP Eurosceptic groups since 2004)	Secondary analysis of statistical data; comparative graphs and tables
Forms, types, features of party-based Euroscepticism	Short programs of political parties (data of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC); political programs/ manifestos of political parties on their websites (5 parties included: 1. The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union; 2. Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance or EAPL-CFA; 3. The People and Justice Union; 4. The National Alliance; 5. Peace Coalition.	Documents analysis; Content analysis (manual and Word Cloud); comparison on parties' programmatic approaches towards cultural/identity; national/EU federalism; economic integration and foreign politics.

Source: The author.

Further analysis of the election manifestos of the Eurosceptic political parties (which participated in the 2024 EP elections) is carried out by analysing the documents. Both - the short manifestos of the political parties distributed to the voters by the parties themselves and the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) of the Republic of Lithuania, and the long manifestos of the Eurosceptic political parties, which are posted by the political parties on their own websites are involved into the analysis. The reason for analysing the short and long programs of political parties is that in the short programs which were read by the voters, the political parties highlighted the most essential aspects, showing the identification of the political parties to attract voters. As the short programs were distributed by the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) of the Republic of Lithuania, they could be seen by all voters. By contrast, the long programs, which were read only by the most interested electorate, highlighted the parties' programmatic positions on various issues more broadly and helped to identify the directions and features of their Eurosceptic approaches.

All five political parties (or political movements, coalitions) that took part in the EP 2024 elections and can be classified as Eurosceptic parties in Lithuania are included in this study. The reason is that the electoral vote gap between several of these political parties is very small, and the election results in the same year (2024) fluctuate (EP, national parliament). Moreover, an analysis of the programs of all the Eurosceptic political parties provides a better indication of the similarities/

differences in their attitudes towards EU integration and the extent of Euroscepticism among Lithuanian political parties. By analysing the programs of political parties, the study seeks to identify links with various types of Euroscepticism (soft and hard Euroscepticism) and other forms, features of Euroscepticism, distinguishing the programmatic attitudes of political parties towards cultural/identity and economic aspects of integration, attitudes towards nationalism, EU institutions and foreign policy orientation, and looking for a correlation with forms of Euroscepticism highlighted in academic literature. The analysis of the political parties' programs explains and maps their attitudes towards the EU integration project in general and links to the specific aspects: cultural/identity, economic, nationalism/euro-federalism and foreign policy orientation.

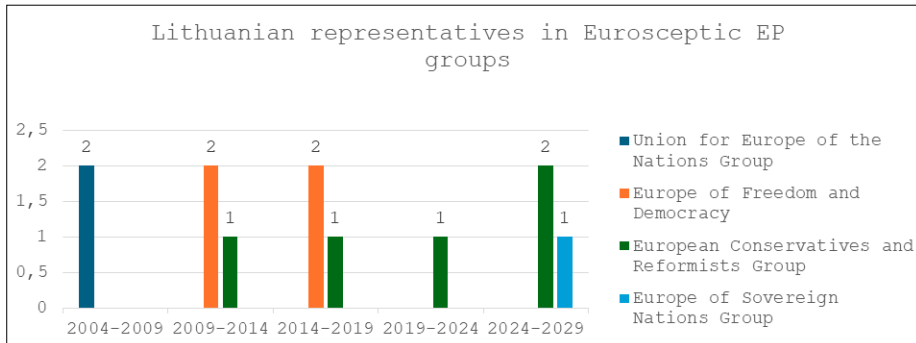
Using the Word Cloud tool and manual reading, the manifestos were analysed for the frequency of mentions of 'EU institutions', 'EU policy', 'Green Deal', 'EU values', 'identity', 'EU federalism', and 'EU integration', examining the contexts in which EU institutions and specific EU policies were mentioned, identifying programmatic proposals related to the EU perspective, as well as assessing criticism of the EU – whether it was directed at the functioning of institutions, specific policy areas, or the overall direction of integration.

4. Political map of Lithuania - Eurosceptics in the European Parliament

Lithuanian electorate currently elects 11 representatives to the European Parliament. In the early years of Lithuania's EU membership (since 2004), the number of representatives reached 14, but this number has gradually decreased as the EU has enlarged. Lithuania's political and party system is characterized by relatively strong fragmentation, with 7–8 different political parties representing citizens at national level (after the last elections in October 2024, 7 fractions and one mixed group in the Parliament was formed). The coalition Cabinet is usually formed by at least three political parties (currently a left-Centre coalition). Similarly, in the EP, elected Lithuanian MEPs join EP political groups by political ideology and split between different European political families. Most of them join the traditional EP political groups.

Although Lithuania has emerged as one of the most euro-optimistic countries within the EU, as depicted in Chart 1, it has had representatives in Eurosceptic political groups during every term of the European Parliament since joining the EU.

Chart 1:
Lithuanian Eurosceptics in the EP



Source: The author, data retrieved from EP websites.

During the first terms of Lithuania's representation in the European Parliament, Eurosceptic members made up 10–15% of the country's total representation. However, following the 2024 European elections, this percentage rose to 27%, with three out of eleven Lithuanian MEPs joining Eurosceptic political groups. The question now is whether this increase reflects a growing trend of Euroscepticism in Lithuania, or if it's more related to the personal characteristics of the elected MEPs.

As illustrated in Table 3 and Chart 1, two of the Lithuanian MEPs (Aurelijus Veryga and Waldemar Tomaszewski) became members of the *European Conservatives and Reformists group (ECR)*, while one (Petras Gražulis) joined the *Europe of Sovereign Nations Group*. It is particularly notable that Aurelijus Veryga, a member of the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union (as shown in Table 3), chose to align with a Eurosceptic political group in the European Parliament, marking a departure from his predecessors who had previously joined the *European Greens* in earlier parliamentary terms.

Waldemar Tomaszewski has been a member of the ECR since his first term in the European Parliament in 2009. This shows rooted Euroscepticism and the constant support from its voters. Similarly, Aurelijus Veryga, who was elected to the EP for the first time, also joined the ECR. This political group, established in 2009, is considered a soft form of Euroscepticism, opposing European federalism and advocating against the creation of a supranational state while aiming to preserve the identity of individual Member States (ECR, 2024). Petras Gražulis, also elected to the EP for the first time, joined the newly formed Eurosceptic group, the *Europe of Sovereign Nations Group*, which was established after the 2024 elections. While still developing a distinct political identity, this group is associated with hardline Euroscepticism. It is the smallest political group in the current EP term, with only 25 members, the majority of whom come from *Alternative for Germany* political party (European Parliament, 2024). Although this Lithuanian MEP aligns

himself with hardline Euroscepticism by joining this political group, it raises the question of whether such form of Euroscepticism (hardline party-based Euroscepticism) exist in Lithuania.

Table 3:
Data analysis - EP elections 2024

MEP	Political party/ number of seats a party has in the national parliament (2024-2028)	EP political group/ number of party members in a group (2024-2029)	Term of office in the EP	Party list Electoral EP elections 2024
1.Petras Auštrevičius	The Liberals' Movement /12	Renew Europe/1	Term III MEP since 2014	5,31%
2.Dainius Žalimas	The Freedom Party/0	Renew Europe/1	I Term	7,94%
3.Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis	The Social Democratic Party of Lithuania/ 52	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats	I Term	17,63%
4.Vilija Blinkėvičiūtė			IV Term MEP since 2009	
5.Rasa Juknevičienė	The Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats/ 28	European People's Party (EPP)/ 3	II Term MEP since 2019	20,92%
6.Andrius Kubilius (after he became Commissioner - Liudas Mažylis)			II Term MEP since 2019	
7.Paulius Saudargas			I Term	
8.Virginijus Sinkevičius	The Union of Democrats 'For Lithuania' /13	Greens/European Free Alliance/1	I Term	5,84%
9.Aurelijus Veryga	The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union/11	European Conservatives and Reformists Group/1	I Term	8,95%
10.Waldemar Tomaszewski	Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania - Christian Families Alliance/ 3	European Conservatives and Reformists Group/1	IV Term MEP since 2009	5,67%
11.Petras Gražulis	The People and Justice Union/	Europe of Sovereign Nations Group	I Term	5,34%

Source: compiled by the author based on the data of the Lithuanian High Electoral Commission, 2024(a).

4.1 Lithuanian Euroscepticism – diffused and on the margins

Researchers observe that Euroscepticism in Lithuania has largely remained on the margins of the country's political landscape (Vilpišauskas, 2020; Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė, 2014). Recent European Parliament elections reflect a similar trend. Analysing the list of Eurosceptic political parties in Lithuania (see Table 4), it becomes evident that party-based Euroscepticism is diffused, political parties are divided and often critical of one another. In the 2024 EP elections, at least five political groups (or lists, coalitions) with strong Eurosceptic tendencies took part.

Table 4:

Lithuanian electoral votes for Eurosceptic political parties and lists, 2024

Political party	Party leader	EP leader/seat on the electoral list	Number of votes EP elections, 2024 (June)	Number of votes National parliamentary elections, 2024 (October)	Number of votes in EP elections, 2019
Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union	Ramūnas Karbauskis	Aurelijus Veryga/ 1	61 907/ 8,95%	87 374/ 7,02%	158 190/ 11,88%
Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania	Waldemar Tomaszewski	Waldemar Tomaszewski/1	39 202/ 5,67%	48 288/ 3,88%	69 347/ 5,21%
The People and Justice Union	Petras Gražulis	Petras Gražulis/1	36 958/ 5,34%	17 218/ 1,38%	-
National Alliance	Vytautas Radžvilas	Vytautas Sinica/0	25 726/ 3,72%	35 726 / 2,87%	42 228/ 3,17%
Peace Coalition (Lithuanian Christian Democracy Party, Samogitian Party)	Viktor Uspaskich	Mindaugas Puidokas/0	23 777/ 3,44%	27 362 / 2,20%	-

Source: compiled by the author based on data from the Central Electoral Commission.

For many of them, the national parliamentary elections held just a few months later (2024, October) were less successful than the EP elections (see Table 4). One reason for this was the emergence of more populist political parties (e.g. 'Dawn of the Nemunas') that did not participate in the EP election. This further fragmented the voters' support. Therefore, two political parties ('The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union' and 'Electoral Action of Poles in Lith-

uania') decided to combine their efforts by working together in a joint fraction in the Lithuanian Parliament. According to their press release, 'this will be the only group that will consistently represent traditional values and the policy of traditional family' ('The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union', 2024c). However, these parties' representatives hold little political influence at the national level and remain in opposition. The political party 'Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania' has a stronger presence only in the Vilnius region, where the Polish minority resides and traditionally supports the party. Therefore, at present, Lithuanian Eurosceptic parties represented in the EP are not shaping policy and have yet to gain significant influence on the national agenda.

5. Analysis of the manifestos of Eurosceptic political parties in Lithuania

Next, to evaluate the expression and extent of Euroscepticism in publicly stated political positions, we examine the political programs and manifestos of Lithuanian Eurosceptic parties (Table 5).

Table 5:
Programmatic attitudes of Lithuanian Eurosceptic political parties

Political party	Main slogan, leitmotif	Key provisions	Foreign policy dynamics-Russia/US
The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union	‘Equal Europeans’ Defending traditional values	Public figures must advocate for the interests of Lithuanian agriculture within EU institutions; Support for strengthening the EU’s military industry; A strong, traditional family is essential for the survival of the EU.	Will help Ukraine fight Russian aggression; Will maintain strategic partnership with the US
Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania	FOR FAMILY AND PEACE! FOR A JUST LITHUANIA FOR ALL	For the traditional family, for Christian values, for a Europe of the Nations; For the protection of children from harmful gender ideologies; For the rights of minorities.	Russia is not mentioned in the programme; For improving relations with neighbouring Belarus; Lithuania’s security conditions are ensured by its membership of NATO and the EU; For peace in Europe and the world.
The People and Justice Union	Get up Lithuania! For God! For the Family! For the Nation! For the State!	Schools without genderism; Healthy environments without the madness of the Green Deal; stopping the federalization of the EU that has already begun.	Lithuania’s NATO membership is a necessity for survival;
The National Alliance	Becoming a political nation, let’s take back our country	Christianity, nation, natural family, church, state Lithuanian language, anti-genderism; independent monetary policy of EU member states; oppose the creation of an EU army - do not duplicate NATO;	Western structures have increased Lithuania’s security and act as a deterrent (44); the US is the guarantor of Lithuania’s security;
Peace Coalition	WITH US there will be peace!	Promote traditional values, regional cultural identity, local politics, and the customs of communities and ethnic groups.	‘Will refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of other countries’; ‘will support peace efforts in Ukraine through diplomatic means’; ‘will not oppose external forces’; ‘will advocate for halting the increase in defence spending’. Russia is not mentioned in the program.

Source: compiled by the author based on political party programs.

Based on the analysis of the political manifestos, the key characteristics/arguments of Lithuanian party-based Euroscepticism can be identified, which are reflected in the political programs of all Lithuanian Eurosceptic political parties:

- *Cultural/identity-based Euroscepticism* - is the most strongly expressed form of Euroscepticism in Lithuania. It is a common and strongly uniting feature of all Eurosceptic political parties in Lithuania. In the political programs and public media, usually it is manifested in the slogan that 'The EU is disrupting the traditional family', and united by 'anti-genderism campaign';
- *Economic Euroscepticism* - is the most critical towards the EU agricultural policy, the EU's Green Deal policy and migration policy, but varying degrees of criticism is expressed in the programs of the different political parties;
- *Pro-national Euroscepticism* (national/ethnic Euroscepticism) - refers to criticism of EU institutions, Eurocentrism and EU bureaucracy of specific EU personalities and leaders. The manifestos point out that the EU violates the national sovereignty of the Member States, 'orders' too much, 'interferes' in national affairs, and that it is necessary to strengthen the defence of national sovereignty, national interests, and the preservation of nationality and ethnicity. However, as far as the aspect of nationality/ethnicity is concerned, this is manifested quite differently in the rhetoric of individual Eurosceptic political parties. For example, the Eurosceptic *Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania* political party, which represents Polish (and Russian) minorities, advocates a limited multiculturalism based on historical 'Grand Duchy of Lithuania' and multi-ethnicity.

The following sections will separately analyse the attitudes and characteristics of Euroscepticism in the specific areas mentioned above.

5.1 Cultural/identity-based Euroscepticism: family, Christianity, tradition and the anti-LGBTQ campaign

Cultural/identity-based Euroscepticism is most prominently expressed in Lithuania, uniting all the Eurosceptic political parties mentioned above. It is characterized by the belief that 'the EU is undermining the traditional family'. All five political parties explicitly support 'traditional values' and oppose 'genderist policies' in their political programs. This is a clear unifying feature across all of them, with the only difference being in the way they communicate - specifically, the extent and form of their criticism of the EU on this issue.

For instance, P. Gražulis has long established himself as a prominent figure in the anti-LGBT campaign in Lithuania. The political program of this party states:

'In recent years, there has been an erosion of the natural family and Christian values, with the introduction of LGBT, genderism, and transgender ideologies in schools, the media, and public life, which undermine constitutional freedoms' (The People and Justice Union, 2024, part IV). The political party's program is highly critical of EU institutions, emphasizing that the EU is interfering with the national concept of the family by attempting to 'legitimize the ideology of genderism', 'funding genderism propaganda', and 'leading to moral decline', as well as 'destructing the natural family model, which poses a threat to the very existence of the state' (The People and Justice Union, 2024, parts IV and XI). In this way, EU institutions and 'pro-gender' EU policies are portrayed as a 'threat' and can therefore be linked to a more hardline form of Euroscepticism.

The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union similarly supports the traditional family and values, although in a much more moderate manner. In its program, the party emphasizes that: 'The traditional family is the foundation of the EU's survival. Member States must have the right to constitutionally define what constitutes a family' (The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union, 2024, part 3). The party's political program also highlights the educational aspect, stressing that each EU member state should have the right to decide its approach to sex education, moral education, and family rights and duties (The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union, 2024, paragraph 3).

The Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania places significant emphasis on the importance of Christian education and, like the previously mentioned political parties, highlights the value of the traditional family and founding principles in its manifesto: 'The post-modern culture prevailing in Europe is causing increasing confusion... <...> We will not allow the redefinition of marriage as the union of a man and a woman, nor will we allow the promotion of gender ideology in Lithuanian schools' (Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania, 2024, p. 14).

The National Alliance, like other Eurosceptic political parties in Lithuania, strongly opposes genderist policies, emphasizing that EU institutions should not interfere in national policies regarding the definition of family concepts. In its political program, the party even refers to this trend as the 'neo-communist propaganda of gender ideology in the EU member states' (The National Alliance, 2024, 43.11). The party's political program explicitly rejects the socialization and education of homosexuality and transsexuality in schools.

The Peace Coalition's political manifesto also highlights 'genderist ideology and propaganda', stressing that it will work to improve the 'Life Skills Programme in Lithuania' and 'strengthen traditional family values' (Peace Coalition, 2024, part 23).

Thus, when comparing the manifestos of Lithuanian Eurosceptic political parties in terms of cultural/identity aspects, they are all united by an anti-LGBT stance, the promotion of the traditional family, and the preservation of Christian values. On one hand, this reflects a unified aspect of Lithuanian party-based Eu-

roscepticism and a clear criticism of the EU's specific cultural/identity policies. On the other hand, each of these parties presents very similar formulations of these policies and attitudes, meaning none of them offers unique programmatic proposals to voters.

5.2 Economic Euroscepticism: criticism of the EU's agricultural, migration politics and European Green Deal

Lithuania, like other EU Member States, is characterized by economic Euroscepticism. The most common criticisms in Lithuania focus on the EU's agricultural policy, the EU Green Deal, and the EU's migration policy. However, Lithuanian political parties express their Euroscepticism in these areas quite differently in their manifestos, with migration policy and the Green Deal being less prominent compared to other EU countries.

The most critical of the EU's Green Deal is the People and Justice Union (MEP P. Gražulis), which describes the European Green Deal as 'madness' that needs to be stopped, claiming it is 'completely unrealistic' and 'reduces the competitiveness of EU companies on the global market' (The People and Justice Union, 2024, IX). It is the only Eurosceptic party in Lithuania openly opposed to the development of alternative energy resources. Another political party, The National Alliance, although less critical of the EU's Green Deal, highlights that energy policy and the development of renewable energy should be cost-effective, 'without becoming an unbearable burden on communities' (The National Alliance, 2024, 36.2).

Other Eurosceptic political forces in Lithuania are more moderate regarding the EU Green Deal. The Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania views the Green Economy as an opportunity for economic and social development and supports the development of renewable resources (Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania, 2024, p.11). Similarly, the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union advocates for renewable energy to achieve energy independence in Lithuania (The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union, 2024, part 6). However, this party is very critical of how the European Green Deal applies to agricultural policy, tying it to the national interests of Lithuanian farmers and positioning itself as the primary defender of farmers' interests. The program of the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union calls for 'the immediate implementation of the EU accession treaty and the equivalence of direct payments to Lithuanian farmers with those received by older EU member states' (The People and Justice Union, 2024, X). This party, along with other Eurosceptic forces, critiques the EU for the continuing disparity in payments to farmers in the older and newer EU member states. They argue that EU terms such as 'solidarity', 'non-discrimination', and 'EU single market' are

meaningless in this context (The People and Justice Union, 2024, X.). ‘In a Union where everyone is equal, there can be no second-class farmers!’ (The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union, 2024, Part 6). This is a clear example of soft Euroscepticism, where strong criticism of specific EU decisions and policies is made, but the fundamental EU integration model is not questioned.

The Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania and the Peace Coalition also highlight similar critiques of agricultural policy. Thus, when comparing the programs of different Lithuanian Eurosceptic political parties, it is clear that a unifying feature of their economic Euroscepticism is their criticism of the European Green Deal’s impact on agriculture and their objection to what they see as the EU’s ‘unfair’ agricultural policy towards Lithuanian farmers, with ongoing disparities in support for Western and Eastern European farmers. This reflects the concept of the ‘losers’ of integration in the agricultural sphere (as reflected in academic literature on Economic Euroscepticism, Nicoli, 2017).

EU migration policy is also tied to the economic sphere, as migrants affect jobs, the economy, and social policies. However, Lithuania’s Eurosceptic political parties do not focus on migration policy as much as their counterparts in Western Europe. The most critical in this area is the National Alliance, which is strict on migration issues. It argues that immigration should be linked to national security, stating that ‘mass integration of foreigners is incompatible with <...> the survival of the Lithuanian nation and state’ (The National Alliance, 2024, 43.13). The party opposes ‘the dictatorship of international organizations in the field of migration policy’ (The National Alliance, 2024). Similarly, the People and Justice Union states: ‘We will put a stop to the policies of multiculturalism, which threaten to make nations a minority in their own countries’ (The People and Justice Union, 2024, XI. Item 4).

Meanwhile, other Eurosceptic political forces do not view migrants as a major threat and some even advocate for welcoming them: ‘Through a system of incentives and tax exemptions, we will support and encourage citizens of EU Member States to come to Lithuania and pay their taxes here... We will strive to admit only enough migrants to Lithuania to meet the need for labour, and only from those countries that are close to us in culture and worldview’ (Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania, 2024, p. 9). Thus, once again, the significance of cultural identity is highlighted. The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union focus on the need to change EU migration policy by strengthening the protection of the EU’s borders, resisting instrumentalized migration, and focusing on managing the causes of migration rather than the consequences (The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union, 2024, part 1).

In assessing the significance of EU migration policy, it is noticeable that it has not become one of the central issues (to attract electorate) for Lithuanian Eurosceptic political parties as is the case in Western Europe and other EU member states. The reason is that traditional pro-European Lithuanian political parties

also have a critical stance on migration and have pursued an active policy in this regard. For instance, the Homeland Union-conservatives, the leading party in the Lithuanian government (2020–2024), with Interior Minister Agnė Bilotaitė at the helm, quickly ‘securitized’ the influx of migrants at the Belarusian border, labelling them as instrumentalized attacks against Lithuania. They made push-backs of the migrants and built concertinas/walls on the border, despite criticism from EU institutions, including Frontex, at the time (Jakučionis, 2021). In this way, the traditional parties, while also regulating mass migration and linking it to national security, have taken away this ‘key card’ from Eurosceptic forces in Lithuania compared to their Western European counterparts.

5.3 Pro-national Euroscepticism: defending the nation and sovereignty, anti-EU federalism

Pro-national Euroscepticism primarily targets EU centralism, ‘bureaucratism’, and the federalization of Europe. A common theme within this movement is the argument that this ‘EU is not what we joined’, with the key slogan being ‘No to EU dictatorship.’

The National Alliance party offers the strongest critique of the EU's federal integration model in its manifesto. This political party explicitly supports the strengthening of nationalism and strongly opposes EU centralization, warning that it could reduce Lithuania to ‘a periphery and a second-class province of the Union.’ It advocates for limiting the influence of unelected EU institutions, such as the ECJ, over the sovereign powers of Member States. The party also argues that the *globalist EU elite*, pushing for deeper integration, is exacerbating the crisis and undermining the unity of Europe. Furthermore, The National Alliance calls for a shift in the approach to education in Lithuania, from a ‘Eurocentric’ to a ‘Lituanian-centric’ one. This party is the only Eurosceptic group to propose reviewing and reforming the EU's monetary policy, reflecting strong criticism of the current EU integration model. However, despite its severe critique, the party does not advocate for Lithuania to leave the EU, positioning itself as a more extreme form of Euroscepticism.

Other Eurosceptic political parties tend to criticize EU institutions and their leaders, particularly unelected bodies, which they believe have no right to interfere in national sovereignty. For instance, the People and Justice Union argues that the Lisbon Treaty (2007), which granted the EU legal status, has transferred too much power to EU institutions, leading integration in the wrong direction. The Peace Coalition contends that the supremacy of the Constitution of Lithuania and the law should prevail over EU law.

The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union represents a more moderate form of Euroscepticism. They aim to preserve the EU's foundational principles

and values while ensuring Lithuania's national identity and traditional values are respected within the EU. Their main criticism is directed at EU agricultural policy, but they do not reject the EU integration model or its current political direction.

The Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania, in contrast, embraces the EU integration model in its political program, emphasizing the need for legal protections for traditional national and linguistic minorities, particularly the Poles living in Lithuania. This party seeks to consolidate the rights of historical national minorities, including the Polish minority, even if it means supporting aspects of EU law that align with their programmatic goals.

The contrasting attitudes of Eurosceptic political parties towards nationalism and ethnicity are evident. The National Alliance advocates for education to be conducted in the national language only in Lithuanian schools, while the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania supports maintaining schools for national minorities, particularly those with a long-standing presence, such as Polish schools in Lithuania. These opposing views highlight the diverse approaches on national/ethnic policies within party-based Euroscepticism in Lithuania.

5.4 The linkage between Euroscepticism and pro-Russian stance

In Lithuania, the connection between Euroscepticism and pro-Russian stance is not as clear or strong, as more Eurosceptic political parties and their representatives openly express support for Ukraine rather than advocating for cooperation with Russia (see table 5). Both the Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union and the highly Eurosceptic the National Alliance identify Russia as an aggressive state in their political programmes, emphasizing the importance of supporting Ukraine and Lithuania's NATO membership, as well as strategic partnerships with the US to ensure national security (The Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union, 2024; The National Alliance, 2024, 44).

However, other Eurosceptic political parties adopt a *peace-oriented* narrative without being explicitly pro-Russian. The Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (2024, p. 10) does not mention either Russia or the USA in its political programme, but it highlights Lithuania's EU and NATO membership as crucial for the country's security and refers to NATO as a 'well-established multilateral cooperation with allies'. P. Gražulis (who has joined the more hardline Eurosceptic political group in the European Parliament, which includes *Alternative for Germany*) openly supports Ukraine and considers Russia to be an aggressive country. The party's short programme stresses the importance of NATO and strengthening Lithuania's military (The People and Justice Union, 2024, part 13). Therefore, unlike in Germany, where *Alternative for Germany* is seen as a pro-Russian party and categorized as hard Eurosceptic, the Lithuanian party in this EP group is not

explicitly openly pro-Russian and does not mention either Russia or the USA in its political programme.

The most pro-Russian Eurosceptic party is the Peace Coalition, which, while not mentioning Russia or the US in its programme, echoes the Russian narratives (e.g. 'For peace') and emphasizes resolving the military conflict through diplomatic means and advocates for less defence expenditure in Lithuania: 'Achieving peace is of utmost importance and priority for Lithuania. We believe in nation-building based on national interests as an alternative to liberalism, globalism, and war' (Peace Coalition, 2024, part 1).

Therefore, in Lithuania, when comparing the manifestos of Eurosceptic political parties regarding their stance on pro-Russianism, no very clear correlation emerges. As just some of the five parties are subtly pro-Russian, promoting Russian narratives and advocating for halting the strengthening of national defence by populistically proposing that defence funds be redirected to increase pension payments. However, this campaign by the Peace Coalition has not gained significant public support (with over 80% of the population backing Ukraine's NATO membership, Spinter research, 2024) and has not secured any mandates in the European Parliament, despite being led by longtime politician and former long-term MEP Viktor Uspaskich.

However, when examining the correlation between Euroscepticism and pro-Russian sentiment, certain limitations arise, as some political figures do not openly express pro-Russian views, and therefore, this is not reflected in their political manifestos. This requires alternative methods and research into their funding.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the extent and scope of Euroscepticism in Lithuania shows that it remains stable and diffused. Although more than a quarter of Lithuanian representatives (3 out of 11) joined Eurosceptic political groups in the EP after the recent EP elections in 2024, electorate's support for their (Eurosceptic) political parties dropped significantly in the national parliamentary elections held a few months later. Thus, their success in the EP elections could be seen more as the effectiveness of their personal political campaign and the extremely low turnout in the EP elections (28.35%). As Eurosceptic political forces in Lithuania are strongly dispersed, they are characterized by harsh political competition.

An analysis of the manifestos of the five Eurosceptic political parties (lists) that took part in the EP elections in 2024, and an assessment of them along the spectrum of Euroscepticism, reveals that none of them exhibits the characteristics of extreme, hard Euroscepticism, with a political campaign to leave the EU. These political parties are characterized by soft Euroscepticism, with proposals

to reform the EU or criticism of the current EU leadership and specific policy or orientations. All Eurosceptic political parties in Lithuania have similar features of cultural/identity-based Euroscepticism. It is the strongest form of Euroscepticism in Lithuania, creating a narrative that 'the EU is disrupting the traditional family', and are united by an 'anti-genderist campaign'. In this way, the EU is even 'shamed' by pointing out that the EU is interfering and encroaching with the traditional notion of the family and has chosen the wrong social and political direction.

The other forms of Euroscepticism are linked to economic and pro-national reasoning. Economic Euroscepticism is directed at the EU's agricultural policy, where Lithuanians are portrayed as the 'losers' of integration in this area, as farmers still do not receive equal payments. While the EU's Green Deal and migration policy receive a lot of attention and criticism in the context of Euroscepticism in other EU countries, in Lithuanian party-based Euroscepticism this is less relevant and less frequently expressed. Finally, pro-national Euroscepticism, which is associated with Eurocentrism, criticism of the EU bureaucracy, and the exaltation of nationalism and ethnicity, is not typical of all Eurosceptic political parties in Lithuania and is emphasized by them to varying degrees.

Looking at the linkage between Euroscepticism and pro-Russianism, it can be argued that some Eurosceptic political parties (e.g. Peace coalition) and actors create and follow pro-Russian narratives, but most of them do not openly express pro-Russian stance. An analysis of the political manifestos suggests at least three out of five Eurosceptic parties and their leaders openly condemn and criticize Russian aggression in Ukraine. Other parties often do not mention Russia and Ukraine in their political programs. However, this study faces the limitation as their political strategy may not be overtly pro-Russian due to the clear pro-Ukrainian stance of most of the public. To establish a clearer link, the financial aspects of political parties, which are not included in this study, should also be investigated.

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