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# THE LITHUANIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION ADVANCING ENERGY POLICY AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP GOALS: CONDITIONS FOR EXERTING INFLUENCE

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## *Abstract*

This article assesses Lithuania's potential to exercise added influence in EU decision-making during its upcoming EU Council Presidency in two priority areas: the energy policy and relations between members of the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries. This article presents a comprehensive empirical ex ante analysis of the potential influence of the Presidency, based on official documents, academic literature, and interviews with officials from Lithuania and other EU member states. We first reflect on the roles and functions of the Presidency, how these roles changed with the Lisbon Treaty, and how the incumbent can take advantage of its position to increase its influence. We then discuss the different national, issue- and context-related conditions for influence, and how they apply to Lithuania's upcoming Presidency. We conclude that Lithuania fulfils most national conditions for influence, but that energy and Eastern Partnership policies present specific constraints for individual Presidencies to exert influence, and that the policy context is not favourable for advancing ambitious goals in these areas.

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## Introduction

Lithuania starts its first-ever Presidency of the Council of the EU (hereafter – Presidency) on 1 July 2013. Over the course of six months, Lithuania will organise and chair approximately 3,000 events – Councils, working group meetings, conferences, forums, etc. – of which 190 will take place in Lithuania.<sup>1</sup> In terms of budget, staff, logistics, and expertise, this constitutes one of the largest undertakings the Lithuanian government has faced since the country joined the EU in 2004. The Presidency also has an important political element, especially for a member state assuming it for the first time. Some have argued that a Presidency period can be seen as the ultimate test of whether new member states are capable of fulfilling their obligations in the EU.<sup>2</sup> Although the government holding the Presidency formally cannot and should not use its position for national purposes<sup>3</sup>, there is a growing body of literature showing that the incumbent does exert additional influence on decision-making.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, fulfilling its obligations is not the only objective of the holder of the Presidency: the Presidency period constitutes a unique opportunity

<sup>1</sup> Lucenko V., “Préparation de la présidence du Conseil: le cas de la Lituanie (second semestre 2013)”, in Charléty V., Mangenot M., eds., *Le système présidentiel de l’Union européenne après Lisbonne*, Strasbourg: École nationale d’administration, 2011, p. 75-77.

<sup>2</sup> Drulák P., “Comparing the EU Presidencies: a Pragmatic Perspective” in Drulák P., Šabič Z., eds., *The Czech and Slovenian EU Presidencies in a Comparative Perspective*, Dordrecht: Republic of Letters, 2010, p. 1-20.

<sup>3</sup> Dewost J.-L., “La Présidence dans le cadre institutionnel des Communautés Européennes”, *Revue du Marché Commun*, 1984(273), p. 31-34; Ludlow P., “The UK Presidency: A View from Brussels”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 1993, No. 31(2), p. 246-260; Vida K., “Introduction: a Theoretical Approach” in Vida K., eds., *The Impact of the 10 New Member States on EU Decision-Making: The Experience of the First Years*, Budapest: Foundation for European Progressive Studies, 2010, p. 4-11; Culley P., et al., “Le trio de présidences” in Charléty V., Mangenot M., eds., *Le système présidentiel de l’Union européenne après Lisbonne*, Strasbourg: École nationale d’administration, 2011, p. 79-91.

<sup>4</sup> Arter D., “Small State Influence Within the EU: The Case of Finland’s ‘Northern Dimension Initiative’”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2000, No. 38(5), p. 677-697; Bjurulf B., “How did Sweden Manage the European Union?” *ZEI Discussion Papers*, 2001, No. C 96; Tallberg J., “The Power of the Presidency: Brokerage, Efficiency and Distribution in EU Negotiations”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2004, No. 42(5), p. 999-1022; Schalk J., Torenlvied R., Weesie J., Stokman F.N., “The Power of the Presidency in EU Council Decision-making”, *European Union Politics*, 2007, No. 8(2), p. 229-250; Warntjen A., “Steering the Union: The Impact of the EU Presidency on the Legislative Activity in the Council”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2007, No. 45(5), p. 1135-1157; Thomson R., “The Council Presidency in the EU: Responsibility with Power”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2008, No. 46(3), p. 593-617; Bunse S., *Small States and EU Governance: Leadership through the Council Presidency*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

for governments, interest groups, and NGOs of EU member states to promote their own views and projects.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the Lithuanian administration has set increasing Lithuania's influence in the EU decision-making process as one of its goals during the Presidency, along with ensuring smooth management of the myriad meetings and other Presidency activities, and strengthening European values in the country.<sup>6</sup> The former speaker of the Seimas (Lithuanian Parliament) stated that "the Lithuanian Presidency [...] is not only an opportunity to reinforce our membership in the European Union, but also a chance to achieve national goals", while the former foreign minister surmised that "the Presidency will be a chance for Lithuania to consolidate its position in the EU and take off its 'rookie's hat'. Lithuania will have the opportunity to present and protect national interests."<sup>7</sup>

Although there is evidence that the holder of the Presidency can exert some influence on EU decision-making and that Lithuania will also aim to do so, the impact of the Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, should be addressed. This treaty significantly curtails the opportunities the holder of the rotating Presidency has for shaping policy outcomes, leaving the incumbent member state more of a coordinating role. Furthermore, a trend can be detected among policy makers in Lithuania of the initial emphasis on focusing on national priorities during the Presidency, as illustrated by the quotes cited above, shifting towards an emphasis on broader European affairs and issues of European interest, which are being discussed more frequently as the Presidency period approaches. Nevertheless, finding a balance between advancing national priorities and managing the decision-making process while holding the Presidency in order to broker deals for bringing the European agenda forward remains an important issue.

This article discusses the extent to which Lithuania can be expected to exert increased influence in advancing national priorities during its Presidency in the current institutional context, based on a systematic analysis of the conditions for influence. In addition to the general priority of restoring economic growth and stability in the EU, Lithuania has identified four specific areas in which the EU

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<sup>5</sup> Tulmets E., "Introduction: Identity and Solidarity in the Foreign Policy of East Central European EU Members: Renewing the Research Agenda", *Perspectives*, 2011, No. 19(2), p. 5-26.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see Lithuanian Government, "Lietuvos pasirengimo primuminkauti Europos Sajungos Tarybai 2013 m. gairės (protokolo Nr. 38, 2010-05-26)", p. 2; Seimas, "Nutarimas dėl Lietuvos Respublikos pasirengimo pirmininkauti Europos Sajungos Tarybai 2013 m. liepos 1 - gruodžio 31 dienomis (Nr. XI-846)", <[http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/w5\\_show?p\\_r=8212&p\\_d=119269&cp\\_k=1](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/w5_show?p_r=8212&p_d=119269&cp_k=1)>, 08 03 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Lithuanian Presidency website, "Lithuania's Preparation for the Presidency of the Council of the European Union", <<http://www.eu2013.lt/index.php?4294425822>>, 20 11 2012.

should make progress during its Presidency: (i) increasing energy security within the EU, (ii) strengthening EU relations with Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, (iii) strengthening the Baltic Sea Strategy, and (iv) effectively managing external borders.<sup>8</sup> These four “national” Presidency priorities are of importance primarily to Lithuania and the other countries of the Baltic/Nordic region. However these issues were formulated in consultation with the European Commission and taking its Work Programme<sup>9</sup> into account, and are thus considered crucial for the EU as a whole. In this article, we focus on the first two “national” priorities, i.e. energy security and the EaP, for several reasons. First, both topics touch upon the core interests of Lithuania in the EU, constituting an extension of the country’s key European policy priorities as formulated since 2004, which are less important to (many) other member states.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, these priorities were emphasised in the work programmes of both the 15th and the 16th Governments of Lithuania, which were responsible for the preparation period for the Presidency.<sup>11</sup> In addition, energy security policy, though it does touch on some external aspects, is largely related to internal EU policies, while EaP policies are part of the EU’s external policies: this allows for the assessment of how the conditions for influence differ/converge in these two areas. Finally, energy security is particularly illustrative as an example of a national priority with no major decisions expected on the EU level during the Presidency term.

In what follows, we first sketch the (formal and informal) roles of the Presidency, how they changed with the Lisbon Treaty, and how these roles may increase or limit Presidency influence. Subsequently, we present an overview of the conditions for influence that have been identified in academic literature, and how they apply to Lithuania. This part also includes a description of the key priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency in the fields of energy policy and EU-EaP relations. In the third and final part, we analyse the main opportunities and challenges for Lithuania to steer EU decision-making in energy and EaP policies. We conclude that

<sup>8</sup> Seimas, “Seimo Nutarimo Dėl Lietuvos Respublikos pirmininkavimo Europos Sąjungos Tarybai 2013 m. Projektas (XIP-3550)”, <[http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter2/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=409464&p\\_query=&p\\_tr2=>](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter2/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=409464&p_query=&p_tr2=>), 30 03 2012 ; Lucenko, (note 1).

<sup>9</sup> Interview 8.

<sup>10</sup> For the development of Lithuanian foreign policy since 2004, see Vilpišauskas R. “Lithuanian Foreign Policy since EU Accession. Torn between History and Interdependence”, in Braun M., Marek D., eds., *The New Member States and the European Union. Foreign Policy and Europeanization*, London: Palgrave, 2013, p. 127-142.

<sup>11</sup> Seimas, “Nutarimas dėl Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės programos“. Vilnius, 2008 m. gruodžio 9 d. Nr. XI-52.; Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, „Nutarimas dėl Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės programos“. Vilnius, 2012 m. gruodžio 13 d. Nr. XII-51.

Lithuania fulfils most national conditions for exerting influence, but that the EU and international contexts, including the domestic situation in the EaP countries, are not favourable for advancing ambitious projects in the aforementioned policy areas. Each area also has its specific challenges and constraints for exerting influence.

This article's contribution to academic literature is mostly empirical and consists of two main aspects. First, it engages in an ex ante assessment of Presidency influence, contrary to most literature on Presidency performance, which usually makes ex post evaluations. The advantage of this approach is that it can act as a basis for later assessment in light of actual events. Second, the article provides the first systematic overview of the conditions for Presidency influence under the Lisbon Treaty rules applied to Lithuania, and is based on official documents, secondary sources, and interviews with officials from Lithuania and other EU member states.

## **1. Roles and influence of the Presidency in internal and external EU policies**

### **1.1. Presidency roles**

Formally, the Presidency only has one main responsibility: convening and chairing the meetings of the Council and its preparatory bodies, including a number of other organisational and administrative tasks.<sup>12</sup> However, over the past few decades, the Presidency has become an increasingly important actor in EU decision-making.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the role of organiser/administrator, five other political roles of the Presidency have been discerned in academic literature, of which agenda setting/shaping, mediation/brokerage, and representation are most often cited.<sup>14</sup> First, the incumbent is also an agenda setter or shaper: resources,

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<sup>12</sup> Langdal F., von Sydow G., *The 2009 Swedish EU Presidency: The Setting, Priorities and Roles*, Stockholm: Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2009; Chenevière C., "La présidence tournante du Conseil de l'Union européenne dans le cadre du traité de Lisbonne", *La XIIIème présidence belge du Conseil de l'Union européenne: bilan et perspectives*, Bruxelles: Bruylant, 2011, p. 99-111.

<sup>13</sup> Westlake M., Galloway D., eds., *The Council of the European Union*, London: John Harper Publishing, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Bjurulf, (note 4); Vos H., Baillieul E., "The Belgian Presidency and the Post-Nice Process after Laeken", *ZEI Discussion Paper*, 2002, No. C 102; Elgström O., "Introduction" in Elgström O., ed., *European Union Council Presidencies: A comparative perspective*, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 1-17; Tallberg J., "The agenda-shaping powers of the Council Presidency" in Elgström O., ed., *European Union Council Presidencies: A comparative perspective*, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 18-37; Thomson, (note 4).

time, rooms, interpretation services, etc. are limited, so there is a need to define priorities, which is done by the Presidency together with the European Commission. The Presidency programme puts certain issues in the foreground, indicates where results are expected, and sometimes excludes issues from the agenda. Second, the Presidency fulfils the role of mediator or broker: it builds consensus between the member states, as well as between the Council, the European Parliament (EP) and the European Commission. Third, the Presidency acts as a representative and contact point: it speaks and negotiates on behalf of the Council with the other EU institutions and represents the EU in contact with the media or third states and international organisations, although the latter role has diminished since 2009 (see *infra*). Fourth, some authors<sup>15</sup> have also described political leadership as a role of the Presidency: the chair promotes initiatives and priorities that further the process of European integration or that contribute to a better functioning of the EU. Finally, Adriaan Schout and Sophie Vanhoonacker<sup>16</sup> have discussed the Presidency's role as a representative of national interests, which is the most controversial one. The fact that all EU members hold the Presidency at a certain point has resulted in a tacit agreement in the Council that the incumbent can, to a certain extent, promote national preferences.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, member states cannot and do not ignore their own interests during their Presidency; the question is not whether or not the chair has preferences, but how it deals with them. In other words, being fair is more important than being neutral.<sup>18</sup>

## 1.2. Reform of the roles of the Presidency

During the Convention on the Future of Europe (2001–2003), a number of shortcomings of the rotating Presidency system related to continuity, leadership, coherence, excessive workload and costs were discussed.<sup>19</sup> The period of six months

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<sup>15</sup> Elgström O., “The Presidency: The Role(s) of the Chair in European Union Negotiations”, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 2006, No. 1(2), p. 171-195; Quaglia L., Moxon-Browne E., “What makes a Good EU Presidency? Italy and Ireland Compared”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2006, No. 44(2), p. 349-368; Schout A., Vanhoonacker S., “Evaluating Presidencies of the Council of the EU: Revisiting Nice”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2006, No. 44(5), p. 1051-1077.

<sup>16</sup> Schout, Vanhoonacker, (note 15).

<sup>17</sup> Tallberg, (note 14).

<sup>18</sup> See also: Schout A., “The Presidency as a Juggler: Managing Conflicting Expectations”, *Eipascope*, 1998(2).

<sup>19</sup> Schout A., “Beyond the Rotating Presidency” in Hayward J., eds., *Leaderless Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 269-287; Bunse, (note 4); Vanhoonacker S., Pomorska K., Maurer H.,

is too short to introduce and finalise projects, resulting in a discontinuous stop-and-go process and a lack of follow-up of initiatives, often due to overambitious agendas. Discontinuity existed not only between successive Presidencies, but also between two Presidencies of the same member state, due to the long interval between its two semesters at the helm. In addition, the system entailed a lack of strategic direction and leadership, especially in external affairs. Moreover, EU policies were not always coherent because different actors (the Presidency, the European Commission and/or the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) were competent in different aspects of the same policy area. Furthermore, the growing agenda and successive enlargements of the EU had led to increased workload and high costs for the Presidency. Finally, some feared that the new and mostly small members would not be able to run the Presidency properly, or would represent the EU externally in a biased manner.

Proponents of the rotation system defended it as the most pure form of equality between member states. Other advantages of the rotating Presidency are the extension of policy makers' networks during their period at the helm, more awareness about EU affairs in the incumbent country, extra incentive to implement EU legislation during the period at the helm, and the modernisation of national administrations that the Presidency often entails.<sup>20</sup>

The Lisbon Treaty preserved the system of rotation, but made substantial changes with regard to the roles of the Presidency. The most drastic modifications were made in external policy.<sup>21</sup> The Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) is now chaired by Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP), and the European Council is headed by Herman Van Rompuy, its first full-time president. Ashton represents the EU externally at foreign minister level, while Van Rompuy is the EU's representative at the level of heads of state. The newly established European External Action Service (EEAS) assists the HR/VP in ensuring coherence and consistency of external policies, and chairs most working parties related to external relations. The Presidency's role in external policies has thus changed,

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"The Presidency in EU External Relations: Who is at the Helm?", *Politique européenne*, 2011(35), p. 139-164.

<sup>20</sup> Bunse, (note 4); Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, (note 19).

<sup>21</sup> Bunse S., Rittelmeyer Y.-S., Van Hecke S., "The Rotating Presidency under the Lisbon Treaty: From Political Leader to Middle Manager?" in Van Hecke S., Bursens P., eds., *Readjusting the Council Presidency: Belgian Leadership in the EU*, Brussel: ASP, 2011, p. 43-63; Charléty V., Mangenot M., eds., *Le système présidentiel de l'Union européenne après Lisbonne*, Strasbourg: École nationale d'administration, 2011.



but it has not become entirely irrelevant.<sup>22</sup> The Presidency still chairs a number of crucial preparatory bodies related to external policy, including COREPER I and II, as well as all the other Council configurations, even if the topics discussed have external implications. The Presidency also chairs the FAC when trade issues are on the agenda. Moreover, although the HR/VP is the official external representative of the EU, in practice some third countries still prefer to negotiate either with individual member states or with the Presidency. Furthermore, the agenda of the HR/VP is overburdened with meetings, which has resulted in Ashton asking the Presidency to replace her on certain occasions. Finally, the Presidency plays an increasingly important role as mediator between the different EU institutions: the competencies of the EP in external relations have expanded considerably, and the Presidency can play a role in leading the files through the procedural steps in the Council, thus contributing to consistency between the different aspects of both external and internal EU policies.

The institutions of the EU have generally become more powerful since the Lisbon Treaty. The EP's areas of competence have expanded and the former co-decision procedure is now the ordinary legislative procedure. The European Commission's right of initiative is extended to former third pillar issues. The European Council is formally recognised as an EU institution. Since this body formulates long-term EU policies, the Council configurations will increasingly have to follow the guidelines set by the European Council, which will affect the agenda-setting powers of the Presidency.<sup>23</sup>

The practice of team Presidencies, established unofficially in 2002, was formalised.<sup>24</sup> From 2014 onwards, a new system of Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) will be in force, which will alter coalition building. QMV was also expanded to more policy areas.

In sum, the creation of the positions of HR/VP and permanent president of the European Council, the formalisation of Presidency trios, and the fact that

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<sup>22</sup> Drieskens E., Debaere P., De Ridder E., Nasra S., "The External Role of the Belgian Presidency: Out of the Limelight, into the Shadow?" in Van Hecke S., Bursens P., eds., *Readjusting the Council Presidency: Belgian Leadership in the EU*, Brussel: ASP, 2011, p. 207-220; Gostyńska A., "Evaluation of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union", *Polish Institute for International Affairs Bulletin*, 2011, No. 71(288); Vanhoonacker, Pomorska, Maurer, (note 19).

<sup>23</sup> Van Hecke S., Bursens P., "Evaluating the Success of a Council Presidency in Post-Lisbon Europe" in Van Hecke S., Bursens P., eds., *Readjusting the Council Presidency: Belgian Leadership in the EU*, Brussel: ASP, 2011, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Schout, (note 19); Fernández Pasarín A.M., "The Reform of the Council Presidency: Paving the Way for a New Synergy with the European Commission?", *Politique européenne*, 2011(35), p. 29-54.



an increasing number of working parties are headed by permanent chairs, point to growing “denationalisation” and “supranationalisation” of the Presidency.<sup>25</sup> The role of the rotating Presidency may become more important for procedural matters and less for content matters: its roles as agenda setter, political leader and representative of the EU are weakened, while its tasks related to administration and mediation have become more prominent. It is still unclear to what extent the role of national representative can (still) be played by the Presidency.

### **1.3. The Presidency as an influential actor?**

The political roles of the incumbent can be approached from two competing perspectives: the Presidency seat can function either as a “silencer” or an “amplifier” of national preferences.<sup>26</sup> In the former case, the chair plays down (“silences”) its national interests during the period of its Presidency. The dominant theoretical explanations for this effect are based on sociological institutionalism, pointing to expectations as well as formal and informal norms that shape the Presidency’s behaviour.<sup>27</sup> The neutrality norm is the most important in this respect: the Presidency is expected to act as an honest broker. In the latter case, the country at the helm uses its formal power position to promote (“amplify”) its preferences and ideas: the incumbent country temporarily becomes more influential in the EU. The underlying theoretical assumptions of this approach are based on rational choice institutionalism.<sup>28</sup>

The dichotomy of the Presidency period as an “amplifier” or a “silencer” is very pertinent to the key question addressed in this article, i.e. to what extent will Lithuania be able to exert influence during its Presidency, notably on energy issues and EaP policies. Influence is understood as “changing an outcome from what it would have been in the absence of an action.”<sup>29</sup> In the next part, we discuss the

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<sup>25</sup> Fernández Pasarín, (note 24).

<sup>26</sup> Bengtsson R., Elgström O., Tallberg J., “Silencer or Amplifier? The European Union Presidency and the Nordic Countries”, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 2004, No. 27(3), p. 311-334.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Elgström O., ed., *European Union Council Presidencies: A Comparative Perspective*, London: Routledge, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Tallberg J., “Formal Leadership in Multilateral Negotiations: A Rational Institutional Theory”, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 2006, No. 1(2), p. 117-141; Tallberg J., “The Power of the Chair: Formal Leadership in International Cooperation”, *International Studies Quarterly*, 2010, No. 54(1), p. 241-265.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Bunse, (note 4), p. 5.

conditions for Presidency influence as identified in academic literature and apply them to Lithuania.

## 2. Conditions for Presidency influence

Conditions for Presidency influence<sup>30</sup> can be divided into three categories: national conditions, which are related to the characteristics of the incumbent, the way it organises the Presidency, and its position in the EU; issue-specific conditions, which refer to decision-making rules as well as preferences and other aspects of policy areas or concrete issues; and external context – including both foreseeable and unexpected events – which impact the ability of the Presidency to be influential.

### 2.1. National conditions

National conditions include the incumbent country's size, government service coordination, preparation, reputation, and networks, as well as the division of labour between the national capital and the Permanent Representation (Perm Rep).

Size of the incumbent country has been discussed in relation to Presidency influence by several authors.<sup>31</sup> The Presidency period seems to be an opportunity for small member states to increase their leadership potential and ability to influence decision-making, which was one of the reasons why small EU member states were generally opposed to abolishing the rotating Presidency during the negotiations on the Lisbon Treaty.<sup>32</sup> Small states are rarely accused of having a national agenda that is too ambitious, since they are not expected to (be able to) promote their national interests in the same way as large states do; they “naturally” have a better reputation as honest brokers. However, there is no agreement in academic literature on the

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<sup>30</sup> For an overview, see: Vandecasteele B., Bossuyt F., “Assessing EU Council Presidencies: Conditions for Success and Influence”, *Comparative European Politics*, 2013 (forthcoming).

<sup>31</sup> Baillie S., “A Theory of Small State Influence in the European Union”, *Journal of Development and International Cooperation*, 1998, No. 1(3-4), p. 195-219; Thorhallsson B., Wivel A., “Small States in the EU: What Do We Know and What Would We Like To Know?”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 2006, No. 19(4), p. 651-668; Björkdahl A., “Norm advocacy: a small state strategy to influence the EU”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2008, No. 15(1), p. 135-154.

<sup>32</sup> Bunse, (note 4).

abilities of small states to manage the tasks required while holding the Presidency. Bo Bjurulf<sup>33</sup> has claimed that small Presidency holders can manage practical issues as effectively as large ones, since they are usually very motivated and have good contacts with EU institutions. Heidi Maurer<sup>34</sup>, by contrast, argues that large Presidency holders are better managers, as they have more resources to employ labour-intensive methods, and they can function independently from the Council Secretariat.

Lithuania is a small state in terms of population, economy, military capacity and voting weight in the EU. Furthermore, its Presidency budget for 2012–2014, at 214 million LTL (approximately 60 million EUR)<sup>35</sup>, is rather small compared to larger Presidency holders such as Poland, which had a budget of 100 million EUR.<sup>36</sup> On the one hand, it can be hypothesised that Lithuania, as a small state, will temporarily become more influential during its Presidency and steer EU decision-making in line with its preferences. On the other hand, however, Lithuania may have to focus all of its resources on the effective management of its administrative and organisational responsibilities, which would leave little or no room for discussing issues of national importance. One of the challenges for Lithuania will thus be to turn its small size into leadership capacities, while at the same time effectively performing its tasks.<sup>37</sup>

A second condition for exerting influence is effective inter-ministerial coordination and involvement of officials at all relevant domestic policy levels.<sup>38</sup> Negotiators should formulate clear and consistent positions if they wish to exert influence on decision-making. According to Bjurulf<sup>39</sup>, small-state administrations typically ensure an efficient flow of communication. Smaller administrations also have more informal working relations, which can help in coordinating positions and reaching quick decisions under time pressure. A study of the 2008 Slovenian

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<sup>33</sup> Bjurulf, (note 4).

<sup>34</sup> Maurer A., “The German Council Presidency: Managing Conflicting Expectations”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2008, No. 46(Annual Review), p. 51-59.

<sup>35</sup> Lithuanian Presidency Website, (note 8); Lucenko, (note 1).

<sup>36</sup> Kaczyński P.M., *Polish Council Presidency 2011: Ambitions and Limitations*, Stockholm: Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Most interviewees expect that Lithuania’s small size will not hamper its performance. If there will be some impact, it will be a rather positive one, due to short bureaucratic chains and a stronger honest broker reputation (Interview 2; Interview 3; Interview 4; Interview 5; Interview 7; Interview 8; Interview 9; Interview11).

<sup>38</sup> Bunse, (note 4).

<sup>39</sup> Bjurulf, (note 4).

Presidency revealed, however, that the flow of information is not necessarily good in small administrations.<sup>40</sup>

In Lithuania, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Vytautas Leškevičius is responsible for EU affairs and preparations for the Presidency. Within the formal structure of preparation for the Lithuanian Presidency, he is the head of the Coordinator Network, although some of his duties are performed by other Lithuanian officials. The Governmental Commission on EU Affairs (Vyriausybės Europos Sąjungos komisija, VESK), which consists of all the vice-ministers and is chaired by the foreign minister, plays a key role in formulating and coordinating positions on EU affairs. The commission, which was established in 2009, meets every Tuesday and prepares the EU-related issues to be discussed by the government on Wednesday. Input for the VESK meetings is provided on the one hand by the Department of EU Affairs under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and on the other hand by the Coordinator Network, consisting of representatives of the Seimas, the president, the prime minister and the ministries.<sup>41</sup> Alongside the Department of EU Affairs, the EU Council Presidency Department (Pirmininkavimo ES Tarybai Departamentas, PESTD) was created within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>42</sup> The PESTD, a temporary department that will be dissolved in 2014, is responsible for the organisation of staff training, planning, communication, logistics and coordination of Presidency activities.<sup>43</sup> There are thus clear mechanisms for coordination between ministries, both regarding content (Department of EU Affairs and VESK) and logistics/planning (PESTD). However, it is still not entirely clear who will do what, and the PESTD also wishes to have a say in substantial policy content matters. The fact that Lithuania has no experience with EU Presidencies is cited as the main reason for this uncertainty.<sup>44</sup> Finally, it should be noted that President Dalia Grybauskaitė will provide significant leadership during the Lithuanian Presidency, especially in relations with other EU member states. Routine discussions of the upcoming Presidency in meetings with leaders of other countries, as well as her public comments on the need for the government and certain ministers to be prepared for the Presidency, illustrate her intentions

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<sup>40</sup> Kajnč S., Svetličič M., “What it Takes to Run an EU Presidency: Study of Competences in Slovenia’s Public Administration”, *Halduskultuur – Administrative Culture*, 2010, No. 11(1), p. 84-109.

<sup>41</sup> Interview 11; Interview 16; Lithuanian Government, “Resolution on the Formation of the Commission on the European Union of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (No. 512, 2009).”

<sup>42</sup> Lucenko, (note 1).

<sup>43</sup> Interview 8.

<sup>44</sup> Interview 11.

to play an active role in promoting the Presidency agenda. She also criticised the government for being inconsistent in its communications on the construction of a new nuclear power plant, and claimed that such inconsistency would harm Lithuania's international reputation.<sup>45</sup>

A third condition is timely and thorough preparation<sup>46</sup>, which allows for the formulation of clear priorities as well as the development of skills and expertise necessary for performing chairmanship; they are the preconditions for influencing the agenda or the compromises that are reached. Preparations for Lithuania's Presidency started approximately three years in advance. The VESK presented a preparations schedule to the European Affairs Committee of the Parliament (Seimas) in September 2010. Investing in human resources and institutional cooperation was named as the initial priority. The PESTD was created in December 2010.<sup>47</sup> Another important step was taken in the preparations in October 2011: all political parties represented in the Seimas signed an agreement by which they committed themselves not to use the Presidency as a ground for competition during the October 2012 general parliamentary election campaign. They agreed to ensure continuity in preparing for the Presidency, regardless the composition of the government after these elections.<sup>48</sup>

In the 2012 elections, the ruling centre-right coalition lost seats and became a minority; at the end of the year, a new coalition formed by centre-left groupings (Social Democrats, the Labour Party, Order and Justice, and the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania) was sworn in with a constitutional majority. The formation of the Cabinet of Ministers was strongly influenced by the factor of the upcoming Presidency, as President Grybauskaitė was explicit that knowledge of the English language would be a key precondition for her approval of prospective ministers. With all of the ministers and most of the vice-ministers being replaced, there was a danger of discontinuity in preparations for the Presidency. However, all interviewees assessed that the political parties did adhere to their agreement of 2011 and that there is considerable political continuity.<sup>49</sup> Officials in key positions were

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<sup>45</sup> (On energy policy, see also *infra*). Source: Delfi, "D. Grybauskaitė: Vyriausybės atstovai menkina Lietuvos įvaizdį", <<http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/dgrybauskaite-vyriausybes-atstovai-menkina-lietuvos-ivaizdi.d?id=61075157>>, 05 04 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Arter, (note 4); Bunse, (note 4).

<sup>47</sup> Lucenko, (note 1).

<sup>48</sup> Seimas, "Political Parties Represented at the Seimas Signed the Accord on Lithuania's EU Presidency in July-December 2013", <[http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/w5\\_show?p\\_r=8296&p\\_d=116591&cp\\_k=2](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/w5_show?p_r=8296&p_d=116591&cp_k=2)>, 23 10 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3; Interview 5; Interview 6; Interview 7; Interview 8; Interview 9; Interview 10; Interview 11.

not replaced; approximately 6 per cent of the planned working party chairs has changed in the past year, a rate which does not exceed normal diplomatic rotation.<sup>50</sup> Some interviewees touched upon minor disadvantages of the new government, notably the lack of international experience and poor foreign language skills of some of the ministers.<sup>51</sup> In sum, the Lithuanian administration is well-prepared for the Presidency. At the political level, the change in government did not create disruptions in terms of priorities or organisation, although “it would be good if the Presidency would be one year later”<sup>52</sup>, as this would give the new ministers more time to prepare. Furthermore, although there is much agreement on general EU policies, disagreements might appear once the Presidency agenda touches directly upon domestic interests such as the energy policy, where interest groups and political elites have often clashed over major projects. During the preparations for the Presidency, most work is performed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which is also the main coordinator of the Presidency), while other politicians are mostly concerned about domestic issues, and have no significant interest in Lithuania’s EU policies.<sup>53</sup> However, with the Presidency approaching, additional measures have been taken to prepare the ministers, including special training and a visit to Brussels in April 2013 to meet key EU officials. Members of the Seimas have also begun to show increased interest in the Presidency.

The fourth condition – a reputation as being impartial, effective and knowledgeable<sup>54</sup> – is crucial for being influential during the Presidency. The reputation of the Presidency is related to the incumbent country in general, but can also differ among individual chairpersons or heads of state. Familiarity of other EU member states with the geographical and historical context and the main priorities of the chair, as well as a positive attitude on behalf of the Presidency towards European integration<sup>55</sup>, are factors that can improve the incumbent’s reputation.

On the one hand, reputation as a condition for influence can be considered a challenge for Lithuania. The countries that know Lithuania best are for the most part its neighbours, such as Latvia, Estonia, Poland and the Nordic countries,

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<sup>50</sup> Lithuanian Presidency website, “Lietuvos pirmininkavimo Europos Sąjungos Tarybai 2013 metų tarpinstitucinio 2012-2014 metų veiklos plano 2012 metų įgyvendinimo ataskaita”, <[http://www.eu2013.lt/uploads/files/Metine\\_TVP\\_ataskaita\\_2013\\_02\\_13.pdf](http://www.eu2013.lt/uploads/files/Metine_TVP_ataskaita_2013_02_13.pdf)>, 07 03 2013, p. 7; Interview 16.

<sup>51</sup> Interview 4; Interview 5; Interview 6; Interview 17.

<sup>52</sup> Interview 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Tallberg, (note 4); Bunse, (note 4); Kajněč, Svetličič, (note 40); Karoliewski I.P., Sus M., “The Polish EU Council Presidency”, *Friedrich Erbert Stiftung - Perspective*, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Quaglia, Moxon-Browne (note 15).

with whom Lithuania (together with the other Baltic States) maintains good relations in various policy areas.<sup>56</sup> For the rest of Europe, Lithuania is perceived as a small country in the Eastern periphery with a Soviet background, yet also an old European country that is part of the West, with a rich history of statehood but a short history of recent independence; one that maintains vague relations with some of its neighbours, and has strong national interests in a few specific areas relating to security issues.<sup>57</sup> These areas correspond to the four main priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency specified above. As non-Lithuanian interviewees noted, Lithuania usually tends to emphasise these national priorities in a narrow way during discussions at the Council or at informal meetings, and has no interest in tackling a broader range of issues such as development cooperation with the poorest African countries.<sup>58</sup> Looking at the forthcoming role of the Presidency, this could be seen as a disadvantage. To be an effective leader and an honest broker, the chair is expected not to emphasise its national interests and to try to reach an agreement with a broad perspective and a clear opinion on all the issues that compose the current EU agenda.<sup>59</sup>

On the other hand, Lithuania has a relatively positive reputation as a “good European”. The Charlemagne Prize awarded to President Grybauskaitė in 2013 acknowledges Lithuania as a committed EU member with a positive attitude towards European integration. As a former European Commissioner, Grybauskaitė contributed to the reform of the EU budget structure and later, as Lithuanian president, she strongly supported the fiscal austerity measures that have been implemented during the financial crisis in the EU.<sup>60</sup> At this point, Grybauskaitė is the leading figure shaping a positive reputation for Lithuania in terms of a stable, growing economy and restrictive budget spending.<sup>61</sup> This economic approach, an excellent record for implementing EU legislation, and a responsible attitude towards preparations for the Presidency, are the foundation for Lithuania’s current reputation. Preparations started early on; approximately 1,500 Lithuanian diplomats and officials underwent intense training throughout 2011–2013<sup>62</sup>, and

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<sup>56</sup> Interview 14; Interview 15.

<sup>57</sup> Interview 4; Interview 13.

<sup>58</sup> Interview 13; Interview 15.

<sup>59</sup> Interview 14.

<sup>60</sup> Lithuanian President, press release: “International Charlemagne Prize is Recognition of Entire Lithuania”, <[http://president.lt/en/press\\_center/press\\_releases/international\\_charlemagne\\_prize\\_is\\_evaluation\\_of\\_the\\_whole\\_of\\_lithuania.html](http://president.lt/en/press_center/press_releases/international_charlemagne_prize_is_evaluation_of_the_whole_of_lithuania.html)>, 06 03 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Interview 13; Interview 14.

<sup>62</sup> Lithuanian Presidency website, (note 50), p. 6.



their skills and knowledge about the EU are highly valued by representatives from other countries.<sup>63</sup> In sum, Lithuania is relatively unknown, but nevertheless has, in general, a positive reputation in the EU.

Finally, well-developed networks in the EU can aid the Presidency in moving issues forward. Networks include alliances with other member states, regional networks, personal ties, and inter-institutional relations.<sup>64</sup> They allow the Presidency to obtain first-hand information, formulate acceptable compromises, and build coalitions around certain topics.

Although coalitions depend on specific issues and policy areas, Lithuania's most frequently cited partners are the other members of the Nordic-Baltic group of six (NB6) countries (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, and Latvia), as well as Poland, Romania and Slovakia.<sup>65</sup> There is also a group of like-minded countries on EaP-related issues, which occasionally meets at the level of political directors or vice-ministers; this group consists of the above-mentioned countries plus Germany, but minus Finland.<sup>66</sup> Lithuania is also a member of an informal group of countries – roughly consisting of the Baltic States, the Nordic EU members, and other “Northern” countries such as the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Germany – which support further extension of internal market principles to areas like services and energy. To summarise, Lithuanian officials tend to focus on a relatively narrow set of issues which are seen as important for the country, and cooperate more intensely in informal settings with their closest neighbours.

In preparing for the Presidency, Lithuania held consultations in February 2013 with the EEAS on what can be expected in the second semester of the year; a second round is planned in June.<sup>67</sup> There has also been intensive contact with the Commission<sup>68</sup>, and working agreements have been made with Van Rompuy's cabinet, especially with regard to the November 2013 EaP Summit.<sup>69</sup> Relations with Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle,

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<sup>63</sup> Interview 13; Interview 14; Interview 15; Interview 18.

<sup>64</sup> Bjurulf, (note 4); Bunse, (note 4); Karoliewski, Sus, (note 54).

<sup>65</sup> Interview 4; Interview 6; Interview 8; Interview 9. This confirms the conclusions of earlier studies of coalition building patterns which have been done in Lithuania and which noted that Poland as well as Latvia, Estonia and the Nordic EU States are most often preferred coalition partners of Lithuania (Vitkus G., Novagrockienė J., “The Impact of Lithuania on EU Decision-Making”, *Lithuanian Strategic Annual Review*, 2007, p. 91-123).

<sup>66</sup> Interview 9; Interview 12; Interview 19.

<sup>67</sup> Interview 9.

<sup>68</sup> Interview 8; Interview 9.

<sup>69</sup> Interview 6; Interview 7; Interview 8.

who served as the Czech Ambassador to Lithuania in 1998-2001, are very good; this is further enhanced by Füle's rapport with Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius.<sup>70</sup> Cooperation with the EP seems to be less developed. With regard to Lithuania's coordination with Ireland and Greece, its Presidency Trio partners, many interviewees indicated that they had insufficient information. The level of communication with the preceding Irish Presidency is evaluated satisfactorily, and Lithuania even sent three officials from different ministries to work within the Irish corresponding services in 2012–2013. By contrast, according to Lithuanian officials, cooperation with Lithuania's successor is almost non-existent, mainly due to a lack of interest on behalf of the Greeks.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, academic literature argues that Brussels-based Presidencies, with their centre of gravity at the Perm Rep, are more influential than those where the national capital keeps strict control.<sup>72</sup> Lithuania clearly opted for the Brussels-based model: although most of the working party chairs will not reside permanently in the Perm Rep, the majority of working party meetings will be chaired by a Brussels-based chair.<sup>73</sup> The chairs of working parties that meet regularly are posted to the Perm Rep, while those chairing working parties that meet only a few times per semester will travel from Vilnius.<sup>74</sup> One interviewee described the Presidency model as rather "chair-based"<sup>75</sup>: the chairs have more room for manoeuvring than other delegates. Furthermore, the staff at the Perm Rep has more than doubled, up to 180 officials<sup>76</sup>, and approximately one quarter of the Presidency budget is allocated to the expansion of the Perm Rep.<sup>77</sup> As one official put it: "usually there are weekly instructions from Vilnius to the Perm Rep. But during the Presidency, all chairs will know their margin of negotiation and they will only get one very big instruction at the start of the Presidency: execute the work programme."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Interview 9; Interview 12.

<sup>71</sup> Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 9; Interview 10; Interview 11; Interview 17.

<sup>72</sup> Bunse, (note 4).

<sup>73</sup> Lithuanian Presidency website, (note 50), p. 9, p. 37-38.

<sup>74</sup> Interview 1; Interview 8.

<sup>75</sup> Interview 8.

<sup>76</sup> Lucenko, (note 1).

<sup>77</sup> Lithuanian Presidency website, (note 8).

<sup>78</sup> Interview 7.

## 2.2. Issue-specific conditions

Issue-specific conditions include the heterogeneity and intensity of preferences, voting rules, and the stage of the issue within the EU legislative process.

The heterogeneity (distribution) of preferences between the parties, as well as the intensity (salience) of these preferences, has an impact on the chair's ability to exert influence. Thomson<sup>79</sup> concludes that Presidencies with extreme positions have relatively more influence than other member states, and Bjurulf and Ole Elgström<sup>80</sup> have found that if the positions of different institutions diverge, a skilful chair can benefit from this situation and bring compromises closer to its own preferences. Jelmer Schalk et al. and Andreas Warntjen<sup>81</sup> have observed increased Presidency influence in areas that are highly salient to the chair. Simone Bunse<sup>82</sup> has formulated a more general observation: diverging but weak preferences in the Council allow the Presidency to build consensus around a compromise that is close to its own position, as long as a coalition of large member states against the chair's proposal does not exist.

In energy policy, the Trio programme focuses on the “three S's”: “Security of supply, Safety, and Sustainability of energy production and use, while bearing in mind the decisive contribution of the EU's energy policy to competitiveness, growth and employment.”<sup>83</sup> Lithuania has a track record of a consistent focus on advancing the principles of the internal market in the field of energy, in particular electricity and natural gas, which should also integrate the Baltic States into the northern and central European markets. Being an “energy island”, Lithuania has been an outspoken advocate of including the provision on energy security into the Lisbon Treaty, and supported the adoption of the Council conclusions to complete the internal market where electricity and natural gas “flow freely” by 2014.<sup>84</sup> Lithuania also supported the adoption of the Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP) in 2009 as a way to coordinate and advance regional energy projects among the eight member states located along the Baltic

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<sup>79</sup> Thomson, (note 4).

<sup>80</sup> jurulf B., Elgström O., “Negotiating Transparency: The Role of Institutions”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2004, No. 42(2), p. 249-269.

<sup>81</sup> Schalk, Torenvlied, Weesie, Stokman, (note 4); Warntjen, (note 4).

<sup>82</sup> Bunse, (note 4).

<sup>83</sup> Council of the European Union, “18 Month Programme of the Council (1 January 2013 – 30 June 2014)”, <<http://www.eu2013.ie/media/eupresidency/content/documents/Trio-Programme.pdf>>, 02 04 2013, p. 84.

<sup>84</sup> European Council Conclusions, EUCO 2/11, Brussels, 4 February, 2011, paragraph 4.

Sea; this plan has since been presented by the European Commission to other EU regions as an example of good practice in coordinating large infrastructure projects among groups of EU member states. Several projects are being developed to create a single energy market, including Lithuanian-Polish (LitPol Link) and Lithuanian-Swedish (NordBalt) electricity interconnections. The construction of an LNG terminal, another strategic project, has been halted due to obscurity related to public procurement, but is expected to be completed by 2015.<sup>85</sup>

BEMIP is an example of a coalition of countries with a common interest in the development of joint infrastructure projects that might not be of interest to others. However, heterogeneity of national interests remains even after the adoption of the Third Energy Package, due to the existence of different regulatory regimes in different EU member states. Although Germany and France usually form an avant-garde motor of integration, their drive for the creation of a common market has been visibly lacking in the case of the energy policy. Furthermore, different EU members attach different importance to the multiple objectives of competitiveness, sustainability, and security of supply. Finally, the recent history of Lithuania revising the instruments of implementing its strategic energy projects after each Parliamentary election, which resulted in numerous postponements of completion deadlines and controversial delays of dismantling the closed Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant, are likely to reduce the credibility of Lithuania's Presidency as a mediator of debates on energy matters.<sup>86</sup> Mere months before the commencement of the Presidency, the newly formed government was still deliberating the National Energy Strategy. The main question to be resolved is whether or not to implement the Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant project, which was prepared by the previous government.<sup>87</sup> The current ruling coalition also started a discussion on the extraction of shale gas, which is a controversial topic in the EU; different member states are developing diverging policies towards this unconventional gas resource, amidst debates about its possible impact on environment.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Černiauskas Š., "Stebuklas: dujotiekis dujų terminalui atpigo keliomis dešimtimis milijonų", <<http://verslas.delfi.lt/energetika/stebuklas-dujotiekis-duju-terminalui-atpigo-keliomis-desimtimis-milijonu.d?id=60896345>>, 02 04 2013.

<sup>86</sup> Delfi, "Estų politologas: mus erzina lietuvių neapsisprendimas dėl VAE statybų", <<http://verslas.delfi.lt/energetika/estu-politologas-mus-erzina-lietuviu-neapsisprendimas-del-vaestatybu.d?id=60412607>>, 02 04 2013.

<sup>87</sup> BNS, "Energetikos strategijoje – perspektyvos su ir be atominės elektrinės". <[http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/15080503/Energetikos.strategijoje..perspektyvos.su.ir.be.atomines.elektrines=2013-02-14\\_15-44/](http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/15080503/Energetikos.strategijoje..perspektyvos.su.ir.be.atomines.elektrines=2013-02-14_15-44/)>, 14 02 2013.

<sup>88</sup> Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department A: Economic and Scientific Policy, "Impacts of Shale Gas and Shale Oil Extraction on the environment and on Human Health." Study IP/A/ENVI/ST/2011-07, 2011 June.

Lithuania might face the dilemma of mediating as an impartial broker or advancing its national interests on issues such as the selection of projects to be financed by the Connecting Europe Facility. If selection of the projects to be financed during the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) takes place in the second half of 2013, the Presidency will have to balance between lobbying for allocation of EU funding for infrastructure projects which are relevant to the immediate region and mediating for competing projects. Furthermore, Lithuanian energy priorities scarcely focus on the main policy directions in the EU – energy efficiency and the “Europe 20-20-20” goals. If Lithuania does not hold a more flexible and extensive position in the Council, this could harm its reputation as an honest broker.<sup>89</sup> Conversely, if the government manages to show considerable progress in implementing measures for improving energy efficiency in Lithuania (something the ruling coalition parties focused on during the election campaign and the first days of formation of the government), this might improve the credibility of the Presidency when further EU-wide energy efficiency measures are discussed.

With regard to the EaP, Lithuania strongly favours further integration of these countries into the EU.<sup>90</sup> It has an embassy in each of the six EaP countries, and Eastern Europe has become its niche in external policy; EaP policy is one of the areas where Lithuania is an EU policy-maker rather than a policy-taker. The country can share its experience with the region in “de-Sovietisation” and Europeanization. Lithuanian politicians and civil society representatives participate in various initiatives aimed at bringing the EaP countries closer to the EU, such as the Baltic Sea–Black Sea Axis, the Community for Democratic Choice, and the Baltic to Black Sea Alliance.<sup>91</sup> Lithuania has defined a set of ambitious goals for the EU’s relations with EaP countries in general,<sup>92</sup> as well as for a number of

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<sup>89</sup> Interview 1; Interview 13; Interview 14; Interview 15; Interview 18.

<sup>90</sup> Raik K., Gromadzki G., *Between Activeness and Influence: The contribution of New Member States to EU Policies towards the Eastern Neighbours*, Tallinn: Open Estonia Foundation, 2006; Janeliūnas T., Kasčiūnas L., Dambrauskaitė Ž., *The EU New Member States as Agenda Setters in the Enlarged European Union: Lithuania*, Sofia: Open Society Institute, 2009; Vilpišauskas R., “National Preferences and Bargaining of the New Member States Since the Enlargement of the EU: the Baltic States - Still Policy Takers?”, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, 2011(25), p. 9-32; Vilpišauskas R., *The Management of Economic Interdependencies of a Small State: Assessing the Effectiveness of Lithuania’s European Policy since Joining the EU*, Reykjavik: Centre for Small State Studies Institute of International Affairs, 2012.

<sup>91</sup> Kesa K., “Latvian and Lithuanian Policy in the Eastern Neighbourhood: Between Solidarity and Self Promotion”, *Perspectives*, 2011, No. 19(2), p. 81-100.

<sup>92</sup> Centre for Eastern Studies, “The Centre-Left Government Takes Power in Lithuania”, <<http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/ceweekly/2012-12-19/centreleft-government-takes-power-lithuania>>, 21

specific policies: ministerial meetings in Transport and Justice and Home Affairs are foreseen in parallel to the EU's Council meetings, with an aim to upgrade sectoral dialogue with the EaP to a permanent high-level cooperation. The November EaP Summit will be the main EaP policy event in 2013, and even the main Presidency event. Lithuania anticipates signature of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA) and the start of its ratification, the conclusion of AAs and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) with Georgia and Moldova, the implementation of visa liberalisation plans with Ukraine and Moldova, significant progress in negotiating AAs with Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the conclusion of visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>93</sup> Lithuania also plans to initiate a reflection in the EU and the EaP on the further development of their relations after the conclusion of AAs.<sup>94</sup> While EU-EaP relations are highly salient for the incoming Presidency, ambitions in other EU countries are expected to be lower. Reforms in the EaP countries are advancing rather slowly, leading to declined interest of many EU members in the region.<sup>95</sup> Whether or not Lithuania will be "allowed" to put EaP policies higher on the agenda will depend on developments in the EaP countries and the assessment of these developments in the EU capitals. The situation in Ukraine since the end of 2011 clearly illustrates how the domestic political situation can slow down or even stop the process of closer integration of an EaP country with the EU. Advances in the establishment of the Eurasian Customs Union and its offer of membership to Ukraine and other EaP countries further complicates the geopolitical environment in the EU's eastern neighbourhood.

A second issue-related condition for Presidency influence is the method of voting. Several studies<sup>96</sup> have concluded that Presidencies have more influence on decisions taken by QMV than when unanimity is required. The voting method as a condition for the influence of Lithuania's Presidency will probably not be crucial. Since the inception of the Lisbon Treaty, most policy areas are decided by QMV.

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12 2012; Ditrych O., "Good cop or bad cop? Sanctioning Belarus", European Union Institute for Security Studies Policy Brief, 2013(14).

<sup>93</sup> Background note for the discussion on the Eastern Partnership in the Parliamentary European information centre, organised by the European Affairs Committee and the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University, 21.03.2013; Interview 2; Interview 3; Interview 7; Interview 8.

<sup>94</sup> Interview 19.

<sup>95</sup> EUObserver, "EU foreign policy: More for more, or more of the same?", <<http://euobserver.com/7/113818>>, 5 10 2011.

<sup>96</sup> Elgström, (note 16); Tallberg, (note 29); Warntjen, (note 4).

However, for certain EaP-related decisions (including some aspects of common commercial policy and especially the signature of AAs), unanimity will be required, which could limit the influence of the Presidency.

Thirdly and finally, the stage of the issue within the EU legislative process shapes the Presidency's ability to exert influence. A number of studies<sup>97</sup> have shown that the Presidency is more influential in legislative issues if a final decision is taken during its term in office. The chair thus has more influence at the end of a legislative process than at other stages, but it usually has little influence on the timing of decision-making.<sup>98</sup> The progress in legislation on the energy policy will depend on the preceding (Irish) Presidency. Moreover, there are no major decisions foreseen during the Lithuanian Presidency regarding the EU energy policy; work will continue on the action plan to advance the internal market, as well as on energy efficiency and renewable energy. This will significantly limit the possibilities for Lithuania to advance its priorities on energy security, both in terms of completing the internal energy market and facilitating the convergence of the positions of member states on issues related to external energy supply. For EaP policies, this condition is less relevant, since most of the EU's external action is non-legislative. In the areas that do have a legislative character, such as AAs or DCFTAs, the negotiation process is led by the Commission, on the basis of negotiation mandates from the Council, and, as will be discussed below, progress in these dossiers highly depends on the EaP countries themselves. The contents of such decisions cannot be influenced by individual member states or by the Presidency, although the Presidency can work on trying to forge an internal consensus in the EU on the state of affairs in the EaP countries and the reforms required for major decisions like the conclusion of AAs.

### 2.3. External context

Presidencies are most likely to be influential when there is a favourable external political and economic environment.<sup>99</sup> External crises do not necessarily constitute an unfavourable external environment: if well-handled, unexpected events and crises can create opportunities for providing leadership, thus allowing

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<sup>97</sup> Bjurulf, Elgström, (note 80); Schalk, Torenvlied, Weesie, Stokman, (note 4); Thomson, (note 4); Warntjen A., "The Council Presidency: Power Broker or Burden? An Empirical Analysis", *European Union Politics*, 2008, No. 9(3), p. 315-338.

<sup>98</sup> Bjurulf, (note 4).

<sup>99</sup> Bunse, (note 4).



the incumbent to steer EU policies.<sup>100</sup> However, in the case of external (energy) policy, unexpected events or crises might only provide minimal opportunities for the Presidency to exert influence: Ashton and Van Rompuy are responsible for foreign policy in the strict sense, and the European Commission has extensive powers in external energy policy. In the event of an external crisis, these actors are likely to react first. Although it is difficult to describe the policy context in advance, four main challenges can already be identified, each of which limit the potential influence of the Lithuanian Presidency on energy and EaP policies.

First, the MFF for 2014–2020 will have to be finalised by the end of 2013. Since the EP rejected the MFF as proposed by the European Council, and there are approximately 70 legislative acts to be adopted;<sup>101</sup> Ireland will not manage to broker agreement on all of them, so a significant part of the work will be left for the Lithuanian Presidency and leave less room for other issues.

Second, the legislative cycle of the European Commission and the EP ends in May 2014, which will increase the pressure on the Council to finalise as many dossiers as possible. At the end of the five-year term, the legislative workload in the Council can increase as much as tenfold.<sup>102</sup> The new MFF and the end of the legislative cycle, which happen to coincide this year, will absorb most of the energy and administrative capacity of the Council, and thereby of the Lithuanian Presidency in managing these processes. The “inherited” EU agenda always constitutes approximately 90 per cent of a Presidency programme, but for Lithuania this share will be even higher, thus additionally limiting its ability to focus on “national” issues.

Third, continuing uncertainty regarding economic reforms required to maintain the euro, difficulties in some euro area countries, and the stagnating EU economy will create an important constraint limiting the possibilities to devote attention to other issues. The forthcoming German federal election in autumn 2013 might also affect discussions of certain issues on the EU agenda, for example, the creation of a banking union. Although the context is always difficult to a certain extent, the above-mentioned context factors will be especially constraining in 2013, also taking into account the fact that Lithuania has no former experience in holding the Council Presidency.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Bunse, (note 4); Langdal, von Sydow, (note 12).

<sup>101</sup> Interview 7; Interview 8.

<sup>102</sup> Interview 7.

<sup>103</sup> EurActiv, “Tiny Lithuania prepares to wrestle with heavy EU dossiers”, <<http://www.euractiv.com/future-eu/lithuanian-presidency-readies-wr-news-519333>>, 29 04 2013.

The final challenge is related to the EaP in particular: much depends on the domestic political situation in the partner countries.<sup>104</sup> The signing of Association and other agreements has been made conditional upon reforms within the EaP countries. For example, the EU has formulated 19 guidelines related to selective justice, electoral reform, and overall reform that must be in place before EU-Ukraine relations can move forward.<sup>105</sup> Another example is Azerbaijan, whose ambassador to the EU recently stated that he would like EU-Azerbaijan relations to develop into a strategic partnership, a status that is enjoyed by big powers such as Russia and China, thus downplaying the relevance of the EaP framework.<sup>106</sup> The success of the EaP depends very much on how the partner countries react to EU policies, as well on the stability of their governments.

### **In lieu of conclusions: opportunities and challenges in advancing energy and EaP priorities**

As is the case for all countries holding the Presidency for the first time, Lithuania is faced with two chief opportunities related to its incumbency. The first is external: Lithuanian policy-makers can establish their country as an “old EU member”, awareness elsewhere in the EU about Lithuania’s culture and preferences may increase, and formal and informal contacts with other member states and the EU institutions will intensify.<sup>107</sup> The second opportunity is internal: the Presidency period can have a positive effect on the country’s political capital and the further professionalization of its administration, since a high number of Lithuanian officials will get intensive, first-hand experience with EU affairs, which can later be brought into Lithuanian domestic and foreign policies.

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<sup>104</sup> See also: Dudzińska K., Kaca E., “The Eastern Partnership Under the Lithuanian Presidency: Time for the EU to Keep an Eye on Eastern Europe”, *Polish Institute for International Affairs Bulletin*, 2012, No. 93(426).

<sup>105</sup> EurActiv, “EU sets May deadline for Ukraine’s reforms”, <<http://www.euractiv.com/europes-east/eu-gives-may-deadline-ukraine-news-518052>>, 10 03 2013.

<sup>106</sup> EUObserver, “Azerbaijan dangles EU gas bonanza”, <<http://euobserver.com/foreign/118199>>, 10 12 2012.

<sup>107</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, “Nutarimas dėl Lietuvos Respublikos pirmininkavimo Europos Sąjungos Tarybai 2013 metais tarpinstitucinio 2013-2014 metų veiklos plano patvirtinimo”, <[http://espirmininkavimas.urm.lt/uploads/files/documents/Nutarimas\\_del\\_TVP\\_1277-23.pdf](http://espirmininkavimas.urm.lt/uploads/files/documents/Nutarimas_del_TVP_1277-23.pdf)>, 20 03 2013.

With regard to the Presidency's roles, we assume that Lithuania will be a passive organiser for issues that it considers relatively insignificant. In more important issues that do not interfere with domestic interests, Lithuania might focus more on its role as mediator. The administrator/organiser and mediator/broker roles are mentioned by most interviewees as the main duties of the Presidency, and are the most obvious tasks of the incumbent since the Lisbon Treaty. This is the most feasible model, especially for small states. However, considering its ambitions in energy and in EaP policies, it is clear that Lithuania also aims to act as an agenda setter and political leader, and will try to bring these policies closer to its national preferences, as much as its position as holder of the Presidency allows doing so. On external representation, Lithuania is less ambitious and will concentrate on investing in good working relations with Van Rompuy and Ashton.

Returning to the central focus of this article, i.e. the extent to which the Lithuanian Presidency can be expected to exert additional influence on energy and EaP policies, we note substantial differences between the national, issue-related, and contextual conditions for influence.

Lithuania meets most national conditions for exerting influence: efforts have been made to ensure effective inter-ministerial coordination, training and preparations are being executed in a timely and responsible manner, the country's reputation in the EU is generally positive – although Lithuania is known for its narrow focus in European policies, the Presidency will be Brussels-based in practice – and the already existing formal and informal networks are being further expanded. Country-specific conditions seem to be less of a challenge compared to issue-specific conditions. The main country-specific challenges for Lithuania may be to turn its small size into a source of influence, and some officials indicated that a number of ministers lack international experience and language skills. The administration should also watch out for possible turf battles between the PESTD and other EU-related bodies. In general, it will be a challenge to mobilise interests and expertise on the full range of issues on the European agenda, contrary to Lithuania's usual EU policy of focusing on a few specific topics.

The external context in the second half of 2013, however, will not leave much room for Lithuania to manoeuvre. The adoption of the MFF for 2014–2020 and the end of the EP legislative term will both signify a heavy workload for the Lithuanian Presidency. The financial situation in the EU as well as the German federal election in September 2013 might also have an impact on the Council agenda. In addition to these contextual conditions that will limit the Presidency's ability to exert influence, there are some specific issue-related constraining factors for energy policy and EU-EaP relations respectively.

With regard to energy policy, there are two main challenges: first, the country's internal political struggles and indecisiveness on strategic energy projects might harm Lithuania's reputation and its position in negotiating EU-wide agreements. Second, the Presidency's honest broker role can be challenged by Lithuania's usual focus on national and regional projects for energy security and relative lack of interest in other energy issues that are of importance to many other EU members.

The challenges in EaP policies are of a different nature. The main challenge for the Presidency will be to play a significant role along with the other actors and institutions that engage in EU external action, i.e. the European Commission, the EEAS and the HR/VP, and the president of the European Council. The Presidency's formal capacities in this field are limited. Furthermore, the dependence that the success of EaP policies has on domestic developments in the partner countries will limit Lithuania's ability to shape those policies.

In summary, Lithuania has set ambitious goals in energy and EaP policies, two topics that are close to the country's national interests. This shows that the Lithuanian government and administration expect the Presidency period to "amplify" the country's preferences and influence to some extent. The degree to which Lithuania will be able to exert influence on EU policies depends on national, issue-related, and context-related conditions. While the national conditions for influence are, for the most part, in place, the general context in the EU is not the most fruitful for advancing projects that do not seem to constitute everyone's crucial interest, and there are also specific constraints for energy and EaP policies. This article has outlined the conditions for influence before the start of the Presidency; the actual influence of the Lithuanian Presidency can later be assessed based on this analysis.

#### Appendix No. 1: List of Interviews

- Interview 1. Lithuanian official, Brussels, 19 February 2013.
- Interview 2. Lithuanian official, Brussels, 20 February 2013.
- Interview 3. Lithuanian official, Brussels, 20 February 2013.
- Interview 4. Lithuanian expert, Vilnius, 4 March 2013.
- Interview 5. Lithuanian official, Vilnius, 4 March 2013.
- Interview 6. Lithuanian official, Vilnius, 6 March 2013.
- Interview 7. Lithuanian official, Vilnius, 6 March 2013.
- Interview 8. Lithuanian official, Vilnius, 7 March 2013.
- Interview 9. Lithuanian official, Vilnius, 12 March 2013.
- Interview 10. Lithuanian official, Vilnius, 12 March 2013.

- Interview 11. Lithuanian official, Vilnius, 13 March 2013.
- Interview 12. Lithuanian official, Vilnius, 13 March 2013.
- Interview 13. EU diplomat, Vilnius, 5 March 2013.
- Interview 14. EU diplomat, Vilnius, 13 March 2013.
- Interview 15. EU diplomat, Vilnius, 15 March 2013.
- Interview 16. Lithuanian official, Vilnius, 28 March 2013.
- Interview 17. Lithuanian official, Vilnius, 29 March 2013.
- Interview 18. EU diplomat, Vilnius, 19 March 2013.
- Interview 19. Lithuanian official, Vilnius, 5 April 2013.