



# BULLETIN

No. 63 (658), 9 May 2014 © PISM

Editors: Marcin Zaborowski (Editor-in-Chief) ● Katarzyna Staniewska (Managing Editor)  
Jarosław Ćwiek-Karpowicz ● Aleksandra Gawlikowska-Fyk ● Artur Gradziuk ● Piotr Kościński  
Łukasz Kulesa ● Roderick Parkes ● Patrycja Sasnal ● Marcin Terlikowski

## Presidential Election in Lithuania

Kinga Dudzińska

*On 11 May 2014, a presidential election will be held in Lithuania, and current president Dalia Grybauskaitė is likely to win. Her re-election would only reinforce existing trends in foreign policy, including in particular working towards integration with the Eurozone and increasing the country's energy security. Eventually, this situation will strengthen the anti-Russian position of the Lithuanian authorities, despite attempts, apparent in recent years, to increase pragmatism in relations with its neighbour. At the same time, the Ukrainian–Russian conflict has highlighted the issue of national minorities, which does not bode well for improving relations between Lithuania and Poland.*

**The Electoral Calendar and the (Un)certain Re-election.** The presidential election in Lithuania has been held alongside, but in the shadow of the elections for European Parliament. There are seven candidates, but none of the leaders of the major parties are contesting the election. The winner is likely to be the current president, Dalia Grybauskaitė, but Social Democratic MEP Zigmantas Balčytis, or populist Labour Party Artūras Paulauskas may make it through to a second round.

Recent polls suggest that the current president will be supported by about 45% of the voters. The candidate of the left enjoys the support of 12%, and the representative of the controversial PP would gain also more than 10% of votes. However, about 20% of the electorate are “don't knows.” Grybauskaitė's popularity recently increased, mainly due to skillfully raising the issue of Lithuanian security in public debate, in the context of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, and due to the effective commitment of the international community, including the United States, the region and the greater interest of the West. Lithuanian society is more interested in issues that affect them directly, such as tax reform and the minimum wage than in foreign policy. However, the president is not responsible for internal issues, yet these are strongly recurring issues in the rhetoric of social democrats and populists, which is why one cannot exclude the second round of elections. Grybauskaitė is a formally independent candidate, but has gained the support of right-wing parties, including conservatives, and the former prime minister, Andrius Kubilius.

A candidate must win the most votes, with the participation of at least half of the electorate, in order to win in the first round. This is possible, taking into account data from previous years (in 2009, 52% of those eligible voted, in 2004, 48%, in 1993, almost 80%).

In Lithuania, the president plays a significant role in shaping foreign policy. Grybauskaitė herself was often accused of acting beyond the limits of her authority in this respect, often limiting the role of government, both in the previous conservative cabinet and in the current government of Social Democrats. She has been criticised repeatedly for being too authoritarian in her exercise of the highest functions, including exerting pressure and exerting too great an influence on foreign policy, for which the Lithuanian government is also responsible. Waldemar Tomaszewski, leader of the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania, is also fighting for the presidential office. His support, however, does not exceed 2%, which further indicates the need to treat the presidential campaign in the context of the upcoming elections to the European Parliament to get higher support for his own party. In addition, AWPL cooperation with the Russian minority organisation Russian Alliance, arouses considerable controversies. Moreover, in the current geopolitical situation, Russians are willing to vote (Poles and the Russians in Lithuania now account for about 10% of the population of Lithuania). The mobilisation of the Russian minority is expected due to Russian allegations of discrimination against Russians in Baltic States. Also under discussion is an amendment to the new Lithuanian law on national minorities, which would regulate the spelling of first names and family names in Lithuania.

**Elections in the Context of the Ukrainian-Russian Conflict.** The Ukrainian–Russian conflict dominated the presidential campaign on foreign policy issues around the security of the region and the country. It strengthened the position of the current president, with Grybauskaitė presenting herself as a strong leader. At the same time, bearing in mind the economic security of the country, she has repeatedly advocated the improvement of relations with Russia, and supported pragmatism in bilateral relations, especially in economic terms. The centre-left Butkevičius government has also emphasised the need to increase the presence of Russian capital in Lithuania, to effectively combat the effects of the economic crisis.

As a result of the Ukrainian–Russian conflict, but also in response to Lithuania’s fairly aggressive policy regarding Gazprom, Russia imposed an embargo on Lithuanian milk and meat. That is the main reason why even the so far pro-Russian left have supported the need to seek alternative markets for Lithuanian goods. In 2013, investment from Russia decreased (by around PLN 2 billion, or 4% of total foreign investment in Lithuania), while investments from the Nordic countries, Germany and Poland increased, but Russia remains the most important trade partner. In 2013, Lithuanian exports to Russia accounted for almost 20% of the total, with the transport sector (transit), food (dairy products, meat production and processing), and tourism (the Russian holidaymakers visiting the Baltic coast in summer, and those buying properties on the coast) most dependent on Russian capital, and generating 30%, 11% and 27% of Lithuanian exports in manufacturing and services, respectively.

In 2013, Lithuania imported 46% of its electricity from Russia, 98% of its oil, and all of its natural gas. Moreover, the relatively small fluctuations in the trade balance of the small Lithuanian economy, with its 80%-plus dependence on exports, illustrates the need to seek stable markets. Therefore, there has been a clear increase (currently at 55%) in support for Lithuanian integration with the euro.

The Lithuanian authorities, despite their country’s strong economic ties with Russia, were among the first to support the imposition of sanctions on Russia by the EU, and requested NATO to strengthen its military presence, seeking to enhance security in the region. Grybauskaitė has declared support for the intensification of cooperation between Lithuania, the U.S. and NATO, and now points to the need to strengthen defence within the EU. Polish MiG 29s, supported by British Eurofighter Typhoon multirole aircraft, arrived at the Lithuanian base in Siauliai in the framework of the air policing mission at the end of April. This course of action by the Lithuanian authorities will probably be strengthened, in particular because, at the beginning May, Russia unilaterally suspended the 2001 Lithuanian–Russian agreement on additional confidence-building measures and security.

**Conclusions and Recommendations.** If Grybauskaitė wins the election, she is expected to move toward increasing economic security, including euro implementation, in order to strengthen the presence of NATO forces in Lithuania’s region. This would strengthen the credibility of the investment and the competitiveness of the country in the European markets, which has already been confirmed by the cases of the other Baltic States. The growing influx of investment from the EU increases the possibility of diversion of currently unstable trade with Russia to the European markets, or at least to balance the potential losses.

The likely victory of Dalia Grybauskaitė, even if only as a result of the second round, means a continuation of fairly difficult relations with the current centre-left government, and a necessary cohabitation, not so much with the Social Democrats, as with the problematic Labour Party. In addition, the results of the presidential election will be at least indifferent to Polish–Lithuanian relations, especially if Grybauskaitė is re-elected; during her time in office, she has tightened her stance on Poland by, for example, refusing to visit Warsaw on 11 November, and by criticising the Polish authorities for their support of Lithuanian Poles, at the same time urging the latter to show loyalty to Lithuania. She has not shown any ambitions of conciliation towards the Polish minority, and in fact signed a law causing the deterioration of Polish education in Lithuania and denying Poles the right to the original spelling of their first names and family names.

Due to common regional interest, Poland should continue to advocate for the strengthening of cooperation with the Baltic States in, for example the framework of multilateral projects implemented in the Baltic region, and support the energy independence efforts of these countries. Solidarity, confirmed by Poland’s participation in air policing, should be strengthened through strategic projects, including energy, all the more so as Lithuania supports Polish efforts on the creation of an Energy Union. Both countries should strive not to lose EU funding for electricity interconnections, and to provide EU funding for the planned construction of the Polish–Lithuanian pipeline. Poland should continue to insist on a solution to the problems of the Polish minority in Lithuania, in accordance with EU and international standards. The 20th anniversary of the signing of the Polish–Lithuanian Treaty of 1994 offers an opportunity to reinforce bilateral dialogue.